

## UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL VALUES IN THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY: KEY MESSAGES FROM UMAR KAYAM'S PARA PRIYAYI NOVEL

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Submitted: July 2022, Revised: December 2022, Accepted: May 2023

### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this research is to describe cultural values in the Javanese community as depicted in Umar Kayam's novel entitled Para Priyayi. The data were collected through the critical reading of the novel, and the data analysis used Kluckhohn's preliminary framework as developed further by Koentjaraningrat. The research results show that perceptions of Javanese nobles in the Dutch colonial era (Priyayis) closely relate to the nature of life, the nobles' resignation to the will of God (rila), patience, and the willingness to accept (narima) because everything in the world is determined by God. Such perceptions deal with the work ethics through which Priyayis worked to find out wealth and power. Their perceptions of the nobility coincide with the sacred place and the place for recreation. In terms of time management, the nobles' groups worked from morning until afternoon; they had flexi-time to relax on holidays. To build their relationship with superiors, they stayed respectful and loyal. In the royal family, they accommodated families who were economically deprived. Parents and older and younger siblings mutually respected each other. Colleagues kept their guards prosperous. Meanwhile, the Priyayis supported grassroots in need of help considerably.*

**Keywords:** Cultural values, priyayi, Javanese community, perceptions, recreation

### 1. PREFACE

Modern Indonesian literature is mainly concerned with cultural elements. Culture has become an integral part of its ethical consideration in sustaining literary works or ethical elements in Javanese culture and its civilization (1). In turn, literary works depict many customs, advice, and punishment for criminals, and goodness that must be maintained (2). Free writers produce meanings through their literary works, and they remain consistent with the conventions of language, literature, and socio-cultural contexts (3). The world in literary works is an alternative to the reality that can only be imagined by the author concerning the knowledge of reality and cultural values that enrich the conceptions of the community members (4). Thus, Javanese culture (5) in contemporary Indonesia has two purposes, namely literary sustainability to make active bearers true Javanese and to make 'others' Javanese (Javanization) including other races and ethnicities (6). This is because Javanese people are "the most culturally and politically dominant in Indonesia" (7).

Through cultural values, human beings can actualize cultural value system functions, Javanese culture (8), and its cultural missions to represent the nation (9) as the highest guideline for daily life. Javanese nobles (*priyayis*), for example, have ideal values that sustain their way of life so that each ideal value forms a positive attitude toward life and the discourse on Javanese Islam (10). Geertz defines *priyayi*'s world in opposition to farmers. The term *priyayi* has a subtle meaning (*alus*) and the term farmer has a rude meaning that refers to (im)politeness (11). *Alus* means pure, refined, and soft in behavior, polite, very beautiful, gentle, civilized, and friendly. Therefore, values related to *priyayi* are associated with subtlety in terms of work ethics, etiquette, and aesthetics. The *priyayi*'s polite behavior is increasingly respected because subtlety has a civilization value.

Koentjaraningrat discusses Javanese cultural values in *priyayi*'s groups and farmers using F. Kluckhohn's framework of cultural values (4). In a broad sense, the cultural values framework divides the cultural values of all nations into five main issues, namely: a) a universal problem concerning the nature of life; b) universal problems regarding the nature of work and human efforts; c) universal problems regarding the relationship between humans and nature; d) human perceptions of time; and e) universal relationship between human beings and Javanese traditions (12); (13).

Kluckhohn's framework seeks to analyze the representation of *priyayi*'s cultural values in the novel. The author expresses the contents of the novel concerning an influential socio-cultural environment. (3) states that literary works were produced in a cultural vacuum including the Para Priyayi novel by Umar Kayam, a modern literary work that dominantly discusses cultural values embedded in *priyayi*'s groups. The *priyayi*'s cultural values represent customs, ethics, and intellectual perceptions concerning the nature of life, the nature of literary work and work ethics, human relations with nature, time, and fellow humans.

### Cultural Values

Cultural values are modalities that guide people's lifestyles, parenting approaches, cultural changes, collectivistic ideals (conformity, security, and tradition), and social rules (14). This defined idea emphasizes the importance of cultural values in supporting the dynamics of social norms and ethics that govern how and to what extent people build up interactions with nature, humans, families, and neighbors. Even, human values and beliefs will shape people's knowledge and understanding of how humans feel and act in the real world concerning the original environment in which they live. In this context, traditional beliefs can help to achieve environmental justice, particularly for indigenous peoples who are marginalized but maintain cultural diversity, values, and environmental views (15). In real life, socio-cultural values of the surrounding environment can be discovered in and through rivers as cultural ecosystems that represent the interests of stakeholders, and freshwater value management by considering geographic variations (16). In conclusion, cultural values are critical in sustaining human traditions, activities, and relationships. More fundamentally, cultural diversity, social rules, settings, and socio-cultural values should all be taken into account.

There are a few things to consider when it comes to how cultural beliefs influence parenting practices. First, parents must play an important part in balancing the responsibilities of mothers and fathers. Second, based on ideas and the local cultural value system, local cultures in Indonesia influence either parents' behavior or expectations differently. Third, traditional cultural norms in Indonesia, including Javanese and other ethnic groups, include patriarchal and matrilineal beliefs (17). This praxis implies that parents collaborate in the care of their children, which is impacted mostly by local cultural norms, such as patriarchal and matrilineal value systems. As a result, the community dynamic, as well as its changes over time, has become increasingly important.

From this standpoint, cultural values influence the development of human capability in enhancing management and leadership roles that emphasize how parental upbringing and role models have been a major driving force for change in promoting progressive leadership and Javanese statesmanship (18). The local community, which participates in the conservation of legacy treasures through religious and cultural activities, is a critical component in nurturing cultural values and their authenticity (19). Cultural values are the concepts that govern how the local

community participates in social activities while also embracing leadership and management values.

### **The Javanese Cultural Values**

Aside from the previously mentioned values, Javanese culture and its values are complicated and nuanced because they lead to the formation of societal complexities that are more focused on the application of western management approaches. According to Koentjaraningrat, the reason for this is more about the uniqueness of Javanese culture, which has long been a complex mixture of norms, regulations, values, and concepts, all of which are the product of adoption that most Javanese people utilize to sustain their lives. Javanese cultural values have consolidated in the history of Indonesia over the centuries, particularly during the existence and development of the Hindu-Mataram Empire from the eighth to eleventh century. Javanese culture's core values include managerial practices such as change management, communication, and conflict resolution (7).

This situation has an impact on the application and diffusion of Javanese cultural values in the societies where the Javanese live. Because the Javanese are the majority ethnic group in terms of education and politics, as well as in terms of population and economy, Java and Javanese are frequently used to represent Indonesia and its culture (20). The existence of the life ideology, generally known as *alus*, pervades the lives of Javanese people who incorporate values as principles that direct each individual to behave well enough and wisely. Javanese people are supposed to act responsibly and embrace the *oyo dumeh* philosophy of life, which translates to "don't be overconfident in any advantages you have in life." They're also humble enough to demonstrate the *tepo seliro* philosophy of life, which roughly translates to "finer tolerance and the application of other core values" (7).

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Type of Research**

This research is a qualitative content analysis of the cultural values found in Koentjaraningrat's use of the Kluckhohn model of literature (4). Content analysis is a qualitative research method for interpreting the meaning of text data content that follows the naturalistic paradigm. Researchers can use qualitative content analysis to deepen and expand their understanding of the human experience practically and flexibly (21).

### **Data Collection Techniques**

The data for this research were collected from Umar Kayam's *Para Priyayi*, specifically from the characters' varied utterances. The total data included 80 utterances, which were then categorized into integrative themes, such as the *priyayi*'s perception of life, work and work ethics, the relationship between humans and nature, the *priyayi*'s perception of time, the relationship between humans, namely parents and family, and relationships with other people, namely superiors and friends.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The Kluckhohn model was used to classify concept fragments from the main characters' utterances, which included universal problems about the nature of the *priyayi*'s life, the nature of work and effort of the Javanese *priyayi*, the relationship between humans and nature, human perception of time, and human relations with each other. These five things are understood as they are in the fragments that include them. The work is also studied for new meanings relating to the author's socio-cultural background, livelihood, social class, attitudes, or perspectives on Javanese *priyayi* culture. The analysis begins with the applicable theory or research findings as a starting coding

guide in a targeted approach. A content analysis entails counting and comparing terms or material, and then interpreting the underlying context (21).

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### **The Priyayi's Perceptions of Life**

In terms of emerging events and unsolved problems, Javanese Priyayis generally show an attitude of resignation. They think that everything is given to God because people live in the world temporarily. As implied in the Para Priyayi novel, Noegroho faced the death of his son because the Dutch troop's bullet killed him in a battle (22). This sorrowful event is closely related to how the teachings of Mangkunegara IV were delivered through songs or poems (23). In addition to being submissive and grateful (*nrimo*), the nobles have a similar patience mentality as Lantip showed in responding to friends' jokes in public schools (22). Human life is transient in this perspective, and humans will be vulnerable at times, leading them to commit their lives to God as the owner of life.

#### **The Priyayi's Perceptions of Work and Work Ethics**

The nature of work or intended work for a *priyayi* means a position to make a living. In manifesting a position, a *priyayi* tries to work diligently to attract the superior's attention (24). The craft is displayed with discipline in front of the superior. The *priyayi* is ready to carry out all tasks without any protests like Sastrodarsono in the Para Priyayi novel. Sastrodarsono did a good job until he had the highest position as an orderly teacher (22).

#### **Priyayi's Perceptions of the Relationship between Humans and Nature**

The nobles view nature as a sacred and magical thing. As Javanese nobles and the development of their religiosities (25), they tried to live in harmony with nature. Humans like nature as expressed in the Para Priyayi in that a myth of the construction of the Pendak Wanagalih regency involved wood taken from the forest and smart people asked for *sing mbaureksa*'s help to take the timber (22). Nature is seen as a place for *brata*'s behavior, i.e., the river is used for penance and the mountains for the meditation of Eyang Kusuma's brother Sastrodarsono (26); (22). The nature represented in the Para Priyayi is sacred and magical.

The nature in the Para Priyayi illustrates the historical background of the construction of the regency in which the community considers that nature is very sacred and associated with supernatural power. In terms of animism and dynamism, all objects are considered to have protective spirits. Watchmen of objects or trees are often called *sing mbaureksa* or *danyang*. Javanese people call the *abangan* a person who was the forerunner of the place that first occupied the village or forest before other people arrived, as stated by Yana M.H.

The Javanese people consider that each village has its protective spirit that lives in a shady tree. Residents imagine that the spirits had lived in the area before the land was cleared for the construction of the village in question (27).

#### **The Priyayi's Perception of Time**

Javanese people especially the *priyayi* view a time cycle as a sacred thing used to hold a Javanese communal feast (*selamatan*), for example, birth, droplets, brides, and death within the pluralistic contexts of religious discourse (28). In the Javanese religion, *selamatan* aims to send prayers to people who passed away within a time cycle of *telung dina* (Javanese) or three days, *pitung dina* (Javanese) or seven days, *matang puluh dina* (Javanese) or forty days, *satus dina* (Javanese) or one hundred days, *pendakak sepisan*, *pendindo pendindo* (Javanese), and *nyewu* (Javanese) or one

thousand days day. In the Para Priyayi, the Javanese communal feast (*selamatan*) is viewed as a day when people freed from political prisoners and there was a request of Sastrodarsono's wife to Noegroho's wife who is pregnant that during the full moon she should take a ritual bath using flowers. As her belief shreds of evidence, if his wife did not take a ritual bath, Betorokolo could eat her fetus.

### **The Priyayi's Perceptions of Human Relations**

#### *The Relationship with Parents and Families*

The Priyayi has high regard and respect for his parents and ancestors. In the Para Priyayi, one of his parents named Atmokasan arranged Sastrodarsono's marriage to Ngaisah (22). Hardoyo also obeyed his parents because he was not allowed to marry Dik Nunuk because of different religions. Even Hardoyo's brothers and sisters named Noegroho and Soemini despite being respected were also obedient to their parents (22).

The Priyayi's obedience to parents is in line with the teachings in the book called *Wulangreh*. The following statement is based on Maridja's views as the informant.

Yes, indeed the nobles, in general, are obedient to parents because it is in line with the teachings of *Wulangreh* in that those who must be respected are parents, fathers, mothers, in-laws, and superiors including being compliant with an arranged marriage, and respecting parental advice even though the advice is in opposition to children like Sastrodarsono's children who accepted the advice, and they agreed only to respect their parents (Interview on April 1, 2014).

This interview shows that a child's obedience to parents does not result from fears of parents who have taken care of children, but respecting parents is of paramount importance. That is because there is a belief in the Javanese tradition that children who do not respect their parents will not be guarded, meaning that their life will be miserable. Furthermore, parents should not agree or expect that children will cause harm because of a closed-door policy that parents are not the general public.

Javanese nobles think that a wife is a subordinate as stated in the Para Priyayi. Sastrodarsono is an orderly teacher who has a wife called Ngaisah working as a housewife (22). Sastrodarsono always holds a personal meeting with his wife to talk about various problems even though all the final decisions are in his hands. He is very loyal to his wife so he works only to help his extended families and bring respected people to life (22).

In general, the nobles' children are closer to their mothers than their fathers. Various childcare affairs are left to the wife. A husband only needs to determine the general policy line. The nobles generally educate children so as not to embarrass the family. Therefore, the children are expected to know the etiquette of the craft arising from court procedures for the aristocratic nobles. The intellectual nobles educate their children through stories of *wayang*, *Serat Wedhatama*, and *Wulangreh*. The nobles expect their children to be well-established and have good character. Therefore, Sastrodarsono sent his children to HIS school (a public elementary school for native children), so that they would become the government's employees (22) in the future. Sastrodarsono's children named Noegroho became brigadier generals (*brigjen*) who were employed as commissioners of state-owned enterprises (BUMN), Hardoyo became the Ministry of Education's official, and Soemini became the wife of a high-ranking official at the Ministry of the Home Affairs. However, in reality, Sastrodarsono's children spoiled their children so much that they could not become nobles (22). The one who behaved like a noble was the Sastrodarsono's

adopted son named Lantip (22) and Teyi became a fried bananas' seller; she was educated by Putri Parasi in the novel entitled Tangsi. Lantip was educated to be a noble whose etiquette was based on the stories of Wayang, Serat Wedhatama, and Wulangreh besides going to the formal school.

In the Para Priyayi, Sastrodarsono solved family problems using the family consensus even though the final decision was in Sastrodarsono's hands, including the agreement on Hardoyo's future wife candidate, Soemini. The pattern of nobles' relationships within the family mostly has in common with the reality of life as described in (29) in that a mother determined everything in the family related to the education, work, and living needs of her children.

In terms of unlucky relatives, the nobles tended to help, for example, Sastrodarsono sent Soipandar to Lantip's father, who raised and educated Lantip until he got a job. Besides, Sastrodarsono also accommodated Mbok Nem, Kang Trimu, Kang Man, and Lik Paerah to work in the rice fields.

### **The Priyayi's Relationship with Others**

#### *The Priyayi's Relationship with Bosses*

The nobles are vertically oriented (upward) by respecting seniors. The nobles possibly follow the seniors' orders. All seniors' advice is obeyed like obeying a superior's orders. In this sense, Sastrodarsono worked diligently for the government to attract the authorities' attention and then he was immediately promoted (22). Sastrodarsono realized that he entered the nobles' world because his parents did a good job for his superior, Ngoro Seten Kedungsimo (22). Ngoro Seten Kedungsimo was also obliged to obey his superiors because there were reports from the nobles' friends who did not like him; he was hampered by his career to be a district officer (22). Sastrodarsono's group of friends named Doctor Soedradjat and Rama Jeksa were also nobles who were loyal and obedient to their superiors so that their position was sustainable (22).

The nobles' obedience to superiors is a solid foundation of the upward-oriented behavior, just like the following perspective (24) that the respect that must be given to the rank may vary according to the case. But the difference is not qualitative, but quantitative, along with other words of respect for anyone higher / more numerous / wiser in the rank, but the higher the rank, the greater the respect that must be given, so that it sometimes resembles a fawning attitude.

The nobles who are oriented toward superiors are more serving superiors and less care for subordinates because these nobles tend to ask for services from their subordinates. The assessment of superiors to subordinates is not an assessment of the abilities and skills to do something, but it is the perseverance and craft in carrying out the will of superiors. Therefore, the nobles are not in line with the wishes of their superiors or groups such as Pak Bei who have different ideas about the issue of sacredness, the palace walls, and marrying women who are not nobles and are regarded as foreign nobles. Gender equality (20) is another issue worth considering in the Javanese community. Likewise, Ngoro Seten Kedungsimo is a noble who used to push subordinates to develop and the government considered another noble who endangered government politics was Martoatmodjo, a noble who was close to the people's movement (22).

Ngoro Seten Kedungsimo and Martoatmodjo were close to the people's movement, so they were considered endangering the government's legitimacy in implementing its colonial policies. This situation was applied to the nobles who doubted the strength of the palace walls and the *sithinggil* as the pride of the palace people. The nobles were considered to endanger the harmony of traditions cultivated by the nobles of Surakarta's aristocracy.

### *The Priyayi's Relationship with Friends*

The nobles (*priyayi*) remain respectful if they seem to live in luxury and have a great influence. To get respected behaviors from others, the nobles usually maintain the image that they live a noble life in the presence of equal people. The glory of a noble is manifested in the symbol of a large and luxurious house, the latest model of vehicles, jewelry, and a festive party. Nobles who are capable of doing so are seen as nobles who can care for the civil services while also nurturing nature. In contrast, the nobles who are unable to show this attitude will feel ashamed in front of other nobles' friends.

The guardianship values were realized by Sastrodarsono by making a large *gebyok* house so that it could accommodate his brothers who were riding (22). The guardianship was a measure of a Priyayi's self-esteem. This is based on De Jong's statement that precisely claims the sense of self-esteem as one of the characteristic attitudes of a noble (24).

The luxury of the nobles in holding a party was also carried out by Uncle Mukarom while holding the wedding celebration of Sastrodarsono and Ngaisah (22). The luxury of the party was also held by Noegroho when marrying off his child to cover the shame because the child was pregnant before marriage (22). Thus, the nobles building the relationships were influenced by their social rank as aristocrats who lived in luxury and possessed a great deal of wealth. They are concerned about each other as well as the environment.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Javanese nobles' perceptions of the nature of life are that the nobles deal with life as a way of acknowledging God's will (*rila*), patience, willingness to accept (*narima*) because everything in the world is determined by God as implied in the Islamic mysticism and theology (30). People's life is like people who are on a journey and take a shortstop in the world to drink.

The perceptions of Javanese nobles in the Para Priyayi are related to the work ethic in that the nobles generally prefer to work in the government offices rather than trading. The nobles-oriented works aim to find wealth and power. To achieve this, the nobles diligently work and tend to be loyal to superiors.

In general, the nobles' perceptions tend to view nature as a sacred place and a place of recreation. In perceiving the time, the noble group used to work from morning until noon, the resting time was at dusk, the time to relax was on holidays, and the ritual of salvation was held at night. In terms of the relationship between individuals and the nobles' superiors, what might be essential was respectful behaviors and high loyalty. In dealing with the nobles' families, it is necessary to accommodate economically disadvantaged families. To parents and older siblings, the nobles were very respectful. In dealing with younger siblings, the nobles tended to condition themselves to be respected. In dealing with colleagues, they tried to keep their guards to guarantee security. In dealing with people who were lower in rank, the nobles tended to give helping hands.

### **Acknowledgement**

The researcher would like to thank other related parties for the continuity of this research, as well as to all participants who have involved in this research.

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