



The Protagonist's Inner Conflict in the Novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono: Literary Psychology Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the protagonist's inner conflict in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono through the lens of Alfred Adler's individual psychology and to identify the factors influencing the emergence of this conflict. The study employs a qualitative approach and a descriptive method. The primary data source is the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono, while supporting data is derived from relevant books, journals, and scholarly articles. Data collection was conducted through a literature review, utilizing techniques such as reading, close observation, and noting excerpts related to the protagonist's inner conflict. Data analysis was performed using content analysis based on Adler's individual psychology concepts, specifically inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle. The findings reveal that the inner conflict experienced by the protagonist, Kunti, is reflected in three aspects of Adler's individual psychology. The aspect of inferiority is evident in her feelings of low self-worth, doubt, sadness, and inability to cope with life's pressures. The aspect of superiority is manifested in her efforts to overcome personal weaknesses, develop her potential, and achieve a better life. Meanwhile, the lifestyle aspect is reflected in her mindset, attitudes, and behaviors, which are shaped by life experiences—particularly a lack of parental affection during childhood. Furthermore, the factors influencing the emergence of this inner conflict include family dynamics, the social environment, past experiences, the protagonist's personality, and her hopes and life goals. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the protagonist's inner conflict arises from the interaction between feelings of inferiority, the drive for superiority, and a lifestyle shaped by her life experiences. Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology proves relevant in explaining the personality dynamics and psychological development of the protagonist in Maria A. Sardjono's novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi*.

Keywords: protagonist's inner conflict, novel, literary psychology

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of human expression manifested through language, whether spoken or written. This expression arises from ideas, experiences, worldviews, and feelings that are crafted creatively and imaginatively. In literary works, the reality of life is not merely presented as-is but is imbued with elements of beauty, thereby possessing aesthetic value. Furthermore, literature often addresses issues closely related to everyday life. According to Saragih (2021), literature is a creative art form that focuses primarily on humanity

and human life, utilizing language as the medium of expression. Thus, literature can be understood as a means of expressing thoughts and feelings through language.

In contrast to this view, Teeuw (2013:20) explains that the term "literature" derives from Sanskrit, signifying the act of directing, teaching, or providing guidance. Based on this definition, literature serves not only as art but also as a source of life values and a guide for navigating one's life. Through literary works, readers can gain insight

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into human values and moral truths. This perspective aligns with that of Nurhayati (cited in Lestari et al., 2023), who describes literature as a medium for conveying messages of truth, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Literary works are products of human creativity that convey messages—or even moral teachings—shared by the creator with the reader. Through literature, authors seek to invite readers to understand and embrace the ideas or perspectives being presented. As a product of human thought, literature is created not merely to be read, but also to be enjoyed and appreciated (Choiriyah et al., 2023). Messages in literary works can be conveyed either directly or indirectly, depending on the author's intent.

Fundamentally, literature is a creative art form that centers on human beings and the various aspects of their lives, utilizing language as the medium of expression. As a work of art, literature inherently possesses aesthetic qualities that satisfy the reader's sense of beauty. Consequently, every literary work bears its own distinct characteristics and uniqueness, even when addressing similar themes or subjects. This uniqueness distinguishes a specific literary work from others, rendering it impossible to replicate exactly.

As noted by Putri (2023), literature is a creative art form focused on humanity and human life, with language serving as the vehicle for expression. Thus, literature can be viewed as a representation of human existence. However, the portrayal of life within literary works is typically shaped by the author's imagination—making it fictional in nature—even though not all literary works are based entirely on elements of fantasy.

The novel is a form of prose literature capable of presenting narrative elements in a more comprehensive and profound manner. Beyond offering an expansive narrative scope, novels frequently address various issues related to societal life (Nastiti et al., 2022). Etymologically, the term "novel" originates from the English word denot-

ing a work of fiction. It is rooted in the Italian novella and the German novelle, both referring to a specific form of fictional literature. In Indonesian, the term has a counterpart known as novelet (novellette). A novel can be defined as a work of prose fiction with substantial length and greater complexity than a short story. The distinction between a novel and a short story lies primarily in form, length, and the breadth of plot and character development. Consequently, a novel is understood as a fictional narrative constructed through the author's imagination.

As a work of fiction, the novel is imaginative in nature and often presents issues concerning humanity, human values, and social life (Hasnatin, 2024). Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin *novellus*, stemming from *novelis*, meaning "new." This term was adopted because the novel is considered a literary form that emerged later than other genres, such as poetry and drama (Tarigan, 2000:164).

The internal conflict experienced by the protagonist is a compelling aspect for in-depth study. To ensure the analysis aligns with the research subject, a relevant and appropriate approach is required. This study analyzes the internal conflict of the character Kunti in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* using the approach of the psychology of literature. According to Suryabrata (2002:1), psychology is the study of the human psyche and interpersonal relationships. Psychology and literature are closely linked as both explore human life, albeit from different perspectives. This study examines the subject matter through the lens of Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology. This theory was selected because it is grounded in a social approach that emphasizes the concepts of inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle. Adler viewed human beings as social creatures whose consciousness lies at the core of personality formation. According to him, every individual possesses specific drives or motivations that influence their behavior and life experiences. Consequently, Adler's theory of individual psychology is considered relevant and



significant for understanding human behavior. Further explanation of the theory is based on the account provided by (Anggita, 2025).

Inferiority is the feeling of being inadequate, weak, or lacking in some way compared to others. According to Adler, feelings of inferiority are natural and experienced by every individual. These feelings arise because humans are aware of their own limitations, whether physical or psychological. However, feelings of inferiority do not always have a negative impact; in fact, they can serve as motivation for a person to grow, improve themselves, and achieve better life goals. Yet, if these feelings develop excessively, an individual may develop an inferiority complex, leading to a lack of self-confidence and difficulty adjusting to their environment.

Superiority represents an individual's effort to overcome weaknesses and attain a better state. Adler explained that every human being possesses a drive to grow, enhance their abilities, and achieve success. Superiority does not mean feeling superior to or higher than others; rather, it is the pursuit of self-perfection in accordance with one's own potential. This drive toward superiority serves as the primary motivation guiding a person's behavior throughout their life.

Lifestyle refers to the patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, attitudes, and habits an individual employs to achieve their life goals. According to Adler, lifestyle begins to form in childhood through a person's life experiences and social interactions. Each individual has a unique lifestyle, shaped by family circumstances, environment, personal experiences, and how they perceive themselves and the world around them. Lifestyle acts as a guide for navigating various problems and determining the actions one takes in life.

The novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono is a literary work that vividly portrays the protagonist's inner conflict. This conflict is depicted through a series of events that reveal shifts in the protagonist's emotions, behavior, and perspective on life. Thus, the novel offers not only a

storyline but also a gradual portrayal of the character's psychological development. The protagonist of this novel experiences various emotional upheavals stemming from life's pressures, social interactions, and the quest for self-identity. These upheavals are reflected in an unstable inner state, characterized by anxiety, indecision, and uncertainty regarding life choices.

This research is significant because examining the character's psychological state offers deeper insight into the meaning constructed within the literary work. The inner conflict experienced by the character Kunti illustrates how an individual confronts limitations, life's pressures, failure, and difficult choices. Furthermore, analyzing concepts such as inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle reveals the character's developmental process in navigating various challenges. Thus, this study focuses not only on the conflicts Kunti faces but also on the psychological processes underlying her attitudes and actions.

Based on the preceding description, this study is titled "The Inner Conflict of the Character Kunti in the Novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono: An Alfred Adler Individual Psychology Study." This research aims to provide an overview of the character Kunti's psychological state and the nature of her inner conflict in relation to Alfred Adler's concepts of individual psychology. The study focuses on three key aspects—inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle—as reflected in Kunti's attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and actions when facing various life challenges. Additionally, it examines the factors influencing the emergence of this inner conflict, specifically family factors, social environment, past experiences, the character's personality, and her hopes and life goals.

Based on the introduction, the research problem centers on the inner conflict experienced by the character Kunti in Maria A. Sardjono's novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi*, analyzed through the lens of Alfred Adler's individual psychology, as well as the factors contributing to this conflict. The specific research questions are: (1) What is the

nature of the main character's inner conflict in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* from the perspective of Alfred Adler's theory? and (2) What factors influence the emergence of inner conflict in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi*?

In line with these research questions, the study aims to identify the main character's inner conflict in *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* using Alfred Adler's individual psychology theory and to identify the factors influencing the emergence of this conflict. Thus, the research is expected to provide insight into the psychological condition and personality dynamics of the character Kunti as she navigates the various life issues depicted in the novel.

This research is expected to offer both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it aims to contribute to the development of literary psychology studies, specifically regarding the application of Alfred Adler's individual psychology theory to the analysis of characters' inner conflicts in literary works. Furthermore, this study can enrich the understanding of concepts such as inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle when analyzing a character's psychological development.

In practical terms, this research is expected to benefit the researcher, readers, students, and future researchers. For the researcher, it offers insights into applying Alfred Adler's individual psychology theory to literary works. For readers and students, the findings can serve as a reference for understanding the relationship between psychology and literature, particularly regarding a character's inner conflict. For future researchers, this study is intended to serve as a reference for conducting similar research using different objects, theories, or perspectives.

A relevant article by Irodutil Mu'ti Sekarsari (State University of Surabaya) is titled *Konflik Batin Tokoh dalam Novel Nona Teh dan Tuan Kopi Karya Crowdstroia: Kajian Psikologi Alfred Adler*. Regarding its relevance to the current study, this article reinforces the argument that Alfred Adler's theory is appropriate for analyzing the inner conflict of the character Kunti, especially given the

shared focus on novels and the psychological conflicts of the characters.

Another relevant study is by Lestari Sugiarti (Sanata Dharma University), titled *Konflik Batin Tokoh Utama Dalam Novel Rasa karya Tere Liye* (Inner Conflict of the Main Character in the Novel *Rasa* by Tere Liye). This study explicitly discusses the forms of inner conflict, the factors causing such conflict, and its impact on the character's life. The findings categorize the causes into family factors and environmental factors. This classification is highly suitable if you wish to discuss the factors influencing the emergence of Kunti's inner conflict.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, as the research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogue, and narratives found within the novel, which are analyzed based on their underlying contexts (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019). A qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena through descriptive data obtained from the research object, while the descriptive method is utilized to depict and explain the data exactly as found in the research source (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2019). This study aims to describe and analyze the protagonist's inner conflict in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono, utilizing a literary psychology approach (Ratna, 2015). The literary psychology approach is adopted because the study focuses on the character's psychological aspects—reflected through their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors within the literary work (Endraswara, 2013).

The psychological analysis in this study utilizes Alfred Adler's individual psychology theory, which views human beings as individuals possessing life goals and a drive to overcome weaknesses and achieve a better state (Alwisol, 2019). Adler's theory of individual psychology is applied here with a focus on the concepts of inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle, as these three concepts facili-



tate an understanding of the character's psychological state, drives, and behavioral patterns when facing various life challenges (Adler, 1927; Alwisol, 2019). Inferiority relates to feelings of inadequacy or inability that can motivate an individual to strive to overcome such weaknesses, whereas superiority relates to the individual's struggle to grow and attain a state perceived as superior or better (Adler, 1927; Feist, Feist, & Roberts, 2018). Meanwhile, lifestyle refers to patterns of behavior and the ways individuals deal with life's challenges—shaped by experience as well as how individuals perceive themselves and their social environment (Adler, 1927; Alwisol, 2019).

The primary data source for this study is the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono, as it serves as the object of analysis for gathering data on the main character's inner conflict (Moleong, 2017). Supporting data sources—comprising books, scholarly articles, and research journals relevant to the psychology of literature, inner conflict, and Alfred Adler's individual psychology theory—are utilized to strengthen the theoretical framework and the data interpretation process (Sugiyono, 2019; Ratna, 2015). Data collection was conducted using the documentation study technique, given that the novel, as a data source, constitutes a written document amenable to systematic analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). Reading and note-taking techniques were employed to identify and document sections of the novel containing information regarding the main character's inner conflict, inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle (Endraswara, 2013).

The data collection phase involved several steps: first, reading the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* in its entirety to gain an understanding of the plot and the main character (Endraswara, 2013). Subsequently, the researcher conducted an intensive re-reading of the novel to locate dialogue, narration, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions that reveal the main character's inner conflict, as well as aspects of inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle (Ratna, 2015). Relevant data were then recorded, grouped, and classified according to the research

focus to ensure a systematic analysis process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Finally, the classified data were analyzed descriptively through the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This study focuses on identifying and describing the protagonist's inner conflict in the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono, utilizing Alfred Adler's individual psychology perspective, and analyzing the factors influencing the emergence of this conflict (Adler, 1927; Alwisol, 2019). The inner conflict is analyzed based on the character's psychological state—reflected in their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and actions—as they confront the issues presented in the story (Endraswara, 2013). Factors influencing the inner conflict are analyzed through both internal elements (stemming from the character's psychological state) and external elements (related to social conditions, interpersonal relationships, the environment, and events experienced by the character) (Moleong, 2017; Lestari & Sugiarti, 2023).

In this qualitative study, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, being directly involved in the processes of data collection, selection, categorization, interpretation, and analysis (Sugiyono, 2019; Moleong, 2017; Razak, 2017). The researcher reads and comprehends the novel in its entirety, identifies data relevant to the research focus, classifies the data according to established categories, and interprets the findings based on Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology (Sugiyono, 2019). Supporting instruments—such as data classification tables, research notes, and reference documents related to the research subject and theory—are utilized to facilitate the research process (Miles et al., 2014).

Data validity in this study was established through persistent observation and theoretical triangulation—comparing data found in the novel with Alfred Adler's concepts of individual psychology and relevant prior research (Moleong, 2017). Persistent observation involved reading the data source repeatedly and meticulously to ensure the data obtained aligned with the research focus

(Moleong, 2017). Theoretical triangulation was conducted by utilizing multiple relevant theoretical sources to assist the researcher in achieving a more robust and defensible interpretation of the data (Moleong, 2017).

RESULTS

1. Feelings of Inferiority

The protagonist experiences feelings of inferiority arising from life experiences marked by stress, rejection, and an inability to meet the expectations of those around her. These feelings cause her to frequently doubt her abilities, feel a lack of self-worth, and experience anxiety when faced with life choices.

According to Adler, feelings of inferiority are a natural condition in individual development. In this novel, these feelings serve as the primary source of inner conflict, as the character constantly compares herself against standards set by her family and social environment.

In response to her feelings of inferiority, the protagonist attempts to improve her life through hard work, self-control, and efforts to demonstrate her capabilities. The character strives for a better life in order to gain recognition, acceptance, and happiness.

However, the journey toward superiority is not easy. The character must confront various emotional obstacles, often experiencing uncertainty, fear, and even conflict between personal interests and the expectations of others.

2. Style of Life

The analysis reveals that the main character's lifestyle is shaped by past experiences, family upbringing, and values held since childhood. The character tends to be responsible and patient, and attempts to avoid open conflict. However, the tendency to suppress feelings actually intensifies the character's internal conflict. This lifestyle leads the character to blame themselves rather than expressing their feelings directly to others.

Based on the research findings, several fac-

tors influence the emergence of the main character's inner conflict.

a. Family Factors

Family is a dominant factor in triggering inner conflict. Family expectations, demands, and communication patterns compel the character to meet various expectations, even when doing so conflicts with their own desires.

b. Social Environment Factors

The social environment exerts pressure through norms, societal judgment, and interpersonal relationships. The character feels compelled to maintain a certain self-image, often leading them to suppress their emotions and personal desires.

c. Past Experience Factors

Life experiences marked by disappointment, loss, and failure shape the character's psychological state, making them prone to anxiety, doubt, and fear when making decisions.

d. Character Personality Factors

The character's personality—characterized by sensitivity, a strong sense of responsibility, patience, and a tendency to bottle up feelings—causes the inner conflict to become increasingly complex. The character prefers to resolve issues internally rather than sharing them with others.

e. Expectations and Life Goals

The character aspires to a life that is happy, independent, and socially accepted. The discrepancy between personal expectations and the reality faced creates psychological pressure that fuels inner conflict throughout the story.

Overall, the study reveals that the main character's inner conflict in the novel **Cahaya Mentari Pagi** by Maria A. Sardjono represents an individual struggle to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve superiority, as described in Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology. This conflict is shaped by the interplay of internal factors—such as personality and life experiences—and ex-



ternal factors, including family and the social environment.

Through this process, the main character undergoes personality development, marked by an increased ability to accept themselves, make independent decisions, and resolve conflicts with greater maturity. Thus, Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology is capable of comprehensively explaining the dynamics of the protagonist's inner conflict, as it encompasses aspects such as feelings of inferiority, the striving for superiority, lifestyle, social interest, and the role of the creative self in shaping the character's personality.

DISCUSSION

Inferiority

The main character exhibits signs of an inferiority complex. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"Because if I were truly bored and didn't love you, it certainly wouldn't weigh so heavily on my heart," she replied, her lips trembling and eyes welling up with tears (Sardjono, 2023:12).

The excerpt above reveals an internal conflict and an inability to cope with a situation that runs counter to her desires. She feels pressured by the need to choose between holding onto her love and fulfilling her father's promise. Feelings of heaviness, sadness, and helplessness indicate inferiority—a condition in which an individual feels incapable of handling the pressures or demands they face (Lestari, 2023).

The character reveals perceived shortcomings within the domestic sphere, an aspect dominated by a sense of inferiority characterized by feelings of inadequacy. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"Even though your university studies were cut short, you possess vast knowledge thanks to your hobby of reading various types of books. Often, I cannot keep up with your conversation. That is the first point." Secondly, "although one could say I am successful in terms of my career, job, and material wealth, I often feel lonely and lack a sense of warmth" (Sardjono, 2023:15).

The quote above reveals a sense of inferiority stemming from perceived deficiencies in emotional relationships, despite the character's material and career success. She compares herself to others who possess greater insight and emotional closeness. According to Adler, inferiority is not always linked to physical weakness; it can also arise when a person feels lacking, inadequate, or unable to meet their psychological needs.

Superiority

The character displays behavior that conveys a sense of hope. This attitude reflects the function of superiority in individual psychology—specifically, the primary drive to become perfect or whole (Anggita, 2025). This is evident in the following quote:

"Kunti, you know I've always wanted you to have a child and experience the joy of being a mother" (Sardjono, 2023:20).

The quote above illustrates a desire to show care and support for Kunti, reflecting an effort to be a good person and offer support to others. However, this drive is not fully realized because an internal conflict makes it difficult for her to accept her circumstances.

The character highlights the achievements she has attained so far. This attitude reflects the function of superiority in individual psychology. This is evident in the following quote:

"Although one could say I am successful in terms of my career, job, and material wealth" (Sardjono, 2023:20).

The quote above highlights the character's life achievements—her efforts to succeed through her career, work, and material means. In Adlerian theory, the drive for superiority represents the human effort to grow and improve. However, this success has not brought her a sense of fulfillment, as there remain unmet emotional needs.

Lifestyle

The character demonstrates a focus on achievement. This attitude reflects the function of lifestyle within individual psychology—

specifically, the primary drive toward perfection or wholeness. This is evident in the following quote:

“A beautiful wife, a rather luxurious house—I own all the vehicles.” (Sardjono, 2023:34). The quote above illustrates a lifestyle oriented toward social achievement and success. Her lifestyle was shaped by a desire for success, status, and material comfort. However, this lifestyle did not bring complete happiness, as she still experienced loneliness.

The character reveals a history of lacking parental affection during childhood. This attitude reflects the individual psychology concept of lifestyle regarding the drive for mutual complementarity within a partnership. This is evident in the following quote:

“Because of the lack of parental affection, my relationship with Mas Hari felt so sweet and beautiful, as we complemented each other.” (Sardjono, 2023:10)

The quote above depicts the character's life patterns and how she formed relationships based on past experiences. The absence of parental affection led her to seek comfort, support, and balance through her relationship with Mas Hari. According to Adler, lifestyle is the way an individual approaches life, shaped by their experiences, environment, and life goals.

Factors Causing Internal Conflict

“After separating from Hari, Kunti married a man named Mas Wahyu, but the marriage ended tragically when he betrayed her while she was pregnant. This experience left her with psychological trauma and a fear of commitment.” The quote above describes how Kunti's betrayal by her husband during her pregnancy gave rise to feelings of worthlessness and disappointment, as well as a loss of faith in relationships. Such feelings of vulnerability or inadequacy cause psychological pain. Kunti's trauma and fear of commitment are consequences of this past experience, shaping her perspective on relationships. To avoid having to face Hari on campus, Kunti decided to drop out of

medical school during her seventh semester. This decision triggered an emotional turmoil and deep regret within her.

The passage above describes Kunti dropping out of medical school because she felt unable to cope with the pressure or the painful situation, leading her to choose avoidance. She found the prospect of encountering Hari to be an overwhelming emotional burden, prompting her to make a major decision—even at the cost of her own aspirations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the novel *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* by Maria A. Sardjono—utilizing the approach of literary psychology and Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology—it can be concluded that the inner conflict experienced by the protagonist, Kunti, is manifested through three aspects: inferiority, superiority, and lifestyle. The aspect of inferiority is evident in her feelings of low self-worth, inadequacy, sadness, and doubt when confronting various life challenges. Kunti experiences inner turmoil when faced with situations that do not align with her desires; furthermore, she perceives a deficit in the fulfillment of her emotional needs. These conditions reveal an awareness of her own limitations, which serves as the source of her inner conflict. The aspect of superiority is demonstrated by Kunti's efforts to improve and develop herself in pursuit of a better life. This drive is reflected in her ambition to achieve success across various domains, including her career, social relationships, and the fulfillment of personal needs. Despite achieving some successes, Kunti continues to seek inner satisfaction and emotional happiness, indicating a persistent drive for growth and the attainment of superior life goals. Meanwhile, the aspect of lifestyle is reflected in how Kunti views life and establishes relationships with others. Her life experiences—particularly the lack of parental affection during childhood—have influenced her mindset, attitudes, and the decisions she makes. These experiences shaped a lifestyle that serves

as a guide for Kunti in navigating the various issues she encounters. Thus, the inner conflict Kunti experiences in *Cahaya Mentari Pagi* arises from the interplay between feelings of inferiority, the drive for superiority, and the lifestyle formed through her life experiences. These three aspects are interconnected and play a pivotal role in shaping her personality and the way she confronts the challenges of her life.

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