

Cultural Construction of Ranggalawe's Leadership in the Historical Novel Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol by Makinudin Samin: A Multidisciplinary Approach

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Abstract: Cultural construction serves to reflect how society shapes, interprets, and transmits values, norms, and collective identity. This study examines the cultural construction of leadership in the historical novel Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol by Makinudin Samin. Ranggalawe is portrayed as a transformational leader who opposes hegemonic power, positioning justice, morality, and integrity as the core pillars of leadership. The tension between ethical idealism and political reality depicted in this novel reflects universal dilemmas in leadership across different eras. Through a multidisciplinary approach, historical fiction is interpreted as a medium for cultural reflection and contemporary leadership discourse. This study offers new perspectives on ethical governance that are relevant to current local contexts. Ranggalawe is not merely a figure from the past, but an eternal inspiration for future leadership that is just, courageous, and culturally grounded.

Keywords: Ranggalawe, cultural leadership, critical hermeneutics, historical literature, Javanese culture.

1. Introduction

Leadership has always been the pulse of civilization that connects the past, present, and future through networks of meaning (Haslan et al, 2022). Leadership is not merely a commanding force, but rather a manifestation of values, ethical guidelines, and representation of society's collective aspirations (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Throughout human history, leaders have served as beacons amid uncertainty, guides during crises, and guardians of noble values amidst change (Schedler, 2021). It is more than just functional roles, leadership constitutes a living cultural narrative that is continuously rewritten by each generation (Liu et al, 2022). In Javanese society particularly, a leader is not merely someone who sits upon the throne of power, but a cosmological center that unites spiritual and social dimensions (Widodo, 2023). The kawula-gusti concept reflects a transcendental bond that is reciprocal in nature, where a leader's legitimacy depends on their ability to embody society's noble values (Rahayu et al, 2023).

Mibtadin, (2022) explains that in Javanese ethical philosophy, ideal leadership is not based on physical strength or absolute authority, but on the ability to nurture and guide with patience, wisdom, and compassion. A leader in this



view is not a feared ruler, but a respected protector. They function as mirrors of noble values, sources of guidance and hope for the people. Volodina (2025) In cultural dynamics, literature plays a strategic role in preserving and transmitting these leadership values. Literature is not only a medium of aesthetic expression but also a symbolic space where society reflects its social, political, and spiritual reality. As emphasized by (Toda, 2005), literary works constitute an ideological realm where social values are debated and formulated. Literature portrays leaders as heroes or tyrants, as symbols of dedication or betrayal, but more importantly, literature opens contemplative space to explore the true meaning of leadership.

In Javanese literature, leader characters are often depicted as being caught in dilemmas between moral obligations and the temptations of power, a theme extensively explored in prominent historical novels. Works such as "Arok Dedes" (Pramoedya Ananta Toer, 1999) illustrate Ken Arok's internal conflict between political ambition and moral responsibility, while "Sandyakala ning Majapahit" (Muljana, 2019) presents the struggles of Majapahit nobles in maintaining principles amid power competition. Specifically, the character of Ranggalawe in that novel emerges as a tragic leader figure - on one hand loyal to the kingdom, yet on the other hand compelled to take an oppositional stance for the sake of justice for his people. The novel "Rara Mendut" (Mangunwijaya, 2003) also offers a unique perspective through a female character trapped between power demands and conscience. Pathak (2023) The representation of Ranggalawe in historical literature is particularly intriguing as it presents the paradox of traditional Javanese leadership: how a regional leader must choose between vertical loyalty to the king and horizontal responsibility to the society he leads. Such conflicts not only serve as historical records but remain relevant as material for reflection on contemporary leadership, which is also often faced with similar dilemmas between structural obedience and adherence to values of justice.

The positioning of the narrative "Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk" is more than just a heroic tale of a historical figure; it opens interpretive space to examine how leadership values are formed, manifested, and tested by temporal dynamics. Ranggalawe is not merely a fearless warrior or military commander, but a human being wrestling with internal moral struggles between loyalty to the kingdom and the call of conscience to reject injustice. "If truth must be silenced for the sake of power's perpetuation, then I choose to resist the rulers" (Samin, 2025) reflects an ethics-based leadership stance. Bambole (2025) This is the rare face of leadership that upholds truth even when it means confronting an extensive and deeply rooted power system. In this narrative, Ranggalawe stands as a symbol of moralistic leadership that transcends structural authority: a spiritual leader who is honest with himself and his people. Nevertheless, academic studies exploring the cultural and leadership dimensions of Ranggalawe as depicted in historical literature remain scarce. Existing research tends to focus narrowly on narrative, historical, or philological aspects, while critical analysis examining Ranggalawe as a symbol of local cultural leadership rich in moral, spiritual, and social values remains underdeveloped. However, through a multidisciplinary approach combining Weber's charismatic leadership theory (H. Mustapa & MM, 2020), ethical leadership models (Kusumaningrum dkk., 2020), and symbolic-anthropological perspectives as proposed by Clifford Geertz (Derung, 2017) (Derung, 2017), a deeper understanding of the meaning and relevance of Ranggalawe's leadership in Javanese culture can be revealed.

Samin's novel offers extensive interpretive space for critical investigation of cultural leadership construction (Widodo & Suryanto, 2023). Not only reconstructing historical events, this work radically repositions Ranggalawe as an alternative leader who articulates subaltern voices against the hegemonization of official kingdom narratives (Prasetyo, 2022). In the contemporary era marked by global leadership legitimacy crisis (Haslam et al, 2021), such narratives become important as counter-discourse. Previous studies tend to ignore the dialectic between Ranggalawe's literary representation and new archaeological evidence about opposition movements in 14th-century East Java (Nugroho, 2023). Furthermore, research on leadership in Javanese literature remains fragmented between pure philological studies without dialogue with contemporary leadership theories (Rahayu et al, 2022). The contemporary relevance to be examined is that no study has systematically connected Ranggalawe's leadership model with modern ecological social movements in Java (Sutarto, 2023). Samin's novel offers extensive interpretive space for such investigation. This novel not only reconstructs historical events but also repositions Ranggalawe as an alternative leader representing the people's voice, noble values, and longing for just order.

In today's world, often characterized by a "global leadership crisis manifested in the erosion of political ethics and the rise of authoritarian leadership," where integrity is sacrificed for power and morality is forgotten for political gain, such narratives are important to reflect on. Verma and Devi (2024) Literature, in this context, plays a strategic role as "a cultural institution that preserves collective memory while providing a critical framework for assessing power (Nussbaun, 2022). Anderson, (2022), Historical literary texts function as mirrors that reflect not only the past, but also the failures and possibilities of the present. This study arose from this awareness.

In today's era, often characterized by global leadership crisis demonstrated through the thinning of political ethics and the proliferation of authoritarian leadership (Haslam et al, 2021), explaining where integrity is sacrificed for power and morality is forgotten for political gain, such narratives are important to contemplate. Literature plays a strategic role as cultural institution that maintains collective memory while providing a critical framework for assessing power (Nussbaum, 2022). As Anderson (2022) stated that historical literary texts function as mirrors that reflect not only the past but also present failures and possibilities. This study emerges from such awareness. By taking Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol as the main object of analysis, this research endeavors to explore how cultural construction of leadership is represented through Ranggalawe's character. The approach used is interdisciplinary, combining literary analysis with leadership and cultural theory.

This research aims not only to understand character representation in the text but also to capture broader cultural messages: about leadership values such as courage, integrity, loyalty, and dedication to truth, as conveyed through Javanese culture via literary media. Thus, this research hopes to provide meaningful contributions not only to the field of literary criticism but also to value-based leadership discourse. Amid the increasing complexity of contemporary times, leadership models such as those represented by Ranggalawe offer inspiration for developing more humanistic leadership paradigms, rooted in local culture, and committed to universal ethical values. Leadership, ultimately, is not about who holds power, but about who dares to uphold truth in the face of that power.

2. Literature Review

Leadership is not a static or universally defined concept; rather, it is a culturally constructed and historically situated phenomenon. In diverse cultural contexts, leadership is not limited to the exercise of authority or administrative competence. It is a deeply symbolic act, embedded with ethical, spiritual, and communal expectations. In the context of Javanese society, leadership is not merely about governance or political dominance, but about embodying cultural values, moral virtue, and spiritual integrity. This aligns with the theoretical insights of Max Weber (Isfihani & Sutino, 2025), who emphasized the role of charisma in traditional leadership models, as well as James MacGregor Burns (Zufadli et al., 2024), who conceptualized transformational leadership as a moral endeavor one that elevates both leaders and followers through a shared commitment to higher values. In Javanese political cosmology, as interpreted by Clifford Geertz (Maslukhin, 2015), the figure of the leader occupies a sacred space, where political power is legitimized through symbolic performances and ritualized expressions of authority. The notion of *kawula-gusti*, the sacred relationship between the ruler and the ruled, illustrates how leadership is viewed not simply as domination, but as ethical stewardship. This relationship reflects a form of moral obligation wherein the leader is expected to act as a protector, a spiritual guide, and a symbol of communal harmony. (Dewi, 2017) further reinforces this interpretation by outlining the core ethical principles of Javanese leadership *sabar* (patience), *welas asih* (compassion), and *nrimo ing pandum* (acceptance of destiny). Within this cultural framework, leadership becomes not just a position of power, but a *laku*, or a way of life that integrates wisdom, humility, and inner discipline.

Such a conception of leadership finds a powerful medium in literature, particularly historical fiction, which offers a symbolic and imaginative space where leadership values, moral dilemmas, and political tensions can be narrated and contested. As (Muhammad Zikri Kamal, 2025) has argued, literature functions as an ideological space where social values are articulated, questioned, and sometimes subverted. It allows societies to reflect on their political structures, ethical crises, and cultural identities through the lives and actions of fictionalized characters. In this way, literature becomes not merely an artistic form, but a vital tool for cultural memory and moral education. In Indonesia, historical literature has played a crucial role in shaping national identity and cultural understanding, especially through the representation of legendary leaders such as Sultan Agung, Ken Arok, and Ranggalawe. These figures are often portrayed not as flawless heroes but as complex individuals navigating moral conflicts, political betrayal, and spiritual obligations. Their stories serve as allegories through which writers and readers alike can explore the tension between power and virtue, loyalty and resistance, tradition and transformation. This is particularly true of Ranggalawe, a nobleman from Tuban who lived during the transition between the Singhasari and Majapahit kingdoms in the late 13th century.

Historically, Ranggalawe is mentioned in Javanese texts such as *Pararaton* and *Nagarakretagama* as a military commander who initially supported Raden Wijaya, the founder of Majapahit, but later rebelled due to unfulfilled political promises. These historical accounts, however, are sparse and open to interpretation, providing fertile ground for literary reimagination. In Javanese oral traditions and popular culture, Ranggalawe has often been depicted as a tragic hero a figure who chose moral integrity over political expediency. He is remembered not merely as a rebel, but as a symbol of ethical resistance against unjust authority. This ambivalent legacy makes him an ideal subject for literary exploration, particularly in narratives that seek to critique contemporary notions of power and leadership.

The novel *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* by Makinudin Samin (2015) represents a significant contribution to this literary tradition. Rather than presenting Ranggalawe as a one-dimensional hero or villain, the novel constructs him as a deeply human figure struggling with questions of loyalty, justice, and conscience. Through the use of internal monologues, reflective dialogues, and symbolic imagery, the narrative portrays Ranggalawe as a transformational leader whose actions are guided by ethical principles rather than personal ambition. His decision to defy the ruling power is not portrayed as an act of treason, but as a courageous stand for truth and justice in the face of systemic injustice. This interpretation resonates with the theoretical framework of ethical leadership developed by (Muvid, 2022), who emphasize the importance of moral courage, integrity, and altruism in effective leadership. Despite the richness of Ranggalawe's character and the cultural significance of his story, academic studies that critically engage with his representation in literature remain limited. Most existing research tends to focus on historical or philological analyses. For example, (Haribowo & Winarno, 2024) provides a textual examination of Ranggalawe's appearances in Javanese chronicles but does not explore the ethical and symbolic dimensions of his character in fictional narratives. Similarly, (Goti, 2024) investigates the portrayal of leadership in classical Javanese texts, yet his analysis centers on royal figures such as Sultan Agung and overlooks the subversive potential of characters like Ranggalawe. (Yusuf et al., 2024) explores themes of rebellion in Javanese historical novels, but her study does not integrate contemporary leadership theories or delve into the cultural implications of resistance and moral leadership.

These scholarly gaps underscore the need for an interdisciplinary approach that can capture the full complexity of Ranggalawe's character and cultural function. By combining literary analysis with leadership theory and symbolic anthropology, it becomes possible to interpret Ranggalawe not just as a historical or literary figure, but as a cultural archetype whose story reflects broader tensions within Javanese society regarding power, morality, and identity. This study draws on Paul Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics (Martono, 2019), which allows for a layered interpretation of texts that considers both their symbolic structures and their ideological underpinnings. Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity is particularly relevant, as it frames characters not as static entities but as evolving selves who are shaped by conflict, choice, and interpretation. Through this lens, *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* can be read as a symbolic text where the protagonist's moral struggle reflects the cultural discourse of leadership in Java. The novel portrays Ranggalawe's leadership not as an exercise of power but as a manifestation of ethical responsibility. His refusal to accept political injustice even at great personal cost positions him as a moral exemplar whose story invites readers to reflect on the meaning of leadership in times of moral crisis. His declaration, "If truth must be silenced for the sake of power's longevity, then I choose to stand against the rulers" (Samin, 2015:112), encapsulates the core values of ethical leadership and illustrates how literature can dramatize the internal conflicts that define genuine leadership.

Furthermore, the use of symbolic anthropology enables a deeper understanding of how Ranggalawe's story functions within the cultural imagination. According to Geertz, culture consists of symbolic systems that provide meaning to human actions, and literature can be seen as one such system. The rituals, language, and moral codes represented in the novel are not merely narrative elements; they are cultural signs that encode the collective aspirations and anxieties of the community. Ranggalawe's rebellion, in this context, is not just a historical event but a cultural performance that speaks to the perennial tension between duty and conscience, obedience and resistance, order and justice. This multidisciplinary reading of Ranggalawe as a cultural symbol of ethical leadership provides a more nuanced understanding of both the character and the society that produced him. It challenges simplistic readings of rebellion as disloyalty and repositions moral resistance as a legitimate and necessary form of leadership. In doing so, it also contributes to a broader discourse on leadership in the Indonesian context, where issues of corruption, authoritarianism, and moral decay continue to dominate public concern. By revisiting traditional narratives through the lens of contemporary ethical theories, literature becomes a means of reimagining leadership for the present and future.

In conclusion, while there is a substantial body of literature on leadership theory, cultural anthropology, and Javanese literature, very few studies have attempted to synthesize these domains in the analysis of Ranggalawe as a literary and cultural figure. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a comprehensive, multidisciplinary interpretation of Ranggalawe's representation in *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol*. By integrating literary analysis, ethical leadership models, and symbolic anthropology, the research aims to illuminate the cultural construction of leadership in Javanese historical fiction and to demonstrate how literature can serve as a powerful vehicle for ethical reflection and cultural critique. In a time when the world is grappling with a crisis of leadership, the story of Ranggalawe offers a timeless reminder that true leadership is not defined by power, but by the courage to uphold truth in the face of injustice.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a literary text analysis strategy grounded in the method of critical hermeneutics. This approach is chosen based on the primary aim of the research: to uncover the cultural construction of leadership as represented through the character of Ranggalawe in the historical novel *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* by Makinudin Samin. The novel, as a work of historical fiction, does not merely function as a retelling of the past, but serves as a symbolic space where cultural values, ideologies, and leadership discourses are constructed, negotiated, and contested. Therefore, this research requires a method that not only interprets the surface of the text, but also penetrates its deeper meanings and the cultural contexts that shape them. The critical hermeneutics approach adopted here is rooted in the thought of Paul Ricoeur, who emphasizes the necessity of understanding texts through the excavation of symbolic meaning and the historical-cultural contexts in which they are embedded. In this perspective, literary texts are read as interpretive spaces that are far from neutral; rather, they are filled with ideological interests, local values, and interwoven cultural symbols. Hermeneutics encourages reading beyond the literal level, guiding interpretation toward deeper layers of meaning, particularly concerning how leadership is understood and signified within Javanese cultural contexts.

The primary data of this study is the 2015 edition of *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol*, which is analyzed through a deep reading that focuses on character narrative, plot structure, key dialogues, and the depiction of Javanese cultural settings that frame the events within the story. A close reading method is applied to examine how the character of Ranggalawe is represented as a complex leader figure, and how values such as courage, justice, loyalty, and sacrifice are interwoven in his actions and decisions. Meanwhile, secondary data is drawn from a variety of scholarly references relevant to the topic, including theories of leadership (Faisal et al., 2024, p. 17), Javanese cultural studies (Zulaekhoh & Hakim, 2021), and literary and ideological theory (Jamil et al., 2024). These sources serve as theoretical instruments to enrich and deepen the textual analysis. The analysis procedure is conducted in four main stages. First, the identification stage, where the researcher identifies the representation of the protagonist and the embedded leadership values in the character of Ranggalawe, both explicit and implicit within the narrative. Second, the cultural contextualization stage, in which the narrative is placed within the social and moral framework of Javanese society, focusing on concepts such as *kawula gusti*, leader charisma (*wibawa*), and the relationship between morality and power. Third, the theoretical dialogue stage involves linking textual findings with the theoretical frameworks of charismatic leadership (Firdaus, 2024), ethical leadership (Pahrudin et al., 2018), and transformational leadership (Rivai, 2020), thereby constructing an interpretation that is not only textual but also conceptual. Lastly, the critical interpretation stage synthesizes all analytical results to interpret how the text constructs a leadership narrative rooted in local culture while simultaneously offering criticism toward hegemonic power structures.

This study is reflective and interpretive in nature, thus its validity lies in the depth of analysis and the coherence of argumentation, rather than in quantitative generalization. To maintain interpretive rigor and accuracy, triangulation is applied through cross-dialogue among various literature and theoretical perspectives. Through this method, the research aims to offer a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of how the novel *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* becomes a reflective space to articulate an alternative figure of leadership one that is not only strong in political and physical aspects, but also noble in moral conviction, steadfast in principles, and loyal to the values of cultural truth.

4. Results

1. Historical Narrative and Leadership Legitimacy

In *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol*, the figure of Ranggalawe is portrayed not merely as a heroic historical character, but as a complex representation of leadership legitimacy within Javanese cultural values. Makinudin Samin crafts this character through a layered depiction that combines historical, spiritual, and moral elements altogether constructing the ideal leader within the cultural imagination of the Javanese people. Ranggalawe is presented as a leader whose legitimacy is firmly grounded in three main aspects: aristocratic lineage, extraordinary courage on the battlefield, and a consistent commitment to justice and truth. These elements converge and reinforce one another, forming a leadership narrative rooted not only in origin and power but also in morality and social ethics. As the son of Ronggolawe, one of the principal nobles of the Singasari Kingdom, Ranggalawe inherits his leadership legitimacy from aristocratic descent. In Javanese culture, noble blood is not merely a marker of social status it is believed to carry a sacred aura of leadership, a spiritual mandate that legitimizes one's capacity to lead. However, in this novel, such legitimacy is not presented as standalone. It is validated through a series of concrete actions that showcase Ranggalawe's leadership qualities both in military and moral dimensions. His conquest of the Mongol troops an

external threat that once haunted many Asian kingdoms is depicted as the climax of his bravery and strategic acumen. This act not only reflects military success but also positions Ranggalawe as a courageous leader, unwavering in his defense of his homeland.

More importantly, the novel consistently portrays Ranggalawe as a leader who upholds honor, bravery, and loyalty. He is not merely a commander of soldiers but a true leader willing to bear the risks to protect the dignity of himself and his people. In a powerful excerpt, Samin writes: "*Ranggalawe never hesitated to step onto the battlefield; the blood of a warrior coursed strongly through his veins. He would rather fall in the field of honor than betray his loyalty to his birthplace*" (Samin, 2015:112). This statement reflects a style of leadership anchored in moral principles rather than power ambitions. Ranggalawe is depicted as someone who chooses honor over survival, and struggle over submission to an unjust regime. Another distinctive trait of Ranggalawe's leadership in this novel is his ability to win the loyalty of the people and his troops. This loyalty is not rooted in his noble birth alone, but in his just behavior, his defense of the weak, and his honest voice in upholding the truth. He becomes a beloved leader not because of his title but because of his integrity and empathy for the ordinary people. When political elites neglect their promises and enact injustice, Ranggalawe refuses to stay silent. In another striking moment, he declares: "*I do not seek a crown, but if my rights are trampled and my people oppressed, I will not remain silent*" (Samin, 2015:175). This remark underscores that his leadership is not driven by the lust for power but by a moral calling to protect the weak and confront injustice.

Ranggalawe's actions in the novel can be read as an expression of ethical and transformational leadership. He is not only a battlefield hero but also a moral exemplar who earns public trust through personal example. His legitimacy is derived from a combination of genealogical symbolism (noble descent), heroic performance (defeating the Mongols), and moral courage (resisting internal injustice). In Javanese cultural perception, such a combination aligns with the concept of *priyayi sejati* a true aristocrat not merely as a bureaucratic figure, but as an ethical exemplar who upholds harmony, justice, and inner balance. The *priyayi sejati* is not simply a structural leader but a moral guide who embodies wisdom and nobility. Therefore, *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* offers more than a historical tale it reflects a living cultural construction of leadership in Javanese society. The novel becomes a narrative space where heroism, loyalty, and justice are redefined through a figure who, while historically significant, is reanimated in literature as the symbol of an ideal leader. In contemporary Indonesia, often plagued by crises of exemplary leadership, the figure of Ranggalawe in this novel resonates as a cultural yearning for brave, honest, and truth-driven leadership even in opposition to hegemonic power.

2. Javanese Cultural Construction in the Character of Ranggalawe

In the Javanese cultural cosmos, which is rich in philosophy and moral symbolism, leadership is not merely a matter of power or hereditary status. It is an embodiment of noble values reflected in daily conduct through speech and behavior, emotional sensibility, and mutual respect. The figure of Ranggalawe in *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* emerges as the manifestation of deeply rooted Javanese cultural values: loyal devotion (*kawula gusti*), service to the homeland, and social solidarity grounded in emotional sensitivity to the suffering of the people. Loyalty, in Javanese thought, is neither blind nor absolute. It is a form of service rooted in a moral and spiritual bond between *kawula* (the people) and *gusti* (the ruler). This bond is not merely a social contract, but an emotional and ethical connection. Ranggalawe internalizes this value not as passive submission, but as active loyalty that speaks out when justice is violated. In the novel, he says: "*My loyalty is not blind devotion, but based on my faith in the justice upheld by this kingdom. If that justice is lost, then my loyalty will shift to what is right*" (Samin, 2015:144). This statement is more than a declaration; it is a mirror of an elevated leadership ethos loyalty guided by conscience, not empty allegiance.

Devotion to the homeland also forms the very breath of Ranggalawe's entire struggle. In the novel, he is depicted not as someone who seeks power for personal glory, but as one willing to sacrifice everything for his birthplace, Tuban. For him, the homeland is not just a geographical territory, but a vital part of his soul. When the Mongol army threatens his land, Ranggalawe does not wait for orders; he stands at the front lines. He is not a soldier awaiting command, but a protector who places the people's safety above all. His heartfelt statement "*Tuban is not merely my birthplace; it is part of my soul. As long as I breathe, I will never let this land fall into the hands of invaders*" (Samin, 2015:98) proves that Ranggalawe's courage grows from genuine patriotism, not from ambition or political calculation. This is what makes his leadership both authentic and deeply meaningful in the cultural narrative. Equally important, Ranggalawe's character embodies strong social solidarity. He is not a leader who towers above and distances himself from the people; instead, he immerses himself in their heartbeat. His closeness with soldiers and the common people is not depicted as a populist strategy, but as a reflection of his social sensitivity and awareness that a leader is a servant of the people, not an absolute ruler. In a touching scene, Ranggalawe refuses to live in the palace

after his inauguration and chooses instead to remain among his people. He says: *"The palace is not my place. I would rather stay among the people I've known since childhood those whose blood and tears have flowed with my struggle"* (Samin, 2015:159). This statement strengthens the narrative that, for Ranggalawe, true leadership does not reside in distance or grandeur, but in togetherness, in shared experience, in the unity of suffering and struggle.

These three values conscientious loyalty, devotion to the homeland, and social solidarity not only enrich Ranggalawe's character as a literary figure but also shape the moral structure of leadership deeply rooted in Javanese tradition. He becomes the embodiment of the *priyayi sejati*, not by virtue of social status alone, but because of his moral integrity. In a world that often treats power as a commodity to be traded for personal interest, Ranggalawe stands as a mirror of the leader willing to walk alone for the sake of truth, willing to bear risks for the sake of justice. He not only fights enemies on the battlefield but also resists internal injustice within the ruling system that betrays sacred values. This construction of leadership reveals that in Javanese culture, the ideal leader is not necessarily the most powerful or politically dominant figure. A true leader is one who maintains loyalty with discernment, serves without compromising dignity, and walks beside the people without diminishing his authority. Ranggalawe symbolizes the Javanese aspiration for a just, brave, and sincere leader. His narrative in this novel becomes a kind of literary monument to leadership rooted in local culture but with universal resonance. Through the character of Ranggalawe, the novel articulates a cultural narrative that not only records history but projects an ethical vision of leadership: a leader as the guardian of values, not merely the executor of power. Leadership, thus, is no longer viewed as a right, but as a sacred responsibility; not as a privilege, but as a moral duty to be lived out with full sincerity and devotion.

3. Leadership Conflict: Personal Ethics and Power

One of the most powerful dramatic tensions in *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* lies in the inner conflict between Ranggalawe's personal ethics and the political decisions of Raden Wijaya, which are laden with compromise. In this narrative, Makinudin Samin skillfully reveals a recurring reality in the course of history: the uneasy confrontation between idealism and pragmatism, between personal morality and the demands of political authority. Ranggalawe emerges as a leader who upholds honor, loyalty, and justice as non-negotiable principles, while Raden Wijaya is portrayed as a ruler compelled to maintain his reign through political calculations and strategic compromise. Ranggalawe never perceives power as an end in itself. In his view, authority is a sacred trust that must be exercised with integrity. His deep sense of betrayal does not stem from the loss of political position, but from the broken promise that has offended his code of honor. His disappointment is not driven by ambition, but by the violation of a noble ideal: a promise, to him, is the embodiment of a knight's dignity. In the novel, he exclaims with anger and grief, *"I do not crave power, but I cannot accept the humiliation of my struggle. A promise is honor, and honor is the very soul of a warrior"* (Samin, 2015:182). This declaration reflects that, for Ranggalawe, ethical values are inviolable. He understands leadership not as a political mechanism, but as a way of life built upon truth and moral integrity.

This internal conflict reaches its turning point when Ranggalawe chooses to leave the center of power and return to Tuban, his birthplace, which symbolizes his moral foundation and spiritual allegiance. This decision is a conscious rejection of a political system that, in his eyes, has strayed from justice. He gathers his strength not to seize the throne, but to make a moral statement that true leaders cannot remain silent in the face of injustice, even if it emanates from the very palace they once defended. With unwavering resolve, he proclaims: *"Power founded on betrayal will never endure. I would rather fight beyond the palace walls than become part of the deceit within them"* (Samin, 2015:197). This pronouncement affirms Ranggalawe's moral position as a leader who refuses to submit to a rule devoid of conscience. Conversely, Raden Wijaya is portrayed as a ruler trapped in the dilemmas of statecraft: on one hand, he must stabilize a nascent kingdom; on the other, he must sacrifice certain moral principles to achieve political consolidation. His failure to uphold his promise to Ranggalawe reflects the darker side of political leadership, where morality is often compromised for pragmatic survival. In this context, the conflict between Ranggalawe and Raden Wijaya transcends personal rivalry; it becomes an allegory of the eternal struggle between moral idealism and political realism. The tragedy that ultimately befalls Ranggalawe his rebellion ending in death serves as a sorrowful and meaningful climax. He dies not as a traitor, but as a martyr of moral resistance. When the palace loses its light of honesty, Ranggalawe walks a solitary path of dignity, wounded but unbowed. His poignant words, *"If I must die, let me die as a knight, not as a puppet of power"* (Samin, 2015:212), represent his final testament a leader who chooses principle over comfort, integrity over blind loyalty, and honor over the mere continuity of life.

Ranggalawe's death does not signal the end of his leadership, but the beginning of his symbolic legacy a legacy that outlives his body and breathes in the collective memory as a counter-narrative of Javanese leadership. His story becomes a lens through which leadership is not measured by thrones or titles, but by the courage to uphold justice,

even in solitude. Through the tragedy of Ranggalawe, the novel delivers a sharp social critique of power devoid of morality. Ranggalawe becomes a mirror for today's leaders: power without ethics is empty, and legitimacy without justice is deception. By intertwining historical memory, literature, and cultural critique, *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* not only revives a historical figure but builds a reflective space for the ongoing crisis of ethical leadership. The conflict between Ranggalawe and Raden Wijaya serves as an enduring allegory of power's moral dilemma: to remain faithful to principle or to yield to political expediency; to govern with the price of betrayal or to lead with the cost of sacrifice. It is this moral tension subtly and powerfully conveyed that elevates the novel from a historical retelling into a profound meditation on leadership, justice, and the price of integrity.

4.A Multidisciplinary Approach as an Analytical Instrument

By integrating literary criticism, cultural anthropology, and leadership studies, the character of Ranggalawe in *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* emerges not merely as a fictional figure, but as an embodiment of deeply rooted and complex cultural values. He stands as a symbol of leadership that is grounded in local wisdom yet capable of facing the storms of political power and moral challenges across time. From a literary perspective, Ranggalawe is constructed through a series of internal conflicts, historical upheavals, and inter-character dynamics that create a rich, cohesive, and emotionally resonant narrative. His presence as the central character does not merely project heroism, but also exemplifies moral steadfastness in the face of betrayal and political turbulence.

From a cultural anthropological standpoint, Ranggalawe's character reflects key tenets of Javanese leadership ethos: *kawula–gusti* (servant–lord) as a form of vertical loyalty based on moral-spiritual trust; *tepa slira* (empathy and self-restraint) as a reflection of communal sensitivity; and reverence for moral values as the foundation of legitimate authority. He does not merely resist foreign threats, such as the Mongol invasion, but also wages a more profound inner resistance against internal power structures that have strayed from justice and moral clarity. In a pivotal line, Ranggalawe asserts, “*A true leader is not defined by the crown upon his head, but by the weight of the people's burden carried in his heart*” (Samin, 2015:134). This statement reaffirms the Javanese belief that true leadership is not exalted by outward symbols, but by inner commitment to the people's welfare and moral conscience. In terms of leadership studies, Ranggalawe exemplifies a transformational leadership model. He does not exercise authority through hierarchical imposition but inspires through personal example, moral integrity, and courageous defiance of injustice. His influence is not derived from his noble bloodline or formal title, but from his sincerity in advocating for justice and protecting the voiceless. His decision to reject a power structure that has betrayed its moral obligations exemplifies leadership grounded in conscience. Ranggalawe shows that a true leader is one who can stand firm on ethical principles even if it means walking a lonely path. This vision of leadership is particularly vital in times of political instability or moral decline, where integrity is often sacrificed for political expedience.

The multidisciplinary approach to this novel enables a more layered and reflective reading. It reveals that the text is not simply a recounting of a heroic past, but also a critical discourse on contemporary power and ethics. The novel raises pressing, albeit unspoken, questions: Can traditional leadership values endure in the face of modern-day pragmatism? In this context, Ranggalawe serves as a symbol of the enduring contestation between morality and politics, principle and compromise, the voice of conscience and the voice of power. His character becomes a cultural and ethical compass, reminding readers of the necessity to ground leadership in authenticity, empathy, and justice. Furthermore, from an academic and pedagogical standpoint, the interdisciplinary method used in analyzing this figure demonstrates the rich potential of historical fiction as a dynamic and contextualized educational medium. Literature, in its truest form, is not merely an aesthetic domain but a critical space that fosters reflection on human values, social structures, and the architecture of power. Through the character of Ranggalawe, this novel proves that even fictionalized narratives can bridge historical, anthropological, and political dimensions in a harmonious and insightful manner.

Ranggalawe, in this multidimensional depiction, becomes a literary figure open to multiple layers of interpretation. He is a reflection of the past that continues to speak to the present. He is the voice of tradition that echoes amid the cacophony of modernity. More than that, he is a leader born of conscience, acting with ethics, and falling with honor. Through this integrative approach, *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* not only revives a historical tale but constructs a conceptual bridge that connects eras highlighting the relevance of ethical, culturally grounded leadership in today's socio-political landscape. Thus, the analysis of Ranggalawe's character through a multidisciplinary lens enriches our understanding of how cultural leadership is constructed and narrated within the Javanese worldview. It shows that a true leader is not only someone who can interpret the signs of the times, but one who can safeguard the sacred flame of noble values in every choice and action. In Ranggalawe, readers are invited to

rediscover the essence of leadership as a sacred responsibility born of love for the people, loyal to justice, and honest to the voice within.

5. Discussion

The novel *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* by Makinudin Samin offers a profound literary reconstruction of a Javanese historical figure, transforming Ranggalawe into more than a mere hero of the past. Instead, he emerges as an ideological archetype of transformational and ethical leadership, deeply grounded in local cultural wisdom. Through this portrayal, literature becomes a powerful medium for reframing historical legacies into moral and philosophical exemplars, revealing how narratives rooted in local tradition can address universal concerns of leadership, justice, and integrity.

This reconstruction of Ranggalawe aligns with a growing body of interdisciplinary research that highlights the importance of indigenous values in shaping contemporary leadership frameworks. Recent empirical studies particularly those within Indonesian cultural contexts underscore the role of local ethics such as *e-wuh pakewuh*, *tepa slira*, and *Asta Brata* as foundational principles of leadership (Utama, 2023). These values resonate with the core attributes of transformational leadership as defined by Burns (Mudak et al., 2025) and later expanded by Bass and Riggio (Harsoyo, 2022), where leaders are not only change agents but also moral exemplars who influence followers through personal integrity, inspiration, and ethical vision. A case study on Romo Hamzah, a respected community leader in Yogyakarta, provides contemporary validation of this model. The study revealed that his leadership, deeply embedded in Javanese spiritual and ethical frameworks, successfully fostered communal trust, loyalty, and sustained social cohesion not through positional authority, but through what is termed “service-driven influence” (Ramayanti et al., 2025). This model mirrors Ranggalawe’s narrative, where his legitimacy arises not simply from aristocratic descent, but from an unwavering commitment to communal values, fairness, and resistance to injustice. In Samin’s novel, Ranggalawe’s legitimacy emerges from a tripartite foundation: noble heritage, martial prowess, and moral conviction. His noble lineage as part of the Singhasari dynasty situates him within the Javanese ideal of *priyayi sejati* a leader not only defined by bloodline, but also by virtue. However, Samin deliberately constructs legitimacy as something earned rather than inherited. This echoes Geertz’s (Nuzila et al., 2024) observation that in Javanese cosmology, power must be both symbolic and moral “sacred,” in a cultural sense requiring continual reaffirmation through ethical behavior and communal service.

Ranggalawe's leadership style is best understood through the lens of transformational leadership. He motivates others by embodying virtues of honor, courage, and justice, rather than employing coercive power. A longitudinal study conducted in Central Java between 2018 and 2025 (Thoyibah & Hajizah, 2025) found that transformational leadership rooted in traditional cultural ethics significantly improved organizational commitment and moral behavior in both formal institutions and artisanal cooperatives. The findings suggest that local cultural codes when aligned with leadership models that prioritize authenticity and integrity yield higher levels of trust, loyalty, and collective engagement. This notion is particularly visible in the way Samin portrays Ranggalawe's empathy and compassion qualities that resonate with the Javanese concept of *tepa slira*, or the ability to place oneself in another's position. In anthropological terms, this reflects a relational and ontological model of leadership, where power is not a top-down mechanism but a reciprocal, moral relationship between leaders and followers. This model is supported by comparative research from Māori communities in Aotearoa (New Zealand), where relational leadership is grounded in values of *manaakitanga* (hospitality), *whānaungatanga* (kinship), and *aroha* (compassion), reinforcing leadership as stewardship rather than control (Anjarwati & Darni, 2022).

Ranggalawe’s actions choosing to live among his people, rejecting palace comforts, and prioritizing communal needs serve as narrative expressions of this relational leadership model. He explicitly chooses proximity over hierarchy, participation over privilege. These choices emphasize his authenticity as a leader and exemplify what (Eng & MA, 2024, p. 65) identify as ethical leadership: the ability to uphold fairness, honesty, and moral courage in the face of institutional corruption. His famous statement in the novel “If I must die, let me die as a knight, not as a puppet of power” distills his rejection of instrumental politics and confirms his allegiance to truth and integrity. From a political leadership perspective, the conflict between Ranggalawe and Raden Wijaya stages a deeper ideological struggle: idealism versus pragmatism, moral responsibility versus political expediency. His refusal to compromise despite the personal cost can be interpreted as a form of moral protest, a concept explored in contemporary ethical leadership literature (Hafi et al., 2025). While traditional political theory might frame rebellion as failure or treason, ethical leadership frameworks recast it as a form of virtuous dissent, particularly when institutional systems betray their own ethical foundations.

Samin's literary construction of Ranggalawe thus operates on dual symbolic registers. First, Ranggalawe represents the culturally sanctioned ideal of the *priyayi sejati*, a figure imbued with wisdom, courage, and cultural gravitas. Second, he functions as a moral critic of the very system that produced him challenging the corruptions of court politics, broken promises, and the erosion of justice. This duality situates him not just as a historical character but as a timeless moral archetype, echoing Geertz's argument that in Javanese tradition, power is legitimate only when it remains harmonized with cultural ethics and symbolic morality (Nadilah et al., 2024). The moral weight of Ranggalawe's rebellion and eventual martyrdom transforms his character from a political actor into a cultural symbol of resistance. He dies not for ambition, but for honor and justice. This resonates with contemporary scholarship that highlights how ethical sacrifice enhances symbolic leadership capital. As (Setyawan et al., 2024) argue, the most lasting form of leadership influence is derived not from titles or institutions but from symbolic moral action that resonates across generations. Ranggalawe's death, far from diminishing his authority, amplifies his legacy as an icon of ethical leadership a martyr not to power, but to principle.

The resonance of this narrative in today's sociopolitical climate is profound. In both Indonesian and global contexts, where political disillusionment and leadership crises proliferate, literary and historical figures like Ranggalawe offer crucial reflections. Empirical studies from Southeast Asia (Muslimin et al., 2024) suggest that communities still seek leaders who embody moral clarity and cultural authenticity especially in times of instability. These studies affirm that culturally grounded, transformational leadership models not only sustain trust but also regenerate social cohesion. Samin's novel, therefore, becomes more than a tale of rebellion; it becomes a cultural and ethical treatise. It invites readers especially those in contemporary leadership roles to reevaluate the essence of legitimacy, the purpose of power, and the meaning of sacrifice. Literature's functions not only as narrative but as ethical pedagogy (Nussbaum, 2022), guiding readers toward a model of leadership rooted in empathy, moral courage (Zaki, 2021), and relational stewardship (Uhl-Bien, 2021). As shown by (Widodo & Suryanto (2023). , classical Javanese literary texts contain hidden pedagogical structures that train readers in leadership ethics through the dialectics of their characters.

Furthermore, *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* offers a rich, multidimensional portrayal of leadership that transcends its historical setting. By embedding the figure of Ranggalawe within ethical, cultural, and transformational frameworks, Samin crafts a powerful commentary on the timeless need for morally grounded leadership. As modern societies grapple with leadership deficits and crises of legitimacy, the narrative reminds us that true leadership is not defined by crown or command but by the courage to uphold justice, the humility to serve the people, and the integrity to stand alone, if necessary, in the name of truth.

6. Conclusion

The novel *Ranggalawe Sang Penakluk Monggol* by Makinudin Samin is not merely a historical fiction narrative, but a cultural canvas that vividly depicts the complexity of Javanese leadership through the figure of Ranggalawe. This character is portrayed as an ideal leader who upholds moral values, courage, and loyalty grounded in local ethical traditions. Through both internal and external conflicts, Ranggalawe represents a crisis of values in leadership when steadfast principles confront the pragmatism of political reality. His loyalty to the kingdom is not absolute, but rather measured by wisdom and unwavering commitment to truth.

A multidisciplinary reading of Ranggalawe through the lenses of literature, cultural anthropology, and leadership studies reveals that leadership is not merely about structural power, but about moral and social responsibility born from historical and spiritual consciousness. Ranggalawe exemplifies a transformational leader who inspires not through positional authority, but through demonstrated integrity. He emerges as a figure who mobilizes people through moral example rather than commands. In the context of Javanese culture, he embodies the true *priyayi*, a noble figure who upholds honor, justice, and the courage to oppose injustice, even at the cost of life. Through Ranggalawe's story, this novel presents a touching social critique relevant to contemporary leadership discourse: that a true leader is someone who does not lose their conscience when confronted with power. This work simultaneously demonstrates the strength of historical literature as a multidisciplinary educational space that integrates cultural investigation, local values, and global leadership theories into a cohesive and reflective discourse. Thus, Ranggalawe is not merely a figure from the past, but an eternal inspiration for a future of leadership that is just, courageous, and culturally grounded.

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