

Jaka Tarub as a Reflection of Javanese Cultural Values and Social Norms: An Ethnographic Approach

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ABSTRACT

The story of Jaka Tarub is one of the most well-known traditional Javanese narratives, having existed for centuries. The story of Jaka Tarub is a continuation of older traditions: tales, legends, and babad. In other words, this indicates that Jaka Tarub is not just a standalone story but part of a long, deeply rooted cultural and literary Javanese tradition. Analyzing the story of Jaka Tarub offers a small window into Javanese culture and traditions, partly because of the rich symbolism, cultural values, norms, and morals it conveys. This article aims to explore the cultural value, storytelling, and legacy of Jaka Tarub, both tangible and intangible, within Javanese culture. An ethnographic approach is used to do this, studying the stories in their cultural context to understand their social, historical, and symbolic meanings. Literature review, cultural studies, and field research, including interviews and oral traditions, support the analysis. The findings indicate that the Jaka Tarub story reflects the values and norms of Javanese society, is rich in cultural value, a tangible and intangible heritage, and is essential to Javanese culture. Moreover, it can contribute to education, self-esteem, cultural awareness, and traditional values and norms.

Keywords: Folktale, Javanese Culture, Javanese Myth, Nawangwulan, Oral Tales

INTRODUCTION

Javanese folktales are a rich source of cultural knowledge and offer insight into the values, norms, and traditions of Javanese society. According to the book *Mitologi Jawa* (Herusatoto, 2017), tales contain norms of perseverance, honesty, courage, loyalty, and adherence to social rules. One of the best-known of all stories is the story of Jaka Tarub, which has been passed down orally and in writing for centuries and is part of a broader literary and cultural tradition. Several myths that persist in modern times are societal beliefs derived from stories and practices that blend indigenous Javanese culture, Java-Saka (Hindu-Javanese) culture, and pre-Islamic culture (Herusatoto, 2017). This narrative cannot be easily categorized according to Western literary standards, as Javanese stories often combine elements of fairy tales, legends, and myths and are a holistic reflection of the social and cultural context. The predominance of these themes is due to the cosmic-mystical nature of Javanese thought (focused on the cycle of the supernatural cosmos), which is then connected to cosmic-biological thoughts (focused on the cycle of human existence) (Herusatoto, 2017).



The story of Jaka Tarub reflects Javanese culture on several levels. It illustrates the art of storytelling and the distinctive Javanese way of thinking, as well as social and religious customs, or *adat*, the role of women, patriarchal structures, and even symbolism surrounding rice as an essential food. Through these aspects, the story offers not only entertainment but also a framework for moral and social values within the community. This theory is further supported in the book *Folklore Indonesia* (Danandjaja, 1984), which argues that by collecting only the “lore” (the story) without knowing the “folk” (the community), a researcher will encounter difficulties in classifying the collected folklore material.

Furthermore, the story of Jaka Tarub contributes to the legacy of Javanese culture, both materially and immaterially. The story is not only recorded in texts and performances but also lives on in rituals, oral traditions, cultural arts, and education, thus contributing to the transmission of knowledge, identity, and cultural continuity. The aim of this article is therefore to investigate the cultural significance, symbolism, and heritage value of Jaka Tarub using an ethnographic approach, supported by literature review and fieldwork, including interviews and oral histories. This method allows for an understanding of the social, historical, and symbolic dimensions of the story and reveals its deep connection to Javanese culture.

METHOD

My research will be conducted in the city of Surakarta, located in Central Java. Surakarta is known as an important center of Javanese culture, where traditions, art forms, and historical values are preserved and remain alive to this day. Within this city lies the *Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat*, the royal palace that serves not only as a cultural and historical symbol but also as a repository of ancient stories and values from the Javanese tradition. The palace has a strong connection with the legend of Jaka Tarub.

This research uses an ethnographic approach based on Geertz's theory in “Interpretation of Cultures” (1972). Ethnography can be applied to the socio-cultural context in which myth takes place, with the researcher participating in local practices and community rituals connected to the myth. At the same time, narrative analysis is employed to analyze individual narratives and meaning attributions of informants. Ethnographic approaches consider the social, historical, and political dimensions in which stories are produced and told (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In addition to ethnography, a literature review is used, analyzing previous studies on Jaka Tarub and Javanese folktales to identify theoretical frameworks and comparable findings. Comparative narrative analysis allows the researcher to identify both shared patterns and culturally specific meanings in different versions of a story.

A cultural analysis is also conducted to examine the influence of social structures, traditions, and cultural values on the story. Stories are embedded in cultural frameworks that influence both their form and their interpretation.

Field research includes observations, interviews, and the collection of oral traditions within the community, providing a deep understanding of how Jaka Tarub is passed down and experienced today. Ethnographic narrative analysis requires immersion in the cultural setting to understand the lived experience that shapes the story (Emerson, 1995). Therefore, field research is essential.

Through this combination of methods, the research can uncover both the tangible and intangible dimensions of the story, including cultural symbolism, social norms, and heritage value. An ethnographic work will always encompass only a part or a specific manifestation of a culture (Koentjaraningrat, 1990). An ethnographic work attempts to describe and analyze a culture or community. But culture is incredibly broad: it encompasses language, religion, art, rituals, politics, economics, social roles, and so on. Culture can be understood as everything that emerges from human intellect and the use of reason (I Gede, 2011). Because a single researcher or a single book can never capture everything, usually only a portion of that culture is examined: for example, religious rituals, social relations, marriage traditions, or political structures. Consequently, an ethnography is always a snapshot and a partial representation of reality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Traditional Javanese Stories

Stories have various functions. According to Danandjaja (1994), the basic functions are: (1) as a projection system, namely as a means of reflecting the desires of a collective; (2) as an instrument for reinforcing cultural institutions and organizations, to confirm the existing structures of culture; (3) as a means of educating children, to instill in them norms, values, and rules of conduct; and (4) as a means of enforcement and supervision so that the norms of society are consistently adhered to by the members of the collective. To better understand the place of Jaka Tarub's story within literature, it is necessary first to consider the definitions of folktale, fairy tale, and myth.



Figure 1. Van Dale Dictionary of the Dutch Language

According to the “Van Dale Dictionary of the Dutch Language” (2024) as seen in Figure 1, a folktale is defined as: “a story that belongs to the cultural heritage of a people and is often passed down orally.” This emphasizes the collective and traditional nature, whereby the narrative serves to preserve values, norms, and traditions within a community. According to the book “Folklore Indonesia” (Danandjaja, 1984), the term “folk” refers to the community and “lore” refers to the story. In other words, by collecting only the “lore” (the story) without knowing the “folk” (the community), a researcher will encounter difficulties classifying the collected folklore material.

A fairy tale, on the other hand, is defined by Van Dale (2024) as: “a fantastic story, often with wondrous creatures and magical elements, originally intended primarily for adults, but later also for children.” The emphasis here is on the fictional and magical nature of the narrative, which is primarily symbolic in nature. The “Oxford English Dictionary” (2023) defines a fairy tale as: “a traditional story involving magical beings, places, and events, often conveying a moral or lesson.” Both definitions show that fairy tales rely less on factuality and more on imagination and symbolism. Fairy tales are a tradition dating back to the original Javanese period, encompassing values such as perseverance, patience, honesty, heroism, obedience, loyalty, and societal norms, and serving as a teaching on noble character. There are also fairy tales that tell of the veneration of ancestral spirits, gods, holy figures, and anything (Herusatoto, 2017).

Van Dale (2024) defines a myth as: “a tradition originating from the oldest times of a people concerning the religion and existence of that people.” Van Dale also mentions a second meaning, namely, “a common, considered sacrosanct, but unfounded, view.” The first meaning is relevant to this study because myth is seen as a foundation for beliefs, worldviews, and rituals. The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) adds to this definition by defining myth as: “a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, typically involving supernatural beings or events.” The Javanese still use mythical knowledge in the form of belief in supernatural things (Endraswara, 2013).

The hallmark of a legend is that it tells the story of the origins of something, such as a mountain, forest, river, swamp, lake, village, or area, associated with a figure (human or animal) possessing supernatural powers or special qualities, usually connected to a myth (Herusatoto, 2017). The tale of Jaka Tarub, in its version from Tuban, East Java, was once considered a legend because the local people could still identify the lake that is described in the story (Danandjaja, 1984). In figure 2 below we can see Sendang Widodaren, identified by the locals as the place where Jaka Tarub took a bath and stole the celestial nymph’s cloth.



Figure 2. Sendang Widodaren in Tuban, East Java

When we compare these definitions, it becomes clear that the story of Jaka Tarub is difficult to categorize. On the one hand, it contains mythical elements, such as the presence of supernatural beings (celestial nymphs), which point to a cosmological dimension. On the other hand, it bears the characteristics of a folktale, as it is part of an oral tradition and cultural tradition in Java. Moreover, there are also fairytale-like aspects, for example, the magical events and the existence of celestial nymphs with magical powers.

This mixed or hybrid nature means that Jaka Tarub cannot be clearly categorized into Western narratives, but rather reflects Javanese cultural logic and narrative tradition. The story of Jaka Tarub does not easily fit into any of these categories. On the one hand, the existence of relics and specific locations points to a historical basis, emphasizing its legendary nature. On the other hand, it contains supernatural elements, such as celestial nymphs (*bidadari*) and magical acts, which align with the characteristics of myths and fairy tales.

Westerners arbitrarily impose models on experiences (cf. neo-evolutionary anthropology), while Javanese continually observe, analyze, and act upon their experiences (Keeler, 2017). In other words, Western approaches emphasize experiences subjected to predetermined models and graphics. As seen in neo-evolutionary anthropology, Javanese approach their reality through a reflexive process. They closely observe their experiences, analyze them, and then act upon them in a dynamic, or organic, way. We must be aware that we cannot judge what we have not seen or experienced.

Following Javanese literary tradition, we might perhaps place Jaka Tarub's story in the category of *babad*. A *babad* is a continuation and further development of fairy tales and legends (Herusatoto, 2017). The story has a sequel. According to the book *Mitologi Jawa* (Herisatoto, 2017), Jaka Tarub's story relates that after Dewi Nawangwulan found her *slendang* in the rice barn, which Jaka Tarub had hidden with the intention of taking her as his wife, she realized she had been deceived by her husband. Disappointed, she left her husband and daughter and returned to Kawidadaren in heaven. However, the

gods refused her return because she had been impregnated by a human and therefore no longer had the right to reside in heaven. Dewi Nawangwulan had to remain on earth and was appointed queen of the South Sea by Sang Hyang Guru, where she was given charge of the spirits present there. She was given the title Kanjeng Ratu Kidul.

The story then branches out into the family tree of the Mataram dynasty. A similar story emerges of Jaka Tarub's son-in-law, Bondan Kejawan (Lembu Peteng), who married Nawangsih, the daughter of Jaka Tarub and Dewi Nawangwulan. Then comes his son, Ki Getas Pendawa, then his son, Ki Ageng Sela. Further on, we have his son, Ki Ageng Ngenis, Ki Ageng Pemanahan, and then Panembahan Senopati ing Ngalaga, the father of Sultan Agung, the first ruler of Mataram-Islam (Abimayu, 2017).

One reason why many people speak vaguely about the historicity of stories stems from a habit of reticence in assessing the veracity of any claim (Keeler, 2017). This stems from a cultural tendency not to immediately judge the veracity of certain claims. This reticence leads to stories being approached as meaningful rather than as factually true or false. Mystical figures are used to support Javanese leadership. As a result, some Javanese cling to mystical behavior in leadership (Endraswara, 2013).

The predominance of these themes is due to the Javanese way of thinking's cosmic-mystical nature (focused on the cycle of the supernatural cosmos), which is then linked to cosmic-biological thoughts (focused on the cycle of human existence) (Herusatoto, 2017). Cosmic-mystical thinking leads to the cycles of nature being personified as gods, while rulers or kings are considered incarnations of the gods (cosmic-biological) (Herusatoto, 2017). In Javanese culture, people believe that leaders are not just ordinary people but also possess something mystical within them. They see nature and the cosmos as a cycle connected to human existence. Therefore, natural forces are depicted as gods, and kings or rulers are sometimes seen as a kind of incarnation of those gods.

For this reason, Jaka Tarub is referred to in this study as a narrative, a broad term that allows for a comprehensive study of the story's cultural, social, and symbolic meaning without touching upon the perspectives, beliefs, and judgments of both Western and Javanese cultures.

Reflection of Javanese Culture

The story of Jaka Tarub reflects deeply rooted values, beliefs, and symbols from Javanese culture. These are often expressed in Javanese adat.

Regulations that fall into the category of adat (traditional customs) are those that carry the meaning of rules of conduct or custom, whose validity has existed from ancient times to the present day and has remained unchanged (I Gede, 2011). Within these, religious-mystical belief also plays a special role. First and foremost, there is the religious-mystical belief that is strongly present in Javanese tradition. The supernatural must be considered something that cannot be explained by the laws of science, not for any other reason than the assumption that it does not exist. Yet, the entire framework of Javanese culture seems to support such beliefs and even serves as a foundation from which these

beliefs can emerge and develop (Stuart, 2003).

The supernatural plays a central role in the story, demonstrating the intertwining of spirituality and daily life in the life of a Javanese. This demonstrates that the Javanese not only viewed reality rationally but also allowed room for the mystical, in which divine and cosmic forces guided human destiny. The predominance of these themes is due to the cosmic-mystical nature of Javanese thought (focused on the cycle of the supernatural cosmos), which is then linked to cosmic-biological thoughts (focused on the cycle of human existence) (Herusatoto, 2017).

Cosmic-mystical thinking leads to the cycles of nature being personified as gods, while rulers or kings are considered incarnations of the gods (cosmic-biological) (Herusatoto, 2017). This applies to daily life, rituals, culture, art, etc. This perspective is particularly central to Javanese rituals. Javanese people speak of ritual celebrations as a realization of everything they find characteristic and praiseworthy in their own culture (Keeler, 2017).

According to the locals, this country is permeated with ghosts, spirits, and phantoms; not only on the land where they live, or under the sky beneath which they dwell, where the supposedly real manifestation of the supernatural is abundant and relentless, but also on television, in the cinema, in daily gossip, and in the depths of houses that claim to be the residence of dukun, practitioners of witchcraft, healing, and exorcism. Belief in spirits is an unchanging constant on this Indonesian island (Bruce, 2003). This ubiquitous presence of the supernatural is also reflected in traditional stories such as Jaka Tarub. In this story, celestial nymphs, magical garments, and divine interventions play a central role, demonstrating how supernatural forces influence the characters' actions and social relationships, and transmit cultural values and norms.

Gender Dynamics in Javanese Culture

The status of women in Javanese culture can be understood through both traditional folklore and modern feminist interpretations. Folklore serves as an ambiguous medium: on the one hand, it confirms existing power structures, while on the other, it can also challenge them. Within patriarchal traditions, women are often defined as “the other”, or, in Javanese, *kanca wingking*, a position that legitimizes their subjugation while simultaneously instilling fear in men (Millet, 2000). This expression assumes that women are only capable of working or engaging in domestic tasks such as cooking, washing, and caring for children (Prasetyo, 2018).

This is evident in the Javanese legend of Jaka Tarub, in which the nymph Nawang Wulan is forced into a life of dependency by the loss of her *slendang*, or garment. Stealing her clothes symbolizes the deprivation of her power and autonomy (Fariha & Choiron, 2017). In this context, the figure of Nawang Wulan reflects an ambivalent status. On the one hand, she is seen as the manifestation of Dewi Sri, the rice goddess who symbolizes life, fertility, and prosperity. On the other hand, she is reduced to a domestic role, where her supernatural power functions only within the boundaries imposed by male power. The fact that nymphs are often depicted as beings with a supernatural allure, yet simultaneously

they are captured, reinforces this gender dynamic.

Feminist criticism, however, offers space to question these traditional constructions. According to Firestone (1972), love itself constitutes a mechanism of oppression that perpetuates women's dependency. We see this reflected in a *Ketoprak* play by *Siswo Budoyo Tulungagung* during the scene in which Nawang Wulan loses her *slendang* and is abandoned by her sisters. Her promise in her desperate state, "*Sopo sing biso nulungi aku, yen wadon dadi sedulur sinoro wedi, yen kakung tak dadekke bojoku,*" (Who can help me, if it is a woman I will take her as my sister, when it is a man I will take him as my husband), reflects not only an act of desperation but also the vulnerable position of women in the Javanese cultural context. Instead of self-determination, Nawang Wulan is forced by circumstances to place her fate in the hands of another. The absence of her *slendang* symbolizes the loss of autonomy and power, while the promise to immediately make a rescuer a sister or husband emphasizes her dependency. In patriarchal traditions, as described above by Millet (2000), women are defined in relation to others as wives, mothers, or sisters, never as fully autonomous individuals.

On the other hand, this demonstrates that desperation is transformed into a survival strategy. This aligns with Geertz's (1973) argument that folklore can both reinforce and challenge dominant ideologies and power relations. The scene thus reflects the dual status of women in Javanese culture: on the one hand, bound by traditions, rituals, and patriarchal norms, and on the other, capable of regaining a form of control even in moments of desperation. From this perspective, Nawang Wulan's return to Kahyangan and the recovery of her wings can be read as a symbol of liberation and the restoration of her true identity (Fariha & Choiron, 2017). Thus, the legend becomes not only a confirmation of patriarchal order but also a narrative that opens up possibilities for resistance and reassessment of the female position in Javanese culture.

In the family and social environment, men are considered to hold a higher position than women. They hold the position of head of the household. Because of this position, men are entitled to a greater role in making decisions regarding domestic and social affairs (Prasetyo, 2018). According to Meder and Venbrux (2000) in "Vertelcultuur," male storytellers generally show a preference for jokes, humorous stories, and adventure tales, which usually feature male heroes who are often rewarded with an attractive bride, wealth, or even a kingdom. In these stories, themes such as sexuality and courage play a significant role. In contrast, men are less likely to tell fairy tales in which women play the leading role, and they have little affinity with stories in which a cunning woman manages to outwit the man. Women, on the other hand, narrated more often in private, while men performed more publicly. The roles traditionally assigned to men and women were thus reflected at different levels, including within storytelling culture. This reveals how, in many traditional stories, male initiative is rewarded, even when it comes at the expense of female autonomy.

Jaka Tarub is not punished for his lie or breaking trust. In fact, he wins. He acquires a heavenly wife, becomes the father of a royal bloodline, and is culturally seen as the progenitor of something great (Abimayu, 2024). This points to a patriarchal structure in which male action, even manipulation, is

considered legitimate as long as it leads to social or political stability.

Civilized people repress and suppress all kinds of drives and desires in their subconscious, only to have them resurface in dreams and fantasies. These repressed drives and desires are also said to be visible in fairy tales, products of the imagination after all. According to Freud, these typically materialize in the form of themes such as sexuality and aggression (Meder & Venbrux, 2000). Jaka Tarub's stealing of Nawangwulan's clothes can indeed be seen psychoanalytically as an act with both sexual and aggressive connotations. Taking her clothes during bathing symbolizes an infringement of her bodily and sexual autonomy. By hiding the clothes, Jaka Tarub deprives Nawangwulan of her freedom to return to heaven. It is therefore an aggressive act that amounts to coercion and submission. In this case, Jaka Tarub can be seen as a criminal, or a sexual offender.

Food, Preparation and Culture

Foods have symbolic meanings, namely social, religious, and other significances (Danandjaja, 1984). The importance of rice and the dandang (the traditional cooking pot) cannot be underestimated. In Java, rice is not only a staple food but also a symbol of life, prosperity, and blessing. Cooking rice in the dandang therefore acquires an almost ritual significance. Various folk beliefs exist surrounding rice preparation, which are often seen as omens. To reinforce this symbolic significance, this function is often linked to a belief, conviction, or superstition. Sanctions, both concrete and supernatural, often exist to support this (Danandjaja, 1984). According to Javanese elders, it is believed that when rice overflows during cooking, it is a sign that abundant *rezeki* (luck) will arrive within a few months. The sudden souring or improper cooking of rice is also interpreted in tradition as spiritual signs, ranging from impending success to negative influences such as jealousy or black magic. Also the placement and sudden fall of cooking utensils can also be interpret as a good or bad omen.

According to an ancient Javanese tradition, men are advised against entering the kitchen during food preparation, both on festive occasions and in everyday cooking. It is also customary that men are not allowed to look into cooking pots while food is being prepared. This custom appears to parallel an alternative version of the Jaka Tarub story, in which Nawang Wulan was assisted by her heavenly sisters during cooking. She prohibited Jaka Tarub from entering the kitchen. When Jaka Tarub broke this ban and entered unexpectedly, the heavenly sisters were so shocked that they never returned to help Nawang Wulan. This legend may explain the origin and persistence of this taboo.

It is conceivable that the influence of this story contributed to the passing on of this tradition, which is still less widely observed today, both in Indonesia and among the Javanese community in Suriname. Such beliefs demonstrate that food and cooking utensils are not merely practical objects but an integral part of the spiritual and social culture of the Javanese.

The Impact of Curiosity in Jaka Tarub

In the story of Jaka Tarub, curiosity plays a central role in the course of events. Jaka Tarub's curiosity about the nymphs in the spring leads him to steal a magical garment or *slendang* and ultimately to enter into a relationship with Nawangwulan. This urge to discover and understand not only reflects individual motivation but also serves as a cultural and symbolic tool.

Curiosity can be broadly defined as the recognition, pursuit, and desire to explore new, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous events. It involves the feeling of interest in a situation where the opportunity for learning exists. There is an urge to seek out new experiences to see what happens, to discover how oneself will react, or to learn how others will react (Kashdan et al., 2018). It stimulates exploration as a response to unexpected problems and events, driven by the need to reduce uncertainty while simultaneously creating a sense of control (Litman, 2008).

Curiosity functions in the story as a catalyst for both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, it can be rewarding, as Jaka Tarub's curiosity has brought him knowledge, insight, and a partner in the form of Nawangwulan, strengthening his social status and cultural connection. On the other hand, curiosity can also be destructive, as in breaking the nymphs' magical rules. This ultimately led Jaka Tarub to a situation of disappointment and conflict. The story also teaches us, as readers, a deeper life lesson. Curiosity is not always good, nor is the pursuit of truth always necessary. As humans, we don't need to know everything. The pursuit of absolute truth or complete control is less important than the pursuit of moral perfection, balance, and wisdom in action.

Jaka Tarub's Legacy

The legacy of the legend of Jaka Tarub can be understood in relation to the process of socialization. The socialization process refers to the learning process of culture in relation to the social system. In this process, from childhood to old age, an individual learns patterns of action through interaction with various individuals in their environment who fulfill various social roles, as they occur in everyday life (Koetjaraningrat, 1990). In short, socialization is the lifelong process in which an individual, through interaction with others, learns the values, norms, customs, and social roles of their culture and society. Jaka Tarub's story functions as a cultural tool for affirming and transmitting gender roles and moral values. Cultural rules and rituals exemplify how stories, through socialization, not only influence behavior but also create a lasting legacy, visible in both contemporary Indonesia and the Javanese diaspora in Suriname and elsewhere.

Jaka Tarub's story leaves behind not only cultural and symbolic traces, but also tangible, physical legacies connected to historical places and objects. A key example is the Dandang Kyai Dudo, a cooking pot claimed to be the same cooking pot used by Nawangwulan, which is preserved to this day in the Kraton of Surakarta. Furthermore, the tradition refers to the Mataram Kingdom, where Ki Jaka Tarub is considered the foundation of the Mataram dynasty. His story is thus interwoven with dynastic history, illustrating the cultural and political continuity of the region.

Ki Jaka Tarub's physical presence is also reflected in his grave, which, as a historical monument, provides a tangible connection between the story, local history, and the contemporary community. While several locations claim to be the original grave, the one officially recognized by an official body, the royal palace of Surakarta Hadiningrat, is the one in Grobogan, in the village called Tarub. This grave not only serves as a spiritual or historical site but also symbolizes the enduring, living significance of the story in Javanese culture.

Jaka Tarub's legacy lives on in rituals, customs, and symbols within Javanese culture. A key example is the Adang Tahun Dal ritual, held after the eight-year cycle at the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta Hadiningrat. The core of this ritual involves the Susuhunan of Surakarta, along with his family and closest courtiers, cooking rice. Sacred cooking utensils are used, including the dandang Kyai Duda, believed to have once belonged to Jaka Tarub and his heavenly wife, Nawangwulan. The ritual is steeped in symbolism and heritage. The rice is prepared using the fire Kyai Latu Bledhek from Ki Ageng Selo in Grobogan, wood from the sacred Donoloyo forest, earth from various sacred sites, and water from springs with spiritual meanings. These elements connect the ceremony not only to nature and cosmic forces, but also to the origins of the Javanese royal dynasties. Strict rules apply during the ritual, such as the king's refusal to speak during the cooking. There is even a rule that non-Javanese, or non-full-blooded Javanese, are not permitted within a certain radius of the ritual. The ritual ends with a *selamatan* or a *kembul bujana* (Figure 3), a ritual meal which symbolise the relationship and bond between the ruler and his people.



Figure 3. *Kembul bujana* ritual

The function of Adang Tahun Dal is multifaceted. First and foremost, it affirms the spiritual and social unity between the king and the people, manifested in the sharing of the cooked rice among court servants and ultimately the people. Moreover, the ritual legitimizes the ruler's power through its symbolic connection with the figures of Jaka Tarub and Nawangwulan. At the same time, it reflects a blend of religious layers: animistic, Hindu-Buddhist, and Islamic.

Another important part of the legacy of Jaka Tarub's story lies in the enduring cultural and ritual

practice that has emerged from it during traditional Javanese marriage. When Jaka Tarub suspected his wife of being inattentive, he secretly opened the *kekep* (lid of the rice dandang). However, his wife, Dewi Nawangwulan, discovered this and was deeply disappointed. She returned to the *kahyangan* (heavenly world), but left Jaka Tarub an important message. When their daughter, Dewi Nawangsih, was to marry in the future, a *manggar mayang sakembaran* and a *cikal sepasang* were to be placed in the *pedaringan* (the inner room where valuables were kept) on the evening before the wedding ceremony.

The “manggar mayang sakembaran” refers to double (twin-like) flower arrangements made of the coconut and areca palm and croton branches, while “cikal sepasang” represents a pair of young coconuts. If this instruction from Dewi Nawangwulan were followed, she would descend from heaven that night to bless her daughter and enhance her beauty. The Javanese tradition of the *malam midodareni* originated from this supposed mythical commandment. This is a ritual performed on the eve of a wedding, in which people pray and hope that Dewi Nawangwulan will descend to give her blessing and beautify the bride. The hope of the family and community is not solely focused on the bride's outward beauty, but primarily on the safety, prosperity, and blessing of the marriage itself.

Besides tangible relics and rituals, the story of Jaka Tarub leaves behind a rich intangible legacy deeply rooted in Javanese culture. First and foremost, the stories themselves are passed down orally and remain an important means of teaching values, norms, and moral lessons within the community. These stories are presented to the public through various means, including theatrical performances such as a *Ketoprak* play.

CONCLUSION

The story of Jaka Tarub demonstrates that the value of folklore lies not solely in the pursuit of factual truth, but in its capacity to guide moral development, self-improvement, and harmony with the surrounding world. It reminds us that not all aspects of life can be understood through logic or rationality, and that human knowledge of the universe remains inherently limited. As a cultural mirror of Javanese society, Jaka Tarub encapsulates deeply rooted values, beliefs, symbols, and rituals, revealing the strong presence of the supernatural and religious-mystical dimensions that shape everyday life. At the same time, the narrative exposes patriarchal structures and gender dynamics, where male agency is rewarded while women are confined to traditional roles. Nevertheless, the story also allows space for ambiguity and resistance, particularly through Nawang Wulan's loss and eventual recovery of autonomy, illustrating how folklore can both reinforce and challenge power relations. Moreover, Jaka Tarub highlights how ordinary objects and practices such as food, cooking utensils, and rituals that carry profound social and spiritual meanings, serving as vehicles for the transmission of cultural norms. Beyond its narrative form, the story continues to exist as a living tradition in contemporary society, manifested in rituals, symbolic objects like the *dandang*, marriage customs, and the central role of rice in Javanese culture. These practices demonstrate the continuity of cultural memory, where myth,

history, and lived experience intertwine. Ultimately, Jaka Tarub functions as a living cultural compass that sustains identity, connects generations, and invites reflection on the enduring relevance of myths and rituals in navigating modern life.

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