



The Inner Conflict of the Main Character in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya: Kurt Lewin's Literary Psychology

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and describe the inner conflict experienced by the main character in the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya using Kurt Lewin's literary psychology approach. The focus of the study is directed at three forms of inner conflict, namely approach-approach conflict, approach-avoidance conflict, and avoidance-avoidance conflict. The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. The research data are in the form of excerpts from dialogues, narratives, and events in the novel that describe the inner turmoil of the main character. The data collection technique is carried out through intensive reading activities and taking notes on parts relevant to the focus of the study. Next, the data are analyzed by grouping and describing the forms of conflict based on Kurt Lewin's psychological theory. The results of the study show that the character *Rara Mendut* experiences an inner conflict influenced by the conflict between love, power, freedom, and self-esteem. Approach-approach conflict appears when the character is faced with two choices that both provide benefits. Approach-avoidance conflict appears when the character wants something, but is afraid of the possible consequences. Meanwhile, the conflict of moving away from each other is evident when the characters must choose between two equally detrimental situations. This study concludes that the inner conflict in *Rara Mendut*'s novel reflects a woman's struggle to maintain her dignity, freedom, and the right to determine her own path amidst the pressures of power and patriarchal culture.

Keywords: inner conflict, main character, novel, literary psychology

Konflik Batin Tokoh Utama dalam Novel *Rara Mendut* Karya Y.B. Mangunwijaya: Psikologi Sastra Kurt Lewin

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan konflik batin yang dialami tokoh utama dalam novel *Rara Mendut* karya Y.B. Mangunwijaya dengan menggunakan pendekatan psikologi sastra Kurt Lewin. Fokus penelitian diarahkan pada tiga bentuk konflik batin, yaitu konflik mendekat-mendekat (*approach-approach conflict*), konflik mendekat-menjauh (*approach-avoidance conflict*), dan konflik menjauh-menjauh (*avoidance-avoidance conflict*). Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode deskriptif analisis. Data penelitian berupa kutipan-kutipan dialog, narasi, dan peristiwa dalam novel yang menggambarkan pergolakan batin tokoh utama. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kegiatan membaca secara intensif dan mencatat bagian-bagian yang relevan dengan fokus penelitian. Selanjutnya, data dianalisis dengan mengelompokkan dan mendeskripsikan bentuk-bentuk konflik berdasarkan teori psikologi Kurt Lewin. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh *Rara Mendut* mengalami konflik batin yang dipengaruhi oleh pertentangan antara cinta, kekuasaan, kebebasan, dan harga diri. Konflik mendekat-mendekat tampak ketika tokoh dihadapkan pada dua pilihan yang sama-sama memberikan keuntungan. Konflik mendekat-menjauh muncul ketika tokoh menginginkan sesuatu, tetapi merasa takut terhadap konsekuensi yang mungkin terjadi. Sementara itu, konflik menjauh-menjauh terlihat ketika tokoh harus memilih di antara dua keadaan yang sama-sama merugikan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa konflik batin dalam novel *Rara Mendut* mencerminkan perjuangan perempuan dalam mempertahankan martabat, kebebasan, serta hak untuk menentukan jalan hidupnya sendiri di tengah tekanan kekuasaan dan budaya patriarki.

Kata kunci: konflik batin, tokoh utama, novel, psikologi sastra

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INTRODUCTION

Literary works are not merely a means of entertainment, but rather a form of representation of social reality that encompasses various issues of human life. Literature is a reflection of human feelings and inner life. The existence of literary works aims to depict human existence and draw attention to the realities of life in every era. Thus, the literary works created are expected to provide satisfaction, both aesthetically and intellectually, to their readers. According to Hawa (2017:8), literary language is free, without rigidity or rules in conveying the author's ideas and imagination. Literary works are essentially sourced from real life, but have undergone a process of processing through the author's imagination so that the reality contained in literary works is not entirely the same as reality in the real world.

Wellek & Warren (in Miqdad & Purnomo, 2023:16-17; Barus et al., 2019:80) explain that literature is a language-based social institution that reflects the reality of life. Literature, especially novels, is not just a medium of entertainment, but also a forum for authors to portray the social, cultural, and psychological dynamics of humans. Through this medium, authors can convey ideas, social criticism, and their views on real phenomena in society. According to Desinta (2026:1) a novel is a form of literary work in the form of long and complex prose, novels contain a series of events, characters, settings, and conflicts that are developed in depth. Novels not only present a storyline, but also describe the characters' characters, life settings, and relationships between characters in more detail than other forms of literary works. According to Ahyar (2019:148), Emzir & Rohman (2020:9), a novel is a form of literary work in the form of prose that has intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The content of a novel is longer and more complex than the content of a short story, and does not have structural and rhyme limitations.

A novel is a long narrative prose form that tells the dynamics of a character's life with his social environment by highlighting the specific character and traits of each actor (Azizah, 2025:509). In its development, novels can also be studied from the perspective of literary psychology to dissect the psychological aspects and mental depth of the characters in it (Minderop, 2016:52). Novels are considered a reflection of human life because they contain descriptions of attitudes, feelings, thoughts, and conflicts that occur in everyday life. According to Endraswara (in Miqdad & Purnomo, 2023:16), conflict arises when two or more equally strong desires collide at the same time, thus providing a sensation of tension for the reader. In line with this opinion, Nurgiyantoro (2013:179) states that conflict is triggered by various dynamics of human character, such as differences in interests, struggles for material or influence, betrayal, and motives for revenge. Although the triggers vary, both in reality and in the world of fiction, the conflict that occurs within a person most often stems from the conflict between two opposing desires, known as inner conflict.

Inner conflict not only occurs in real life, but is also an interesting object of study in literary studies. This phenomenon is often explored in depth through novels that focus on psychological dynamics, where a character experiences a personal struggle against himself in order to make a decision or solve a problem. To dissect this phenomenon, a literary psychology approach is commonly used. Endraswara (in Nuryanti & Sobari, 2019:502) views literary psychology as a form of study that positions literary works as reflections of psychological activity. Theoretically, Didipu (2024:143) explains that psychology is the scientific study of human mental activity that can be observed empirically, while literature is more fictional, abstract, and imaginative. Based on these two views, it can be concluded that the literary



psychology approach is a method that analyzes the psychological dimensions of characters in literary texts, whether in poetry, prose, or drama. In its development, one theoretical framework that is often applied to dissect the structure of inner conflict is Kurt Lewin's literary psychology approach.

Kurt Lewin (in Meigita, 2019:6) divides inner conflict into three main forms that occur when a person faces two forces of equal intensity but opposite directions. First, approach-approach conflict is a situation where a person must choose between two equally good goals but cannot choose both. Second, approach-avoidance conflict occurs when one choice has both beneficial and detrimental consequences at the same time. Third, avoidance-avoidance conflict is a condition when a person is trapped between two choices that are both unpleasant or detrimental. One literary work that depicts this psychological complexity and inner turmoil in depth is the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya. This novel tells the life of Rara Mendut, a woman who lives during the Mataram era and must face social, cultural, and power pressures that limit her freedom. Rara Mendut is depicted as a brave woman with strong convictions. However, on the other hand, he also faces various pressures that give rise to inner turmoil. The conflict between personal desires, love, self-esteem, and power causes the main character to experience complex inner conflict.

METHOD

The method used in this study is the analytical description method. Abubakar (2021:16), Afifuddin & Saebani (2002:11), Razak (2017:276), state that descriptive methods are commonly used in various social research fields. This method is intended to describe the inner conflict of the main character which is reviewed from the aspects of approach-approach conflict, approach-avoidance conflict, and avoidance-

avoidance conflict. The data source comes from the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya in 2023, seventh revised edition, number of pages 338, published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

The research data is in the form of novel excerpts that describe the problem of inner conflict experienced by the main character in the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya. The data collection technique is by reading and recording.

The data analysis technique in this study is carried out through several stages. The first stage is to read the novel in its entirety and repeatedly to understand the content of the story and find data related to the inner conflict experienced by the main character. The second stage is to classify the data by grouping quotations related to the approach-approach conflict, approach-avoidance conflict, and avoidance-avoidance conflict according to the formulation of the research problem. The third stage is to describe the classified data so that the data can be presented clearly, systematically, and easily understood. The fourth stage is to interpret the data by providing an interpretation of the meaning of events, characters, and dialogues that describe the inner conflict of the main character in the novel. The final stage is to draw temporary conclusions based on the results of the analysis and interpretation of the data that has been carried out in the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya..

RESULT

Research on the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya is analyzed based on the main character's inner conflict which is reviewed from three problems, namely, (1) approach-approach conflict, (2) approach-avoidance conflict, (3) avoidance-avoidance conflict. The forms of inner conflict of the main character in the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya are as follows.

1. The Main Character's Inner Conflict Reviewed from the Approach-Avoidance Conflict Aspect in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Data 1

"What's so beautiful (and long-suffering) It's a disaster to be beautiful." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:120)

The quote above illustrates the approach-avoidance conflict within *Rara Mendut*. Her beauty presents two possibilities, both of which offer advantages. On the one hand, it attracts the attention of the nobility, particularly Tumenggung Wiraguna.

Data 2

"It's true that her body was stolen. But her heart wasn't." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:142)

The quote above illustrates the approach-avoidance conflict because *Rara Mendut* is faced with two choices, both of which have positive value. On the one hand, accepting Wiraguna offers the potential for a secure life, high social standing, and luxury, given that Wiraguna is an influential commander in Mataram.

Data 3:

"Why doesn't Den Rara want to marry the powerful and wealthy Tumenggung?" (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:142)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict because *Rara Mendut* is in a socially advantageous position if she accepts Tumenggung Wiraguna's proposal, as this choice offers power, luxury, and the guarantee of a respectable life within the palace.

Data 4

"A silver cloud of happy determination glistened on Mendut's face." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:143)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict because *Rara Mendut* has the opportunity to achieve a safe, respectable, and

prosperous life if she accepts Tumenggung Wiraguna's closeness. As a nobleman and commander, Wiraguna is able to provide Mendut with protection and high social standing. On the other hand, Mendut also hopes to achieve inner happiness through a sincere love relationship with Pranacitra.

Data 5

"I don't know... but I like him." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:144)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict because Mendut's expressed feelings of happiness indicate that she is beginning to find emotional happiness through Pranacitra's presence. Pranacitra provides attention, comfort, and genuine affection, which fosters Mendut's attraction to her.

2. The Main Character's Psyche Reviewed from the Approach-Avoidance Conflict Aspect in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Data 1

"The anxiety intensified when news from the Jaga field began to infiltrate the princess's residence..." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:20)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict due to the psychological state of the princess's residents when news of the war began to reach their neighborhood. Information about the battlefield became crucial because it related to their well-being and safety.

Data 2

"After one day with the central army, Rara Mendut's mood had changed." (*Rara Mendut*, 2023:31-32)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict due to the emotional changes *Rara Mendut* experienced after traveling with the Mataram army. Initially, Mendut felt angry,



depressed, and had difficulty accepting the fact that she had been taken prisoner of war.

Data 3

"Tumenggung Wiraguna gave strict orders that the soldiers should rest properly that night." (Rara Mendut, 2023:44)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict due to Tumenggung Wiraguna's assertiveness as a commander responsible for his troops. The order for the soldiers to rest demonstrates his concern for the physical condition of his troops before facing the next war situation. As a leader, Wiraguna wants to ensure that his troops remain strong and ready to carry out royal duties.

Data 4

"...the light of the positions and intricacies of the woman's life story." (Rara Mendut, 2023:56)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict because women in the nobility were judged not only by their beauty, but also by their family origins, social standing, and background. In the palace, a woman's status influenced honor and power relations. For the nobility, women of high status were considered attractive because they could enhance their dignity and strengthen their social standing.

Data 5:

"Their love lives too. Because the love lives of people in high positions are no longer about pleasure, but rather a matter of the glory of the state." (Rara Mendut, 2023:68)

The quote above demonstrates an approach-avoidance conflict because the love lives of people in high positions cannot be separated from matters of power and state interests. In royal circles, love relationships are not only personal matters, but also related to honor, prestige, and politics.

The Main Character's Inner Conflict Reviewed from the Aspect of Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Data 1

"Why don't those big people just fight each other far away, away from the peace of the coastal people..." (Rara Mendut, 2023:9)

The quote above demonstrates an avoidance-avoidance conflict due to the anxiety of the common people regarding the conflict and power struggles carried out by the rulers. The people desire a peaceful life, but the conflict among the nobles has had a negative impact on their lives.

Data 2

"Insulting them means insulting their masters" (Rara Mendut, 2023:21)

The quote above demonstrates an avoidance-avoidance conflict due to the hierarchical system in Mataram society. The nobility held a high position, requiring their honor to be upheld by the surrounding community. Any action or statement toward the nobles' followers was considered an act directly related to the ruler's dignity.

Data 3

"...chose to accompany her husband to the afterlife rather than be touched by the Mataram people." (Rara Mendut, 2023:33)

The quote above demonstrates an avoidance-avoidance conflict because the character is faced with two choices that are both equally painful and difficult to accept. On the one hand, the character must accept the reality of being under the rule of the Mataram people, whom he considers oppressive and demeaning. On the other hand, the character chooses death as a way to maintain his honor and self-respect.

Data 4

"He was too intelligent and too challenging to impose conditions, so that the light in his eyes did not at all show the losing party's complete surrender." (Rara Mendut, 2023:34)

The quote above demonstrates an avoidance-avoidance conflict because it is evident in Mendut's situation, where he is forced to submit to the authority of Mataram and accept the will of Wiraguna, the party in power. However, on the other hand, Mendut continues to strive to maintain his self-respect, honor, and freedom despite facing great pressure and suffering.

Data 5

"But Mendut didn't answer because he was already enjoying the opportunity to sleep, which ended a day full of experiences." (Rara Mendut, 2023: 45)

The quote above demonstrates an avoidance-avoidance conflict due to Mendut's silence, choosing not to respond to the situation he was facing. This attitude is not simply a form of reluctance to speak, but rather reflects the psychological state of the character, who is experiencing inner exhaustion due to the pressures and problems of life that continue to weigh on him.

DISCUSSION

The Main Character's Inner Conflict Reviewed from the Approach-Approach Conflict Aspect in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Approach-approach conflict occurs when a person is stimulated to choose one of two or more positive alternatives. According to Lestari et al. (2023:104), this type of conflict has a balanced value weight, where the individual is in a dilemma because he must face two situations that he likes equally at the same time. In the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, this conflict is evident in the hesitation felt by the main character when forced to make a choice between two things that are equally important to his life. This difficult

situation triggers strong inner turmoil during the decision-making process. The first quote is included in the approach-approach conflict because, in the context of women's lives at that time, closeness to a ruler was seen as an important opportunity to gain protection and improve social status. On the other hand, she wants her beauty to bring her together with a man who is sincere, kind, and loving to her. The second quote is included in the approach-approach conflict because, for Mendut, inner happiness and true love are very valuable things and cannot be replaced by power or luxury. In line with Ratna Megawangi, (1999:78) who said that women have equal rights with men in determining life choices, including choosing a partner freely and responsibly. Inner conflict then arises because both choices have equal appeal for her. The third quote is included in the approaching-approaching conflict because, at the same time there is another choice that also has positive value for her, namely maintaining a life path according to her personal will and maintaining her true love for Pranacitra. The fourth quote is included in the approaching-approaching conflict because, Mendut also has the hope of achieving inner happiness through a sincere love relationship with Pranacitra. This choice provides emotional satisfaction as well as freedom for her to determine her life path according to her own conscience and desires and the fifth quote is included in the approaching-approaching conflict because, Rara Mendut is also within the scope of Tumenggung Wiraguna's authority who is able to provide security, protection, and high social standing.

The Main Character's Psyche Reviewed from the Approach-Avoidance Conflict Aspect in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Approach-avoidance conflict is a dilemma situation where a character has a strong desire to achieve a goal, but at the same time is overshadowed by fear, doubt, or the threat of possible consequences. Putri and Nopriyanti (2024:196) explain that this conflict involves two



forces that hinder each other and work in opposite directions towards the same object. In the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, this dynamic is reflected in the main character's inner turmoil when faced with complex life choices, especially those that bring together love, freedom, and the shadow of power. The first quote is included in the approach-avoidance conflict because the characters feel the need to stay informed about the developments in the ongoing war situation. However, the news not only arouses curiosity but also gives rise to anxiety and fear. The more news they hear, the greater their worries about the bad possibilities that could occur, such as defeat, suffering, or changes in their fate. This situation causes the characters to experience mental stress. The second quote falls into the approach-distance conflict because circumstances forced her to abandon her previous life and follow the authority of the party that had conquered her hometown. However, after a day of travel, Mendut's mood began to change. She began to see new experiences and atmospheres she had never experienced before. The journey presented things that caught her attention and aroused her curiosity. This is the approach side of her inner conflict. The third quote falls into the approach-distance conflict because, as the leader of Wiraguna, she wanted to ensure that her troops remained strong and ready to carry out royal duties. This attitude became the approach side of her conflict. Behind this firmness, there was actually a great mental burden. In line with Rizal (2024:6), mental burdens can lead to different understandings of others. The fourth quote falls into the approach-distance conflict because women are often not free to determine their own path in life because their lives are related to family and political interests. Romantic relationships and marriage are also influenced by factors of power and social honor. This is the

distance side of the conflict that arises, and the fifth quote falls into the approach-distance conflict because the character wants to find happiness through love. However, his position as commander-in-chief prevented him from acting solely on personal desires. This was the driving force behind the conflict.

The Main Character's Inner Conflict Reviewed from the Aspect of Avoidance-Avoidance Conflict in the Novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Avoidance-avoidance conflict is often used to describe the psychological state of characters who are in stressful and difficult situations. According to Faradila et al. (2023:92), avoidance-avoidance conflict occurs when two negative motives arise simultaneously and indecision arises due to avoiding. In the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, the avoidance-avoidance conflict is seen through the main character's inner experience when facing a situation that is both detrimental to her. Rara Mendut is in a position that makes her have to choose between two things that are not in accordance with her wishes. The first quote is included in the avoidance-avoidance conflict because, if they choose to leave their homes, they will also face other difficulties, such as the loss of shelter, loss of livelihood, and uncertainty of fate in their new place. Both choices cause suffering, thus creating psychological pressure within them. The second quote is included in the avoidance-avoidance conflict because, if they express disagreement or show an attitude that is considered impolite, they risk receiving punishment, pressure, or unfair treatment from those in power. However, if they continue to restrain themselves and follow the prevailing social rules, they must also sacrifice their freedom to express their opinions and self-expression. The third quote is included in the distancing-distancing conflict because it is also seen that the character has a very strong rejection of Mataram's power. In line with Hariyanti et al. (2026:2), power does not always appear through

physical violence. For the character, living under power that is considered restrictive and robbing honor is something more painful than losing one's life. The fourth quote is included in the distancing-distancing conflict because, if he accepts Wiraguna's power, he must sacrifice his freedom and self-respect. However, if he continues to refuse, he will face pressure, threats, and even the possibility of heavier punishment from those in power. This situation puts Mendut in a stressful internal struggle because there is no choice that truly gives him peace. The fifth quote is included in the distancing-distancing conflict because, if he expresses his opinions or feelings, he risks facing greater pressure from the environment and those who have power over him. However, if he chooses to remain silent, he must bear the burden of thoughts and inner suffering that continues to oppress him. Mendut's decision to choose sleep can also be understood as a form of temporary escape from a tiring reality.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya using Kurt Lewin's literary psychology approach, it can be concluded that the main character experiences three forms of inner conflict, namely approach-approach conflict, approach-avoidance conflict, and avoidance-avoidance conflict. These three conflicts arise due to the conflict between personal desires, love, freedom, self-esteem, and the pressure of power and the social environment during the Mataram kingdom. This approach-approach conflict is seen when Rara Mendut is faced with two choices that both provide good hope for her future. On the one hand, she can obtain a safe and high-ranking life with Tumenggung Wiraguna, but on the other hand she also wants to maintain true love and the freedom to determine her own life choices. The approach-avoidance conflict is seen through the inner state of the character who wants to approach something, but at the same time feels afraid of the consequences that will be received. Rara Mendut

and other characters in the novel often experience a struggle between hope and social pressure. Meanwhile, the avoidance-avoidance conflict is evident when the characters find themselves in a situation where both sides are at a disadvantage. Rara Mendut must choose between submitting to authority or maintaining her dignity at the risk of significant suffering. This situation demonstrates profound psychological pressure, as each choice brings hardship.

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