



Ronggowarsito's Concept of Islamic Theosophy in Serat Sabdajati

Fida Indra Fauziyyah^{*}; Warto; Sariyatun

Department of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University, Indonesia
Email: fidafauziyyah80@gmail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v5i2.237>

Abstract

This article focuses on the discussion of the concept of Ronggowarsito's Islamic theosophy in Serat Sabdajati with the purpose to identify the concept in detail. The data of this study were obtained mainly from Serat Sabdajati, which were analyzed through text analysis techniques—carried out with a structural analysis approach. The results showed that Serat Sabdajati contains several Islamic theosophical values. The values contained in include the value of Aqeedah (Islamic doctrine) and Akhlaq (Ethics in Islam). The Value of the Aqeedah consists of the Advice to be close to God, the Advice to Believe in God's Atonement, and the Prohibition to believe another God. Meanwhile, the value of Akhlaq consists of the Teaching of humbleness, Self-Reliance and Introspection, and the Teaching of Patience.

Keywords: Teosophy; Islam; Serat Sabdajati; Javanese literature; Aqeedah; Morality

Introduction

Islam came to Indonesia in the first century of Hijri, around the 7th or 8th century AD (Ghofur., 2011). The emergence and development of Islam in Indonesia led to the transformation of local civilizations, including Java. The example of such transformation is the acculturation between Islamic values and Javanese culture—a culture that has lived and developed during the heyday of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms (Aziz., 2013).

The propagation of Islam in Java was done by *Wali Sanga*—a predicate attached to religious leaders or commonly known as *ulama* 'who play a role in the process of Islamization in Java (Muzakki, Joebagio, & Akhyar., 2017). In the propagation, Wali Sanga used a mystical approach (Amin., 2009) which is a form of Javanese culture having been around for a very long time.

The king of Mataram Islam kingdom, Sultan Agung, also issued a policy of Islamic missionary endeavors on the basis of culture, namely by acculturating various old Javanese cultures (in Hindu-Buddhist era) with the teachings of Islam (Sunanto., 2010). Thus, those endeavors are able to instill Islamic values into the Javanese society without having to be uprooted from its cultural base.

Islamic teachings in Java experienced syncretism with pre-Islamic values. This syncretism then gave birth to "Javanese Religion" (Ghofur., 2011) which contains elements of Islamic Theosophy. Such

form of theosophy contains philosophical meaning, doctrine and psychic knowledge largely based on Buddhist and Hindu teachings (Badudu., 2003).

The theosophy influenced by the teachings of Islam, more or less, influences the Javanese life. One of which is in cultural dimension such as Literature. Thus, a lot of old Javanese literatures contain religious mystical values. In accordance with, Javanese literature can be divided into three characteristics, (1) works containing religious orthodox ethical themes and promotion of Islamic law, (2) works in the form of didactic narrative poems; and (3) mystical works (Mahfudh, Joebagio, & Mulyoto., 2017).

According to Zoetmulder (1983) Javanese literature can be used as a reinforcement element of the king's power. This means that in the Old Javanese culture, two kinds of powers, namely, the military and political power of religious intellectuals was in the hands of men of letters called *kawi*. Thus, at that time, the political power of the king needs to be supported by the religious intellectual power of *kawi* (Sudewa., 2001).

One of the most famous men of letter of the time was Ronggowarsito. He was a poet of the Surakarta palace born in 1802. He also studied Islam at a pesantren (Islamic boarding school), who also enjoyed mysticism; therefore, his works were much influenced by the teachings of *kejawen* (Javanese mysticism) and Islam (S. D. Jong., 1976). Hence, it is very logical if the concept of Islamic theosophy is much reflected in his works.

One of Ronggowarsito's works that reflects the concept of Islamic theosophy is *Serat Sabdajati* which was written in 1873. This literary work was written eight days before his death and is the last work of Ronggowarsito. *Serat Sabdajati* is full of noble values, especially with regard to religious (Islamic) aspect. So from *Serat Sabdajati* we can identify the concept of Islamic theosophy from Ronggowarsito reflection.

Raden Ngabehi Ronggowarsito

Raden Ngabehi Ronggowarsito was born on March 15, 1802 in Surakarta. He is a descendant of the intellectual family of Yasadipuran, the family of royal poet of Surakarta palace (Purwadi., 2005). Ronggowarsito is the last poet of the palace who created about 68 pieces of work covering various fields, including philosophy, chronicle, term, primbon, history, pedigree, education, natural science, puppetry and lexicography (Tedjowirawan., 2001).

Ronggowarsito was also known as Bagus Burhan. At the age of 12, he studied at Pondok Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) Gebang Tinatar in Ponorogo and studied Islam from Kyai Imam Besari. In the boarding school, Ronggowarsito began to learn various things about Islam. He developed Islamic thought according to his own understanding. According to Mulyanto (1990) (in Prabowo., 2003) Ronggowarsito prefers the technical values of Islam more than the fundamental one, by practicing meditation, that was often practiced by adherents of the old religions (animism and dynamism) and Hindu. It is then influential in his works, as what can be seen in *Serat Jayengbaya*, *Sabdajati*, and *the wirids* that he wrote (Purwadi., 2005; Prabowo., 2003).

At the age of 23, Ronggowarsito had already showed his talent in writing literature. He has composed works, both in prose and beautiful poetry. In addition, his knowledge about Islam had further strengthened his position as a poet whose writing became a role model for Javanese writers. In position as a royal poet, Ronggowarsito's main task is to develop Javanese culture and literature (Prabowo., 2003).

As the last poet of the Surakarta palace, Ronggowarsito bequeth monumental works, among them are *Serat Sabdajati*, *Serat Paramasastra*, *Serat Cemporet*, *Serat Jaka Lodhang*, *Serat Kalathida*, etc.

Ronggowarsito, in the field of Javanese literature, is a figure that remains eternal and is remembered by many people. His tremendous ability and knowledge, especially in writing Javanese literature cannot be denied. Some of his works continue to be read and studied by many people for the purposes of various things so as to provide spiritual value to its readers, even today (Prabowo., 2003).

Ronggowarsit's Concept of Theosophy

Theosophy is the doctrine of religious philosophy and mysticism. It incorporates elements such as Sufism, philosophical science, doctrine and psychic knowledge largely based on Buddhist and Hindu teachings. In the beginning, theosophy was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), and William Quan Judge (1851-1896), in New York City in 1875. Theosophy perceives human beings as being able to achieve perfection; therefore, every religion has a fragment of divine truth (JohnThorne., 2016; Badudu., 2003).

In accordance with, javanese cultural pluralism, as a fusion of two different cultural elements, is able to form a harmonious new value. The concept of guardianship (Wali), the mystical path and the concept of the perfection of life in Islam influence various facets of Javanese life. Such kind of Islamic teachings are understood and developed with a Javanese perspective, processed into a form of *kejawen* culture that is different from the original Islam and easily accepted by Java society (Maharsiwara., 2006). The situation forms a different theosophy concept from the original Islamic theosophy which is called Javanese Islamic theosophy.

The Javanese theosophy promotes the pursuit for the perfection of life which is based on monistic and pantheistic understanding. Monistic is a view which assumes that God dwells and radiates within man and the whole universe. Meanwhile, pantheistic views the universe as a unity in God. Theosophy, basically, is not much different from mysticism. In the context of Java, the Javanese believe in the macrocosmic and the microcosmic world. The javanese usually describe such concept using puppet concept. Thus, microcosmic world is believed to be a replica of the macrocosmic world. According to the Javanese, the two worlds need to be lived in asceticism through *tapabrata* (meditation) (Endraswara., 2012).

In *kejawen* (Javanese version of Islam), there is integration between religious values and mystical actions. One of them is reflected in literary works. Through art, especially literature, the Javanese express their religious ideas about mankind and the universe. Various literatures are often used as a backrest of asceticism and guidance towards the mystique by them. In addition, it is believed that literature is what brought the Javanese to *makrifat* (the highest level of knowledge and belief) in *kejawen* (Endraswara., 2012; Tedjowirawan., 2001).

The Islamic teaching, which is closest to literature, is Sufism. It guides mankind to always be close to God. The relationship with God is expressed through language and behavioral means. The means of human relationships with God are then expressed with the literature entity. Religious language facilities --reflected in literature--depict the virtues, the tranquility of the heart and the closeness of human and the divine one (Manshur., 1999).

In accordance with, Ronggowarsito is one of the many poets who create beautiful and meaningful literary works. His works combine the tradition of *kejawen* and the elements of Islamic teachings. His religious mystical beliefs is associated with the process of education he got in *pesantren*. The belief are also influenced by Islamic propagators, such as Wali (the one considered as the successor of prophet Muhammad) who introduced sufism in Javanese Islam. Ronggowarsito, as a man born javanese, was easily accept such concept to be recognize as his conviction. The characteristics of Sufism emphasize on various spiritual practices, such as *dhikr* and fasting (Purwadi., 2005).

Since he was a child, Ronggowarsito had been interested more in the technical elements (physical activities) of Islamic *Kejawen* rather than the original fundamental elements of Islam. Such idea can be proven by his habit (meditation) which is the ritual contained in old religions of Java (Hindu and Buddhist). The teachings contain in the literatures of Islamic *Kejawen* are indeed not fully follow the teaching of the holy Quran, however, they render a service in introducing the values of spiritual teaching and the ethics of Islam to their reader. In the present era, Javanese literatures, especially ones related to Islamic values, has been renewed. The literatures and spiritual aspects of Javanese face the mystical and mythological culmination. Such culmination provides the subtlety of taste and religious appreciation that led to the appearance of beautiful literary works (Prabowo., 2003).

In general, the Ronggowarsito's theosophical concepts found in his works reflects the following concepts; (1) *Bawa Rasa* (the appreciation in spiritual world to make it easier to find the God), (2) *Makrifat Jawa*, (the level of perfection obtained if we can find the God), (3) *Isbat Ngelmu Kesempurnaan*, (The nature of existence and nothingness), (4) *Kehalusan Roh dan Tubuh*, (the nature of human life) (5) *Pantheisme* and *Monisme*, (ideologies considering the universe as a unity of God and seeing the God as the unity of the universe), (5) *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti*, (the union of men with their God concerning the origin and purpose of life), (6) *Pramana Jati*, (the resurrection of the soul that will nourish the bright soul).

Ronggowarsito is a phenomenal poet, because as if he is at the level of *ngerti sakdurunge winarah* (already know the various events that will happen), including in answering his own destiny. Only Javanese who have reached the degree of *makrifat* (unite with the God) will be the clairvoyant (wise) or *ngerti sakdurunge winarah* (Endraswara, 2006; Yasasusastra., 2012).

Ronggowarsito's Islamic Theosophy in Serat Sabdajati

Tembang macapat is a song created by the *wali*. Through this macapat song, it is expected that javanese people could accept Islam easily so the Islamic propagation will be easy to hit the target. Macapat song contains 10 songs, one of which is Megatruh (composed by Sunan Giri). It came from the word *megat* and *ruh*, which means separating spirits or thoughts that are not good or holding lust. The doctrine in the megatruh contains the belief to practice worship by lusting away, doing good deed by obeying God's command and stay away from God's prohibition (Endraswara., 2006).

In accordance with, *Serat Sabdajati* was written by Ronggowarsito in 1873 in the form of *macapat Megatruh* song which consists of 19 *gatra* (stanza). In *Serat Sabdajati*, there are many values that can be taken as a life learning process. In this work, we can find the concept of Islamic theosophy coming from its author (Ronggowarsito). According to Dasid Nurwibowo (2008), *Serat Sabdajati*, generally, contains two values (the value of *Aqeedah* and *Akhlaq*.) *Aqeedah* implies everything about belief in the God's Power, while *Akhlaq* can be interpreted as ethics (Nurwibowo., 2008). Here is the concept of Ronggowarsito's Islamic theosophy in *Serat Sabdajati*:

The Aqeedah Values

1. Advice to Get Closer to God

This value is found in the third stanza of *Serat Sabdajati*:

“Pamanggone aneng pangesthi rahayu, angayomi ing tyas wening, eninging ati kang suwung, nangnig sejatining isi, isine cipta sayektos”

Meaning: "The place (of that salvation) is in the ideals of the scathe less, (that) protecting the clear heart, the clarity of the emptiness of the heart, which actually has contents, the contents (are) the great ideals".

The stanza contains suggestions regarding how we draw closer to God that is by emptying the heart and mind before performing an action. The way to place the action is to always align it with beauty and then protect it in clarity. "*The clarity of the empty heart, but it actually is full of contents; the content is the true creation*". The expression means as if we're meeting the God, then our hearts are calm. So what we do is always based on God's way (Nurwibowo., 2008; Sujono., 2008).

2. Suggestions to Believe in God's Help

The value is contained in the tenth stanza of the Sabdajati Fiat;

"Hanuhoni kabeh kang duwe panuwun, yen temen-temen sayekti, dewa aparing pitulung, nora kurang sandahan bukti, saciptanira kelakon"

Meaning: "(God) surely keeps His promise to all who have pleas, if a man is earnest, surely, God will give help, (so he) will not lack of food, clothing; and all that is aspired will be granted".

Through the stanza, Ronggowarsito gives us the knowledge that all our wishes and aspirations will come true. God always fulfills requests for those who ask, as long as we obey all of His commandments, and are humble as well as sincere in praying to God. In other words, God will always give help and grant all wishes (Nurwibowo., 2008; Sujono., 2008).

3. The Doctrine of Prohibition to Worship "Another" God

The teaching is contained in the sixth stanza, "*Lali pasihaning Gusti, Ginunungan Dening Hyang Manon*" which depicts the human negligence of the existence of God. In fact, God can bring happiness to them. They are no longer interested in deeds that lead to virtue because they are already covered with bad deeds and thoughts and Forgetting God's love. His (The God) teachings have been destroyed from human heart (Nurwibowo., 2008, Sujono., 2008).

The Akhlak Values (Ethics)

1. The Teaching of Humbleness, Self-Awareness and Introspection

The second teaching on humility and introspection is found in the second stanza; "*Ulatna kang nganti bisangguh, Galedehan kang sayekti.*" This stanza contains the meaning of life's concerns, looking closely at introspection in accepting a reality of life, do not make mistakes, follow the pure heart in acting so we can capture and put the reality well, not reckless in accepting reality, to remain virtuous (Nurwibowo., 2008; Sujono., 2008).

2. The Teaching of Patience

This teaching is contained in the fourth stanza of *Serat Sabdajati*;

"Lakonana klawan sabaraning kalbu, yen den obah meniwasi, kasusupan setan gundhul, ambebedhung nggawa kandi, isine rupiyah keton"

Meaning: “Do something with a patient heart. If an ideal falter, then, it will deflect us. We will, then, be possessed by setan gundhul (Javanese version of demon), who tempts (by carrying) a bag full of money”.

In the verse, Ronggowarsito invites us to be patient and steadfast in the facing the dynamic of life, which is full of trials and hindrances for only with patience and fortitude, we will be able to control ourselves and our hearts. In his view, patience is the essential of life success (Nurwibowo., 2008; Sujono., 2008).

Methodology

This study uses literature study method (collecting and analyzing documents related to Ronggowarsito and *Serat Sabdajati*). Those documents are in the form of books, manuscripts, journals, theses, proceedings, websites or other documents relating to research objects. the data obtained, then, are analyzed through text analysis techniques which was done through structural analysis approach focusing on the Islamic theosophy concept of Ronggowarsito.

Conclusion

The Hindu-Buddhist religion had first entered and developed in Indonesia before Islam. When Islam came into Indonesia there was a cultural acculturation between Islam and pre-Islamic religions (Hindu-Buddhist). This acculturation, then, brings up the Javanese theosophy. Javanese theosophy is a form of spiritual culture that combines the teachings of Islam with Hindu and Buddhist. The theosophical teachings come into various Javanese cultures, one of which is in literary works. One of famous works came from Ronggowarsito (*Serat Sabdajati*). Ronggowarsito is a well-known poet of Surakarta palace. He produced many phenomenal literary works which is full of meaning. The concept of Ronggowarsito's theosophy, in general, prefers to run the *tariqah* (ritual of Javanese Islamic Kejawen) rather than the Islamic *Shari'a* (The original fundamental values of Islam), such as doing *tapabrata* (meditation) as what has been practiced by the adherents of Hinduism and also performing fasting in kejawen version. In *Serat Sabdajati*, there are Islamic teachings (theosophy), such as *Aqeedah* and *Akhlaq* contained in. The value of the *Aqeedah*, consists of: The Advice to be close to God, the advice to Believe in God's Help, and the Teaching of Prohibition to worship another God besides Allah. The value of *Akhlaq* (Ethics) consists of: Teachings of Humbleness, Self-awareness, self-introspection, and Patience.

Acknowledgment

The author is grateful to all those who have supported the completion of this journal, especially to Prof. Dr. Wanto, M. Hum and Prof. Dr. Sariyatun, M.Pd., M. Hum who have given their valuable time to guide and correct this research by providing some criticism and suggestions. A special honor is also conveyed to the Institute of Educational Fund Management (LPDP) of the Republic of Indonesia who has sponsored this research.

References

- Amin, S. M. (2009). *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*. Jakarta: Amzah.
- Aziz, D. K. (2013). *Akulturasasi Islam & Budaya Jawa*. Fikrah. I(2): 253.
- Badudu, Y. (2003). *Kamus Kata-Kata Serapan Asing dalam Bahasa Indonesia*. Jakarta: Kompas.
- Endraswara, S. (2012). *Agama Jawa; Menyusuri Jejak Spiritual Jawa*. Yogyakarta: Lembu Jawa.
- Endraswara, S. (2006). *Falsafah Hidup Jawa*. Yogyakarta: Cakrawala.
- Ghofur, A. (2011). *Tela'ah Kritis Masuk & Berkembangnya Islam di Nusantara*. *Jurnal Ushuludin* Vol XVII(2): 166.
- John Thorne. (2016, November 16). *Teosofi*. Dipetik Januari Kamis, 2018, dari Wikipedia: <https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teosofi>.
- Maharsiwara, S. (2006). *Moslem in the Javanese Culture-Pluralism and the Palace Art Performance*. *Humaniora*. 18: 226.
- Mahfudh, M. H., Joebagio, H., & Mulyoto. (2017). *Manuscript Suluk Wujil: Values Transformation of Tassawuf Education Sunan Bonang in Nation Character Building*. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*. 4(4): 18.
- Manshur, F. M. (1999). *Tasawuf & Sastra Tasawuf dalam Kehidupan Pesantren*. *Humaniora* No. 10 Januari-April 1999, 102.
- Muzakki, A. W., Joebagio, H., & Akhyar, M. (2017). *Raden Qosim's Religious Humanism Approach of Javanese Islamization Process*. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 4(5): 29.
- Nurwibowo, D. (2008). *Pesan-Pesan Dakwah Serat Sabdajati (Kajian Teks Terhadap Buku Lima Karya Pujangga Ranggawarsita Karya Kamajaya*. Semarang: IAIN Walisongo.
- Prabowo, D. P. (2003). *Pengaruh Islam dalam Karya-Karya R.Ng Ranggawarsito*. Yogyakarta: Narasi.
- Purwadi. (2005). *Mistik Kejawen Pujangga Ronggowarsito*. Yogyakarta: Media Abadi.
- S.D.Jong. (1976). *Salah Satu Sikap Hidup Orang Jawa*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.
- Simuh. (1988). *Mistik Islam Kejawen R.Ng. Ronggowarsito: Suatu Studi terhadap Serat Wirid Hidayat Jati*. Jakarta: UI Press.
- Sudewa, A. (2001). *Sastra & Perkembangan Politik di Jawa Abad XVIII*. *Humaniora*. XIII(3): 240.
- Sujono, J. (2008, Juli 29). *Sarah Serah Sabdajati*. Dipetik Januari 12, 2018, dari Bayt Al-Hikmah Institute: ahmadsamantho.wordpress.com.
- Sunanto, M. (2010). *Sejarah Peradaban Islam Indonesia*. Jakarta: Rajawali.
- Tedjowirawan, A. (2001). *Unsur-unsur Ajaran Pemimpin Negara & Abdi Negara di dalam Teks-Teks Pustakaraja Madya Karya R. NG. Ranggawarsita, Relevansinya dengan Kepemimpinan Masa Sekarang*. *Humaniora*. XIII(2): 1.
- Yasasusastra, S. (2012). *Ranggawarsita Menjawab Takdir*. Yogyakarta: Imperium.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).