THE STORY OF GODDESS DRUPADI AS INSPIRATION FOR ILLUSTRATED STORYBOOK CREATION

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Abstract. Illustration is a form visual communication that powerfully coveys narratives through imagery. This prototype was inspired by the figure of Dewi Drupadi from the epic Mahabharata, serving as the central theme for a picture storybook. Drupadi was chosen due to her multifaceted character, embodying values such as courage, resilience, and sincerity amidst trials. These values are reinterpreted through visual storytelling in a modern illustrative style, designed to appeal to readers ranging from teenagers to young adults. The creative process involved several stages: literature review, story development, character design, and page layout composition review. The artwork was produced digitally using Procreate, with narrative illustration style that blends elements of fantasy and cultural tradition. Character expressions and atmospheric settings are rendered in detail to enhance the reader's imaginative and emotional engagement. This prototype serves not only as a medium for developing illustration skills but also as a cultural effort to preserve and reintroduce classic tales through fresh visual interpretations. The resulting illustrated storybook aims to be both educational and inspirational, offering a contemporary gateway for younger generations to rediscover the richness of Mahabharata legends through art.

1. Introduction

In Indonesian classical literature, two of the most famous epic stories are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Both epics, originally written in Sanskrit, have long become an integral part of the cultural heritage in the archipelago. Experts believe that the Ramayana predates the Mahabharata in its origins (Pendit, 2003; Henry, 2024; Agus, 2022). These works are not only tales of war and adventure but also rich narratives that reflect ancient customs, lifestyles, and moral values of the past societies. The Ramayana was composed by Valmiki, while the Mahabharata was written by the sage Vyasa. Their stories continue to resonate across generations due to their strong moral messages and timeless relevance, not only in India but also in Indonesia and other parts of the world.

The Mahabharata, in particular, derives its name from the Sanskrit words "Maha" (great) and "Bharata" (the Bharata people). It tells the story of a monumental conflict between two royal families. The author first encountered this story during childhood through a televised

Indian series titled Mahabharat (StarPlus version, 2013) broadcast on a local Indonesian channel, ANTV. Initially indifferent, the author became drawn into the story following a friend's recommendation, who praised its rich storyline, heroic characters, and meaningful life lessons. As the series progressed especially during the episodes featuring the Pandava brothers the author grew increasingly invested.

This particular version of the Mahabharata gained massive popularity, being re-aired several times in Indonesia and watched by millions. One character that captivated the author's attention was Goddess Drupadi, portrayed by Pooja Sharma. Her depiction as a brave, intelligent, and dignified woman made a strong impression. Unlike most female characters, Drupadi was shown as a resilient figure who endured great suffering without losing her integrity. This deep admiration led the author to develop an interest in retelling Drupadi's story through a modern medium that resonates with today's youth.

The Mahabharata is more than just a legend; it contains dharma values, political lessons, mythology, and ethical teachings. Scholars like Purwadi (2012) and Suartaya (2016) argue that the epic remains relevant due to these moral underpinnings. Today's technological landscape provides new opportunities for cultural preservation through creative media. One such approach is visual storytelling specifically, through illustrated storybooks. By combining narratives with engaging illustrations, complex stories can be communicated in a way that is accessible and attractive to young readers.

Illustration plays a key role in enriching textual narratives. More than decorative elements, illustrations serve as visual interpreters of stories. In the context of storytelling, illustrated books allow readers to better understand and emotionally connect with the characters and events. According to Muharrar (2003), illustrations enhance the clarity and appeal of a story, making them essential tools in education and communication. For children and teenagers in particular, illustrations act as powerful aids for comprehension and imagination.

Visual communication is vital when verbal explanations are inadequate. Pictures can convey emotions, ideas, and contexts that words alone may not fully capture. In this prototype, illustration serves as a communication bridge between the story of Drupadi and young readers. Illustrated storybooks are thus chosen as the medium, as they combine visual and narrative elements into a cohesive whole (Susetyo, 2016). Mitchell (2003) emphasizes that text and image must work in harmony in such books, as neither can fully tell the story on their own.

For young audiences, especially teens, visual storytelling enhances enjoyment and comprehension. It not only educates but also entertains and nurtures cultural appreciation. Furthermore, such books serve as collectible art objects that uphold design and narrative quality. The current project aims to reintroduce the story of Drupadi through a visually engaging and educational format. The illustrations use a realistic style to represent characters faithfully—from crowns and weapons to clothing and posture ensuring contextual authenticity. These visual representations enrich the reader's understanding and deepen their emotional engagement with the story.

The purpose of this study is to create an illustrated storybook that narrates the life and values of Goddess Drupadi. The goal is not only to retell her story but to present it in a way that is meaningful and engaging for today's youth.

The project offers several benefits. For the author, it provides an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the Mahabharata, refine digital illustration skills, and explore the use of visual storytelling as a cultural education tool. For educational institutions, the result can serve as an innovative teaching material in subjects like history, literature, and arts especially in helping students appreciate classical stories. Illustrators and designers can benefit from a practical example of adapting classical narratives into modern visual formats, inspiring new approaches in the creative industry. For the wider community, particularly younger generations, the storybook offers an alternative and enjoyable medium to access ancient cultural wisdom. It invites readers to learn about moral values and heritage through a visually immersive experience.

2. Results and Discussion

Visual storytelling in this study is grounded in the reinterpretation of a classical epic Mahabharata through the lens of contemporary illustration practice. Following the background and rationale outlined in the previous section, this chapter discusses the concrete outcomes of the project, focusing on the creation and analysis of illustrations inspired by the character of Dewi Drupadi.

The results include a series of digital artworks arranged in sequential narrative form, produced to support a picture book format. This chapter begins with the analysis of the book's visual framing through its cover illustrations, followed by selected key story scenes that reflect the character's emotional and spiritual journey. Each artwork is examined based on its visual composition, symbolic content, stylistic approach, and relevance to the narrative structure. The integration of narrative and visual elements is central to delivering both aesthetic quality and emotional depth to readers.

2.1 Overview of the Work

This study produced 32 illustrations narrating the life of Dewi Drupadi, with 11 selected as representative works for analysis. All were created digitally using Procreate on a 25 x 20 cm canvas and printed on 150gsm art paper. The works combine semi-realistic styles with traditional Indian visual cues, intending to bring ancient narratives to a modern audience through visual storytelling.

2.2 Cover Illustrations

The book cover plays a significant role in shaping the reader's first impression of the visual narrative. In this project, the front and back covers were designed not only to attract attention but also to encapsulate the core themes of the story. Through the use of symbolic characters, colors, and visual metaphors, the covers serve as a prologue and epilogue to the illustrated journey of Dewi Drupadi. The following sub-sections present the artistic analysis of both the front and back cover illustrations.

2.2.1 Front Cover Illustration

The front cover shows Drupadi in a prayerful pose, surrounded by symbols representing her struggles and divine protection: dice (fate and deception), peacock feathers (Krishna), and the opposing figures of Duryodhana and Arjuna. The warm-toned palette (gold, red, orange) and symmetrical layout reflect the tension and dualities of the Mahabharata narrative.

Figure 1. Front Cover Illustration
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.2.2 Back Cover Illustration

The back cover depicts the battlefield scene from Kurukshetra with opposing chariots, under a starlit sky, indicating the resolution of war and divine orchestration. Visual elements echo the cosmic aspect of the epic.
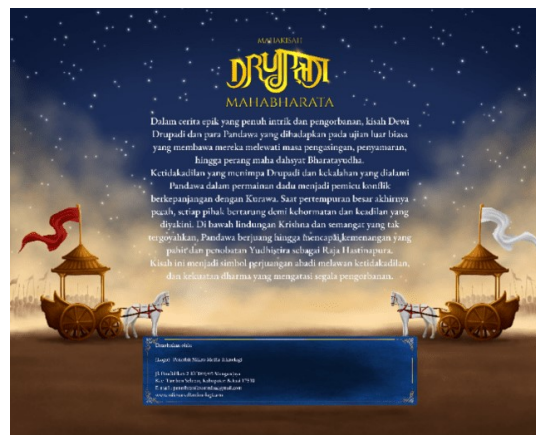

Figure 2. Back Cover Illustration
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3 Selected Story Illustrations

To represent the narrative arc and emotional intensity of Drupadi's journey in the Mahabharata, eleven key illustrations were selected from the full set of thirty-two. These selected artworks visualize critical moments in her story, from birth to her final victory, and are analyzed based on visual

composition, symbolism, and artistic strategy. The discussion below highlights each artwork's narrative function and its contribution to the overall storytelling approach.

2.3.1 The Birth of Drupadi

This illustration captures the moment when Drupadi emerges from the sacred fire, highlighting her divine origin. Placed at the center of the composition, Drupadi appears with hands joined in front of her chest, dressed in a red saree with golden trim. Her long hair flows downward, emphasizing both her grace and strength.

The background is filled with glowing flames, while subtle stars and tree silhouettes suggest a sacred, mystical night. In the foreground, flower petals and embers float, enriching the ceremonial feel. Warm tones—orange, red, and gold—dominate the color palette, symbolizing fire and divinity.

Digitally created in Procreate, the illustration uses semi-realistic rendering and backlighting to emphasize Drupadi's spiritual presence. This scene symbolizes more than birth it represents divine intervention and the emergence of feminine strength within epic history.

Figure 3. Page 3-9 Chapter Birth of Drupadi
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.2 Drupadi's Contest and Wedding

This illustration visualizes the sacred wedding ceremony between Drupadi and Arjuna in the royal court of Panchala. Drupadi is depicted in a traditional red saree adorned with gold ornaments and

flower garlands, following Arjuna as they circle the ceremonial fire. Arjuna, dressed in a white dhoti and crowned with gold accessories, leads the procession with composed steps, reflecting reverence toward the ritual.

The composition places both characters centrally, framed symmetrically by pillars, draped curtains, and floral decorations. Warm colors red, orange, and gold dominate the palette to emphasize the sacred and festive atmosphere. The glowing fire at the center altar serves as both a narrative and visual focal point, illuminating the couple and enhancing the ceremonial ambiance.

Created digitally in Procreate using a semi-realistic approach, the artwork employs gradient shading and directional lighting to evoke depth and solemnity. Decorative elements like falling petals and soft blurring of background guests contribute to a dynamic yet sacred scene. Symbolically, the act of circling the fire reflects the eternal bond of trust and purity, reinforcing the cultural and emotional significance of the marriage.

Figure 4. Page 13-23 Chapter Drupadi's Contest and Wedding
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.3 Arrival at Hastinapura

This scene depicts a formal and spiritual welcome of Drupadi and the Pandava brothers at the royal court of Hastinapura. The illustration centers on the respectful interaction between Queen Gandhari and Drupadi, highlighted by their symbolic gestures and ceremonial attire. Gandhari presents an offering tray, while Drupadi and the Pandavas greet her with folded hands, expressing humility and reverence.

The composition employs a frontal, symmetrical layout with rich Indian architectural elements and textile details. Warm tones such as red, gold, and purple dominate the palette, enhancing the royal atmosphere. Flying flower petals and layered visual depth enrich the celebratory mood. This visual signifies unity, respect, and the cultural sanctity of royal receptions in ancient India.

Figure 5. Page 25 Chapter Welcoming Drupadi and Pandawa in Hastinapura
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.4 The Coronation of Maharaja Yudhistira

This illustration captures the solemn moment of Yudhistira's coronation as Maharaja of Indraprastha. Seated firmly on a golden throne, Yudhistira holds a royal lotus-tipped scepter, while a royal priest stands behind, raising a golden crown about to be placed on his head. Their regal attire, adorned with traditional Indian jewelry, emphasizes authority and spiritual legitimacy.

A diagonal composition directs the viewer's gaze from Yudhistira's scepter upward to the crown, highlighting the ceremonial climax. Dominated by gold, red, and white tones, the visual signifies nobility, purity, and spiritual power. Soft shading, blurred architectural backgrounds, and flying flower petals add depth and festivity to the scene. This moment symbolizes not just the transfer of power, but the acceptance of moral and spiritual responsibility as a righteous ruler.

Figure 6. Page 27 Chapter Coronation of Maharaja Yudhistira
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.5 The Dice Game

This illustration portrays a pivotal moment from the Mahabharata—the dice game at Hastinapura's royal hall. Two central characters, Shakuni and Duryodhana, stand on opposite sides of the composition. Shakuni is depicted in motion, throwing glowing white-and-gold dice toward a board

patterned like a chessboard. His attire and expression convey cunning and control. Duryodhana, standing tall with a contemplative pose, observes the play with tension and ambition.

Using digital soft shading and a warm, regal palette rich reds, golds, and purples the artist builds an atmosphere of grandeur and deceit. A strong diagonal light source and background blur emphasize the dice in midair, symbolizing fate manipulated by human deceit. The symmetrical composition and foreground board full of scattered pieces highlight the strategic and symbolic stakes. This moment sets the stage for the great conflict, capturing both the elegance of court life and the seeds of impending war.

Figure 7. Page 29-31 Chapter Dice Game
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.6 The Humiliation of Drupadi

This illustration captures the iconic scene of Drupadi's humiliation at Hastinapura's royal court. Positioned at the center, Drupadi stands with closed eyes, her wounded face solemn, hands folded in prayer. Her red saree detailed with gold embroidery and peacock feather motifs appears to lengthen endlessly, floating around her with magical luminosity. This visual choice powerfully symbolizes divine protection amidst violation.

Dushasana, shown in motion pulling her saree from the left, is deliberately blurred to emphasize Drupadi's sacred presence. His aggressive posture contrasts her calm resilience. The palace background is softly blurred with towering pillars, a golden throne, and King Dhritarashtra seated passively, visually reinforcing the moral neglect of the royal court.

Executed digitally using soft shading and depth-of-field techniques, the composition leverages glowing golden light from behind Drupadi to enhance her spiritual aura. The warm palette rich in reds, golds, and purples amplifies the tension, power, and sacredness of the scene. Through a mix of visual dynamism and emotional symbolism, this artwork narrates not just a moment of humiliation, but a triumph of inner strength, spiritual faith, and divine justice.

Figure 8. Page 33-41 Chapter Humiliation of Drupadi
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.7 The Period of Exile

This illustration portrays a reflective moment between Drupadi and Krishna in the forest during exile. Drupadi is shown standing on the left, modestly dressed in a brown saree with minimal accessories flower earrings and a rudraksha necklace. Her face expresses worry, framed by long, loose hair. Opposite her, Krishna is depicted in partial body view, mid-gesture as he prepares to eat a single grain of rice with his right hand. He wears a blue, beaded shawl and a golden crown adorned with peacock feathers, radiating divine presence.

The scene is set in a dense forest rendered in muted greens and browns, with supporting details like a woven mat, banana leaves, and a clay jar subtly blurred to create depth. Lighting from the upper right highlights Krishna's golden ornaments and softly touches Drupadi's features, reinforcing their spiritual connection.

The contrast in their visual portrayal Krishna in radiant regalia, Drupadi in earthy tones emphasizes both the disparity in their roles and the harmony of their bond. The composition balances both figures equally, focusing on Krishna's divine gesture. Symbolically, the act of consuming a single grain that miraculously nourishes an entire sage's entourage underscores themes of faith, divine intervention, and protection.

This work uses digital media with soft shading and atmospheric lighting, inviting viewers to contemplate inner strength amid hardship. Through expressive yet restrained gestures, the piece

captures the unspoken emotional exchange and the metaphysical dualism central to this Mahabharata episode.

Figure 9. Page 43-47 Chapter Period of Exile
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.8 The Period of Disguise

This illustration captures a climactic moment from the Pandava exile, showing Bhima (disguised as Balawa) confronting Commander Kicak inside the royal palace of Matsya. Bhima stands in the center, his muscular body arched upward as he raises both fists in a striking pose. Dressed in a brown dhoti and head turban, Bhima's aggressive facial expression and flying scarf accentuate the dramatic tension. Kicak lies on the floor below him, injured and frightened, one hand lifted in a pleading gesture, his crown having fallen to the foreground a visual cue for his downfall.

Drupadi appears blurred in the background, standing quietly to the left, bearing witness to the encounter. She wears a brown saree, her presence understated yet essential as the moral catalyst of the event. The palace interior features pillars and blue curtains, softened in blur to draw visual focus forward. Golden light from the upper left bathes Bhima and partially illuminates Kicak, amplifying the emotional intensity.

Rendered digitally with soft shading and a tilted low-angle perspective, the work emphasizes Bhima's dominance and righteous fury. The contrasting tones warm oranges and browns against cooler blues intensify the sense of justice and conflict. Artistic details like the blur effect on Drupadi and background, dynamic fabric motion, and the fallen crown elevate the symbolic narrative. The crown's displacement reinforces Kicak's defeat and the restoration of Drupadi's honor.

Ultimately, the illustration portrays more than combat it visualizes retribution, protection of dignity, and the reassertion of justice through visual storytelling. Bhima embodies strength as a guardian of moral values, while Drupadi, though not central in composition, remains pivotal in meaning.

Figure 10. Page 49-51 Chapter Period of Disguise
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.9 The Bharatayudha War Period

This illustration portrays a monumental moment during the Bharatayudha war: the revelation of Krishna's Vishvaroop form to Arjuna on the Kurukshetra battlefield. Central to the composition is the majestic figure of Lord Vishnu (Krishna), depicted with multiple heads and arms, surrounded by divine luminosity. His serene blue body, crowned heads, and richly adorned attire dominate the visual field, conveying a sense of transcendental power.

Arjuna is shown kneeling in reverence below, clad in silver armor and a white dhoti, his posture and expression reflecting awe and submission. The low-angle perspective accentuates the divine scale of Vishnu's form, emphasizing the contrast between mortal and divine. A radiant cosmic sky with gradients of purple, orange, and gold serves as the backdrop, reinforcing the spiritual magnitude of the event.

The illustration employs digital soft shading with precise use of light from behind Vishnu, creating a glowing silhouette that radiates outward. The composition is symmetrical, with arms, heads, and fabric arranged in balanced harmony. Dynamic visual elements, such as flying sashes, glowing ornaments, and ethereal weaponry, enrich the aesthetic complexity while maintaining narrative clarity.

Symbolically, the depiction of Vishvaroop eleven heads, eight arms, and celestial regalia encapsulates the universal, timeless nature of divinity. Arjuna's humility, embodied in his grounded posture and upward gaze, affirms his spiritual awakening and surrender to divine wisdom. This moment, rooted in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, captures not only a turning point in the epic but also conveys themes of duty, surrender, and cosmic order.

Visually and philosophically, this work encapsulates the essence of divine revelation and spiritual realization. The harmonious color palette, meticulous detail, and clear visual hierarchy enable the audience to absorb both the grandeur and the metaphysical message of the scene.

Figure 11. Page 53-63 Chapter Bharatayudha War Period
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.3.10 The Victory of Drupadi and the Pandavas

This final illustration captures the coronation moment of Yudhistira and Drupadi as king and queen of Hastinapura, seated side by side on a grand throne adorned with golden sun motifs. Yudhistira, dressed in layered royal dhotis and sashes in gold, blue, and purple, looks gently at Drupadi, exuding wisdom and warmth. In parallel, Drupadi wears a vibrant red lehenga and saree, richly detailed with golden Indian ornaments, along with an elaborate set of regal jewelry including a crown and traditional accessories such as matha patti and maang tikka.

The symmetrical composition centers both figures beneath a gilded throne backdrop, framed by soft golden lighting and scattered pink flower petals, enhancing the atmosphere of celebration and reverence. The digital rendering employs soft shading to achieve depth, volume, and a warm royal ambiance. The balance of warm tones and intricate ornamentation reinforces themes of harmony, justice, and spiritual restoration following the great war.

Through their gentle gestures and calm expressions, the illustration conveys not just political triumph, but the establishment of wise, compassionate leadership. It symbolizes closure and the beginning of a peaceful era. The golden elements serve both decorative and symbolic purposes representing divine legitimacy and enlightenment in governance. This piece stands as a visual affirmation of the Pandavas' moral victory and Drupadi's dignified return to honor.

Figure 12. Page 65 Chapter Victory of Drupadi and the Pandavas
Source: *Author Documentation, 2025*

2.4 Visual Strategy and Symbolic Approach

The illustrations in this project consistently apply a semi-realistic visual style to maintain narrative clarity while allowing expressive and symbolic interpretation. Human figures are drawn with anatomical accuracy yet stylized through facial expressions and motion lines to emphasize emotion and drama. A dominant warm-toned color palette featuring red, orange, and gold is used across the artworks to convey themes of nobility, divinity, conflict, and spiritual intensity. These colors not only reflect Indian traditional aesthetics but also help guide the viewer's emotional response.

Lighting and contrast are applied deliberately to control visual focus. In emotionally intense scenes like the disrobing of Drupadi or Krishna's Vishvaroop revelation, radiant highlights and deep shadows were used to dramatize the divine presence and moral polarity. Symbolic elements such as dice, peacock feathers, sarees, crowns, flames, and flower garlands are intentionally inserted into the compositions to act as visual metaphors. These objects serve as narrative anchors reinforcing the storyline without the need for text.

Compositional principles also play a crucial role in directing narrative flow. Symmetry is employed in ceremonial scenes to imply harmony and order, while diagonals and off-center framing are used in battle scenes to create dynamism and tension. The balance between detail and readability ensures that each page functions both as a standalone artwork and as part of a coherent visual narrative.

2.5 Interpretation and Reflections

The artwork results function not only as aesthetic outputs but as visual tools to preserve and reinterpret classical literature. This project demonstrates that visual storytelling can bridge the past and present, making the Mahabharata accessible and emotionally resonant for today's audience especially youth.

3. Conclusion

This study concludes that the creation of the illustrated storybook Kisah Dewi Drupadi successfully translated narrative depth into visual storytelling that is emotionally resonant and symbolically rich. Through a structured process from research and sketching to digital rendering each element was carefully designed to reflect Drupadi's strength, dignity, and spiritual resilience.

The visual approach combined semi-realistic character design, balanced compositions, and deliberate color choices to communicate key themes such as justice, devotion, and transformation. The integration of digital tools, particularly Procreate, allowed for flexible experimentation in texture, lighting, and layout.

Despite time constraints and challenges in interpreting complex scenes, the project overcame these through iterative design and thematic focus. Ultimately, the work serves not only as a reinterpretation of a classical epic for modern audiences but also as a contribution to visual literacy, cultural education, and the enduring relevance of traditional narratives through art.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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