



# Representation of Power in the Myth of Prince Samudra

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**Abstract.** The myth of Prince Samudra has at least colored the land of Java for more than 7 centuries. However, since the end of the Java War, this myth has received a new meaning that is far from the beginning. In fact, until now this myth is widely believed by pilgrims as the basis for carrying out the *pesugihan* ritual. Prince Samudra is a preacher who is very diligent in studying religion, both from Sunan Kalijaga and Ki Ageng Gugur. This means it is very unlikely that later, Pangeran Samudra taught the *pesugihan* ritual by having sexual relations with his illegitimate partner seven times, namely every Pon Friday night. Thus, it is necessary to trace back the changes in the storyline of the myth so that the cause of the occurrence can be answered. This is important because the image of the Pendhem Village area, Sumberlawang District, Regency has already been labeled as a black area with the smell of sexual pilgrim tourism. In addition, the local government of Sragen Regency has also committed to changing the negative image of tourism in the area. This is done either through physical development in the form of infrastructure improvements as well as improvements in the fields of education, society, and culture.

**Keywords:** representation, myth, Prince of the Ocean

## 1 Introduction

The myth of Prince Samudra has existed and is known by the Javanese people since the fall of the Majapahit kingdom, especially in the era of Bhre Kertabumi or King Majapahit XI or in the early days of Raden Patah's reign in the Demak Bintoro Sultanate [1]–[6]. This means that the narrative about Prince Samudra was originally about the network of missionary journeys of the descendants of Bhre Kertabumi or King Majapahit XI in Java [3], [7]–[9]. During those times, there was no misperception of the existence of the narrative and the burial site of Prince Samudra and the Sendang Ontrowulan site [3], [8], [10]–[12]. This means that for a long time the people around the Prince Samudra Site Area – especially the people of Pendem Village, Sumberlawang District, Sragen Regency, and Central Java Province did not feel "disturbed" by the existence of these sites and the narratives of the stories that surround them [3], [10].

However, after the end of the Java War, narratives began to emerge about the myth of Prince Samudra that deviated, tended to discredit, and even killed Prince Samudra's

character as a preacher figure - a descendant of Majapahit [3], [9], [10]. How the process of character assassination is built in this "counter" narrative is incredibly cruel. Just imagine, the narrative about the figure of an Islamic preacher who is so diligent and active in studying religion has become a new "idol" figure for adherents of the pesugihan belief. The peak of his pesugihan ritual must be done by having sex with his unofficial partner who was met around the Prince Samudra tomb area, on Friday night Pon. It had to be repeated 7 more times, every Friday Pon night, with 7 different pairs [3], [8]–[10], [12]. Truly, a cruel narrative is constructed through this counter-myth. To the extent that the location around the tomb of the preacher was used as a kind of localization or adultery.

This kind of narrative makes the people of Pendem Village feel uncomfortable because they feel that their area is labeled as a black zone and a localization or adultery zone. However, they could not do much because the counter-narrative had already spread and was believed by people outside the Sumberlawang Area and Sragen Regency. As a result, the residents of Pendem Village are now somewhat anti-certain about the presence of the researchers because they think that the results of research conducted by many parties have not attempted to lift them out of the black zone [13]. Therefore, this phenomenon is interesting to be studied further, especially from the perspective of cultural studies, and to find alternative solutions so that the people of Pendem Village, Sumberlawang District, and Sragen Regency can feel comfortable living in their territory.

## **2 Method**

This study was conducted using a qualitative research model, Culture Studies [14]–[16]. It attempts to provide a more complete and thorough account of various phenomena occurring in society. One type of research that uses a qualitative research approach is cultural research [17]–[19]. Cultural studies is a field of empirical research that aims to study cultural phenomena in more detail by collecting them on the spot and further developing existing concepts [20]–[22]. Therefore, cultural studies necessarily require the direct participation of researchers in the field [23]–[25] and Group Discussion Forums (FGD) [16], [20], [23]. The resulting data are then selected and transferred for interpretation using interactive analysis methods [14], [26], [27]. This interactive analysis phase tests the dataset for reliability and validity, providing strong evidence [15], [28]. These facts are then presented accurately and accurately in the form of written reports [29]–[31].

## **3 Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Myth Representation of the Pangeran Samudra**

Myth is a form of cross-generational communication that is carried out through symbolic language. So, understanding a myth cannot be seen as a form of symbolic communication that requires a holistic, integral, and comprehensive interpretation [20], [21], [23], [31]–[33]. Thus, to understand a myth, we must be able to see it in a wider context.

The representation of the Prince of Samudra myth, firstly, can be seen as an effort to continue the tradition of the power of the kings in the Land of Java [8]. That the

successor of a king or ruler can only and may be carried out by the descendants of the kings themselves, either through the official channel – the empress or the unofficial value – the concubine. That is, outside of these two paths it is very unlikely to be able to ascend the throne as ruler [1], [4]–[7].

In the context of the mythical narrative of Prince Samudra, it is narrated that Prince Samudra is the son of Bhre Kertabumi or King Majapahit XI from a concubine named Raden Ayu Ontrowulan [8], [10]. Because there was a coup carried out by Girindrawardhana Dyah Ranawijaya – the nephew of Bhre Kertabumi, finally the capital of the Majapahit kingdom in Trowulan (Mojokerto) was moved to Daha in 1486 AD [1], [4]–[7]. During this critical period, then Prince Samudra and Raden Ayu Ontrowulan were brought by Raden Patah – (brothers with different mothers) to the Sultanate of Demak. Then, Prince Samudra was asked to deepen his knowledge of Islam under the direct guidance of Sunan Kalijaga. After he was deemed sufficient, he was asked to study with Ki Ageng Gugur from Pandan Gugur Village on the West Slope of Mount Lawu [8].

In this context, the representation of Islam began to "enter" and replace the nuances of Hinduism that previously seemed so thick. The influx of Islamic nuances has also expanded to remote corners of the island of Java, such as the West Slope of Mount Lawu. In fact, in another myth, we all know that Mount Lawu is a place of escape and at the same time a place of moksha for the King of Majapahit. In addition, on the western slopes of Mount Lawu, there are also many Hindu temple sites, such as Cetho Temple, Sukuh Temple, Kethek Temple, and Menggung Temple. That is, through this myth, it is as if the Hindu nuances that are so thick covering Mount Lawu are slowly but surely being replaced with nuances that are full of Islamic elements [20], [21], [23], [31], [33]–[37].

The myth of Prince Samudra can never be separated from the existence of the Kedung Ombo Reservoir [13]. In addition, there is also a counter-myth of Prince Samudra which is pejorative, cynical, anti-Islamic, and misleading and is assumed to have developed after the Java War [3], [8], [10], [12]. From the perspective of cultural studies, especially the representation of power, it can be well understood that the creation of this counter-myth is part of a proxy war strategy [38]–[41]. This "proxy war" strategy was applied to complement the "divide et impera" strategy to weaken the power of the Javanese. Thus, the Dutch colonial government was able to fully grasp its power in Java [42]–[45].

After the Java War, the Dutch colonial government began to implement a proxy war strategy to keep the people away from their religious leaders and nobles. The implementation of this proxy war strategy is carried out by creating counter myths that are deliberately spread to be used as "weapons" for character assassination of Islamic religious leaders in Java [31]. This was done so that there would be no more power-raising in the name of religion to fight against the Dutch colonial government. This is because the idea of liberation from Dutch oppression and arbitrariness was well mobilized by Prince Diponegoro and Islamic religious leaders in Java as part of the Holy War or Jihad War [42]–[45]. The impact of the Java War made the Dutch lose 8,000 soldiers and 7,000 indigenous soldiers and made the VOC bankrupt. Therefore, serious efforts need to be made to weaken the power of the Javanese people. If

this is not done, it is feared that a new model or style of Diponegoro princes will emerge which can destroy Dutch rule in Java or the archipelago [42]–[45].

### 3.2 The Myth of Prince Samudra as a Proxy War

Proxy wars are deliberately created in the form of creating new myths which are a match for the existing myths. The presence of this counter-myth is expected to be able to distance the Javanese people from the ulama and the rulers or nobles. Some of the similar proxy war narratives that can be found around the figures of Prince Diponegoro's followers are as follows.

First, the narrative that is built on the counter-myth of Prince Samudra is a new idol figure for adherents of the pesugihan sect in the name of pilgrimage plus free sexual intercourse [10], [12]. This narrative was built because the area around Mount Kemukus was one of the resistance bases for the followers of Prince Diponegoro, led by Nyai Ageng Serang and Raden Widagdo. The two names are the commanders and planners of Prince Diponegoro's war strategy, although both names have never been recorded in Indonesian national history [13]. This is reinforced by the results of folklore research that has been carried out, especially toponymy related to the origin of place or area names, both in the Kemusu District - Boyolali District, Miri District, and Sumberlawang District - Sragen District and Geyer District - Grobogan District. There are so many place names related to the history of the resistance that was inflamed by both Nyia Ageng Serang and Raden Widagdo [13]. Based on this data, it can be understood more closely that the pejorative narrative built through the counter-myth narrative of Prince Samudra is deliberately used as part of the Proxy War strategy.

Second, the narrative built on the myth of R.M. Imam Soedjono in Gunung Kawi is also a new idol for adherents of the pesugihan sect. However, R.M. Imam Sudjono was a student of Grandmother Jugo – who was one of Prince Diponegoro's loyal followers. In addition, he was the great-grandson of Sultan Hamengku Buwono I (who ruled the Yogyakarta Palace from 1755 AD – 1892 AD) [46]. However, the pesugihan narrative is strongly believed by the Javanese and Chinese ethnic communities [47]. Once again, this counter-myth narrative is deliberately used as part of a proxy war to keep the people away from Javanese clerics and aristocrats. Meanwhile, in the palace environment itself, the nobles were also made noisy and busy with the affairs of the struggle for the throne [9]. Finally, there was never a meeting point between the people – rulers or nobles – scholars. If the three powers were united, then colonialism would be very easily expelled from the Land of Java or the Archipelago.

In a similar context, we can also see that the petilasan or tomb of the followers of Sunan Kuning in the Semarang - Central Java area is used as a place of localization. This seems to be deliberately done to distance the positive image of the heroes who dared to oppose Dutch colonialism. History records that Sunan Kuning was captured by the Dutch and then exiled until he died in Africa. So, it is clear that the tomb in Semarang is not the tomb of Sunan Kuning. Most likely it is the tomb of the followers of Sunan Kuning. However, the community already believed that it was the tomb of Sunan Kuning, so the area was made as a place of localization [9], [43], [48]–[50].

Still, in the context of the proxy war, Kyai Muhammad who is a descendant and candidate for the successor to the Mangkunegaran throne was forced to live his whole life wandering. This was due to his participation in the Java War as part of Prince Diponegoro's army. As a result, he was unable to return to Mangkunegaran because he had already been designated as a DPO (The Most Wanted List). Finally, he wandered around the island of Java to escape the Dutch colonial government. Not long ago, his tomb was found on the slopes of Mount Salak. He lived disguised as an ordinary citizen and married a local woman until finally he died and was buried in Mount Salak [51]. However, the Dutch did not just stay silent, a new myth was created which tells that Mount Salak is a nest for all creepy spirits, so that only certain people are "allowed" to enter the area or area of Mount Salak. Or the Mount Salak area is an area to look for pesugihan or supernatural powers. Kyai Muhammad is a Sufi figure of the Syatariah Order who studied directly with Sheikh Muhyiddin [52]. It was Sheikh Abdul Muhyi who had the opportunity to study directly with Sheikh Abdurrauf As-Singkili in Aceh [53]–[55]. So, it is very clear that a sheik of the syatariah tarekat can't teach occult or pesugihan things that violate Islamic religious guidance.

Another form of implementing the proxy war strategy is the formation of the "Algemeene Secretarie" which brings together writers and copyists of Nusantara manuscripts. Initially, the presence of this institution was to provide Nusantara manuscripts for Dutch researchers [56]. However, later on, this institution also developed as part of a proxy war that provided counter-texts that were anti-Islamic, cynical, and pejorative [57], such as "Babad Kedhiri", "Suluk Gatoloco" and "Serat Darmogandul". All three manuscripts appeared in the early 20th century written anonymously or using pseudonyms [58], [59]. What is clear is that the three manuscripts cannot be attributed to the palace writers because they are santri from Kyai Hasan Besari in Ponorogo. Even in some manuscripts, it is written that they (the writers of this palace) have received the blessing of Shah Abdurrauf As-Singkili. This can be seen in the colophon contained in the manuscript of the Book of Ta'bir Lindu [60].

#### 4 Conclusion

Myth is a form of cross-generational communication that is carried out through symbolic language. So, to understand a myth, we must be able to see it in a wider context. First, the mythical representation of Prince Samudra can be seen as an effort to continue the tradition of kingship in Java. Second, the nuances of representation of Islam began to emerge which replaced the nuances of Hinduism in various aspects of life. Third, after the Java War, the Dutch colonial government implemented a proxy war strategy to keep the people away from their religious leaders and aristocrats. The implementation of this proxy war strategy is carried out by creating counter myths that are deliberately spread to be used as "weapons" for character assassination of Islamic religious leaders in Java. In addition, anti-Islamic, cynical, and pejorative counter-manuscripts, such as "*Babad Kedhiri*", "*Suluk Gatoloco*" and "*Serat Darmogandul*" were also raised. What is clear is that the three manuscripts cannot be attributed to the palace writers because they are essentially santri with clear scientific lines. So, the students can't write things that are contrary to the teachings of Islam.

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