

THE BATTLE BETWEEN ARJUNA AND KARNA IN MAHABHARATA COMICS BY R. A. KOSASIH AND KURUKSHETRA GAME: AN ADAPTATION STUDY

Kriswanda Krishnapatria

Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

e-mail: kriswanda.krishnapatria@staff.unsika.ac.id

Abstract

This paper examined an adaptation study of the longest Sanskrit epic, Mahabharata, from a novel by C. Rajagopalachari to comics by R. A. Kosasih and an online game named Kurukshetra by 7Seas Technologies Ltd. This paper only focused on the battle between Arjuna and Karuna in Bharatayuddha War. This Great War, a conflict that arose from a dynastic succession struggle between two groups of cousins, the Kauravs and Pandavs for the throne of Hastinapura, lasted eighteen days taking place in the famous battlefield: Kurukshetra. The framework used to analyse the media was taken from books and lecture notes, and the theory used is based on Ellestrom of modalities by analyzing the element changes in the adaptation study. The conclusion is that both comics and game are adapted differently from the original novel. The findings also show how the comic and the game made few changes due to their different media nature and purposes.

Keywords: Arjuna and Karuna, Mahabharata comics, online game, Kurukshetra, adaptation study

Abstrak

Makalah ini meneliti sebuah studi adaptasi epik Sansekerta terpanjang, Mahabharata, dari sebuah novel karya C. Rajagopalachari dengan komik oleh RA Kosasih dan sebuah game online bernama Kurukshetra oleh 7Seas Technologies Ltd. Makalah ini hanya berfokus pada pertarungan antara Arjuna dan Karuna di Bharatayuddha. Perang Besar ini, sebuah konflik yang muncul dari pergantian suksesi dinasti antara dua kelompok sepupu, Kauravs dan Pandavs untuk takhta Hastinapura, berlangsung delapan belas hari yang berlangsung di medan perang yang terkenal: Kurukshetra. Kerangka yang digunakan untuk menganalisis media diambil dari buku dan catatan kuliah, dan teori yang digunakan didasarkan pada Ellestrom of modalities dengan menganalisis perubahan elemen dalam studi adaptasi. Kesimpulannya, kedua komik dan game tersebut diadaptasi berbeda dari novel aslinya. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bagaimana komik dan permainan membuat sedikit perubahan karena sifat dan tujuan media mereka yang berbeda.

Kata Kunci: Arjuna dan Karuna, komik Mahabharata, game online, Kurukshetra, studi adaptasi

INTRODUCTION

Either a work of literature or art has media used to be appreciated. A novel uses text, while comics use 'silent' images, and video games use motion animation drawings. Furthermore, the use of a work media can also be transformed—for instance: from novels to comics or from comics to film with the same title. It is also, needless to say, possible for a work from one media to be adapted to other art media, like music, plays, etc. The displacement of a work media can be regarded as an adaptation or trans-genre (the former is a more well-known term). Hutcheon (2006:2) argues, "*Adaptations are everywhere today: on the television and movie screen, on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in your nearest theme park and video arcade.*"

One of many works out there that has undergone an adaptation is the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, an ancient literary work supposedly written by Vyasa or Vyasa Begawan from India. *Mahabharata* tells the story of conflict between five Pandavas with their cousins of the hundred Kauravas, fighting over the throne of Hastinapur (Delhi). The climax of the conflict known as *Bharatayuddha* war took place at Kurukshetra battlefield.

The location of this battle lay on the field of Kurukshetra, India. The war lasted for 18 days. During the war, a fierce battle took place between Arjuna, a handsome *ksatria* (warrior) of Pandavas, and his cousin Karna of Kauravas on battle days 16th and 17th. This very chapter is then transformed by 7Seas Technologies Ltd., a game developer, as an online entertainment under the title 'Kurukshetra'.

Furthermore, due to its enormous popularity, *Mahabharata* has been completely rewritten in many versions worldwide, including Indonesia, in different media. Raden Ahmad Kosasih, a prominent Indonesian comic writer, made *Mahabharata* comics as many as 13 volumes published by Elex Media Komputindo. In India alone, there are countless works of *Mahabharata* which have been rewritten. C. Rajagopalachari was one of Indians who has written

Mahabharata epic story in the form of novel. Thus, this study aims to explore how the battle between Arjuna and Karna in *Mahabharata* novel by C. Rajagopalachari was adapted into two different media: comics (by R. A. Kosasih) and online game *Kurukshetra*¹. Elements that are put into consideration by the writer are changes in the plot, setting, characterization, as well as heirlooms.

Literature Review

Sapardi Djoko Damono in his book *Comparative Literature* (2009: 121) states that trans-genre is a transformation from one art type to another type. The changes are not limited to one or two types of literary works. Damono also stated that literary work is not only simply translated from one language to another, but is also adapted or converted into other forms. Based on that statement, it can be concluded that a literary work can change from one media to another media, not only limited to merely one direction, but can also be transformed into a variety of forms—for example: from novel can be adapted to a movie or a comic or the other way around, from film to novel or comic.

In the process of a work adaptation—from a novel to comics and an online game in this case—some changes are obviously inevitable. Such changes are based on the assumption that, in adaptation, necessary adjustments of the original form have to be carried out to suit the new form. Furthermore, Lars Ellestrom (2010: 15) states that media modalities comprise four types, namely modality of material, sensory modality, modality temporal space, and semiotic modality. Lars Ellestrom in his book *The Modalities of Media: A Model For Understanding Intermedial Relation* (2010) further mentions that:

"Media and art forms are constantly being described and defined on the basis of one or more of these modalities. The categories of materiality, time and space, the visual and the auditory, and natural

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<http://www.onlinerealgames.com/play/Kurukshetra.aspx>

and conventional sign, have been reshaped over and over again, but they tend to be mixed up in fundamental ways..."

Considering all of the above, it can be clearly understood that, inform changes (adaptation), there are elements becoming the reason for such changes in the new form. These are indeed related to materiality, physical form, and signs. In this adaptation research from the novel to comics and online games, changes took place in the storylines, characters as well as the representation of characters' heirlooms.

Data Source

Analyses of the data in this paper are based on the novel *Mahabharata* written by C. Rajagopalachari. As for the comic data analysed is famous Indonesian series of *Mahabharata* by R. A. Kosasih. The online game analysed is *Kurukshetra* which is a game developed by 7Seas Technologies Ltd. Therefore, there are three different media that become the object of this study, namely: (1) novel, (2) comics, and (3) online games.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kurukshetra War Day 17: Battle between Arjuna and Karna

One day before the sixteenth battle day, Karna greatly defeated Yudhishthira, Bimasena, Nakula and Sadewa, and made them barely alive as promised to Kunti in the past. Karna then competed against Arjuna, the best archer of Pandavas, in which both are trying to kill each other. When Karna targeted Arjuna's neck using *Nagasatra* arrow, Salya silently beckoned Krishna. Krishna, Arjuna's Guru (mentor), moved his chariot so that Karna's arrow just missed Arjuna and hit his crown instead. The battle is eventually put off by the setting sun to next day.

On day seventeen, the duel between Karna and Arjuna resumed. After a fight in a long time, the first curse upon Karna became a bitter reality. When Arjuna took aim using a magic arrow called *Pasupati*, one of Karna's chariot

wheels stuck half in the mud. Karna did not care, and he cast a spell to rival the power of *Pasupati*. However, the second curse is also fulfilled because all of sudden all knowledge he had learned from Parasurama is completely oblivious.

Karna promptly asks Arjuna to refrain while he was down pushing the stuck chariot in order to return normal. At that moment, Krishna urges Arjuna to kill Karna at once for this could be the best opportunity. Arjuna hesitated because at that time Karna was not alert and out of his chariot. Krishna reminded Arjuna that Karna had also acted unfairly when he contributed to the ganging up on Abhimanyu to death on day thirteen.

Recalling the tragic death of his son, Arjuna then released *Pasupati* arrow, beheading his arch rival; Karna was killed instantly. Before this seventeenth day of the battle, Karna's heirlooms such as holy armors (*Kavacha*) and earrings (*Kundala*) were taken as alms by a priest (brahmin) who was actually god Indra in disguise. Indra then uncovered himself and provided Karna with a new Indrastra heirloom, namely shakti *Vasavi* or *Konta* (meaning "spear") as a reward for Karna's sincerity. *Konta*, however, can only be used once and will perish afterwards. Karna used *Konta* heirloom to kill Ghatotkacha, son of Bima, in early battle.

Adaptation in *Kurukshetra* (online game) and *Mahabharata* (comics)

Changes of Plot and Setting

In *Kurukshetra*, changes occur in the plot and setting of the story. In this game version, the tale begins at the story of Arjuna practicing archery in a forest. This scene apparently does not exist in both the novel and comics. Moreover, both Arjuna and Karna are also not depicted riding a chariot as of those in the novel and the comic versions. Arjuna is instead displayed in a standing position during both practice session and ongoing battle. The comics, on the other hand, begins the story same as the original story of the original novel.

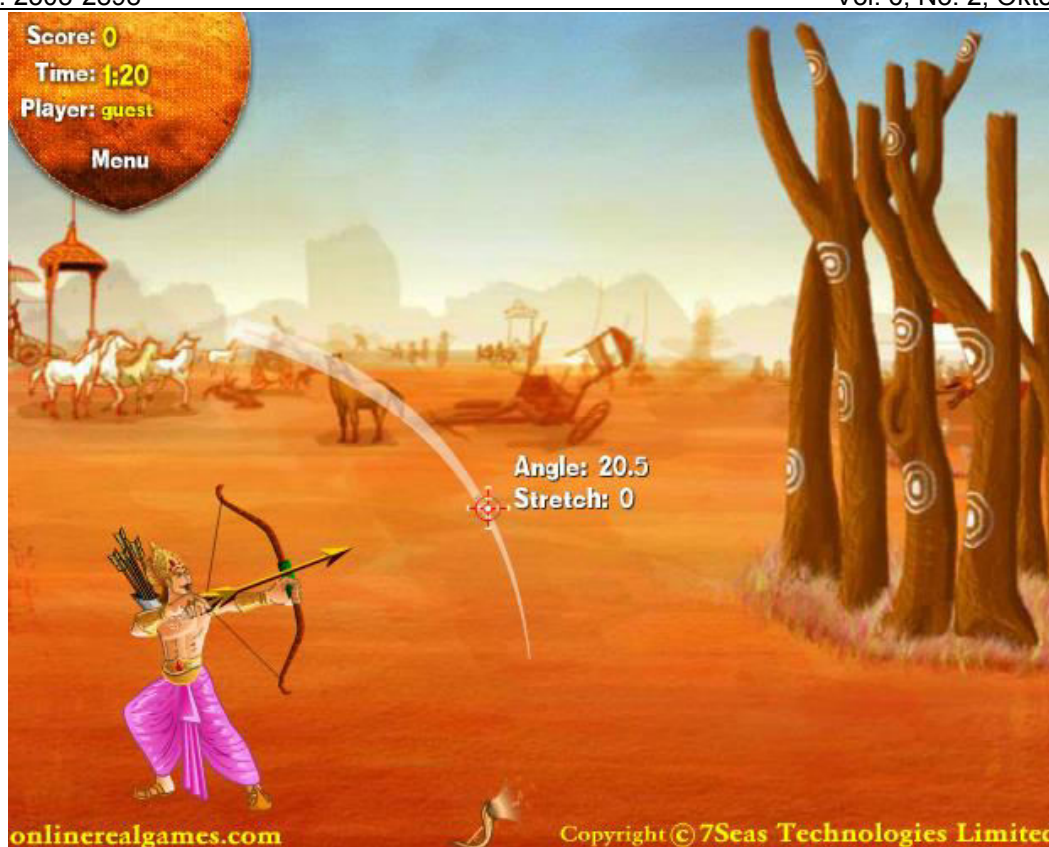


Figure 1. Arjunais practicing archerybefore fighting Karna inKurukshetra

When referring to Ellestrom's theory of modalities, the difference in plot and setting is a natural thing since the material modalities in the comics and those of the game are not entirely the same. The story contained in the novel can still be conveyed visually in the comics, but this is more unlikely to happen in the game because the game makers have tendency to avoid making the players await or be idle for too long. *Kurukshetra* is an aim and shoot game like other casual mobile games nowadays; hence it aims to entertain you. It is so unfortunate that players can only choose one character to play: Arjuna. In the battle against Karna, angle (*angle*) and span of the arc pull (*stretch*) make up the two main gameplays during the game. Selections of heirlooms/arrows do not affect much because they have the same damage though they offer different scores.

While in the comics, background explanation of warfare is clearly visualized

Representation of Characters

Arjuna is known as the charming Pandava who is also gentle and well known for his archery prowess. On

as contained in the novel, but shorter. The chapter telling Arjuna battle with Karna is depicted in illustrations which are somehow classified as short (no more than 15 pages out of 72 pages in the comic volume 12). The changes that occur in the online game as well as the comic are resulting from the unmatched thickness of the novel. In the original fiction, the distribution of the story material is clearly structured because there is no limitation of time and space, whereas the comics are limited to the duration of Kuruksetra war in only one volume. However, the way how detailed emotion descriptions of the novel can only be visualized in comics' character image, setting and writing; while in the game, the emotional effects and their dramatic battlefield situation can be achieved by adding background music that is certainly not present in the version both comics and novel.

the contrary, Karna, who is actually an older relative of Pandavas, is a gallant hero whose qualities are rather complicated. Despite being an antagonist in the story,

Karna is known to strongly uphold the values of a *ksatria* (knight). Though by nature he is haughty, arrogant and snob, Karna is actually a generous benefactor to anybody, especially to the poor and the Brahmins.

In the story of the comics, the depiction of Arjuna and Karna are visually identical. For readers, it seems difficult to tell Pandavas from Kauravas since there is barely information of their names appearing in the dialog bubble.

Arjuna and Karna figures also look very similar from head to toe. They are by all means equally accomplished archers, both mounting the chariots when fighting, and, in terms of facial hair, equally show thin mustache. Those occur because sensory modality in comics is simply displayed without any special attributes in the visualization of Arjuna and Karna characterizations.



Figure 2. Karna (above) is attacking Pandavas, and Arjuna (below) is taking an aim in Mahabharata comic

In the game, figure representation of Arjuna and Karna does not differ much from the comic. They are shown in two almost identical figures, with only a slight difference (position, stance and clothes' color). Since the beginning of the game, players have been accustomed with a third person perspective (Arjuna) in which is located on the left of screen facing the opposite.

If we look at terms of the temporal space modalities, this online game is different from those of the comics and novels. In the game's display, players only

see two figures (Arjuna and Karna) without any other figures. *Kurukshetra* background fields only provide few horses and chariots mounted without *ksatria*. Some characters from the original story are even removed from visualization, especially Krishna and Salya. God Krishna is charioteer of Arjuna, while lord Salya is charioteer of Karna. It is unfortunate that they were both eliminated in the game since their presence will obviously give the game real atmosphere to the utmost.

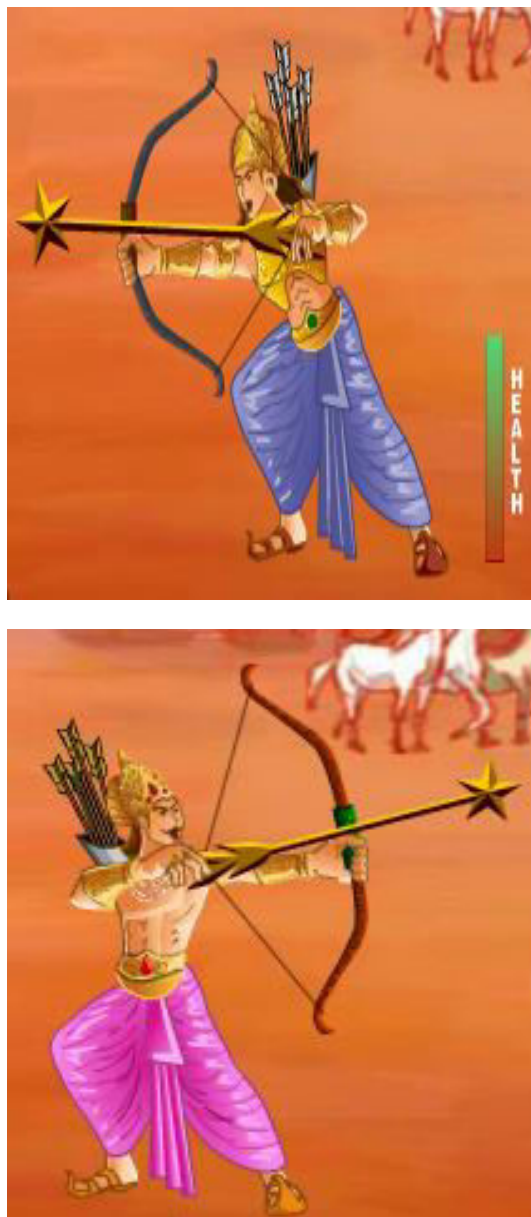


Figure 3. Arjuna (above) is fighting Karna (below) in *Kurukshetra* game

Arjuna's pink clothes and Karna's blue appearance will give special meaning when we refer to semiotic modalities. Arjuna wearing pink clothing is a symbolic figure of a loving, happy, sweet, and confident man (since he is the most reliable Pandavas' archer). On the other hand, Karna wearing blue clothing has meaning of self-esteem, reliability and responsibility. Karna is famously known for becoming the warlord on Kaurava's side in this enormous war.

Heirlooms

Arjuna has a powerful heirloom that is actually a gift from the gods as the result of his hermitage. He has god Shiva's *Pasupati* arrow administered to bring Jayadratha and Karna down in Bharatayuddha. His bow called *Gandiwa* is god Varuna's token when he was about to burn the forests Kandawa. Arjuna also has a shell trumpet (*Sangkala*) known as

Dewadatta, which means "grace of God". On the contrary, since Karna has allotted his relic clothes to Lord Indra in disguise, he only has *Vasavishakti* or *Konta* (meaning "spear") as a reward for his sincerity.

In the comics, Arjuna's and Karna's heirlooms are shown through arrows that are coming one another. Arjuna has a magic arrow *Pasupati* which eventually ended Karna's life. As for Karna himself, he scarcely possessed a useable heirloom after his *Konta* had been used to slain Gatotkaca. Only there is a magic spear whose name was not mentioned in the comic, destroying the crown worn by Arjuna. Therefore, regarding material modality, heirlooms shown in the comics, in terms of weapon variant, are certainly far outweighed by those of the other two media.





Figure 4. Images on some heirlooms in Mahabharata comic

Interestingly, *Kurukshetra* game allows players to try out all sorts of heirlooms in which the original novel story and the comics never presented. It is somehow still considered reasonable inasmuch as archery elements and their variants are decidedly the main attraction of the game. During the battle against Karna, a player (Arjuna) is allowed to pick their preferred arrows. There are six different types of relic arrows altogether that can be used: *Konta*, *Nagastra*, *Chandrastra*, *Suryastra*, *Pasupati*, and normal arrows. Clearly, what is fascinating is both Arjuna and Karna are able to use all types of arrows available.

In terms of material modalities, obviously it is not common if it is applied in the novel or the comics since it will disrupt the universal main story that has been produced to numerous generations for centuries (e.g. *Konta* has always been told to us that it belongs to Karna, not Arjuna). Online games, however, that act more as an entertainment system do not have to worry about all of those provisions as it has different material modality and purposes. The game tends to make its players use all types of arrows available in order to obtain great scores.

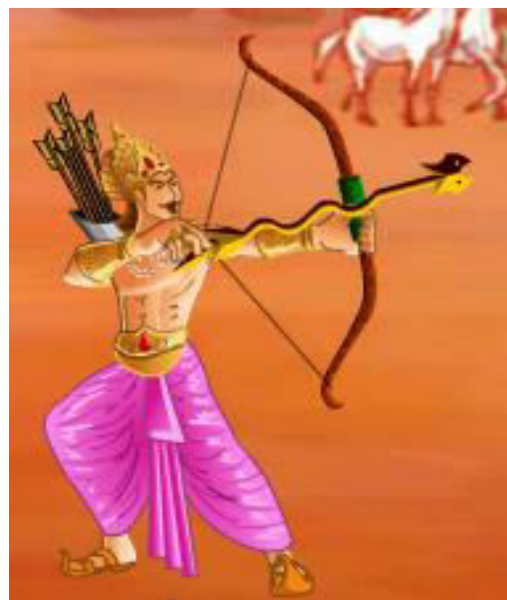




Figure 5. Heirlooms Arjuna can use in *Kurukshetra* game (from left to right: *Konta*, *Pasupati*, *Suryastra*, *Nagastra*, dan *Chandrastra*)

Meanwhile, only in the game is that shell trumpet (*Sangkala*) named *Dewadatta* belonging to Arjuna is displayed. *Sangkala* in the game serves to turn the music and sound effects on. With the presence of music features during the game, players are more likely going to

have a more lively war atmosphere. In addition, the music also serves as a conduit of emotion and dramatic effects for the players.



Figure 6. Relic trumpet *Dewadatta* of Arjuna in *Kurukshetra*. This *sangkala* functions to activate/deactivate in-game music/sound.

CONCLUSION

The changes occurring in those two different media (comics and online game) are because the material in the original novel is not the same as both media. In the novel, the story material is clearly structured because there is no limitation of time and space, whereas the comics are limited to only significant illustrations during the battle. In addition, a detailed description in the novel is required by the comic to bring up the emotions that are only visualized in the form of images and text, while the online game, aiming at entertaining, can demonstrate emotional effect and a dramatic fight can be highlighted by adding background music which is noticeably absent in either novel or comic version. It goes without saying that comics are art form using silent pictures arranged in certain forms to construct the whole story. Typically, comics are printed on paper and come with text.

Kurukshetra game itself is not merely a medium for games and entertainment, but rather a communication tool to convey the values of culture, history and literature through an unusual way. This game is a *single player* casual game-type that does not require players to think too much when playing. The character

allowed to use for players is only Arjuna. Through this game, players are expected to grow curiosity about *Mahabharata* and other cultural aspects that exist.

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