

THE PERFORMANCE OF BANTENGAN IN THE GREBEG SURO EVENT TO ENHANCE THE RELIGIOUSNESS OF THE MERJOSARI COMMUNITY IN MALANG CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of the Bantengan performance during the Grebeg Suro celebration on the religiosity of the Merjosari community in Malang City, Indonesia. Bantengan, a traditional Javanese art form, combines elements of strength, bravery, and spirituality, aligning with religious teachings to foster a deep sense of cultural and religious identity. Utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this research examines how Bantengan performances, in conjunction with the roles of religious and cultural leaders, contribute to the integration of religious values in community life. Findings indicate that Bantengan not only serves as cultural entertainment but also reinforces religiosity, especially among younger generations. Through symbolism, ritual, and communal prayer, Bantengan strengthens individual spirituality and collective identity, with support from family and social environments further enhancing these impacts. This study underscores Bantengan's significance as a medium for preserving cultural heritage while fostering spiritual growth, promoting a harmonious blend of religious understanding, social cohesion, and cultural values.

Keywords: Bantengan; Grebeg Suro; Religiosity

INTRODUCTION

Religion plays a diverse role in human life, offering moral and spiritual guidance that can positively influence individuals and communities. Studies highlight various aspects of this impact: from the potential role of religion in local energy transitions (Koehrsen, 2015: 296-310), to the important role of religious beliefs in shaping interactions with the environment (Mokhtari, 2020: 1-8) and the complexity of religion in post-communist societies during the transition period. Additionally, research on Australian Muslim men shows how religiosity can enhance work-life balance and moderate the effects of job demands on conflict. (Sav, 2019: 3223-3244). Furthermore, the philosophy of religion investigates existential questions, providing a framework for understanding human existence and guiding individuals in comprehending the world. Overall, religion emerges as an important force that can guide individuals towards ethical behavior, environmental stewardship, and a deeper understanding of existence.

Religion and culture are closely interconnected, influencing each other in various ways. The concept of 'cultural religion' in Malang reflects how religion can be deeply embedded in national identity, shared values, emotions, and traditions. The interaction between religion and culture is further emphasized by the idea that cultural processes can shape cognitive mechanisms to automatically produce religious components. (Szocik,

2021). Moreover, the relationship between cultural policies and religion highlights the importance of understanding how cultural beliefs and practices influence religious dynamics. (Ahearne, 2011: 111-114). Overall, this insight underscores the complexity of the relationship between religion and culture, showing how they can shape and be shaped by each other in diverse social contexts.

Grebeg Suro is an important event in Java, especially in Malang, to celebrate the Islamic New Year on 1 Muharram. (Rohmiyati, 2023: 207-219). This tradition involves various cultural performances and Bantengan. In addition, the one-night Suro tradition, including earth almsgiving, plays an important role in shaping the socio-religious life of the community, fostering a harmonious blend of cultural heritage and modern education. (Mulyani, 2023: 100-105).

Grebeg Suro has profound religious significance, serving as a moment of spiritual reflection and a request for blessings in the Islamic New Year. Ritual activities in Grebeg Suro, such as communal prayers and tahlil, reflect the community's efforts to strengthen their spiritual connection with God. The performance of Bantengan in this event, although entertaining, also contributes to the religious atmosphere present during the celebration. Thus, Grebeg Suro and the Bantengan performance serve as a means to deepen the religiosity of the community, especially in the Merjosari area, Malang City. (Nugroho, 2020: 200-215).

Bantengan, as part of Grebeg Suro, functions not only as a spectacle but also as a means of religious education. Through this performance, the community is introduced to symbols of strength and courage that align with religious teachings on resilience and faith. The Bantengan performance helps instill these values in a religious context, strengthening the understanding and practice of religion among the audience, especially the younger generation who are an important part of the Merjosari community. Based on the above background, can the performance of bantengan at the grebeg suro event increase a person's religiosity, especially among the Merjosari community in Malang City?

METHOD

The research method in this study uses qualitative. The research approach uses phenomenology because it focuses on individual life experiences aimed at understanding the subjective meaning of those experiences and exploring the community's perceptions of the bantengan performance in enhancing their religiosity. Meanwhile, the type of research in this study uses a case study because the researcher explores in-depth the phenomenon of bantengan in a specific context (during the Grebeg Suro event in Merjosari Village, Malang City). This case study research also helps the researcher understand the complexity of the relationship between traditional arts and religiosity in the local cultural context. This approach and type of research will help the researcher deeply understand how the performance of Bantengan during the Grebeg Suro event can influence the

religiosity of the people of Merjosari, Malang City, from the participants' perspective and within their local cultural context..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. A Brief Overview of Merjosari Village

Desa Merjosari, located in the city of Malang, is a densely populated urban area near major educational institutions. The village faces challenges such as noise from high vehicle volume and unpleasant odors from a nearby waste disposal site. The community in Merjosari Village has shown an increase in understanding and religious practices, including congregational prayers for inner peace. Additionally, the topography of this village is unique, with two rivers running through it, but it faces issues such as the rivers' poor conditions and a lack of public facilities and communal spaces for the residents. There are Singha Park and Merjosari Flower Park, popular tourist destinations that need improvements in facilities and infrastructure to enhance visitor satisfaction.

2. The Role of Religious and Cultural Figures in Interpreting Bantengan

Bantengan is a tradition that integrates religious values into its performance. Religious and cultural figures play an important role in interpreting and understanding the meaning of this tradition. They help the community in understanding and internalizing the religious values contained in the tradition, so that the community can delve deeper into their faith. Religious leaders have different views on the Bantengan tradition. Their views on Bantengan indicate that this tradition has values that can be accepted by religion. This tradition is considered a means to spread religious teachings and values, as demonstrated by Raden Patah and Sunan Kalijaga in spreading Islam in Java.

In the context of interpreting the Bantengan tradition, the role of religious and cultural figures is very important because they contribute to providing a deep understanding of the values and meanings behind the ritual. Here are their roles in more detail:

A. Religious Figure

- 1) **Maintaining Sacredness:** Religious figures such as priests or scholars can uphold the sacredness and continuity of the Bantengan ritual. They ensure that the ritual is conducted in a manner consistent with local religious values, such as Hinduism, Islam, or others.
- 2) **Providing Spiritual Perspective:** They help the community understand the spiritual aspects of the ritual, including the

relationship with nature, ancestors, or other spiritual entities involved in the Bantengan tradition.

- 3) Leading Prayers and Ceremonies: Religious figures often lead prayers, mantras, or ceremonies related to Bantengan, providing a deep spiritual dimension and guiding participants to focus on the meaning of the ritual.

B. Cultural Figure

- 1) Preserving Cultural Heritage: Cultural figures such as local culturists or historians play a role in preserving and maintaining the authenticity of the Bantengan ritual as an important part of local cultural heritage.
- 2) Conveying Traditional Knowledge: They play a key role in passing on knowledge about the origins, development, and symbolic meanings of Bantengan to the younger generation and the wider community.
- 3) Organizing the Conduct and Protocol: Cultural figures are often responsible for organizing the details of the ritual execution, such as procedures, the use of traditional costumes, and art performances associated with Bantengan.

Thus, both religious and cultural leaders play a vital role in interpreting Bantengan as a ritual that not only maintains cultural identity, but also as a means to connect people with their spiritual heritage and traditional values. Through their role, the community can better understand, respect, and celebrate the Bantengan ritual with full understanding and honour of their ancestors' traditions.

3. Integration of Religious Values in Bantengan Performance

Bantengan is a tradition that integrates religious values in its performances. Religious values such as beauty, harmony, and goodness in the other world, as well as religious emotional experiences, become an integral part of this tradition. The integration of religious values in the Bantengan performance helps the community to live and apply these values in their daily lives.

The integration of religious values in Bantengan performances can be done by including elements that reflect the religious values embraced by the local community. Here are some ways to do this integration:

- a. Prayer and Mantra: Bantengan performances may begin or end with a prayer or mantra in accordance with local religious beliefs. These prayers may honour deities or spiritual entities believed to provide blessings and protection during the performance.
- b. Religious Symbols: Using religious symbols in the makeup, costumes, or accessories of the performers in the performance. For example, the use of special colours or motifs that have religious significance, or carrying appropriate sacred attributes.

- c. Religious Stories or Myths: Using stories or myths from local religions as the basis of Bantengan performances. These stories can be adapted in the form of dance, drama, or other artistic delivery to illustrate religious values and teachings in the context of local culture.
- d. Moral and Ethical Messages: Incorporate moral or ethical messages in accordance with religious teachings, which can be conveyed through dialogue, narration, or actions in the performance. This can teach the audience about the values valued in their religion.
- e. Respect for Ancestors or Sacred Figures: Honouring ancestors or holy figures who are believed to have played an important role in the history or mythology of the local religion. This can be done through small rituals or special honours during the performance.
- f. Sacredness in Performance: Ensure that the performance of Bantengan is conducted with full sacredness and respect for religious values. This includes adhering to customary protocols or rituals required to maintain blessings and safety during the performance.

The integration of religious values in Bantengan performances not only strengthens the spiritual meaning of the ritual, but also enriches the cultural experience for the audience and participants. This ensures that the performance is not just visual entertainment or art, but also a means to celebrate and nurture the rich spiritual and religious heritage of the local community.

4. Influence of Social Environment and Family

Social environment and family have a great influence in influencing a person's religiosity. The social environment can shape a person's religious attitudes and behaviour, while the family provides important early education and guidance in the development of religiosity. Religious families can influence their children to become more religious, while a religious social environment can help in maintaining and enhancing religiosity.

Social environment and family play a crucial role in shaping and influencing a person's level of religiosity. Here are some ways in which the social and family environment can be influential:

- a. Religious Education and Values: The family is often the first place where a person is introduced to religious values. Through religious education received from parents or other family members, individuals begin to develop their understanding of religious teachings and practices.
- b. Participation in Religious Rituals and Activities: Social and family environments can influence how often and to what extent an individual engages in religious activities such as worship, rituals, or religious celebrations. This involvement can strengthen one's religious identity and deepen their spiritual experience.
- c. Role Models: Family members who are role models in religious practices can set a strong example for individuals to follow and instil

religious values in daily life. These examples may include patience, compassion, or commitment to religious beliefs.

- d. **Support and Reinforcement:** A supportive social environment, including religious friends or religious communities, can provide emotional and spiritual support that is important in maintaining or increasing one's level of religiosity. This can be through discussions, prayers, or other religious social activities.
- e. **Social Norms and Values:** Social norms that exist within the social and family environment also play an important role in shaping a person's religious practices. Involvement in religious activities may be considered part of the norms or values that are respected in a particular social group.
- f. **Crises and Challenges:** Family and neighbourhood responses to life crises or challenges can strengthen or reduce a person's religiosity. In difficult situations, support from the social environment and family based on religious values can be a source of calm and hope.

As such, the social and family environment not only influences an individual's religious attainment, but also shapes the way individuals perceive and experience their spiritual lives. The importance of these influences suggests that understanding one's social and family context can provide deeper insights into the development of their religiosity.

5. The Role Of Culture In Interpreting The Bantengan Tradition

Culture plays a significant role in interpreting the Bantengan tradition, a performance art originating from East Java. Here are some important aspects regarding the role of culture in this tradition:

a. Cultural Identity

Bantengan is an integral part of the cultural identity of the East Java community, particularly in the regions of Mojokerto, Malang, and Batu. This performance reflects a rich cultural heritage preserved from generation to generation, becoming a symbol of local pride and community identity. In the series of Grebeg Suro events, the Bantengan performance is an important aspect marked by certain elements. The Bantengan performance includes distinctive costumes that symbolize the authoritative and strong nature of the Banteng animal, incorporating elements of forest animals. The movements in Bantengan serve as a representation of the life of the Banteng, showcasing its strength and significance in the performance. Furthermore, the Bantengan performance combines different realms, blending religious and magical beliefs with Islamic influences, as evidenced by the incorporation of Quranic verses in the ceremonies. The symbolic meaning of the Bantengan performance lies in its ability to convey messages to the public through suggestions and media, emphasizing cultural values and significance within society.

b. Spiritual and Ritual Significance

The Bantengan tradition is not merely an art performance, but also has a profound spiritual dimension. This performance is often

held in a ritual context, such as *tolak bala*, where the community hopes to gain protection from threats or disasters. The magical elements in the performance, such as the possession experienced by the performers, add depth to the spiritual meaning of this tradition. The Bantengan performance is very important in Indonesian culture because it embodies magical realism, traditional art, and social cohesion. This performance represents a blend of magical beliefs and Islamic practices. Designated as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Bantengan art features dance, music, and mantras with profound philosophical and magical nuances. The performance serves as a unifying tool for the community, preserving cultural heritage and fostering social values. Furthermore, the Bantengan performance is not only a form of entertainment but also a way to convey messages, values, and stories to the public, enriching the tapestry of Indonesian culture. The intricate rituals, symbolic elements, and spiritual aspects of the Bantengan performance contribute to the cultural identity and heritage of the Indonesian people, making it a cherished tradition in the region.

The emergence of the Bantengan performance has a significant impact on the religiosity of the community, leading to changes in religious practices, an increased awareness of spiritual values, and the strengthening of religious-cultural identity. The Bantengan performance, with its elements of magical realism, such as irreducible elements, the nature of fusion, and disruptions of space and time, provides a unique platform to convey religious and cultural messages to the public, instill character values, and shape the moral compass of the youth. Furthermore, the social and religious values embedded in traditional ceremonies such as Bantengan contribute to purifying the community, encouraging reciprocal cooperation, and upholding sacred beliefs, which ultimately enhance the religiosity and cultural identity of society. The integration of these traditional practices into community life serves as a powerful tool to promote spiritual growth and preserve cultural heritage, creating a harmonious balance between religious understanding, social welfare, and cultural values.

c. Moral and Social Values

Bantengan contains various moral values that are important for society, such as mutual cooperation, togetherness, and respect for ancestors. In each performance, there is symbolism that teaches values of goodness, responsibility, and beauty, which serve as guidelines in daily life.

d. Cultural Education

The Bantengan performance also serves as a means of cultural education for the younger generation. Through involvement in this performance, children and teenagers learn about history, values, and traditions that have existed for a long time. This helps them

understand and appreciate their cultural heritage, as well as preserve it in the future.

e. Creative Expression

As an art form, Bantengan is also a creative expression that combines elements of dance, music, and drama. This art form not only entertains but also provides space for local artists to express themselves and innovate, keeping the tradition relevant in the modern era. The traditional costumes worn during the Bantengan performance are rich in symbolic and cultural significance, reflecting a unique blend of dance, martial arts, music, and poetry/mantras that characterize this art form. These costumes play an important role in conveying the symbolic and moral values inherent in the Bantengan performance, symbolizing traditional resistance and communal values within the society. The costumes worn by the performers during Bantengan showcase elements of martial arts movements, adding a dynamic and visually captivating aspect to the traditional art form. Additionally, the costumes worn during the Bantengan performance contribute to the magical and mystical atmosphere of the show, especially when the performers enter a trance stage, embodying ancestral spirits and enhancing the overall captivating experience for the audience.

Watching the Bantengan performance can significantly influence religious practices by showcasing elements of magical realism, integrating different religious beliefs, and creating a space for spiritual connection. The Bantengan performance combines irreducible elements that symbolize advice and convey messages to the public, blending the realms of magical beliefs and Islam, and the unsettling doubts through offerings and rituals, all contributing to a unique religious experience. Additionally, the focus on the phenomenal world in the Bantengan performance, such as movements that symbolize the authoritative life of the Banteng animal, adds depth to the spiritual significance of the practice. By engaging with Bantengan, individuals can explore the blend of tradition, belief, and performance that enriches their religious understanding and connection with the divine.

The Bantengan ritual plays an important role in enhancing community cohesion through various mechanisms. The Bantengan performance contains elements of magical realism that contribute to the unity and closeness of community members. Moreover, the Bantengan dance, with its mystical elements and trance experiences, acts as a unifying force among the locals, strengthening their bonds with each other and the universe. Moreover, collective rituals like Bantengan have been recognized for strengthening group cohesion by promoting social synchronization, shared memory, and the transmission of group identity markers. This ritual, rooted in tradition and heritage, creates a sense of belonging and togetherness among the participants, fostering solidarity and the willingness to

sacrifice personal interests for the common good. Overall, the Bantengan ritual serves as a cultural foundation that unites the community and strengthens social bonds.

Traditional dances play an important role in the Bantengan ritual. The Bantengan performance incorporates magical realism through various elements such as irreducible components, the merging of religious and magical beliefs, and disruptions of time, space, and identity. These elements contribute to the mystical and symbolic nature of the dance, creating a unique experience for both performers and spectators. Additionally, Rakočević's study emphasizes how the dance intersects with ritual events, reflecting cultural, historical, and sociopolitical transformations. The performance of Bantengan illustrates how traditional dance is an integral part of honoring ancestors and cultural heritage, showcasing the rooted traditions and beliefs of indigenous communities. Overall, traditional dances in the Bantengan ritual serve as a form of artistic expression, cultural preservation, and a spiritual connection with the supernatural world.

Analysis

Bantengan's role in Grebeg Suro offers insights into how ritual performances not only celebrate but also shape the community's religious consciousness and collective identity. Bantengan, with its roots in ancient traditions and its adaptation within an Islamic framework, acts as a living symbol of Merjosari's socio-religious life. This tradition is more than a cultural spectacle; it embodies a communal experience that reinforces collective values, spiritual beliefs, and social cohesion. The integration of religious and moral themes within Bantengan allows it to serve as an educational tool for the youth, who are learning about resilience, moral integrity, and reverence for heritage (Szocik, 2021).

Religious leaders who endorse Bantengan highlight its alignment with Islamic values of faith and resilience, thus bridging cultural practices with religious doctrines. Their involvement signifies an endorsement that enables the community to perceive Bantengan not only as entertainment but as a form of religious engagement (Sav, 2019). By incorporating prayers, religious symbols, and ethical narratives into the performance, Bantengan becomes a reflection of the community's spiritual ideals and an expression of their religious identity (Mulyani, 2023).

The unique combination of religious and magical realism within Bantengan—including trance states and symbolic costume elements—provides a powerful, immersive experience that reinforces the spiritual dimensions of Grebeg Suro. As participants and spectators engage with these elements, they encounter both the mythical and moralistic aspects of their cultural beliefs, which are interwoven with Islamic teachings. The visual and performative aspects of Bantengan create a connection to ancestral spirits and revered figures, imbuing the ritual with a sense of

sacredness that resonates with viewers and instills a deepened sense of faith.

The social environment in Merjosari further bolsters the impact of Bantengan on personal religiosity by reinforcing shared practices and values that are central to the community. Families, particularly those involved in organizing and participating in Bantengan, transmit religious values and community ethics to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of these traditions and their role in shaping religious perspectives. This intergenerational transmission is critical in a rapidly modernizing urban area like Merjosari, where traditional values can be vulnerable to external influences (Rakočević, 2019).

Bantengan also highlights the role of religious expression as a community-strengthening force. The ritual's participatory nature draws the community together, providing a unifying experience that bridges individual faith with collective practice. This communal aspect is essential in fostering group cohesion, where shared ritual practices solidify bonds and promote a sense of belonging (Nugroho, 2020). Such cohesion is particularly valuable in densely populated urban areas, where shared spaces and collective rituals provide a sense of order and continuity amid the challenges of urban life.

In sum, Bantengan serves multiple purposes within Merjosari: it is a method of spiritual reflection, a channel for cultural education, a symbol of social unity, and a reinforcement of moral values. By examining how religious, cultural, and social elements converge within Bantengan, it becomes evident that such traditions are dynamic frameworks that adapt to meet the spiritual and communal needs of contemporary society. The performance of Bantengan during Grebeg Suro illustrates how religious rituals can transcend mere observance, functioning instead as a profound cultural institution that nurtures spirituality, sustains cultural identity, and fortifies community resilience in Merjosari.

CONCLUSION

The Bantengan performance during the Grebeg Suro celebration in Merjosari Village, Malang City, plays a significant role in enhancing the religiosity of the local community by integrating religious and cultural values within its display. More than just entertainment, Bantengan embodies symbolism of strength, courage, and sacrifice that aligns with religious and traditional teachings. Additionally, the roles of religious and cultural leaders in providing a spiritual interpretation of this tradition are crucial, as they help the community to comprehend the deeper spiritual dimensions and philosophical meanings behind the Bantengan performance.

This study reveals that the influence of the Bantengan performance on community religiosity is not only reflected in their participation in rituals and communal prayers but also in the way these moral and spiritual values are applied in everyday life. The social environment and family further reinforce these values, fostering a stronger religious identity within the

community. Thus, it can be concluded that the Bantengan performance during Grebeg Suro serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a vehicle to enrich and strengthen the religiosity of the Merjosari community. Through its symbolic roles, social interactions, and the involvement of religious and cultural figures, this tradition creates deep religious and social bonds, fortifying community cohesion in facing modern challenges while preserving ancestral heritage.

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