

# Local Wisdom and Disseminating Moderate Islam; A Study of Wayang Golek Purwa

Anik Farida<sup>1</sup>, and Zakiyah Zakiyah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Research and Development for Religious Life, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Office of Religious Research and Development, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Semarang, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. Email: [anikfarida16@gmail.com](mailto:anikfarida16@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Wayang Golek Purwa is one of the living cultures that have existed in West Java. This art is usually performed by a *dalang* accompanied by certain *gamelan*. Initially, in this Wayang Golek a *dalang* would perform a story of Mahabharata or Ramayana coming from Hinduism from India, however in the recent time a *dalang* will elaborate their performance using local wisdom and Islamic teaching. This Wayang Golek Purwa, beside as the cultural show, can play as the media to disseminate moderate Islam. This article concerns on this topic for these reasons; there are many da'wa that ignore the principles of Islam like hating and disrespecting others which can lead to conflict. Therefore, using culture and art to spread religious teaching is a way to create harmony among believers. In addition, da'wa with the local culture had been done by previous preachers during the early history of Islam in Java, thus this can be recognized as the continuation of such da'wa. This article was written based on the qualitative research conducted in Bandung West Java. Data were gathered using these methods; interviews, observation and library research. Finding of this study shows that Wayang Golek Purwa contained many moderate Islamic teaching and various important values such as respecting others, live as the media of learning, equity among human beings, commemoration of state independences by doing a good deed, caring and helping people in need, spread the good deeds and avoid the bad deeds, as well as other valuable principles.

**Keywords:** Local Wisdom, Wayang Golek Purwa, Moderate Islam, Da'wa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has face several challenges related to intolerance and religions based extremism as well as radicalism. This can be seen from various data, for instance during 2020 Setara institute reported that there were 32 cases of religion based violence, 17 cases of rejection on building the house of worship, 6 cases on destruction of house of whorship, 8 cases on prohibition of religious activities, and 5 religion based violence cases (Kompas.com, 2021).

The phenomenon of extremism and radicalism is a dangerous threat because it can damage the religious social life and if it is not managed properly it will lead to religious violence. Regarding this danger, Franz Magnis, one of the prominent religious leaders, said that the threat of radicalism and terrorism could divide the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Beritasatu.com. 2021).

To reduce the number of intolerance, various efforts were made. A number of studies state that the structural

approach is chosen to suppress intolerance, namely through education (J. Miller, 2013), and the security approach (A. Alati, S. Silawati, D. Darmawati, 2019), as well as the da'wa approach (Turhumun, 2016).

Studies that tend to use a security approach state that one of the functions of the police is for maintaining security and public order or known as Bhabinkamtibmas. In a study in Karimun Regency, mentioned the function of Bhabinkamtibmas in collaboration with the community that it is possible to reduce radicalism and intolerance. This is to revive the implementation of the neighborhood safety system (Siskamling), which is carried out in collaboration with the neighborhood associations (RT) and community units (RW) in each village. The results show that the community has the awareness to maintain the security of their territory from various forms of disturbance, including the entry of religious beliefs that have the potential to cause unrest (A. Alati, D. Darmawati, 2019).

Miller (2013) in his research states that people's resilience to extremism and radicalism can be done by providing comparative religious lessons. Each student can exchange their religious experiences with each other, thus fostering mutual understanding. This mutual understanding and respect will avoid religious fanaticism.

In the da'wa approach, Turhumun (2016) mentions that multicultural da'wa by considering various cultures can suppress exclusivist religious views and rigid attitudes towards others. In its implementation, multicultural da'wa is not only about religious doctrines but more to social issues.

The studies discussed previously shows that researches on preventing radicalism have not examined about the use of local wisdom as a medium of da'wa in which it can play as an instrument that can prevent radicalism. One method of da'wa that is quite effective since the beginning of Islamization in the archipelago until now is through cultural media or local wisdom that is popular in the community.

The use of local wisdom as a medium for disseminating and promoting the values of religious moderation has been carried out since before the arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism. Then with the entry of Islam, the local wisdom got an honorable position as a medium for disseminating Islamic values. History shows that the propagator of Islam in Java, Walisongo used local wisdom as a medium of da'wa. In preaching, the saints often use art and local wisdom to attract community's sympathy, such as using a set of gamelan called *bonang*, as it was done by Sheikh Maulana Makdum Ibrahim who was well known as Sunan Bonang, playing a *bonang* to invite the public to listen to it.

The use of local wisdom as a medium of da'wa remains up to date until now. One of the traditional institutions concerned with preserving the art of wayang as well as Islamic values is the art of Wayang Golek Purwa which was popularized by the puppeteer Asep Sunandar Sunarya. In recent times, the play performed by Asep Sunandar Sunarya is not only containing story of the people, but also about Islamic values. This way was initiated by Asep Sunarya added the view that art and da'wa in Islam are intertwined. Because the implementation of da'wa consists of five elements, namely preacher (*dai*), targets (society), subjects/materials, methods, and media for da'wa. In line with that, this article concerns on how the Wayang Golek Purwa used as a media to disseminate moderate Islam in the society.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative research concerning on the Wayang Golek Purwa located in Bandung, West Java Indonesia. Data of this study were collected using these

methods; firstly, documentary research, as there is a number of written sources regarding the Sundanese customs of the West Java community. Some are relics of the royal era, preserved by the descendants of the king/Sultan, and in the regional museums and libraries. Secondly, interviews with leaders of traditional institutions (Wayang Golek Purwa led by Asep Sunarya) and interview with his assistants. Thirdly, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that was conducted to gather information related to wayang golek in general and the da'wa activities. Participants in this discussion were traditional leaders, local social observers, relevant government officials, and people who are able to enrich information about the research subject.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEWS

There are many studies on wayang golek that had been done by previous researchers. Among all those discussion, Setiawan (2020) examined the use of wayang as media of da'wa. He said that the early preacher in Java used this wayang and other media in order to accommodate local culture, such as creating *tembang* (song) containing Islamic values. Huda and Saddhono (2017) mentioned in their writing that walisanga used wayang as media to spread Islam. This study concerned on the wayang Purwa Gagrak Banyumasan. Similarly, Dewi and Mukarom, and Ridwan (2017) discussed about wayang golek as the media of da'wa. This research found that using local language and local content made the da'wa was easily accepted by residents. In this case, wayang golek can be performed in a variety of occasions such as ceremony and rituals, as well as celebration of Islamic holy days.

Partawijaya (2016) explained in his paper that *Cepot*, one of the actors in wayang golek, has Sufis character. Furthermore, this research explored on how this character has various important values for the community. Meanwhile, Sabunga and Budimansyah, and Sauri (2016) talked about the characters embedded in the Wayang Golek Purwa; there are at least six values namely monotheism, physic, physiology, ethic, aesthetic, logic and theology. Sadono and Nugroho and Nasionalita (2018) mentioned in their study that wayang golek in West Java can be used as a media for transferring information and educating people. This writing also found that Sundanese community consists of many structure and various groups. These divers cultural and social background of the people propose people to interact each other, so that they will create harmony among them.

Wayang kulit in Cirebon was studied by Koesoemadinata (2013). He mentioned that the story of wayang was initially based on the Ramayana and Mahabarata coming from India. Then, along with the arrival of Islam in Java, this wayang was used as a media to spread Islam. The used of this local wisdom

was a picture of how the success of the diplomacy between Islam and local culture, since there is no conflict between Islam and local values. On the other hand, Riyantoo and Mataram (2018) studied the development of wayang in the modern time. They said that in the recent era wayang has been transformed into contemporary art in which they have adapted to the development of technology, for instance Heri Dono, one of the Indonesian prominent artists, integrate art painting and installation with the shape of wayang purwa into a shape of cubism

The discussion of wayang as a media da'wa and other aspects were done by those previous scholars. However, there is no study concerning on how wayang golek purwa as a media to disseminate moderate Islam. Therefore, this paper presents this topic in order to fill the gap and to contribute to discourse of the wayang golek Purwa

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Wayang Golek Purwa and Disseminating Moderate Islam

Wayang golek purwa is a puppet show (golek) which was originally an ideological story about ancestral spirits who were believed to have supernatural powers. The types of the puppets called *wayang* are played depending on the ceremony or performance being conducted. This is related to the ancestors of the Indonesian people who were adherents of animism and dynamism, who believed that every object had power and spirit, so that wayang was symbolized in the form of puppets.

Along with the arrival of Hinduism in Java, the ideology of wayang then shifted from ancestral spirits to the main source of stories originating from Indian epics, also known as the Mahabharata and Ramayana stories. The term Purwa refers to the tradition of puppetry in the style of West Java and Surakarta which is derived from the Serat Pustaka Raja Purwa written by R Ng. Ranggowarsito (Poespaningrat, 2005).

Initially, the puppet show was held by the Sundanese aristocrats in the palace for personal and public purposes. The function of the puppet show depended on demand, especially the nobles' demand at that time. For instance, the performance is for special ritual purposes or entertainment for the spectacles. Wayang Golek that was used for ritual was rarely happened now, but it is sometimes conducted like for sea alms ceremony and the earth alms ceremony once a year.

The arrival of Islam in the Sundanese area has used wayang golek performances as a medium of da'wa along with the several cultural adaptations. Initially, the plays that were staged were entirely based on the epics of

Mahabharata and Ramayana, but as a medium of Islamic da'wa, the play was later modified to be based on the values of Islamic teachings. The characters of Semar, Cepot, Dawala, and Gareng, or often called *punakawan* (clowns), are characters that are not found in the Mahabaratha or Ramayana epics, but are characters deliberately created by the Walisanga (a group of Islamic preachers), as the main characters of wayang golek.

The Punakawan are distinctive characters in Indonesian wayang that are recognized as local characters and symbol of the common people. Their characters indicate a variety of roles, such as an advisor to knights, an entertainer, a social critic, clown, even a source of truth and wisdom. All these characters are actually represented in the Koran, as a symbol of virtue and exemplary simplicity. This shows that wayang performances are very accommodating to the growing local culture, not only related to the play (story) but also the characters displayed. This approach was chosen in order to facilitate da'wa to the people who at that time still adhered to Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus the cultural approach is a method that has been adapted to the situation and conditions.

Furthermore, this study found that Asep Sunandar Sunarya as the puppeteer of the Wayang Golek Purwa Giriharja III was able to improvise its story with the Islamic teaching. In general, in wayang performances, a *dalang* will follow the standard and *tetekon* which are the standard rules. However, Asep Sunandar always innovates in the show by not entirely following the standard. Therefore, the plays and the performance techniques that are displayed are dynamic and progressive which have valuable meanings related to the current issues.

Because of its dynamic and progressive character, a *dalang* must have a moderate attitude. Not only in terms of moderating the standard but also the story or play that will be performed. This moderation character is in line with Wayang's function as an effective, educative and persuasive medium of information and communication. The success of da'wa using *wayang* media depends on the puppeteer in playing the puppets and inserting moderate Islamic teachings.

As shown in this study. The *dalang's* ability to analyze contemporary social conditions from the environment is a form of appreciation for the *dalang* in society, so that the *dalang* is not alienated from society, but becomes an integral part of society. One form of non-alienated attitude is to include moderate religious messages as one of the ways to solve the socio-religious problems.

In the play "Semar Gugat" it is told that Semar sued Astina (a country in wayang) because of the injustices that hit the country and the civil wars that occurred

every time, namely between the Pandawa and the Kaurawa. In the story it is stated that religion has existed for a long time, but it did not bring good to this great country. The core of the problem is not really the value of religious teachings, but it is the people's attitudes on religions. Adherents of religion are still shackled in conservatism, traditionalism, and taqlidism. Therefore, religion must lead to these attitudes including *nyahaan* (loving), *deudeuhan* (loving), *daek nulung kanu* (able to help), *daek nalang kanu susah* (able to help the vulnerable one) and others.

The role of the dalang is very important in wayang performances. This is because the puppet show could not exist without the dalang. Asep Sunandar Sunarya said that "Playing wayang is not easy, and between *ngawayang* and *dalang* is also different. He emphasized that wayang is not only an entertainmen but also a guidance. Wayang is also as a medium of communication, counseling media, educational media and it can also be used as a propaganda medium. In the aspect of wayang as a guidance, the role of the *dalang* is almost absolute. To be able to provide guidance to the public, especially the audience, a dalang must master almost everything. Moreover, he explained that "a dalang is not only an entertainer but also a communicator, as an extension worker, as a speaker, educator or teacher for the community,"

Humans, society, and culture are dialectically related. The interconnection between the three lead to social dialectic, which is a process where on the one hand humans create a number of values for their society since they have lived in the community (Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. 1966). In this sense, people will acquire identity during their interaction in the society, and they cannot be separated from the community.

In the cultural life, humans made objectification that involves relationship between the subject (human) and culture, as the object of human creation (Berger, 1991). In this aspect, people will externalize himself through the creation of objects, then internalize it (return to himself) through the process of *sublation* or giving recognition. During this process, people tend to compare with other knowledge in which they will produce creation continuously, and religion take place in this dialectic process (Berger, 1990).

From the perspective of objectification theory, this study found that there is dialectical process between religion and culture. During the performance, dalang will adapt to social conditions, thus at certain time dalang will came out from the standard of wayang golek. This action does not mean violation of the rules but it was intended to deliver message in the story to the spectators, so that they will understand and be able to interpret it easily.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that Wayang Golek Purwa can play not only as the media of entertainment, but also as the media for da'wa activities. How the early preacher utilized wayang to disseminate Islam was a picture of how Islam can accommodate local culture. In the recent time, this wayang was also used to disseminate moderate Islam by a dalang. There are many values and principles that can unite people and create harmony in the communities.

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