

Forms and Meaning of *Laku Prihatin* for Javanese Women in *Ngadi Sarira* Tradition

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Abstract: The philosophy of the Javanese women's beauty trilogy, namely *ngadi sarira*, *ngadi busana*, and *unggah-ungguh* (manners) displays an attractive image for Javanese women. Education about traditional beauty care procedures for Javanese women can be seen through a tradition called *ngadi sarira*. Actually, what is the uniqueness of Javanese women in terms of beauty and self care? Based on the concept of beauty in the style of the princess of the Surakarta Sultanate Palace, this study tries to reveal 1) The forms of *laku prihatin* performed by Javanese women in the *ngadi sarira* tradition, and 2) The meaning of *laku prihatin* for Javanese women in the *ngadi sarira* tradition. This research is a qualitative research using Clifford Geertz's theory of interpretation of meaning. This study aims to review the forms and meanings of caring behavior to obtain the beauty of the female body from inside and outside in the *ngadi sarira* tradition. The results showed that the forms of *laku prihatin* performed by Javanese women in the *ngadi sarira* tradition, namely *ngudhup mlathi*, *mutih*, *adus bengi*, and *туру sepisan*. The meaning of inner beauty, religious meaning, ritual meaning, and economic meaning.

Keywords: Forms, meaning, *Laku Prihatin*, Javanese women, *Ngadi Sarira* Tradition

1. Introduction

The female body holds the charm of aesthetic beauty that radiates through the aura that comes out. Women's beauty is not only seen from the outside, but also from the inside. The beauty philosophy of Javanese women to achieve a perfect appearance starts from taking care of beauty from outside the body, supported by good dress, and confirmed by manners that educate to maintain self-respect. This trilogy of Javanese women's beauty not only emphasizes a beautiful physical form, but also pays attention to good behavior. Such a beautiful image displayed by a Javanese women. Even making people from other countries have seen the beauty of Javanese women before. This is evidenced by the writings of Thomas Stamford Raffles in his book entitled *The History of Java* in 1817.

Actually, what is the uniqueness of Javanese women in terms of beauty and self-care? It should be noted that Javanese society is thick with the term *tirakat* (*prihatin*). *Prihatin* is an abbreviation of *perih ing batin* which means the pain felt by the mind. It is said to be painful because the mind cannot satisfy its lusts excessively. As a warning so that humans do not exceed the limits of reasonableness to use their passions, the behavior of concern is an effort so that humans can follow God's teachings and not easily fall into

negative things. Javanese women, especially women who live in the palace (keraton) environment, still engage in the practice of being concerned about taking care of their bodies and beautifying themselves. Education about traditional beauty care procedures for Javanese women can be seen through a tradition called *ngadi sarira*.

Ngadi sarira is a tradition that originally grew in the royal environment, including the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace. *Ngadi Sarira* tradition carried out by the daughter of the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace is to take care of the beauty from within a princess to get an authentic life and shape her personality in accordance with Javanese cultural customs. *Ngadi sarira* comes from the word 'adi' which means good. 'ngadi' means to make good. 'sarira' is the body in the physical sense. *Ngadi sarira* is an attempt to make the human body good. The princesses of the palace are trained physically and spiritually so that one day they can become real women, perfect wives, and ideal mothers for their families. The princess of the palace gets special beauty treatments that are formulated by the servants (*abdi dalem*) according to the secret recipe of the palace's beauty. These traditional ingredients have been passed down from generation to generation to maintain the health and beauty of women from outside and inside. The Surakarta Kasunanan Palace as the center of Javanese culture has an important position and role in Javanese society, so it is not surprising that the habits and way of life of the Javanese people are strongly influenced by the palace culture, including the art of beauty care which is influenced by royal culture.

In the *ngadi sarira* tradition, a palace princess is often asked to be concerned (*dawuh prihatin*) in order to get blessings from the Almighty in living a much better life. *Laku Prihatin* carried out by the princess of the palace inspired Javanese women to participate in carrying out *ngadi sarira* in order to achieve a perfect beauty. *Laku prihatin* in the *ngadi sarira* tradition is not only interpreted as a form of cultural preservation. In its implementation, which emphasizes more on inner abilities, it makes this tradition meaningful, especially for Javanese women. This is what makes researchers interested in conducting research related to the form and meaning of *laku prihatin* in the *ngadi sarira* tradition.

This research was conducted to identify and describe the form and meaning of *laku prihatin* in the *ngadi sarira* tradition which is oriented to the female culture of the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace. To get an interpretation of the meaning of this tradition, the theory of interpretation of meaning proposed by Clifford Geertz is used. The concept of culture according to Clifford Geertz essentially enters the realm of semiotics. Geertz argues that culture is a network of meanings that can be analyzed, this is not an experimental science to find laws but rather an interpretive science to find meaning. Geertz argues that culture is a pattern of meaning that is expressed in various symbols (Geertz, 1973: 89). Geertz further said that in fragmenting the meaning of symbols, a "thick description" or in-depth description is needed. In-depth description aims to be able to deduce the big from the small based on solid facts (Geertz, 1973: 28). In-depth description is a way to understand culture, both physical and non-physical, by interpreting it to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth meaning. Geertz said that culture is an arrangement of meanings in terms of humans interpreting their experiences (Geertz, 1973:

145), a concept that is always emphasized by Geertz, namely that culture focuses on cultural values that guide human behavior. Academics or researchers have a duty to seek and find the meaning behind the actions or rituals performed (Pals, 2012: 338).

In connection with this research, there are several relevant studies related to the form and meaning of tradition, the concept of traditional royal-style beauty care, as well as the theory of interpretation of the meaning of Geertz, namely 1) “*Makna Tradisi Baku Pukul Manyapu bagi Masyarakat Negeri Mamala*” written by Siti Syamsiah, Novi Anoe-grajekti, and Siti Gomo in a published journal in 2021, 2) “*Perawatan Kecantikan Perempuan dalam Rukmini Tatwa*” by Ni Putu Ayu Desi Wulandari in 2021, and 3) “*Makna Ruang Ritual dan Upacara pada Interior Keraton Surakarta*” by Patricia Jessy and Laksmi K. Wardani in 2014. Although these studies discuss the interpretation of meaning related to tradition, there are some differences in the research. These differences can be seen from the object of research and the focus of research.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative research method with a field research strategy. The research was conducted in the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace, which is located at Jl. Baluwarti, Kliwon Market, Surakarta, Central Java. Field research is carried out directly on the social life of the community with the aim of seeking a holistic description and analysis of culture based on intensive research. Data sources consist of primary data sources, namely data obtained from information from informants, and secondary data sources, namely data obtained from document and library studies. The research instrument is using interview guidelines, stationery, and a camera or cellphone. Data collection techniques were obtained through field observations, direct interviews with resource persons involved in the *ngadi sarira* tradition, and study of literature documents obtained from Lembaga Dewan Adat Keraton Surakarta. The data analysis techniques used are 1) data collection, 2) data reduction, 3) data presentation, 4) conclusion drawing or verification.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. *The Forms of Laku Prihatin Performed by Javanese Women in the Ngadi Sarira Tradition*

In *ngadi sarira*, a woman is not only taught to make up from the outside, but is often asked to be concerned (*dawuh prihatin*) which is done sincerely with all her soul. In *ngadi sarira* itself there is an attitude of concern that must be carried out seriously if you want to get perfect beauty results. The forms of life concerns that must be lived by a woman in performing *ngadi sarira*, namely; *ngudhup mlathi*, *mutih*, *adus bengi*, and *туру sepisan*.

1. *Ngudhup mlathi*

Ngudhup mlathi, is one of the teachings of compassion that comes from the philosophy of the pistil of the jasmine flower. A person who will use this compassion must do *mutih* fasting for three days and three nights. Then it ends with *ngebleng pati geni* fasting

(should not be exposed to sunlight), must be in complete darkness. People who do the prayer must purify themselves with water that comes from seven springs.

2. *Mutih*

Mutih, is a way to get closer to the Almighty by only eating white rice without side dishes and other sweet-tasting foods. As the name implies, *mutih* is done by eating only plain food and drinking only water. *Mutih* is done with the aim of cleansing the heart and cleansing the soul of negative energies. So that his life journey can be likened to a white color that is always clean from bad things.

3. *Adus bengi*

Adus bengi, is a bath that is carried out at 12 o'clock at night at the Windu well by sprinkling water all over the body according to the amount of *weton*. *Weton* is a term taken from the Javanese "*wetu*" which means to come out or be born. *Weton* refers to a person's birthday. By the Javanese, *weton* is used to find out a picture of a person's life. Humans born on earth are believed to have their own energy potential. This energy will be seen through human nature. To be able to know the picture of a human's life, it is necessary to add *weton*. *Weton* calculation system is determined according to what you want to decide in making a choice. As an example; determine mate, fate, planting and harvesting period and so on. For example, in *adus bengi*, if you have 10 *Minggu Legi wetons*, you have to splash water all over your body 10 times. The intention is to purify oneself of all impurities in the body.

4. *Turu sepisan*

Turu sepisan, is one way to get closer to God in the universe by praying silently, disappearing, so that this activity is not felt because of his specialness in praying. *Turu sepisan* can also be done by thinking about anything until you can no longer feel your body. Therefore this must be done in a focused and silent way.

Ngadi sarira's princess of the Surakarta Palace is a tradition to take care of the beauty of the princesses of the king which is done not only by applying makeup from the outside. Care from within a daughter must also be carried out according to the ordinances that have been taught by the ancestors. Women, especially royal princesses, who receive education about *ngadi sarira* are often asked to be concerned.

"*Ngudhup mlathi, mutih, adus bengi, turu sepisan, ngendikane Simbah wong iku yen kerep prihatin, sesuk yen entuk jodo mesti kebeneran. Yen kowe ketaman lelakon mesti gampang oleh pitulungan.*" (Karsini, *abdi dalem*, personal interview, 20/7/22).

The translation

"*Ngudhup mlathi, mutih, adus bengi, turu sepisan*, as said *Simbah* (ancestor) that person when he is often concerned, tomorrow when he gets a mate, he will like it. If you are sure easy to get help (from God) ".

From this explanation, it is known that the concerns made by humans will make their prayers granted by Almighty God. Having an attitude of concern is a general reflection of the attitude of society in Javanese culture. Niels Mulder (1996:39) describes the concerns of the Javanese through the practice of the *slametan*. *Slametan* can be an indication of the view that a state of *slamet*, a state of peace is the dream of many people that does not come by itself, an attitude of concern expresses a sense of concern about the

difficulties of life. Often this concern is reinforced by actions that are mystical or ascetic, such as; abstinence, prayer, and fasting on Mondays and Thursdays throughout adulthood. These practices are believed to be able to lead people to a peaceful life and influence other successes in the future.

According to Javanese traditional beliefs passed down from previous ancestors, women who in their lives are often *prihatin* will easily get help from God. The help obtained from God can be in any form, such as a soul mate that fits the heart, being a strong human being who is not easily shaken, and always getting a blessing for every prayer she prays.

3.2. The Meaning of Laku Prihatin for Javanese Women in the Ngadi Sarira Tradition

1. The meaning of inner beauty

The beauty of a woman is not limited to physical appearance. In a broader sense, beauty is not only seen from physical appearance, but human character, manners, aura that emanates from the body that surrounds it or its inner beauty. Inner beauty is the beauty that comes from inside a person. The beauty treatment of the female body in the *ngadi sarira* tradition of the princesses of the Kasunanan Surakarta palace does not only make her physically beautiful but also brings out the beauty that comes from within a woman's body. The aura of beauty that comes out of the body gives a charm that is unique for women who do *ngadi sarira*.

"If we look at the ancient photos, they don't have make-up, but they look so beautiful and their charisma can come out. Well, this is for sure, his mental order is prepared. That person, if the term in Java is to sharpen his mind, it must also be seen as reflected in the physical, which we usually call aura or charisma." (GKR Wandansari, personal interview, 19/7/22).

Women who also include inner strength in carrying out *ngadi sarira*, their aura will automatically come out and radiate through their bodies. If the implementation of *ngadi sarira* is successful, then the woman will get inner beauty. Because the result of this inner strength will make the body look beautiful even without using make-up. This is what is called inner beauty. Inner beauty is generally defined as beauty that comes from psychological factors. These include personality, politeness, intelligence, charisma, sympathy and empathy, wisdom and love. Inner beauty will radiate through its psychological factors. Inner beauty is not owned by everyone. A woman may look beautiful from the physical, but does not have the charisma of beauty that radiates from within because of her bad character. While a woman who has inner beauty will have a good personality.

A princess of the Karaton Kasunanan Surakarta palace began to be secluded since getting her first menstruation. When after the seclusion or '*pingitan*' came, the princess could not get out of the keputren. Keputren is a residential environment that is devoted only to the daughters of the king. In the Keputren, the princess of the palace gets an education about various kinds of science. They are also required to be more focused on

education about court manners and morals. During the seclusion, the princesses of the palace were trained physically and spiritually. In its development (after the reign of Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono X), the tradition of *ngadi salira* was carried out by the princesses of the palace starting when they enter of 'perawan sunti' period. This period is when before entering the time of the first menstruation, until adolescence (adult-balig) which is marked by the arrival of the first menstruation. From this moment on, a princess of the palace lived within strict limits regarding the education of decency, moral order, and knowledge of various kinds of womanhood (Sarinah, 1985:12).

2. Religious meaning

Religious meaning is the meaning related to the activities of religious behavior. Javanese people who have a religious nature have the belief that ancestral spirits can hear the prayers of their descendants. They believe that ancestors can give blessings to their descendants. Of course, the prayers were the first to be directly offered to God according to their religion and belief. In the implementation of *Ngadi Sarira*, women pray to God as a form of concern in order to get help.

"If the prayers stay up, yes. But we also have to answer what our ancestors said. Still it must be done. The problem is that because we pray for him (ancestors), he (ancestors) who are there will also pray for us. There is a special contact or line. It's still there. As we walk, it is the prayer and blessing of the anointed parents. So the one who blesses it must be the one above, but the prayers of the parents (ancestors) are also with us." (Dewi, courtiers of the palace, personal interview 19/7/22).

In doing *ngadi sarira*, there are prayers that must be said with sincerity to God according to his beliefs and ancestors. Javanese people believe in the existence of a power called *kesakten*. They also believe in the existence of ancestral spirits and divine beings who are invisible to the world where humans live. This invisible god creature is believed to bring good and bad. Therefore, if humans want their lives to be undisturbed, they must make efforts to influence the universe, for example by fasting and offering (Koentjaraningrat, 1999).

"I am with my religion Islam, said *Lillahi Ta'ala*. We also ask God for it, at first we also used *Bismillah*." (GKR Wandansari, personal interview 19/7/22).

From the statement above, it can be seen that religious meaning is contained in the *ngadi sarira* tradition. The implementation of the *ngadi sarira* is still related to certain prayers that are said by the executor by showing the spiritual side of belief and respect for the religion and god he adheres to. The human relationship with God is very close, forming the human character to be stronger and better in carrying out life. Humans will be more aware if there is a power greater than that of humans, namely the power of an almighty god.

3. Ritual meaning

Rituals are things that are done repeatedly as a habit (Angelina & Wardani, 2014: 296). In *ngadi sarira*, there are things that are done as a form of introduction before God, then every thing that is done is given a mantra to give strength. The performer of the *ngadi sarira* prays to concentrate the mind to bring strength. The power that arises has a meaning as purification, cleansing, and help from God. The rituals performed in *ngadi*

sarira are intended to ask for prayer and hope in order to get God's blessing through the actions taken.

"The prayers (mantras) must exist, now it depends on each one. I am too. You want to wash your hair, you want to make up, you want to take a shower yourself, you want to sleep there, you want to wake up there." (GKR Wandansari, personal interview, 19/7/22).

From this explanation, it is known that there are mantras that are uttered in every ritual performed during the *ngadi sarira*. Although the spell that is pronounced is not necessarily the same for everyone, the goal remains the same, namely asking God to get *kapitulungan* (help). The mantra in *ngadi sarira* is taught from generation to generation from the ancestors. Each royal family lineage has a different spell according to the teachings of its ancestors. The following is a mantra chanted by the executor while performing *ngudhup mlathi* in the tradition of *ngadi sarira*.

"*Niat ingsun pasa kudhup mlathi, kuwung-kuwung teja ngadhup ing ngarepku. Hadamar kurung cumanthele atiku. Byar padhang atiku terus pangingalku. Mancur mendorong guwayaku. Cahyane wong sabuwana kalah karo cahyaku sing nyandhing ora tandhing, sing nyepak ora papak. Ya aku retune ayu/bagus sing andulu padha asih marang aku*". (Triana, Yemmy, wawancara pribadi 25/4/22).

The translation

"I intend to *kudhup mlathi* fast, a bright light is in front of me, residing in my heart, bright enough to my vision, shining on my face. The light of all mankind on earth is defeated by my light, those who are side by side will lose, those who attack me are incapacitated. I am the most beautiful ruler / most handsome, who see me will love me".

From the mantra above, it can be seen that in addition to the prayers that are said to God, there are mantras that are said for the sincerity and sincerity of doing *ngadi sarira*. This is also supported by the following explanation.

"There are other rituals as well, such as a midnight bath, *Jamas*. It's okay to use flower water, jasmine water is okay. I like use jasmine, *kantil*, and others. That's for bathing. Soaked in water later for *Jamas* at 12 at night, after that at 12 more about 10 15 minutes, go out facing the sky and look directly at the sky. Because we came from there. To the east. I also do meditation by burning *ratus*. While meditating, I read *Asmaul Husna*, *Basmallah* 7 times, *Kulhu*, *Falaq*, *An-Nas* 7 times. Three is also okay. *Telu ketulungan*, *pitu pitulungan*, *sewelas kawelasan*. *Ben diwelasi karo sak kabehe*. Say we have a problem there will definitely be someone to help. Everything we do has meaning and philosophy." (Dewi, personal interview, 19/7/22).

From this explanation, it can be seen that the rituals and mantras that are said when performing the *ngadi sarira* are different for each royal family lineage. They have their own ways to reach the perfection of *ngadi sarira*. The structure of the uttered mantras embodies a meaning in the *ngadi sarira* ritual.

4. Economic meaning

Javanese women from time immemorial have been familiar with the procedures for taking care of their bodies and beauty by using traditional plants. Using herbal recipes is believed to be able to keep the body healthy. *Ngadi sarira* has an economic meaning that has a positive impact on people's income. *Ngadi sarira* is a traditional beauty treatment

from within (internally) using herbs and decorative external treatments using traditional cosmetics (Soedibjo, 1984:10). Indirectly, traditional herb recipes taken from natural products can bring business opportunities.

Now in today's era, because it is modern, there are *wong dodol jamu*, anything can be bought, the term has been produced at the factory, so it's easier. But if you want to experience it, what is normal for a woman to *garap sari* is only *kunir asem*." (GKR Wandansari, personal interview, 19/7/22).

From the explanation above, it can be seen that many *ngadi sarira* products have been produced, making it easier for consumers. Non-chemical beauty products are still in demand today. Traditional natural beauty ingredients can be produced by manufacturers who want to open a business in the beauty sector. The establishment of a cosmetic company in Indonesia that elevates the image of princess-style beauty in the palace has influenced other industries to follow this trend. The cultural industry packages modern methods of treating *ngadi sarira*'s princess of the palace, which can be found in salon and spa. The industry offers treatment products with the predicate of beautiful palace princesses, which influence users to feel as if they feel the sensation of being like a princess. Traditional ingredients as an ancestral beauty culture have proven their efficacy and are trusted by the princesses of the palace to get a body that looks perfect. This has led to a wide variety of cosmetic products made from Javanese spices that have begun to be produced. The culture of beautifying oneself using natural, non-chemical ingredients is popular because it has a lower risk of side effects. In its development, *ngadi sarira* which was exclusive and formerly only performed by the princesses of the palace, can now also be done by modern Javanese women.

4. Conclusion

Javanese women, especially women who live in the palace environment, still engage in the practice of caring in matters of caring for the body and beautifying themselves. In *ngadi salira*, there is an attitude of concern that must be carried out seriously if you want to get perfect beauty results. The forms of life concerns that must be lived by a woman in performing *ngadi salira*, namely; *ngudhup mlathi*, *mutih*, *adus bengi*, and *туру sepiisan*. The beauty practices carried out by these Javanese women prove that beauty is not only seen through the outer appearance, but the beauty from within the body that is emitted through the aura that comes out is the hallmark and uniqueness of the beauty of Javanese women. The meaning of *laku prihatin* for Javanese women in the *ngadi sarira* tradition is the meaning of inner beauty which proves that the strength of the mind will make the body look beautiful even without using make-up, the religious meaning is related to praying to God as a form of concern in order to get help. The meaning of ritual is related to the existence of things that are done as a form of introduction before God, then every thing that is done is given a mantra to give strength, and economic meaning related to business opportunities or business actors in the health and beauty sector related to the commercialized *ngadi sarira products*.

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