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JAVANESE PHILOSOPHY IN THE ORAL LITERATURE OF THE ORIGIN OF ALAS KETHU

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the declining understanding of Javanese philosophical values among younger generations, particularly those embedded in oral literature. One example is the folklore "Asal Usul Alas Kethu." The research problem focuses on identifying the Javanese philosophical values contained in the story. This study aims to describe these philosophical values. The research method employed is descriptive qualitative, utilizing interviews and literature review as data collection techniques. The results show that the story contains five main philosophical values: concord (rukun), empathy (tepa slira), patience (sabar), awareness (eling), and environmental harmony (memayu hayuning bawana). These values are reflected in the characters' behavior and the storyline, illustrating harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and God. The study concludes that oral literature plays an important role as a medium for character education based on local wisdom.

Keywords: *cultural values; folklore; Javanese philosophy; local wisdom; oral literature*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is not only human's creative expression not only presenting language beauty, but also represents inner experience, moral value, and community culture system. In the context of Javanese culture, literature has a strategic function as a medium to transmit hereditary life values. Endraswara (2012) stated that literature functions not only as an esthetic work, but also as an effective means of character education. Thus, literature plays an important role in the internalization of moral and cultural values creating both individual's and community's self-identity. This perspective is supported by recent studies of oral literature in Indonesia, which

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demonstrate that oral literary traditions function as important media for conveying moral messages, cultural values, and collective experiences within communities (Nursalam et al., 2024). Similarly, Syam et al. (2024) found that oral literature contributes to the preservation and strengthening of social identity amid contemporary cultural change.

One of literature forms playing important role in the transmission of cultural value is oral literature. Oral literature is a literary work transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition and containing social-historical and cultural elements and societal value system (Endraswara, 2018). In a folklore study, folklore as the part of oral literature functions not only as entertainment but also as the representation of community's belief system, social norm, and ideology (Brunvand, 1998). Through symbol, character, and plot, the community inculcates moral values and relation between human, nature, and God.

Folklore as part of oral literature plays an important role in maintaining the sustainability of cultural identity. Through folklore, community can be transmitted through collective experience, cultural value, and ethical system becoming life guidelines. In addition, folklore is also a medium of social reflection representing the dynamics of societal life. Therefore, a study on folklore is important not only in the context of cultural conservation but also in understanding value system evolving within society.

Nevertheless, in modern context, the existence of oral literature faces substantial challenges. Globalization and technology development leads young generation to be more familiar with popular culture than with local one. This is in line with Nida's (2020) study finding that technology development and social change makes high values fading, particularly in the aspect of etiquette and attitude among young generations. Consequently, the appreciation of oral literature and the understanding of Javanese philosophy decline. The condition indicates the importance of scientific study on oral literature as the attempts of documenting, conserving, and reinterpreting cultural values in contemporary context.

One of folklores having strong philosophical and cultural values is "*Asal Usul Alas Kethu* (the Origin of Alas Kethu). This story not only describes the origin of a place, but also contains complex Javanese philosophical values. The result of study shows that the story contains such values as concord (*rukun*), empathy (*tepa slira*), patience, awareness (*eling*), and environmental harmony (*memayu hayuning bawana*) as reflected on the character's behavior and the plot of story. Those values represent Javanese people's ideology emphasizing the balance between human beings and their fellows, nature, and God.

Theoretically, Javanese philosophy is a value system oriented toward life harmony and balance. (Endraswara, 2018) stated that Javanese philosophy emphasizes harmony between human beings and themselves, society, nature, and God. The view is confirmed by Koentjaraningrat (1984) stating that Javanese culture value is directed at maintaining social and cosmic balance. Values such as concord, empathy (*tepa slira*), and environmental harmony (*memayu hayuning bawana*) are basic

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principle in maintaining the harmony. In addition, Mulder (2001) emphasizes that spirituality and inner awareness is an important part of Javanese philosophy creating society's mindset and behavior.

Several previous studies have analyzed cultural and philosophical values in oral literature. The finding of Fransiska's (2024) study showed that folklore contains moral value, ethics, and Javanese philosophy reflecting the society's ideology. In addition, Nur et al (2022) study found that oral literature contains local wisdom values functioning as social and cultural life guidelines. However, those studies still have limitations, particularly in terms of object studied and depth of analysis.

Considering this review, this current study will address the research gap, including: (1) still limited research specifically studying Javanese philosophy in folklore "*Asal Usul Alas Kethu*"; (2) only very few studies having analyzed in-depth the correlation between narrative structure of folklore and Javanese philosophical value; and (3) still limited studies revealing Javanese cultural and philosophical values comprehensively in the context of local oral literature. Therefore, this study has novelty in two aspects. First, this study used folklore "Asal Usul Alas Kethu" not widely studied in-depth yet as the object of study. Second, this study used analytical approach integrating the study of Javanese philosophy and cultural values into the structure of story comprehensively. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of oral literature study and to enrich the understanding of Javanese philosophy in the context of local culture.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, the one aiming to understand and to describe the phenomenon in-depth through interpreting meaning in natural context. This approach was selected because the study focuses on revealing Javanese philosophical values containing in oral literature, thereby needing an interpretative and contextual analysis (Moleong, 2019). Oral literature as the object of study is conceived not only as text, but also as the representation of cultural value and society's ideology transmitted from generation to generation.

The data used in this research is the folklore "*Asal Usul Alas Kethu*" as main source obtained through interview and library study. Data source is divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data source was obtained from informant i.e. a writer and a litterateur, Parpal Perwanto. Meanwhile, secondary data source includes books, journals, and previous studies relevant to Javanese philosophical study such as Endraswara's (2018) and Koentjaraningrat's (2009) works. Techniques of collecting data used were interview, library study, and documentation, by means of identifying, classifying, and taking note on parts of story containing philosophical values.

Data analysis was carried out using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction was carried out by selecting data relevant to the focus of research, while data display was carried out in the form of systematic narrative description. Conclusion drawing was carried out through interpreting meaning based

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on Javanese philosophical theory. Data validity was tested using theory triangulation, by comparing the result of analysis and various relevant theories, thereby obtaining the scientifically valid and accountable-for result of research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the result of analysis on the text of folklore "*Asal Usul Alas Kethu*", it can be seen that the narrative structure of the folklore contains Javanese philosophical values manifested concretely in dialog, character's action, and plot of events. Those values were then analyzed systematically in the discussion below.

1. Concord

Concord in the folklore "*Asal Usul Alas Kethu*" functions not only as social ethics but also cosmological principle maintaining the balance between individual and his/her social environment. Interaction between Ki Kesdik Wacana and Raden Panji taking place without conflict indicates that harmony is an ideal condition endeavored actively.

> "*Sawise lelungan adoh, Raden Panji pungkasane tekan papan tapane Ki Kesdik Wacana. Raden Panji banjur matur kanthi sopan saperlu nyuwun kidang kanggo dipiara ing kraton Demak. Wusanane Ki Kesdik Wacana gelem menehi apa kang dadi panjaluke Raden Panji.*"
>
> Meaning: After a long journey, Raden Panji eventually arrived at the hermitage of Ki Kesdik Wacana. He then spoke respectfully, asking for a deer to keep at Demak Palace. Ultimately, Ki Kesdik Wacana agreed to grant Raden Panji's request.
>
> (Parpal, P.)

In this context, Ki Kesdik Wacana's consent is not merely a form of personal kindness, but also reflection of concord value as a cultural mechanism to avoid social tension. Javanese people, according to Koentjaraningrat (1984), emphasize the principle of harmony to maintain social stability, so that open conflict can be avoided as much as possible. However, what is interesting is that concord in this story is not permissive in nature. This can be seen from Ki Kesdik Wacana keeping imposing sanction to Raden Panji although he has forgiven his mistake.

> "*Ki Kesdik Wacana kang misuwur wicaksana banjur paring pangapura marang Raden Panji.*"
>
> Meaning:
>
> "Ki Kesdi Wacana, renowned for his wisdom, then forgave Raden Panji".
>
> (Parpal, P.)

This indicates that concord does not means removing norm or consequence, but instead being a means of restoring the disturbed balance. Thus, concord in this study

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has two dimensions: (1) social dimension by maintaining harmonious relation between individuals, and (2) moral dimension ensuring that the justice keeps upheld. This interpretation reveals that the philosophy of concord is dynamic and not merely avoiding conflict but also managing conflict prudently.

2. Empathy (*Tepa Slira*)

Empathic (*tepa slira*) value in this story can be seen from Ki Kesdik Wacana's capability of comprehending Raden Panji's condition. Knowing that Raden Panji did not have a means to take the deer, he did not blame him, but gave him solution.

> *"Sakwise krungu wangsulane Raden Panji, Ki Kesdik Wacana banjur meneng sedhela lan ndedonga marang Gusti Allah. Sawise iku, kanthi kesaktiyane, dheweke bisa nangkep kidang lan nglebokake menyang bumbung pring petung kanthi cara ajaib."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> "Upon hearing Raden Panji's reply, Ki Kesdik Wacana fell silent for a moment and prayed to God. Then, using his supernatural powers, he managed to capture the deer and put it inside a "*petung*" bamboo tube through a miraculous feat".
>
> (Parpal, P.)

This excerpt indicates that Ki Kesdik Wacana did not blame, but instead helped with prudent solution. This attitude reflects his capability of understanding others' condition. Asriani et al.'s (2017) study found that folklore contains empathic values that can be used as a medium to shape students' character. In addition, a study conducted by Sibarani (2014) found that local wisdom in folklore contributes to building social solidarity. Thus, empathy (*tepa slira*) in this story serves not only as moral value but also as a social strategy to maintain harmony.

3. Patience (*Sabar*)

Patience in this story is reflected on Ki Kesdik Wacana's response to the violation committed by Raden Panji. Instead of reacting emotionally, he preferred conducting reflection through meditation.

> *"Ing papan liya Ki Kesdik Wacana enggal-enggal ngerti yen ana kedadeyan sing ora bener kang dialami dening Raden Panji. Panjenengane enggal semedi kanggo ngerteni kedadeyan saknyatane."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> "Elsewhere, Ki Kesdik Wacana quickly sensed that Raden Panji was facing a troubling situation. He immediately entered into meditation to discern what actually occurred."
>
> (Parpal, P.)

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This action implies that patience, in the context of Javanese philosophy, not only means controlling emotion, but also involving the process of reflection and searching for inner truth. In addition, patience can also be seen in Raden Panji.

> *"Pungkasane Raden Panji nrima kahanan iku kanthi sabar lan ikhlas amarga rumangsa yen kabeh kang dialami minangka akibat saka tumindake dhewe."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> "Eventually Raden Panji accepted the situation patiently and sincerely; realizing that everything he was experiencing was the consequence of his own actions."
>
> (Parpal, P.)

This patience value indicates self-control and acceptance to the consequence of action. In a study on character education, Lickona (2012)stated that patience is a part of moral knowing and moral feeling that are important in character development. Meanwhile, Wibowo's (2013) study confirmed that patience value in Javanese culture is closely related to self-control and inner balance.

4. Awareness (*Eling*)

Awareness (*eling*) value in this story is closely related to human's spiritual consciousness of God and his/her moral responsibility. It can be seen from Ki Kesdik Wacana's habit of always praying and meditating before making decision.

> *"… Ki Kesdik Wacana banjur meneng sedhela lan ndedonga marang Gusti Allah."*
>
> *"Panjenengane enggal semedi kanggo ngerteni kedadeyan saknyatane."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> "...Ki Kesdik Wacana fell silent for a moment and prayed to God"
>
> "He immediately entered into meditation to discern what actually occurred"
>
> (Parpal, P.)

Otherwise, the violation committed by Raden Panji indicates his less awareness, because he preferred following his curiosity than considering the mandate given.

> *"Amarga ora kuwat nahan rasa kepengin ngerti, pungkasane Raden Panji mbukak sumpel bumbung kasebut."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> "Unable to suppress his curiosity, Raden Panji eventually opened the stopper of the bamboo tube."
>
> (Parpal, P.)

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This excerpt implies that humans must always be aware (*eling*) of mandate and consequence of action. Javanese people, according to Geertz (1976), have strong symbolic system in connecting human action with spiritual values. In addition, religious values in folklore serves as moral guidelines for society.

5. Environmental Harmony (*Memayu Hayuning Bawana*)

The concept of environmental harmony (*memayu hayuning bawana*) in this story represents harmonious relationship between humans and nature. The task given to Raden Panji to take care of deed indicates that humans have responsibility for environmental conservation.

> *"Saliyane nampa paukuman kasebut, Raden Panji uga diwenehi tugas kanggo njaga lan ngreksa kabeh kidang kang urip ing Alas Kethu."*
>
> Meaning:
>
> In addition to receiving that punishment, Raden Panji was also assigned to guard and protect all the deer living Kethu Forest."
>
> (Parpal, P.)

The excerpt above implies that nature has balance that cannot be violated. In ecocritical study, Garrard (2012)stated that literature contains important ecological value in building environmental consciousness. A study conducted by Ratna (2011) also demonstrated that Indonesian traditional literature contains ecological values relevant to environmental education. Thus, the concept *memayu hayuning bawana* in this story can be conceived as the form of ecological ethics still relevant until today.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of research demonstrates that folklore *Asal Usul Alas Kethu* contains Javanese philosophical values integrated into narrative structure through dialog, character's action, and plot of events. The values include concord (*rukun*), empathy (*tepa slira*), patience (*sabar*), awareness (*eling*), and environmental harmony (*memayu hayuning bawana*), interrelated in creating an intact ethical system. Concord value reflects an attempt of maintaining social harmony, empathy (*tepa slira*) shows empathy and social consciousness, patience reflects self-control, awareness (*eling*) shows spiritual consciousness, while *memayu hayuning bawana* emphasizes human's responsibility to the nature. The finding indicates that *Asal Usul Alas Kethu* functions not only as entertainment and cultural heritage, but also as a medium to transmit local wisdom representing Javanese people's ideology in maintaining social, spiritual, and ecological balance.

The strength of this research lies in its integrative analytical approach in revealing the correlation between Javanese philosophy values and giving contribution to the study on oral literature, particularly folklore *Asal Usul Alas Kethu*. However, this research was still limited to one text and used descriptive qualitative approach, thereby not yet exploring the possible interpretation through interdisciplinary approach. Thus, further research is recommended to expand the object of study by

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comparing various folklores from different regions and using other approaches such as semiotics, hermeneutics, or cultural anthropology.

The result of research also holds prospect for development in education and cultural conservation field. The values in *Asal Usul Alas Kethu* can be utilized as teaching material based on local wisdom, character education, and environmental education, particularly to grow ecological consciousness through *memayu hayuning bawana* value. Thus, this study not only contributes theoretically to literary and cultural studies, but also has practical benefit in shaping the students' character and conserving local wisdom all at once.

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