

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF WAYANG IN JAVANESE COMMUNITY TRANSMISSION AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION SUFISM

Received: 2023-02-07 | Revised: 2024-01-18 | Accepted: 2024-01-21

Article Info

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Abstract

UNESCO has determined that wayang is a masterpiece of human oral and intangible cultural heritage, but there are those who understand that it is prohibited in Islamic teachings and should be abandoned. On the other hand, wayang fans are increasingly being abandoned due to poor understanding of the nature of wayang, so this article attempts to explain wayang in terms of its significance for Javanese society and the Sufism of Islamic education. Qualitative descriptive is the setting of this research, with inductive analysis. With a theoretical review, it is concluded: Wayang is a reflection of the reality of human life through a reflection of the essence of the noble culture of Javanese society. In Islamic educational Sufism, wayang depicts human life, where everything cannot be separated from the regulation and supervision of the Mastermind of life, namely Allah. So Walisongo uses it as a means of education adapted to Islamic teachings. Research recommends the symbolic meaning of wayang in the transmission of Javanese society and Sufism. Islamic education contributes to Islamic civilization and culture and Islamic education.

Keywords: *symbolic meaning, wayang, Javanese society, Islamic education.*



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INTRODUCTION

UNESCO in 2003 determined that wayang is a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Permatasari, Qohar, and Rachman, 2020:75). This is a pre-project for the new UNESCO convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Schmitt, 2008:95). This certainly brings a good name to Indonesia. However, according to Ustaz Khalid Basalamah wayang is prohibited in Islamic teachings and should be abandoned. for him, wayang is a tradition of ancient society, but because it is prohibited in Islam it must be eliminated, wayang fans must perform nasuha repentance (Timdetik.com, 2022).

On the other hand, shadow puppetry has long shifted significantly in relation to social dynamics. It was found that there was a reduction in meaning where wayang kulit, which was originally both a guide and a spectacle, became just a spectacle. This shift is evidence of pop culture in a transitional society (Chen, 2020:5).

Therefore, it is important to examine the importance of the primacy dimensions of Sufism as the basis for the spirit of Islamic education in Indonesia today amidst its social dynamics. The dimensions of Sufism are effective in reducing moral decadence and strengthening character education (Syam, 2023:112). The teachings of Sufism are the entry point and capital for the process of forming personality and morals, both of which are essential in character education. This practice has occurred for hundreds of years in the Sufism educational tradition and still continues today. From here, mainstreaming Sufism values into the practice of Islamic education is very necessary in overcoming the problems of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia (Rubaidi, 2020:21).

This argument implies that the Sufistic approach in Islamic religious education can be an effort to deradicalize religion (Fadloli 2014:4), as is often the case in transitional societies such as Indonesia. In transitional societies, change is significant and fundamental, and permeates almost every aspect of life; includes social, political, economic and cultural dimensions. Transitional societies create opportunities to reimagine the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of life (Naudé, 2017:101).

Pop culture is the result of negotiations between mass culture and authentic folk culture created by society. Pop audiences are in a position to create their own meaning through the entry of pop culture texts by generating cultural competence and discursive resources for themselves (Parmadie, 2016:50).

From this explanation, the existence of wayang is a challenge in the contemporary era, even though wayang has a deep meaning from a historical and philosophical perspective. So this article tries to explain wayang in terms of its significance for Javanese society and the Sufism of Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a literature review with a qualitative descriptive approach (Taherdoost, 2023:800). Qualitative methods to obtain natural conditions, and the researcher's position as a key instrument (Breslin and Gatrell, 2023:141). The data collection technique uses polegulation, and the analysis is inductive. Data is presented descriptively, in order to see the characteristics of the variables focused on in this research (Hiebl, 2023:5).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Wayang Art

Wayang comes from the Javanese language, which is a typical performing art of indigenous Indonesian people originating and growing rapidly on the island of Java. The word wayang is taken from the word "Ma Hyang" which is an expression for going to god, spiritual spirit, god, or the Presence of God.

Another opinion is that wayang comes from the Javanese language shadow (shadow). Another source, wayang is an extension of the Wayahe words *Sembahyang* (time to pray). This definition refers to the Walisongo era, where Sunan Kalijaga used wayang as a medium to invite people to convert to Islam. At that time, conveying Islam's invitation did not use violent means, but peaceful methods that were easy to understand and the situation of the times at that time (Susilamadya, 2014:7).

There is a perception that wayang is a relic of Hindu teachings, so it is considered haram and mere shirk. In fact, wayang has been around for a long time before Hinduism came to Indonesia. Indications regarding the existence of wayang kulit in Java have existed since the 10th century BC (Nur Awal, 2019:78). It is assumed that before Hinduism and Buddhism entered the archipelago, in this archipelago there was already a belief called Kapitayan, which is loosely called animism and dynamism. It is alleged that the Kapitayan used wayang media in religious ceremonies. This ceremony is usually intended as an expression of gratitude to God after the harvest (Soenjoto, 2022:71).

Figure 1. Sunan Kalijaga



The earliest confirmed records to date regarding wayang performances refer to around the X Century in 903 AD in the Balitung Inscription. The Balitung (Mantyasih) inscription was made during the time of King Balitung, a descendant of Sanjaya, from the ancient Medang Kingdom. From there it was confirmed "Si Galigi mawayang for hyang macarita Bimma ya kumara", 'Galigi held a puppet show for the gods based on the story of Bima Kumara' (Wibowo and Rahayu, 2020:169–70).

In Java, wayang is used by Walisongo as a medium for da'wah. Walisongo knows the character and culture of Javanese society, which is refined, sensitive and does not like coercion, as well as not liking being patronized. So wayang, which has long lived among the people, is used by Walisongo as a medium for preaching. It can be seen through spectacles, holding wayang performances, but is slowly being directed towards understanding Islam. People are comfortable and do not feel patronized, let alone forced because the puppeteer does not resort to violence, without the arguments that burden Javanese society, and accepts the invitation of Islam through wayang dialogue in the puppeteer's stories (Nasif and Wilujeng, 2018:252).

There are many types of wayang in Indonesia, to this day they continue to exist, especially in Javanese society, including: wayang kulit, wayang klitik, wayang madya, wayang beber, wayang golek, wayang gedog, wayang, orang, wayang torch, wayang suket, and others (Yosefpedia.com, 2020). In the current era, there are also wayang that come out of the standard. Sugeng Nugroho (2020) stated that this nickname had a negative connotation attached to the mastermind's name, appearing in the 80s decade. Starting from Ki Dalang Manteb Sudarsono (Dhalang Satan), Ki Djoko Hadiwidjojo (Dhalang Edan), Ki Enthus Susmono (Dhalang Mbeling), Ki Warseno (Dhalang Slenk), Ki Sun (Dhalang Gondrong'), Ki Narto (Dhalang Gemblung), Ki Exwan Susanto (Dhalang Greng).

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Ki Entus stated that there was a gap between the puppeteer and the audience. This gap includes a segment mismatch between the audience and the wayang spectacle being displayed. Apart from that, the hindrances limit themselves and are confined to the rules so that the barriers between consumers and the hindrances are difficult to remove (Akbar, 2016:99).

In the beginning, the art of *pedhalangan* belonged to the people, not the palace. The feel of familiarity and togetherness is built between players in a group or between players and the audience. It was found that there were no partitions, whether physical or non-physical, the stage equipment seemed simple, where they did not understand the obstacles, busy *gropaks* were an important factor (Sutiyono, 2015:191).

Shadow puppetry is closely related to culture and has the main functions: 1) to promote artistic creativity, and 2) as a medium for communication between interests. These two functions are utilized without causing problems for society at large. From this assumption new creations emerge from artists through new standards or creative compositions.

For example, Slamet Gundono, a contemporary puppeteer who combines elements of wayang performances with other arts, especially *suluk*, poetry and theater. He initiated the *Wayang Suket* hermitage in Surakarta. According to him, wayang *suket* has a line of connection between theatrical performance theory in the West and wayang traditions in the East. *Suket* is a picture of something that continues to grow and develop. Like grass, the spirit must continue to grow, it does not need a lot of water and sun, but it continues to grow (Varela, 2016:53).

There is another 'Wayang Kampung Sebelah' (WKS), which is a shadow puppet show program on television that takes a new genre, where it depicts reality stories that exist in today's life (Situmorang 2017:92). The wayang at WKS are in the form of leather puppets of real figures such as rickshaw pullers, herbal medicine sellers, prostitutes, thugs, Village Heads, RT Heads, and others (Wardani and Widiyastuti, 2013:314).

Wayang Philosophy for Javanese Society

Kelir is a wayang screen, a poem comparing the reality of life with a wayang performance where the world mover (*Jagat kārāṇa*), namely God as the highest *dhalang* (puppet teacher) is only a thin screen from humans. Shadow puppetry was well known and established during Airlangga's time, as evidenced by inscriptions from that period mentioning the work of awayang and *aringgit* (Soekmono, 2022:12).

Wayang conveys deep meaning as a metaphor for human life. The two main shadow puppet stories (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) tell the story of a battle between good and evil, where in the end good wins. Suradira Jayaningrat Lebur Dening Pangestuti (the anger of being strong, strong, rich, cunning and powerful will always be defeated through love) (Wijaya, 2020:52).

In 1035 AD, the Poet of the Airlangga Palace of the Kahuripan kingdom, Mpu Kanwa, wrote in '*Arjunawiwaha*': *santoṣâ hēlētān kēlir sira sakêṅ Sang Hyang Jagat Kārāṇa*, "Peaceful happiness, while separated by a puppet screen from the Creator of the natural world." (Wismulyani, 2018:20).

In essence, wayang is not just a spectacle. The nature and character of the characters are a reflection of human life. In wayang there are honest, holy, wise, kind and gentle characters. There are also deceitful, rude and evil characters. In each wayang story there are expressions of *pitutur* (life advice) and the richness of Javanese philosophy. *Pitutur* is usually spoken by figures of gods,

sages, kings, priests, elders, or puppet masters. Wayang contains moral messages of good and bad characters (Wasino, Sri Hartatik, and Shintasiwi, 2021:31).

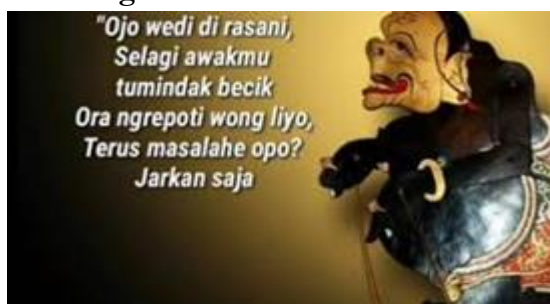
Wayang is actually about forming one's identity through performing arts. The improvisation in the story functions to make it interesting to present to the audience. The formation of identity through characteristics in wayang stories originates from culture that is rooted in society (Gutama, 2020:212).

Wayang is a symbol related to human existence regarding the relationship between natural and supernatural forces. He taught a lot about the essence of the human figure, as an individual or in the capacity of a member of society. It also contains inner guidance and external lessons that are in harmony with human civilization and morality. Puppet art can help humans understand life and get to know themselves and their fellow humans without prejudice and negative pre-conceptions (Pandin, 2020:515).

Wayang is a representation of a philosophy of life. Each character has a character and behavior as a story of human life in the world. The people of the island of Java enjoy self-identification, reflecting while imitating the behavior and character of certain wayang characters. Various identifications can be found in actions in the reality of everyday life. This identification can be seen in the naming of the Javanese people (Basir, 2019:112).

Apart from that, there is a human likeness to a puppet character attached to someone with certain advantages, such as the character Semar. He is a servant of a virtuous knight with good character. Semar is a servant, but has a pious spirit, so the knights respect him (Nurchahyo, 2021:1069).

Figure 2. Semar character



Serat Kanda explained that Semar was actually the only child of Syang Hyang Tunggal whose real name was Batara Ismaya, Batara Guru's brother. As a god in human form, he has the task of safeguarding world peace, playing the role of ordinary people. The main knight believes that following Semar's advice will bring happiness. He is considered to have sovereignty as an enforcer of justice and truth. In that sense, he is a symbol of the people's source of sovereignty and protector of the people (Pramulia, 2021:3).

Javanese people recognize the concept of patron-client, known as kawula-gusti. The position of the client (subordinate) is not determined by professional ability, but by loyalty to the patron (superior). In pre-kingdom society, the leader was a partner. He must be fatherly. All problems lead to him being solved. For the residents submitted the solution to the father and they obeyed it. In difficult situations, the father functions as a protector and protector (Wasino et al., 2021:33).

Semar is commonly called "Ki Lurah Semar", the main figure of the clowns. He is a native Indonesian puppet character, that's why he is not mentioned in the Mahabarata book. In Javanese

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wayang, he describes the deep meaning of what is valuable in humans: not appearance, not outward manners, nor refinement of manners, but in the inner attitude (Purnama, 2014:96). Semar is also an identical figure who is attached to Javanese society. It is said that before the land of Java existed, it existed. Because of this, he is called the gentle guardian of the land of Java (danyange land of Java), which is also known as Sabdo Palon. As a result, an agreement was made between the two (Fatma, Rosa, and Zurmailis, 2020:16).

Identify another Javanese wayang Batara Kamajaya. He is the son of Semar (Batara Ismaya) in Kayangan Cokrokembang. He has a wife Batari Ratih. Both of them are described as very beautiful. Because of this, Javanese people make it a dream and even aspire to have children, just like Batara Kamajaya or Batari Ratih. This is related to the reception of mitoni (seven months of the baby in the womb) symbolizing cengkir (young coconut) with the words 'Batara Kamajaya' and 'Batari Ratih' (Siswanto, 2019:254).

The symbol of courage and justice in the world of wayang is the identical Pandawa character. Yudhishtira's eldest son, is the epitome of justice; the powerful Bima; Arjuna, very handsome and has magical powers; Twin sons of Nakula and Sahadewa. They jointly ruled the State of Amarta. All are descendants of God. The Kauravas led by Duryodhana are a symbol of evil. They tricked the Pandavas into betting on their kingdom through a game of dice. The Pandawa lost and fled to the forest for 12 years. They disguised themselves for a year before returning to claim their right to the kingdom. The Kauravas refused so the Bharatayuddha war broke out, all the Kauravas were killed. It is a noble teaching that truth ultimately wins (Prasojo and Arifin, 2022:304).

Figure 3. Pandawa character



The five Pandavas are depicted as happy and suffering together. Each of them has different characteristics, but they are all always united in facing challenges. Javanese people identify them by naming their sons and daughters after one of the Pandavas in the hope that when they grow up the children will have the same characteristics as the Pandavas.

Wayang Philosophy in Sufism in Islamic Education

God creates everything according to His ideas, so that everything God wills is all good in everything, and because ethical supervenience is true, then creatures have intrinsic value (Kemp, 2022:534). God knows everything universally and rules everything (Tanış, 2021:339). God is the obstacle to the breadth and narrowness of fortune, also the obstacle to marriage, birth and death. He hinders all events in the world and events in the afterlife. Allah is the Obstacle and all humans are just His puppets.

Humans are like puppets, while God is the puppeteer. Whatever happens to humans, everything is the absolute command of the Obstructor. Humans are only puppets who are given feelings, but whatever feelings happen, the puppets know the ending better. Everything feels beautiful if you follow Dhalang's instructions, if you can live with complete surrender and a humble heart with obedience. Humans like puppets both get their role from the Obstacle, but the main difference between humans and puppets is that humans are given His spirit the Qur'an verse Al Hijr: 28-30 :

"And remember, when your Lord said to the angels: "Indeed, I will create a human being from dry clay (which originates) from black mud which was given shape. So if I have perfected the incident and have breathed into it My Spirit, then bow down to it by prostrating yourself. So the angels all bowed down together" (Kementarian Agama, 2020).

Ruhani (His spirit) is called reason, passion and heart. When the soul has feelings such as joy, sadness, amusement, anger or something like that, then it is identified with the heart. When the soul has a will, desire or stimulus that is good or bad, positive or negative, halal or haram, then it is identical to lust. When the spirit examines, thinks, assesses, understands, weighs or investigates, then it is identified with reason (heart mind), which can distinguish between good or bad based on inspiration, guidance or Divine light (Ushuluddin et al., 2021:103).

The philosophy of wayang can be seen in the work Suluk Wujil, by Sunan Bonang. When Sunan Kalijaga asked about the philosophy of wayang and its relation to the teachings of Sufism, Sunang Bonang told the story of Baratayudha (the war of the Kurawas against the Pandavas). In wayang performances, Kurawa occupies the left side, the symbol of the left group. The Pandavas occupy the right side of the right group symbol. The Kurawa symbol is Nafi, while the Pandava symbol is Isbat. The Nafi-Isbat war took place in the human soul, which was called jihad akbar (great jihad), which took place in order to achieve liberation and enlightenment from the shackles of the materialistic world.

Sunan Bonang advised his student Wujil: "Know, Wujil, that perfect understanding can be interpreted as the true meaning of Wayang performances. The perfect man uses this to understand and know the Almighty. Dalang and Wayang are placed as symbols of the Almighty's tajalli (knowledge embodiment) in the realm of difference. The screen or cloth is the universe. The puppets on the right and left are God's creatures. The banana tree trunk on which the puppet is placed is the ground on which it stands. The oil lamp is a living flame. Gamelan provides rhythm and harmony to all events (Mahfudh, Joebagio, and Mulyoto, 2017:19–21).

God's creation grows immeasurably. For those who do not receive divine guidance, much of creation will become a hijab that obstructs their vision. They will stop at birth. His vision was blurry and confused. He was lost in nothingness, because he did not see the essence behind creation. The message of all creation is to foster a sense of love and affection. This is the will of the heart, the manifestation of will-power similar to Him, even if we go East-West, North-South or up to down. Thus, life in this world is the unity of the big universe and the small universe. Our form is just like a puppet. All our actions, behavior and movements are actually secretly moved by the Puppeteer." Wujil finally understood the essence contained in wayang philosophy and the nature of divinity (Nugraha and Dyahrini, 2019:7).

According to Mpu Kanwa, when the world was in chaos as a result of the actions of the giant Niwatakawaca, the gods held a council, deciding that Arjuna would be the knight chosen to

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be the hero challenging Niwatakawaca. The Guru, incarnated as an old priest, descended into the world, meeting Arjuna who had completed his penance on Mount Indrakila until he achieved moksa (Hunter, 2019:341).

The teacher advised Arjuna: "Indeed, worldly life is like a game, like a play. Humans seek happiness and pleasure, but they get misery. It's difficult to use the five senses. Humans are tempted by the activities of their five senses and the consequences are difficult. It is impossible for humans to understand themselves if they are blind to lust, power, sexual and worldly desires.

Just like people watching a wayang performance, they feel sad, even sobbing. A picture of mental immaturity. He knew that a wayang was just a piece of carved leather, moved by a dhalang, made to appear to speak. This is a picture of humans who are bound by sensory pleasures. How stupid he is. "Such is Arjuna! Actually, this world is virtual. All of this is actually a world of fairies and ghosts, a world of shadows! You must be able to see the One behind this virtual world filled with shadows." Arjuna then understood. He then prostrated himself before the Almighty, surrendered, and remained silent. After that, Arjuna felt in his heart the presence of the Only One (Mahfudh et al., 2017:22).

Sunan Bonang succeeded in teaching Wujil that the transition from Hinduism to Islam was not an instant leap for Javanese society. Spiritually, there is harmony to ensure that there is no shock. In appearance, the two religions show great differences, but in the wisdom of wise people, they are able to see enlightenment and free the soul from the grip of the world.

Wayang is a metaphor for human life, a mirror of individual behavior in the world. Wayang is seen as participating in the maturation of society through crisp concepts that are easy to understand and absorb when facing life's problems. Wayang philosophy makes its audience reflect on the relationship between servants and God (*manunggaling kawula Gusti*), the nature of humans in the framework of the universe, and the nature of the origin and purpose of life (*sangkan paraning dumadi*), starting with 'talun' and ending with 'tancep kayon' (Haryanto, 2006:11).

Wayang stories contain at least three main acts: love, wealth, and the throne. This triangle is an everyday reality, presented through newspapers, the internet, radio, television. It's all just a matter of how to find, seize or defend the three. Wayang shows are both human and natural activities. Humans are like puppets, *blencong* is a metaphor for the light that illuminates human life, the white screen is like the balance of the universe, empty or quiet waiting for humans to fill it. Banana stems are like the ground on which humans stand. Gamelan pieces are played by *niyaga*, accompanied by *sinden kias*, the strains of every human's life. Sometimes it's a piece of passion, romance and sadness. The puppets lined up on the right side symbolize good qualities, lined up on the left side symbolize bad qualities. The different shapes and faces of the puppets are a symbol of the differences in the nature of each human being (Nasif and Wilujeng, 2018:252).

Wayang is a noble teaching for humans on how to live life, which must be by speaking, behaving, thinking and being careful. From this it emerges that wayang is not just a spectacle for its audience, but is a guide to life. Walisongo gave an example of using wayang as a soothing medium for Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

After discussing it carefully above, we conclude: Wayang is a reflection of the reality of human life through reflecting the essence of the nobility of Javanese culture. In Islamic educational Sufism, wayang depicts human life, where everything cannot be separated from the regulation and supervision of the Mastermind of life, namely Allah. So Walisongo used it as a means of education adapted to Islamic teachings. The research recommends that the symbolic meaning of wayang in the transmission of Javanese society and Sufism in Islamic education contributes to Islamic civilization and culture and Islamic education.

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