

INDIGENOUS JAVANESE CULTURE AND ITS MORAL VALUE IN BUILDING CHARACTER EDUCATION

Sumartono

the Lecturer of English Education Study Program
Pancasakti University - Tegal
E-mail: smart.onpbi@gmail.com
Phone. +62 812 2661 106

Abstract

This paper aims at describing the indigenous Javanese culture which is inspired by the uniqueness of Javanese people in terms of their characteristics, attitude, and points of view. As the biggest tribe that inhabits the most congested island (Java Island) in this country, the uniqueness is very interesting to be observed. By considering to the so complicated condition of the Javanese people at this moment, this paper limits the discussion only on describing the general characteristics of the indigenous Javanese people before some changes occur as the impact of the modernity process. Their typical feudalistic attitude is characterized by giving high respect for older people and those who have higher social status through very polite speech and behaviour, their carefulness in behaving for gaining their expectation, and giving in for someone else showing that they are not selfish. Besides, the stories of *wayang* that mostly tell

about goodness and wise guidance for human life and characterizing some figures of wayang (Pandhawa Lima) having good manner also inspires Javanese people in forming their characteristics, attitude, and points of view in interpreting the real truth. In term of their religious point of view, there was a heterogeneous belief. They did not fully keep the purity of their belief, but they even effect and assimilate one another as the impact of cultural assimilation and acculturation process. In fact, these Javanese paradigms are still relevant with the real life at this moment. Moreover, they still have big power of attraction and moral value in building the character education. Nevertheless, we also argue that some of the paradigms still need to be revised adjusted to the needs and human life atmospheres at this moment.

Keywords: indigenous Javanese culture, moral value, feudalistic attitude, religious attitude

A. Introduction

Indonesian country is an ocean country which is inhabited by a number of tribes having various kinds of uniqueness in terms of characteristics, attitude, and points of view as well. From the difference, in fact they still always appreciate one another by living aside peacefully. It is relevant with the national slogan “*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*” (Unity in Differsity) which is still being highly kept by most of Indonesian people to show their commitment in appreciating other people originating from other parts of this country.

As one of the biggest community in this country, Javanese culture has a great deal number of uniqueness which are interesting to be observed. Based on this consideration and supported by the origin of the writer himself as an indigenous Javanese

person, the writer tries to observe and analyse the uniqueness of Javanese culture in terms of its characteristics, attitude, and points of view in general. Actually several researches have ever been conducted by several people coming from not only this country, but also overseas, from which mostly they conclude that Javanese people are generally famous for the slowness and carefulness in behaving, like to make gathering, low temper, easily offended when they are not treated properly and they have an outstanding philosophical base “*Mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul*”, meaning that togetherness is above everything.

Javanese people who have lived spread out not only in Java Island, but also in out of this island and even in overseas such as in Suriname mostly inherits culture from their ancestors. Their characteristics, attitude, and behaviour are inspired from *Yogyakarta* and *Solo* as the centre of Javanese culture. These people represent the most of indigenous Javanese people who are famous for the slowness in behaving which is actually not relevant anymore with the condition right now demanding a quick thinking and action in responding the problems of life.

Considering the so complicated condition of Javanese society now a days as a result of the process of assimilation, cultural acculturation, and way of life development as the impact of the modernity process, in this paper, the writer limits the discussion only on a cultural analysis on indigenous Javanese people before several changes occur as the result of the process above.

B. Discussion

The discussion of this paper comprises the feudalistic attitude of Javanese people, the religious attitude of Javanese People, *wayang* as the main root of Javanese culture, and the cultural perspectives of Javanese People in a change.

1) Feudalistic Attitude of Javanese People

The feudalistic attitude of Javanese people is initiated from the ways of life conducted by most of people from *Yogyakarta* and *Solo* as the capital of *Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat* and *Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace*. Feudalism is a mental attitude for another people by giving a special attitude due to the difference in terms of age or social status. In this case, the Javanese language and culture have already had a certain pattern which is formulated in such a way, adjusted to the people's age and social status. In the case of language, the Javanese people will use *bahasa Jawa Ngoko* when they speak to younger people or people who have lower social status. Conversely, they will use *bahasa Jawa Kromo* when they speak to older people or people having higher social status. In the case of attitude, the Javanese people will also behave by considering the age and social status as well. For example, when they will pass on several older people or people with higher social status, they will say "*nuwun sewu*" before passing by bending the back and smile. In fact, they sometimes have a mental burden with this kind of tradition that has already been implanted and inherited from their ancestors for a long time. This burden will be more serious in working circumstances. It is very hard for Javanese people to say "No" to their superior although actually that is the best idea for

them, or at least they will refuse something offered by the superior very politely to avoid his/her disappointment, although actually it is very hard for them to say no as the way of refusal. This kind of phenomenon is sometimes regarded as a communicative skill that must be possessed by Javanese people. Even, Javanese people also believe in a statement argued by an outstanding man of letters, *Ronggowarsito*, “*Sing sopo ngerti ing panuju, prasasat pagere wesi*”. It means that those who agree and follow the superiors willingness, they will be escaped from a serious problem. They generally tend to make the superiors happy although it is sometimes contradictive from their deep inner feeling.

This kind of feudalistic attitude actually can be a weakness for Javanese people especially in working atmospheres. They are not able to produce an intended result because they are mentally burdened with the inconvenient feeling to have different ideas.

2) Religious Attitude of Javanese People

The religious attitude of indigenous Javanese people is generally categorized nominal. It means that they do not strongly follow the religious guidance, by giving exception for those who are quite faithful with their religion. Most of Moslems usually live in an area around the mosque which is called *Kauman*. Meanwhile, most of Christians like to live around their church.

In fact, the two religions, Buddha and Hindu had formerly spread over widely in Java Island long time before Islam and Christian were recognized well. As a result, some Buddhane and Hindunese guidance and doctrine had been

implanted strongly in their mind. Therefore, it is quite inevitable if their religious attitude were assimilated and contaminated with Buddhane and Hindunese belief although they have become Moslems or Christians. They still committed several ceremonial activities, believed in superstitions and magical power which are principally irrelevant with the belief of their own religion.

Islam as the most dominant religion in this island has increasingly spread over this island through *preachers* (someone who expounded Islamic ideas). They are known as *Wali Songo* (nine Preachers) consisting of *Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Giri, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Muria and Sunan Gunung Jati*. Even most of Moslems still highly believe, appreciate, and respect them up to now by visiting their grave (*ziarah*) and praying them devotedly.

Generally, the religious attitude of Javanese people definitely depends on the religion that they believe, but they sometimes cannot keep the purity of their own religion and tend to believe in a certain religion which is integrated or even contaminated with another religion as an impact of an acculturation process.

3) *Wayang* as the Main Root of Javanese Culture

Wayang is a kind of puppet made of leather. It used to be one of effective media in delivering some ideas for Javanese people. It usually contains moral messages and essential guidance of life through an interesting imaginative story performance played by someone called *Dhalang*. A *dhalang* usually

characterizes *wayang* into several figures of *wayang* having different typical characteristics. Mainly, they are classified into two different characteristics. In one hand, there are those who have good manner, such as *Puntadewa*, *Wrekudara*, *Arjuna (Permadi)*, *the twin Nakula and Sadewa (Pandhawa Lima)*, *Gathotkaca*, and *Kresna*. On the other hand, those who have bad manner are such as *Suyudana*, *Sengkuni*, *Burisrawa*, *Dursasana*, and *Durna*. They are known as *Kurawa*. The stories of *wayang* mostly tell about the battle of goodness versus badness and finally the goodness always wins the battle. This story gives a moral message that we must have good manner and attitude as the way of life.

Wayang has significantly influenced the Javanese culture. For example, the name of *wayang* figures having good manner (*Pandawa Lima*) are used as the names of people, such as *Permadi*, *Nakula*, *Sadewa*, *Kresna*, etc. Hopefully, the owner of the names will have good manners and attitudes like in the story. Besides, we sometimes see the paintings of *wayang* figures (*Pandawa Lima*) are put at the wall to beautify the Javanese people's house symbolizing the respectability on the goodness.

Most of *wayang* stories are initiated by Indian Epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Javanese people mostly argue that the stories of *wayang* are like a story of real life. In fact, it is only an illustration presented in an imaginative story composed by a great Indian author whose name is *Valmiki*.

4) Cultural Perspectives of Javanese People

Considering a principle that there is nothing eternal, Javanese people think that what

they think, what they feel, and what they do are not eternally regarded as a good thing. They need to formulate several points of views adjusted to the condition nowadays. A change can convincingly guide them to a better life in terms of characteristics, attitude, and points of view in interpreting the truth that can be acknowledged by all parts of society. They used to believe in several wise guidance stated in *Serat Wulung Reh* and *Serat Wedhatama* as the principles of life. They still did not care with a horizontal relationship in solving several problems among people, but now they tend to think more critically by interpreting and analyzing problems they have through a communicative discussion. As a result, they can get and define the truth rationally and reasonably.

Javanese culture is basically inspired by the Javanese people's point of views in defining and interpreting the truth. In its development, Javanese culture also strongly supports the emergence of Indonesian culture. One of a Javanese philosophy which is still acknowledged nationally as a very wise guidance is "*Wong ngalah iku luhur wekasane*" meaning that person who gives in to another person is the best person. This wise philosophy tends to be a very speculative and simple statement, but actually it construes a very wide and deep moral value that tells us that we should not be selfish, we should care with other people and put them above us although we sometimes must sacrifice what we must get, but we are always sure that we will get more finally.

C. Conclusion

Various kinds of people's uniqueness in terms of characteristics, attitude, and points of view in several places are as a phenomenon which inevitably happens in human life. It is a reality that differentiates a certain community from others. Javanese people, for example, that contains a group of people who originally come from indigenous Javanese tribe and historically and geographically inhabit most parts of Java Island, have the uniqueness that has been inherited by their ancestors which is different from people coming from other areas in this country.

In term of their characteristics, these people are convinced with the slowness by having slogan "*Alon-alon waton kelakon*" for the reason of carefulness in behaving to gain their expectation. Besides, they seem to be low profile in both speaking and behaving with older and those who have higher social status as their typical feudalistic attitude for the reason of giving high respectability.

In relation to the vertical relationship with the God, there was a heterogeneous belief through several outstanding religions such as Buddha, Hindu, Islam and Christian. Even, by giving exception for some loyal and pious followers of a certain religion, they cannot keep the purity of their religion. Their belief is sometimes affected and assimilated with other religions as the impact of cultural assimilation and acculturation process. Besides, the philosophy of *wayang* stories also significantly influence and form their characteristics, attitude, and points of view in interpreting the general truth.

Seemingly, we realize that not all of Javanese paradigms are recommended to be implemented in real life at this moment. They need some changes

which are adjusted to the needs and conditions at this moment. Conversely, we absolutely agree that some of Javanese paradigms, such as, “*Alon-alon waton kelakon*” (carefulness in behaving), “*Wong ngalah iku luhur wekasane* (giving in for someone else and not to be selfish), being low profile to show a high respect for older people and those who have higher social status and the good manners of *Pandawa Lima* in *wayang* stories still become magnetic paradigm up to now for building the human’s character education.

Acknowledgement

Alhamdulillahirobil ‘alamin, by the grace of Alloh SWT, the Almighty, the Most Merciful, I have completely succeeded in finishing writing this article. A number of people have given me advice, assistance, and encouragement through the many hours it took to write this article. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Dede Nurdiawati, M.Pd, as the head of English Education Study Program of Peradaban University, for her substantial advice and permission for involving this article in the outstanding journal that she organises as well. I would also like to express my gratitude to the team of editors, Mrs. S.R. Pramudyawardhani, S.S. M.Pd., and reviewers who have criticized, scrutinized as well as given suggestions for making this article much better. Besides, my gratitude also goes to a number of friends for sharing ideas, knowledge, and for energizing every step that I made in the completion of this article writing. Hopefully, this article is intended to have meaningful contribution for the readers.

Bibliography

Achmadi, Asmoro. 2001. *Filsafat Umum*. Fajar Inter Pratama Offset.

Hardjowigoro, Marbangun. 1984. *Manusia Jawa*. Jakarta: Inti Idayu Press.

Salam, Solichin. 1960. *Sekitar Walisanga*. Kudus: Menara.