



The Concept of Reincarnation: *Isbat* in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*

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Abstract. The process of rebirth and death is called reincarnation. Reincarnation is considered by Hindus to be a step toward attaining life's completion. The purpose of this study is to interpret the concept of reincarnation found in *isbat*. The source of research data is a Javanese manuscript entitled *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita* by R.M. Partawiraya (1929). The research data used is Javanese idiomatic *isbat* type. The data analysis carried out was qualitative analysis with a phenomenological hermeneutic approach. The analysis indicates that the diction choices of birth and death are frequently employed in *isbat* that address the concept of reincarnation in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*. A clear understanding of the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*'s concept of reincarnation through *isbat* would show how people can attain *manunggaling kawula Gusti*, or the perfection of life.

Keywords: *Isbat*, Reincarnation, *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*.

1 Introduction

Reincarnation in the Hindu view is repeated rebirth. This is also shown in several literatures where when the physical body dies/is destroyed, the soul will change to a new body. This recurrence occurs through the process of repeated birth and death. In the Javanese worldview, the process of repeated births is easy to find in Javanese puppets stories with the theme of *panitisan*, for example the play *Rama Nitisa*. The concept of reincarnation can also be found in several beliefs. Reincarnation is the process of being reborn into the world with the aim of resolving karmic debts in a previous life [18]. Furthermore, in Islamic teachings, the concept of reincarnation is often referred to as *tanasukh al-arwah*, namely the cycle of birth that repeats itself without end, where the repetition of life occurs in relation to the deeds in one's life [1]. From this view, it can be concluded that reincarnation is a process of repeated rebirth to redeem karma in previous lives. Reincarnation will give humans another opportunity to repair karmic debts to others [16]. The most important principle in reincarnation is the belief in the transfer of the soul from one body to another until the soul reaches perfection and is free from rebirth into the world (Hardjowono, 2004). The concept of reincarnation is also found in the Javanese text entitled *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*.

Sêrat Bhagawad Gita is a text adapted from the Sanskrit book *Bhagawad Gita*. Reincarnation is a path of rebirth based on karma that has been carried out in a previous

life with the aim of resolving karmic debts [2]. In the reincarnation process, where the body experiences birth and death, birth and death are part of the soul's eternal journey to achieve perfection [23]. The presentation of concepts regarding reincarnation in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita* is expressed using *isbat*.

Isbat is a Javanese proverb that describes the behavior and character of Javanese people. Many of the parables used contain teachings about science, the supernatural, philosophy, or the science of perfection and messages about human goodness [15, p. 11], [20, p. 34]. The *isbat* structure as a lingual unit consists of a single sentence or command sentence [22, p. 54]. The language style used in *isbat* is a direct metaphor using complicated diction choices (*bâsâ rinênggâ*) [5, p. 59], [22, p. 76]. The choice of diction in figurative language using the language *rinênggâ* is because it refers to the function of *isbat*, which is used to convey knowledge (*ngèlmu tuwâ*, *ngèlmu ghaib*, philosophy, or *ngèlmu kasampurnan*).

Isbat as a Javanese parable containing the science of *sêpuh* or the science of Javanese perfection is quite often found in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*. Based on the results of data codification, quite a lot of idiomatic findings in the *isbat* category were found in the source texts. *Isbat* which functions to convey *ngèlmu tuwâ*, knowledge of magic, philosophy, or knowledge of *kasampurnan* in accordance with the contents of the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita* which contains the transmission of the teachings of life from Krishna to Arjuna. The Bhagavad Gita is a philosophical revelation from God which contains the essence of true truth relating to the existence of God, humans and nature.

Previous research related to traditional Javanese expressions was carried out by Riris Tiani [21], namely "The Use of Javanese Proverbs (*Sanépâ*) in Community Culture in Surakarta". This research shows that there are six *sanépâ* that are very influential in the lives of Javanese people, especially in Surakarta. The six expressions are *alon-alon waton kêlakon*, *grêmêt-grêmêt waton sêlamêt*, *mangan ora mangan asal kumpul*, *anak polah bâpâ kêpradah*, *mikul dhuwur mên dhêm jero*, *surâ dirâ jayaningrat lêbur déning pangastuti*, and *ngundhuh wohing pakarti*. These expressions contain local wisdom values of the community that need to be understood and preserved for future generations. Local wisdom can be used to build national character and identity. The fundamental difference between this research and the study to be carried out is the data source and the scope of the study carried out. The research conducted by Riris Tiani focused on the Javanese expression *sanépâ*, while this research is on *isbat*.

Another relevant research was conducted by Pandya & Joshi [12] entitled *Similes and Examples in the Explanation of KarmaYoga in the Jnaneshwari by Sant Jnaneshwar*. This research presents all the parables and examples used in the form of allegory by Jnaneshwar to simplify the message in the Bhagavad Gita. The study conducted on the forms of allegory is limited to the KarmaYoga section in the Bhagavad Gita, especially in the third to sixth chapters. This research focuses on the parables and examples in the third to sixth chapters of the Bhagawad Gita, while this study was carried out on all chapters in the Bhagawad Gita. This research will discuss reincarnation which is conveyed using traditional expressions, especially *isbat*. Delivery of teachings using *isbat* shows the richness of Javanese culture in interpreting local wisdom. This study aims to interpret the concept of reincarnation found in *isbat* in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*.

2 Methods

This research uses a qualitative method using Paul Ricouer's hermeneutic phenomenological approach. This research attempts to describe the concept as it actually is. The data source for this research is a Javanese manuscript entitled *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita* collected by the Dharma Sthapanam Foundation, Bali. The data in the research is *isbat* which contains the concept of reincarnation. Data collection was carried out using hermeneutic reading. The research instrument is a human instrument assisted by data cards. Data analysis was carried out using qualitative analysis. The analysis stages carried out are data collection, data condensation, data categorization, and drawing conclusions [10]. The validity used is semantic validity and source triangulation, while the reliability of research data is carried out using stability reliability.

3 Results and Discussion

In the text of the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita*, the concept of reincarnation is often associated with the use of the diction *lair* and death 'birth and death.' The concept of reincarnation in the *Sêrat Bhagawad Gita* is contained in the following *isbat*.

Ingsun lan sirâ âpâ déné pâra ratu sakabèhé, ora ânâ kang durung tau mati, lan ora ânâ kang ing têmbé ora linairaké manèh. (Bab II.12) [13]

"Me and you or all the kings, there is no one who has never died, and there is no one who has not been born again."

This *isbat* illustrates that there is not a single human being in the world who has never died, and none of them who have not been born again. This means that every human being has experienced repeated birth and death. Life and death cause a cycle of reincarnation to the point where the soul as the human life force is able to be free from the cycle of reincarnation and reunite with God. The process of repeated human births cannot be avoided until the stage where humans gain true knowledge that is able to lead them to liberation [17]. All creatures must have experienced death and birth, this is conveyed in the following *isbat*.

Amargâ sâkâ lair mulané mèsthi mati, lan kang mèsthi lair iku sâkâ ing pati, rêhning wus ora kêna disingkiri, mulané sirâ âjâ sêdhih. (Bab II.27) [13]

"Because from birth comes death, and what is born must come from death, because it cannot be avoided, therefore you should not be sad."

This *isbat* illustrates that death exists because something is born, and what is born must come from death. That is the principle of reincarnation, where the cycle between birth and death will never be interrupted. A person will be born to carry out a stage and then will die to be born again to carry out the next stage [14]. Every living creature will definitely taste death, this refers to a quote from the Quran, letter Ali 'Imran 3: verse 185, namely *kullu nafsing zaaa-iqotul mauut, ...* 'every living creature will taste death,

...' [3]. Because death and birth cannot be avoided, in the context of the story, the war

that will be fought on the battlefield in the story is an inevitability for humans to go through one stage to the next stage. All living creatures will always be bound by the cycle of repeated births. The cycle of the chain of births will not be broken until the soul can achieve liberation. This is conveyed in the following *isbat*.

Pårå wicaksånå kang anunggal sarånå budiné, ora maèlu woh kang mêtu sākå panggawéné, bañjur luwar sākå bēbandaning lair marambah-rambah, bañjur tumuju marang panggonan karahayon kang sukci. (Bab II.51) [13]

“A wise person who is one with his mind, not bound by the fruits of his actions, will be free from the bonds of repeated births, then go to a high, holy place.”

This *isbat* means that when people are free from the bonds of work, they will be free from the bonds of repeated births and achieve perfection. From this *isbat* it can be concluded that one way to break the cycle of reincarnation is to not be tied to the results of work. This *isbat* represents the Karma Yoga path to breaking the bonds of reincarnation. Karma Yoga is a spiritual path that is carried out without choosing who and for what and in its implementation it is not tied to the results/selflessly [4], [24].

Understanding the concept of work based on Karma Yoga teachings becomes a means for humans to break themselves from the chain of reincarnation [9]. Reincarnation does not only apply to humans, but under certain conditions, God (in the form of Lord Vishnu), also carries out reincarnation. The reincarnation or incarnation of Lord Vishnu into the world is called *avatar*. The *avatar* of Lord Vishnu as protector of the world does not just happen, but is caused by a factor. This is conveyed in the following *isbat* which is accompanied by further text as supporting context.

Héh Têdhaking Barâtå, sabab sabên-sabên darmå iku kēndho, utåwå wudharing darmå sâyå andådå, Pribadining Sun nuli Sun utus mañjalmå. (Bab IV.7) [13]

Kang margå prælu angayomi kabêcikan, lan angrurah pialané si angkårå murkå, mulå Ingsun iyå bakal mañjalmå manèh marambah-rambah. (Bab IV.8) [13]

“O descendant of *Barata*, because when dharma begins to fade and *adarma* becomes more rampant, I will send My Person to incarnate.”

“To protect goodness and defeat evil, I will incarnate from time to time.”

The *isbat* in these two quotes means that every time the implementation of dharma begins to fade, God will send His person/*maya* to come down and incarnate into the world. The purpose of this incarnation is to protect goodness and defeat evil. God will continue to appear from time to time by protecting the truth. This means that God (in the form of Lord Vishnu) will incarnate or incarnate as an avatar for the purpose of defeating *adarma*. As has been said, based on Hindu mythology, there are ten avatars of Vishnu. The five incarnations of Vishnu, namely Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, and Vamana are called religious incarnations, while the four incarnations, namely Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, and Buddha are included in the historical incarnations, next, the last avatar, Kalki, is called the future incarnation [8].

The duty of every avatar is to protect dharma and protect goodness in the world from danger [19]. In this context, reincarnation or rebirth is also described in the form of the

person of God himself, but the reincarnation carried out is free from karmic ties, because God is not bound by karma and the fruits of his actions. Another isbat in the text that contains reincarnation is as follows.

Sing sâpâ pikiré gélêng marang ing Dat, kang sâpâ pribadiné asasânâ ing Dat, sâpâ kang pangayomé marang Dat, iyâ iku kang lungâ wus ora bali manèh, iyâ dhèwèké kang wus angruwat dosané sarânâ kawicaksanan. (Bab IV.17) [13]

“Whoever has his mind focused on Dat, whose person is in Dat, who seeks protection only in Dat, he is the one who goes and does not return, he who has cleansed his sins with wisdom.”

This *isbat* means that people who have cleansed their sins with wisdom will not return again (will not experience reincarnation again). This means that someone can break the cycle of reincarnation if that person is able to be free from their sins and karma through wisdom. The ultimate path to stop continuous reincarnation is included in the path of Jñana Yoga. Jñana Yoga is the highest path of knowledge about Brahman to achieve moksa [11].

The teachings of Jñana Yoga contain about *apara widya* and *para widya*. Knowledge in *Jñana Yoga* teachings relating to the knowledge of spirit and God, as well as the relationship between them, can be a means for humans to be free from worldly ties [7]. Humans who are free from worldly ties will be able to achieve perfection in life. People who know this and always worship God will be free from the bonds of reincarnation. This is as isbat in the following quote.

Lah Pritâ Putrâ, sing sâpâ pangèsthiné tumuju maring Sun, ora watârâ suwé Ingsun bakal asung pamudharan marang dhèwèké sâkâ samodraning pati lan ubênging tumimbal lair. (Bab XII.7) [13]

“O Son of Prita, whose pangesthi is directed towards Me, not long after that I will give him freedom from the ocean of death and the cycle of birth.”

This *isbat* means that a person will be given enlightenment and liberation from the bonds of reincarnation when he becomes a good worshiper of God. The *isbat* explains that people who always carry out the teachings of dharma and whose thoughts are always focused on serving God will gain freedom. God will free him from reincarnation in the form of an ocean of death and repeated cycles of birth. Devotees (*bhaktas*) who are deeply devoted to God will be saved from the material world and thus freed from the ocean of death and repeated birth [14]. When someone is free from the sea of death and birth, then in Hindu and Buddhist teachings, that person will reach nirvana (a place of immortality) [6]. How people arrive at the level of *moksa* or perfection of life is then explained in the *isbat* which is accompanied by further text as an explanation.

Ora kumlungkung lan ora sasar, doså sårå karémé wus kasor, kalayan wus sirnå mèliké, tansah dèdunung ing Adiyatmå, mardikå sårå sisihan kang kosok bali, sumurup marang bungah lan susah, dhèwèké tumuju marang dalan kang wus ora kêna rusak. (Bab XV.5) [13]

Iku ora pinadhangan déning sréngéngé, rêmbulan, sartå gêni, sing sårå mrono parané yèkti ora bali manèh, iyå iku padunungan Sun Luhur. (Bab XV.6) [13]

“Not excessive and not straying, the sin of his desires has been conquered, and his desires have vanished, always remaining in the nature of Adiyatma, free from the asides of the Balinese kang kosok, knowing hardship and joy, he heads towards the path that cannot be damaged.”

“Not illuminated by the sun, moon and fire, whoever goes in that direction will definitely not return, that is My sublime place.”

These two text quotes explain the breaking of the chain of reincarnation so that a person can reach perfection. One who is free from sin and has surrendered himself to God completely, one who has Krishna consciousness, then he will attain the uncorrupted path. The imperishable path is the path of perfection and the place to unite with God. The next text explains the condition of the place of freedom, namely *Kṛṣṇaloka*, which is a place that is not illuminated by the sun, moon and fire. The spiritual world called *Kṛṣṇaloka* does not need light from the sun, moon and fire, because it already has its own light [14]. This shows the place for humans who have achieved perfection and are united with God.

4 Conclusion

Reincarnation is part of the belief in the Hindu view in an effort to achieve perfection in life. People are able to escape the shackles of reincarnation, they will achieve oneness which in the Javanese view is called *manunggaling kawula Gusti*. The concept of reincarnation can be conveyed in various ways and terms. *Isbat* is an idiom that is able to convey things related to the concept of reincarnation. The concept of reincarnation has been adapted quite a lot in various views, especially views that teach the concept of oneness and/or the perfection of life.

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