

**Faith and indigenous belief systems in cultural texts:
implications for mental health and community well-being**

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Abstract

When Islamic or Christian religious leaders encountered the indigenous beliefs of Indonesia known today as Kejawen, Kepercayaan, or Kebathinan in Java, various engagements took place. Outsiders often view that folk indigenous beliefs among others are syncretistic, superstitious, pantheistic, or simplistic. Yet, their leaders produce numerous sophisticated spiritual texts that among others enable them to survive holding their spiritual views persistently while continuously influencing believers of various formal religions while frequently facing marginalization. In 1925, a book called *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* was published in Central Java. The author transforms the narrative of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman into Javanese grand poetry or canto called *Macapat*. The article explores questions concerning the writer's faithfulness in maintaining the message of the original source, the enrichment, and the impact of his work. Through literary form analysis and narrative interpretation, several results show that the author dares to deviate from the narrative to enter a mutual enrichment process yet, he maintains a faithfulness to the core of Christology, and gives hints of a sophisticated method to be replicated in cross-cultural hermeneutic or contextualization process.

Keywords: Indigenous beliefs, spirituality, Javanese, narrative, cross-cultural hermeneutic

Introduction

From 270 million Indonesian citizens today, there are around 12 million adherents of indigenous beliefs.¹ People name them as the adherents of Kebathinan (inner spiritual

¹ David Saut, "Ada 187 Organisasi Dan 12 Juta Penghayat Kepercayaan Di Indonesia," *Detiknews*, November 9, 2017, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3720357/ada-187-organisasi-dan-12-juta-penghayat-kepercayaan-di-indonesia>.

Christian Studies. More made efforts to embrace the pattern of thought, language, and spiritual framework of the indigenous beliefs that suit Christian faith for mutual enrichment processes.¹⁰

However, many Indonesian Christian leaders, especially those who are more comfortable with the European missionary mindset tend to underestimate the patterns of thought or expressions of the indigenous spirituality adherents.¹¹ Thus, they viewed the Kejawen and their literature as illogical, superstitious, animistic, dualistic, and similar to fortune tellers or even witchcraft and black magic.¹²

In 1923, when Sie Siauw Tjong, a Chinese from Surakarta, Central Java interpreted the narratives of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman and wrote it in form of Javanese *Serat Suluk* or a text of grand poetry, it is a unique step although until today stays neglected. At that period, most Chinese lived with a negative narrative about the indigenous.¹³ Although many universities and State libraries have replicated and stored the *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah*, only limited works are done to study and interpret the text until 2006.¹⁴ Especially, a text with Christian content in form of a Javanese poetic narrative could easily be judged as a syncretic or shallow contextualization effort.

This article explores the method used by the author of the *Suluk* to interpret and share his understanding of the narratives of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4: 4-42) into the indigenous beliefs' context. Thus, the article explores the method used by the author in introducing Jesus within the framework of Kejawen concepts which are, for example, *sangkan paraning dumadi* (beginning with and returning to God),¹⁵ *manunggaling kawula gusti* (united with the Lord)¹⁶, *ruwatan* (re-

¹⁰ Bambang Noorsena, *Menyongsong Sang Ratu Adil: Perjumpaan Iman Kristen Dan Kejawen*, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Andi Offset, 2003).

¹¹ David Hicks and P. J. Zoetmulder, "Pantheism and Monism in Javanese Suluk Literature: Islamic and Indian Mysticism in an Indonesian Setting.," *Pacific Affairs* 69, no. 4 (1996): 600, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2761214>.

¹² Zoetmoelder, *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti: Pantheisme Dan Monism Dalam Sastra Suluk Jawa: Suatu Studi Filsafat*, Cet. 2 (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2000).

¹³ Robby Igusti Chandra, *The Power of Narratives: Exploration of the History, Narratives, and Spirituality: The Case of Chinese Indonesian*, 1st ed. (Cianjur: Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Cipanas, 2020), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343444310_The_Power_of_Narratives/citation/download.

¹⁴ Danu Priyo Prabowo, "Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah: Sebuah Pencarian Tirtamarta Dalam Nuansa Kejawen-Kristiani," *Diksi* 13, no. 1 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.21831/diksi.v13i1.6434>.

¹⁵ Maretha Manik Mintaningtyas, I Ketut Donder, and I Gusti Putu Gede Widiana, "Metafisika Jawa Dalam Serat JWirid Hidayat Jati," *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu* 2, no. 1 (2018): 350, <https://doi.org/10.25078/jpah.v2i1.490>.

¹⁶ Kholid Karomi, "Tuhan Dalam Mistik Islam Kejawen (Kajian Atas Pemikiran Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita)," *KALIMAH* 11, no. 2 (2013): 287, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v11i2.97>.

covering, re-balancing, healing, or reharmonizing)¹⁷, and God who cannot be described as Rahnip describes completely in his classic book *Aliran Kepercayaan dan Kebathinan Dalam Sorotan* (Indigenous Beliefs and Spirituality under Scrutiny).¹⁸ Within space limitation, the study primarily explores the author's usage of the concept of *ruwatan*. At the same time, the article studies the degree of modification that he uses to achieve his goal of introducing his faith into the cultural context that he appreciates. At last, whether the author manages to enrich both the Kejawen readers or audiences and the Christians as well through the text while trying to maintain the core of Christology used in his time is also an issue to study.

Methods

To discover both the intention of the author as well as his achievement or failure, this article uses two methods.

First, as the text is a narrative but also in as a form of grand Javanese poetry or *Macapat*, the focus of the analysis is on such a literary form and to explore whether there are embedded message or teaching in the form that the author chooses. Therefore, the study will mainly use literary form analysis within the context of Javanese culture or society. However, the study does not delve into the technicalities of Javanese poetry that are irrelevant to the focus.

Second, the study relies on narrative interpretation both on the narratives in the *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* as well as on the narratives in John 4:5-42 as the source. The answer to the above-stated questions is obtained by comparing the results of the analysis.

Since the era when Aristotle lived, experts have considered a narrative as a representation of reality. It is assumed that it also represents actions or sequences of events to trigger the emotions of the readers or audiences. Narratology, narrative analysis, or interpretation is a continuous study until today. In the last three years,

¹⁷ Rukiyah, "Ruwatan Dalam Masyarakat Jawa," *Sabda* 3, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.14710/sabda.v3i2.13233>.

¹⁸ M Rahnip, *Aliran Kepercayaan Dan Kebathinan Dalam Sorot (Indigenous Beliefs and Spirituality under Scrutiny)* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progressif, 1984).

experts like Clandinin,¹⁹ Phelan²⁰, or Kim²¹ make effort to sharpen several aspects of the studies and summarize the findings. The narrative analyses or studies even intersect with Biblical study as often literary criticism is interchangeable with narrative criticism. Such an approach creates various discussions as described in the work of Jian Yang.²² Today, there are many more streams in contemporary narrative theory, such as unnatural, transmedial, cognitive, and functionalist narratology as Phelan describes.²³ Yet, Shaffer V, Focella E, Hathaway A., et al. mention in their study that “Narratives have been used by many disciplines for many reasons. Each discipline often has a different term, but the concept represents similar, if not identical, constructs.”²⁴ This article does not include the analysis that Fokkelman posits to distinguish real narratives and fictional ones.²⁵ Instead, it treats both John 4:4-42 as well as *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* mainly as a narrative and relies more on a conventional framework of Todorov to analyze a plot of a narrative. Todorov states that inside the plot, there are equilibrium, disequilibrium, realization, resolution, and new equilibrium²⁶ Equilibrium is a condition that everything flows as routine events or as most people expect. Disequilibrium is a condition that disruption takes place and shakes the previous equilibrium or even stops it. Realization is a moment or process when the actors of the narrative begin to recognize the change. Then, the resolution is an effort to bring about a new equilibrium that returns the disappearing equilibrium.

Also, in the second method, there are analyses on the setting, the characterization, and along the way main the messages of *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* are compared to

¹⁹ D. Jean Clandinin, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry, Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315429618>.

²⁰ James Phelan, “Contemporary Narrative Theory,” in *Companion to Literary Theory*, ed. David H. Richter, first (New York, NY: John Wiley&Sons, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch6>.

²¹ Jeong-Hee Kim, “Narrative Data Analysis and Interpretation: ‘Flirting’ With Data,” in *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861.n6>.

²² Jian Yang, “An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Biblical Narrative Studies and Overall Construction Framework: A Review of Liu Hongyi’s Studies on Biblical Narration,” *Foreign Literature Studies*, 2013.

²³ Phelan, “Contemporary Narrative Theory.”

²⁴ Victoria A. Shaffer et al., “On the Usefulness of Narratives: An Interdisciplinary Review and Theoretical Model,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 52, no. 5 (2018): 429–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/abm/kax008>.

²⁵ See. F Hatavara, M; Matti, Hyavarinen; Makella, M; Mayra, *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media*, ed. F Hatavara, M; Matti, Hyavarinen; Makella, M; Mayra, *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315722313>. p. 54

²⁶ T Todorov, “Structural Analysis of Narrative,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3, no. 1 (1969): 70–76.

John 4:4-42. The results are combined with the result of the literary form analysis on the *Macapat*.

The Results and Discussion

I. Analysing the form of Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah

According to the Common Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia, the word *Serat* is related to the word *surat* that means a paper consists of writing or letter.²⁷ The word *Suluk* might come from the Arabic word *salaka*. In Online Great Indonesian Language Dictionary, *Suluk* means a way to spiritual perfection, mystics, or ascetic method.²⁸ In a shadow puppet show (*wayang*), *Suluk* serves as a method to convey the initial narrative of a scene. Using *Suluk* will build the atmosphere and provide a vivid description of a character while in the background a *gamelan* (a local musical instrument) sound accompanies it. The one who uses *Suluk* will recite it as a poem in harmony with the *gamelan* sound. In daily life, often spiritual teachers in Javanese also use *Suluk* to deliver their esoteric message or sermon. Therefore, *Serat Suluk* means a Javanese literature text to be recited as a *canto* to convey teachings about spiritual perfection.

Prabowo, the first writer who analyses *Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah* (herewith will be shortened as *Suluk Samariyah*) stated that it means a way to bring someone as close as possible to God.²⁹ The uniqueness of this *Suluk* lies in its content as it translates the narrative of John 4:4-42 into Javanese Kejawen patterns of thought, terminologies, and spiritual concepts. The writer might have added something into the message of John 4:4-42 while he also made few omissions or disguised messages.

As a whole work, *Suluk Samariyah* takes the form of a canto or long poetry. Most of the time, a *Suluk* is to be recited by a male spiritual teacher or a shadow puppet master called *dalang*. Through his voice, a reflective mood is being set up for all audiences. In Javanese culture, there are 11³⁰ kinds of poems called *Macapat*.

²⁷ WJS Poerwadarminta, *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia (Common Dictionary Bahasa Indonesia)*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986).

²⁸ <https://kbbi.web.id/suluk>, downloaded on October 11, 2020

²⁹ Prabowo, "Serat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah: Sebuah Pencarian Tirtamarta Dalam Nuansa Kejawen-Kristiani." *Diksi* no 3.1 (2006)

A macapat is a sophisticated art that demands the writer to obey certain aesthetic rules for each type of it, such as,

- *Guru gatra*: number of lines per stanza
- *Guru wilangan*: number of syllables per word in each line
- *Guru lagu*: type of vocal sound at the end of each line.³¹

Each *macapat* will set a different atmosphere when it is recited. For example, when a master recited an *Asmarandana Macapat*, he purposely leads his audience into a romantic atmosphere that underlies the content. On other occasions, he might teach something by using a different *Macapat* to give a hint to his audience about his message before it is explicitly expressed. Thus, the message and the medium are purposely integrated, or as Marshall McLuhan stated: “The Medium is the Message.”

Suluk Samariyah was published in 1923. Surprisingly, the writer, Sie Siau Tjong is not a Javanese but a Chinese descent. He developed *Suluk Samariyah* as a *macapat* by placing six smaller *macapat* in sequence within its body. Their names are *Dhandhanggula*, *Sinom*, *Asmarandana*, *Gambuh*, *Mijil*, dan *Kinanthi* as they appear in that order. What does each signify?

1. *Dhandanggula* is a word that derives from “*Gegedhangan*.” It means expectation, yearn, and fantasy. *Gula* means “sweet.” Thus, *Dhandanggula* is a *Macapat* or poem that conveys about dream or expectation for goodness to come.³² This *Dhandanggula Macapat* is at the beginning of the whole *Serat Suluk Samariyah*.
2. *Sinom* is a poem that describes the growing process of youth. It consists of pieces of advice related to the journey to find the real self while people dealing with curiosity and emotional upheaval.³³ This *Sinom* as *Macapat* follows directly after *Dhandanggula*. It means that *Suluk Samariyah* recognizes the struggle in the journey of human beings to arrive at their dreams.
3. *Asmarandana* poem means flaming love. The word comes from an old word “*asmara*” which means love and fire. *Asmarandana* poem is filled with narratives about the love between human beings or romance between man and woman.³⁴

³¹ Akhmad Nugroho, “Tembang Macapat Dalam Komunitas Sastra Jawa,” *Semiotika* 18, no. 2 (2017): 75–87.

³² Padukata, 13+ Tembang *Dhandanggula* Lengkap Contoh dan Artinya. <https://padukata.com/tembang-Dhandanggula/> downloaded on September 25, 2020

³³ <https://lenteramata.com/tembang-sinom/> downloaded on September 26, 2020

³⁴ Contoh Tembang *Macapat Asmarandana* dan Artinya Secara Lengkap <https://www.senibudayaku.com/2018/09/8-contoh-tembang-Macapat-Asmarandana.html>. 04 Sep, 2018 downloaded, on September 25, 2020

4. Gambuh poem is full of conviction concerning the steps to be taken in life.
5. Mijil in Javanese relates to words such as *wijil*, *wiyos*, *raras*, *medal*, or *sulastri* which mean emergence. The Mijil poem means the commitment to create good impacts after someone experiences a turning point in life.³⁵ The content is mostly advice on how to walk further after such a turning point.
6. Kinanthi poems come from word *kanthi* which means *nggandheng* or holding hands. Kinanti poem is related to the process that an adult undergoes. Its flavor signifies joyfulness.

Therefore, when one analyses the forms and their sequence in the *Suluk Samariyah*, it is logical to conclude that the text begins with an expectation or dream. Then, it depicts the transformational stages in life such as the growing stage, romancing period, finding conviction, turning point, and committing. The ending part is then, joyful further steps. Later when delving into the content, further analysis is on the explicit message of the *Asmarandana Macapat* or love-relation poem as the writer placed the main teaching of the Serat Suluk Samariah in it.

To sum up, in the Javanese cultural context, by using *Suluk* means first, the writer or the poet profoundly intends to touch the understanding, the heart, and the soul of his audiences or readers. Thus, in its essence, *Suluk Samariyah* is a spiritual and psychological insight that Sie Siauw Tjong shares. Second, the sequence of *Macapat* or poems being used to convey teaching or advice gives a hint of its core content. This *Suluk* and its six *Macapat* beacons the audience to reflect on the meaning of life from the time of birth until further.

Relating such findings to *Suluk Samariyah*, by choosing to convey one part of the Gospel into the form of *Suluk Samariyah* as a work consists of six poems, it is evident that the writer intends to guide his audiences or readers into a deep reflection about human life. It also means that the writer does not only convey his teaching to be understood and remembered, but to change the spiritual and psychological life of his audience or readers.

³⁵ Padukakata, 13+ Contoh Tembang *Mijil* (Sejarah, Watak, Paugeran dan Artinya), https://padukata.com/tembang-Mijil/downloaded_on September 25, 2020

II. Analyzing the Narratives

A. *The Context and Content of the Gospel of John*

As the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John has distinct features and often consists of narratives that do not exist in the Synoptics. At least, scholars frequently discuss three issues related to the Gospel of John: the issues around its writer or narrator, the purpose of its existence, and its unique features. In this article, by treating John 4:4-42 primarily as a literary text or narrative, it does not mean that the study ignores its theological and historical context.

The writer or narrator of this Gospel has been an issue for quite some time. In the past, Continental scholars differ from their American or British counterparts concerning their identification of the writer or narrator. The latter tends to entertain the idea that John, the beloved disciple of Jesus is the writer while the former reject the idea.³⁶ Recently, their view seems to become more similar except for the conservative evangelical. It means that John, the disciple might have a close association with the Gospel as the witness of the events related to the ministry of Jesus although the real writer could not be certainly identified. Other opinions state that a “Johannine school,” “circle,” or “community,” which traced its origins back to the apostle as the origin of this Gospel. Other scholar mentions that the Fourth Gospel is unique as it provides a history of the author’ existential struggles in terms of the history of Jesus.

Concerning the purpose of this Gospel, various studies offer many answers based on their views of its writer. Some believe that the Gospel is to emphasize Jesus as the Messiah who has incarnated or, Jesus' glory was manifested continuously in the path of lowly service.³⁷ Kostenberger states. John’s explicitly stated the purpose is quite clear: “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus and that by believing you.” Thus, the divinity of Christ is profoundly expressed. Others point out to the disciples or community of John compelled him to write words or teaching of Jesus that were given only to His inner circle added with his insight. Even Eusebius writes, “For it is evident that the three evangelists recorded only the deeds done by the Saviour for one year after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, and indicated this at the

³⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: WMB Eerdmans Publishing, 1995)., p, 29

³⁷ Morris.p.32

beginning of their account . . . They say, therefore, that the apostle John, being asked to do it, for this reason, gave in his Gospel an account of the period which had been omitted by the earlier evangelists.³⁸

Thus, the characteristics of this Gospel can be listed as follows

1. It has some narratives that are absent in the Synoptics Gospel
2. The writer's familiarity with some locations in Palestine can be surmised from the accurate descriptions in the text
3. The Gospel of John can give impressions that its teaching is similar to that of the Gnostics
4. The sharpest message of the Gospel of John is the Divinity of Christ. In the 24 statements of *εγω ειμι* (I am), the Gospel describes Jesus, Himself explains who He is.
5. A distinct Christology, which might be called high-Christology is apparent in this Gospel, the Johannine epistles, and the Revelation that emphasize the teaching revealed in John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

Most of the scholars agree that the Gospel of John emerged later than the Synoptic Gospel although the precise date is arguable, either in the first half of the first century or later. It seems that the Gospel of John was written for the early Christians who came out of Jewish background.

Concerning the narratives of John 4:4-42, there are possible three interpretations concerning its setting. First, the setting is a common or routine life event. A tired traveller decided to take a rest near a well. Not far from him, a woman was walking to get water from the same well. The encounter took place near the well. It signifies that God can visit those who are chosen in daily life events.

Second, Eyzenberg, an expert from Israel states that the first-century readers of the Gospel of John recognize that the encounter took place near the location that Joshua 24:32 describes: the tomb of Joseph in the land that Jacob had bought. For Eyzenberg, the proximity of the tomb of Joseph and the Samaritan woman indicates their similarity.

³⁸ Gary H Everett, *Study Notes of the Holy Scriptures: The Gospel of John* (Logos Bible Softwares, 2018), https://www.academia.edu/17900452/The_Gospel_of_John_2018_edition. p. 40

Both were persons who had been through tumultuous life events more than most people. Joseph had been through hostility, exile, temptation, injustice, and sadness as the woman had seen death visited her husbands added with probable social punishment. Yet, the Jewish expert continues that through God's grace, both Joseph and the woman as well end up reconciling with people who used to cast them out.³⁹

Third, some writers insist that the setting of the encounter is a metaphor to describe a betrothal scene. The idea started with the finding of Robert Alter as described in his book *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. He points out that there is a repetitive pattern among biblical narratives that he refers to as a "betrothal type-scene. He writes, "The betrothal type-scene, then, must take place with the future bridegroom... encounters a girl ... or girls at a well. Someone, either the man or the girl, then draws water from the well; afterward, the girl or girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger's arrival...; finally, a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl. The examples are Abraham's servant and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, and Moses and Zipporah.⁴⁰ Afterward, several Johannine scholars followed Alter's view and use it as the framework to view Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. For example, Brant Pitre in his book, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*.⁴¹ Or Jo-Ann A. Brant.⁴² Yet, Dorothy Lee rejects the framework as such to be used for John 4:4-41 with a strong reason: the woman has been married many times or she is a widow. She even lives with a male partner in her house.⁴³ Therefore, it is not a context related to the Bride and Bridegroom encounter with Jesus as the bride.⁴⁴ Similar rejection is also given by Arterbury by

³⁹ Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, Rethinking the Samaritan Woman, February 19, 2018 <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/rethinking-samaritan-woman/> downloaded on September 21, 2020

⁴⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1981).p. 52

⁴¹ Brant James Pitre, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, ed. Crown (New York, NY, 2014).

⁴² Jo Ann A. Brant, "Husband Hunting: Characterization and Narrative Art in the Gospel of John," *Biblical Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1996): 205–33, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851596X00194>.

⁴³ Dorothy A Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002).

⁴⁴ See. Colin Hamer, The Samaritan Woman Meets the Bridegroom Messiah: An Implied Christology, An unpublished paper, Union School of Theology, Wales, January 16, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/31093643/The_Samaritan_Woman_Meets_the_Bridegroom_Messiah_An_Implyed_Christology

stating that John 4 and similar narratives point out more into hospitality rather than a courtship.⁴⁵

B. Analysis of the Narrative as the Content Serat Suluk Samariyah⁴⁶

1. The Setting

In *Serat Suluk Samariyah*, the writer describes the setting in the first poetry which is Dandhanggula stanzas 12 to 15 as follows

*12. Nabi Ngisa sawusira prapti
nagri Sikar kang wus kocap ngarsa
ngraos sayah sarirane
gya nyêlak pinggir sumur
arsa ngaso datanpa kanthi
sakabatnya tinilar
nêba marang dhusun
samyandon luru têtédhan
tan darana sêlak ngêlak lawan ngêlih
sigêg gêntya kocapa*

The Prophet Jesus, he arrived in the Sikar which has been mentioned before, felt tired.

I found a place near the well,
intended to take a rest.
All his friends have gone to a village to find food,
his thirst and hunger
will soon be replaced

*13. antawisnya têngange kang wanci
Nabi Ngisa ngaub soring wrêksa
lênguk-lênguk linggih dhewe
anginnya midit maniyub
karya sumyah angga jêng nabi
ya ta tan dangu prapta
wanodya yun ngangsu
yèku Nikèn Samariyah
dene wanci têngah ari amèt warih
de nyêbal ing padatan*

The time arrives,
the Prophet Jesus lowered himself,
stretching and sitting down alone,
the wind blew softly,
comforting the Prophet,
soon a woman was coming, seeking for water,
a Samaritan woman,
in the middle of the day,
not a customary time

⁴⁵ Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the Betrothal Bonds: Hospitality in John 4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2010): 63–83.

⁴⁶ Siau Tjong Sie, *Serat Suluk Pawèstri Samariyah* (Gemblekan. Solo: Sie Siau Tjong, 1923), <https://www.sastra.org/kisah-cerita-dan-kronikal/cerita/2814-pawestri-samariyah-sie-siau-tjong-1923-1275>.

14. awit tēbih dunungnya kang prigi
lamun ngangsu tēngange ing wayah
tamtu bēntèr tēmahane
kajawi lamun pērlu
apa baya darunanèki
pawèstri Samariyah
tēngah ari ngangsu
punapa gēnthonge pēcah
atanapi ing wisma kēntekan warih
apa nuju kewala.

Karena letak sumur yang jauh,
bila menimba di tengah hari,
pasti terasa panas hawanya,
kecuali kalau perlu, bahaya apapun
akan dihadapi perempuan Samariah,
siang hari menimba atau pun tempayannya pecah,
atau jika rumah kehabisan air,
itu saja

15. tan mangkana sababing wigati
pambukanya kang kināntha ring hyang
mangkana pan wus pasthine
dhawahirèng kang wahyu
nugrahane punang pawèstri
panggih lan Nabi Ngisa
nabi dibya anung
utusanira Hyang Suksma
mawèh marta mastawa samèng sumadi
mêmayu yuning jagad

therefore, it needs to be underlined
The beginning has been established by God
Thus, everything has been ascertained
Manifested as revelation
That the grace comes for the woman
Who will encounter Jesus, the Prophet,
The Special Prophet
The representative of God, the Spirit
Giving freshness of life
make the universe beautiful.

16. Nabi Ngisa tan samar pangèksi
mring pawèstri kang tigas kawuryan
kadadyanira ing tēmbè
sinawang calon punjul
bisa tampi wasitèng gaib
wus pinasthi dening Hyang
rahayu tinēmu
ing dunya praptèng ngakerat
kangjèng nabi arsa ngruwat mring pawèstri,
tarunaning tyasira

The Prophet Jesus was not hesitant to view
The woman who is still holy (innocent)
who will play a significant role in the future
in receiving revelation
That God has determined her salvation

On earth and until in eternal life
The Lord Prophet plans the woman experiencing total recovery
that is His wish

The similarity of the setting concerning the encounter between Jesus and the woman is evident in John 4:4-42 and *Suluk Samariyah*. However, in the *Suluk Samariyah*, the writer explicitly emphasizes the initiative of Jesus and His intention to give grace to the woman. It is unusual for the spirituality of the indigenous. Most of the time, grace can be obtained if a person seriously intends and makes effort to find cure, recovery, forgiveness, or salvation from calamities.

Interestingly, the writer uses a special term which is *ngruwat* to describe Jesus' intention for the woman—a term that is not in the Bible. In the Kebathinan or Kejawen Indigenous spirituality, *ngruwat* (verb) or *ruwatan* (noun) has a deep spiritual meaning. The term encompasses the following meaning as re-covering, re-balancing, healing, or reharmonizing.⁴⁷ In Javanese spirituality, there is a saying to describe the function of *ruwatan*: *tumindak kangge ngicali sukerta utawi sesuker, amrih manungsa saged kalis saking memangsani pun Kala* (*ruwatan*, an act to cleanse dirt and disruption to free human beings from becoming the victims of God Kala) as a sentence to describe its function. *Ruwatan* can also be understood as expressed by this sentence: *ruwatan minangka tumindak manungsa kangge pados kawilujengan* (*ruwatan* is the human act in seeking salvation or freedom from disaster).⁴⁸

Furthermore, the Javanese understand the role of a human concerning *ruwatan* as follow: *Tumindak manungsa kangge ngupadi sageda uwal saking blengguning swasana ajrih, sumelang, mboten nyamar. Mila, mboten kajiret malih utawi kalis sing karibedan* (human actions while actively acts should be free from the bondage of fear and worry). The necessity of humans to take initiative is important as express in this sentence *Kodrat dipunwiradati utawi kanthi dipun sranani*. (the destiny of human beings has been determined by God's power, yet human should seek for a mediator to be free from the misery inside the destiny).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Rukiyah, "Ruwatan Dalam Masyarakat Jawa." *Sabda*, 3, no 1 (2017), p. 5

⁴⁸ Sugeng Rahanto, "Pengaruh Ruwatan Murwokolo Terhadap Kesehatan," *Jurnal Kesehatan* 15, no. 3 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.22435/bpsk.v15i3>.

⁴⁹ Kristriyanto: *Yesus Kristus Juru Ruwat Manusia...* Copyright© 2018; KURIOS, ISSN: 2615-739X (print), 2614-3135 (online)

Thus, with the term *ngruwat*, the writer mentions in the setting of *Suluk Samariyah* that the woman is someone who has created disaster both in her life as well as in others due to the wrong choice. However, he also uses the word “suci” (holy) to describe the Samaritan woman. As the word can be translated as unblemished or innocent, it can then be concluded that the writer of *Suluk Samariyah* views that the woman did not purposely choose her path that leads to the suffering of her own and others.⁵⁰

The setting in both narratives also shows that the two characters of the narrative. One is a Jewish prophet and the other is a Samaritan. They come from two cultural and social or even religious backgrounds that are related but each has erected boundary to be apart for hundreds of years.

2. Plot

a. From equilibrium to disequilibrium

The plot in the narrative is started by Jesus. By taking the initiative to speak first to the woman, Jesus creates surprise or even disequilibrium in her routine daily life. The woman might have been more comfortable being ignored by Jesus as there were thick social and cultural or even religious boundaries between them that normally kept them separate.

In the second part, Sinom poem as a youthful atmosphere, such disequilibrium is introduced as it describes the situation that the Samaritan woman faces in the following part.

*2. yèn nitik pangagêmanya
wong iki bāngsa Yahudi
tan mlèsèt pakêcapannya
dene bènèh lawan mami
lah ta paran wong iki
têka wani canthuk-lawung
lan bāngsa Samariyah
kang wus kanggêp satru lami
nulya matur dhuh pukulun kadi paran*

From his appearance,
By nation, this person is a Jew,
His accent is undeniable,
So different from mine,

⁵⁰ Yahya, Pancha. “Ruwatan Dan Pandangan Dunia Yang Melatarbelakanginya”. *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi dan Pelayanan* 8, no. 1 (April 1, 2007): 25-48. Accessed October 19, 2020. <https://ojs.seabs.ac.id/index.php/Veritas/article/view/173>.

How come as our enemy,
This person asks and bows down to
A Samaritan kind,
Whom they consider as their enemy for a long time,
But he requests something...

b. The Realization

The plot thickens as Jesus as the main character in the narrative continues His intention.
Until this point, the narratives of *Suluk Samariyah* still substantially follows the plot of
John 4: 4-42

However, a deeper analysis shows something different.

*hèh babo bibi rungokna
ywa kagyat ingsun jarwani
mènawa sira wèruha
nugrahanirèng Hyang Widhi
lan wèruha sirèki
sapa ta kang mundhut ngunjuk
ing mau masthi sira
nuli dadi kosokbali
mangénjali gantya nyuwun mring dhèwèknya*

My lady, please listen.
Do not be surprised as I will tell you
So, you will know
The grace of God
And that you know
Who has been asking you for a drink,
then, you will instead,
Request him in reverse,

*6. banjur sira piningan
tirta marta kang sajati
mangkana wardining basa
wiyose sabda jèng nabi
wèh sasmita kang dhingin
nugraha saking Hyang Agung
tégèsnya kaslamètan
pangapuntèn lawan urip
tri prakara karacut aran nugraha.*

Flow to your life,
The real living water,
That is the core of the words of the Prophet,
Giving the signs that soothes,
The Grace of the Supreme God,
Meaning: salvation,
Forgiveness and life,
Three dimensions in one grace.

In the last three lines the terms salvation, forgiveness, and life do not exist in John 4:4-42 at all. Does Sie Siauw Tjong expand the message in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel and combine it with the concept of *ruwatan*? Whatever is his intention, the Javanese audience, especially the adherent of the Kejawen will find it is easy to understand Jesus' role and His intention. The narration might fall within their latitude of acceptance.

The plot continues and the narrative flows faithfully as the John 4:4-42. The woman rejects the words of Jesus. When conversing about the living water, she fails to understand that Jesus refers to a deeper meaning. She takes the word literally while Jesus softly uses metaphor.

c. Climax and Resolution

The writer places the climax of the plot in the poem of *Asmarandana*. It signifies that whatever the message or teaching in it must correlate to the loving atmosphere. Thus, in the dialogue between the Samaritan woman with Jesus, the writer recognizes that it is within the frame of loving relations when Jesus offers a solution to the disequilibrium. In short, there is an explicit teaching or message and the tacit message, both are inseparable in strengthening each other.

*Nabi Ngisa ngandika ris
nini aywa wancak driya
sun warah tilingna age
banyune sumur punika
sing sapa anginuma
maksih ngêlak akiripun
ana lyane punang toya*

the Prophet Jesus says softly,
dear woman, do not need to be anxious.
Let me tell you,
The water of this well,
Whoever drinks out of it
Will end up thirsty again,
Yet, there is another water.

*2. singa ngombe toyanèki
kang saka péparing ingwang
tan ngêlak langgêng slawase
sanityasa sêsênétan
jênèk nèng atmanira
ing sajroning wong kang nginum
dadya sêsumbêring toya*

2. Who drinks from the water,
That I give,
Will eternally never thirsty again,
There will always in the soul,

Comfort
For the soul of humans who has drunk,
Will become the source of water.

3. *sumbêr urip kang umili
mancur praptèng urip baka
sang dyah kascaryan ing tyase
nging nyathêt sajroning driya
sangsaya pangangsêgnya
kêsusu asêlak bêsus
mring sandining kasunyatan*

3. The source of life that flows
Flows until eternal life,
The woman is surprised,
Save it in her heart,
Hastens quickly to clean herself
As she begins to see the real truth.

Asmarandana communicates God's grace and love for the Samaritan woman. From that point, the narrative follows faithfully John 4:4-42. The woman humbly asks for the living water, but later she shifts the direction of the conversation to a religious area. Then, Jesus shifts to speak about the husband of the woman. Here, *Suluk Samariyah* mentions something that does not exist in the gospel. The woman feels deeply saddened by the inquiry about her personal life. She is more comfortable to engage in discourses about religious practices or spirituality.

d. The New Equilibrium

The new equilibrium emerges in the narrative of John 4:4-42 as the woman leaves behind her pail. She hastens to share her experience with her fellow neighbors in the village. Either the Gospel of John purposely informs that the first person who brings the Good News is a Samaritan woman or not is an interesting issue to explore. However, the impact of her turning point experience is evident. This event is omitted in *Suluk Samariyah*.

e. Analysis of Characterization in *Suluk Samariyah*

The writer describes clearly the two characters or the actor and actress in the narrative of *Suluk Samariyah*. However, the Samaritan woman is the person who experiences the strongest impact of the encounter. She has a turning point experience.

Traditional Christians in 1910-an and even today tend to understand the Samaritan woman in John 4:4-42 as a marginal person. First, she is a Samaritan woman. In her

time, the Jews viewed the Samaritans as unclean. Contact with them will transfer the uncleanness.⁵¹ There are issues concerning their identity and blood-relationship with the Jews.⁵² In a Mishnah, Niddah 4:1 states that a Samaritan female has started her menstruation since she is a child and then should be avoided. Thus, when she comes of age, it is still unclean to have a relation with them.⁵³ Josephus, the writer mentions that the Samaritan is full of envy and hostility toward the Jews.⁵⁴ Yet, contrary to such opinions, Sung Uk Lim states that the hostility between those two ethnic groups is not that clear.⁵⁵

It will be beyond the scope of this writing to delve too deeply into the issues. Whether the Samaritans are the descendants of a mixture of impious Jews and Gentiles, or the offsprings of heathens, John 4:4-42's portrayal of the Samaritans is formulated from an exclusively Jewish point of views. The Gospel of Matthew does not view them as belonging to the house of Israel, the Gospel of Mark does not mention anything about them, while the Gospel of Luke and Acts see them as foreigners.⁵⁶

Thus, traditionally the woman is viewed as lonely and full of suffering. She is a sinful person with a bad reputation as her family life proves it.⁵⁷ The traditional interpretation uses John 4: 6 as the foundation of such a view. The woman comes to the well in the middle of the day instead of in the morning time. That verse is understood as indicating that the woman avoids meeting her fellow villagers. Self-isolation is her own choice. Until that verse, the narrative shows the routine life event of her. Despite her unhappy life, equilibrium exists as she is used to such a routine process.

⁵¹ Lawrence H Schiffman, "Mishnah Niddah 2:4-6 Some Laws of Purity," in *Texts and Traditions*, (Ktav: Hoboken, 1998), 726–27.

⁵² One of the treatments of the social identity approach see: Hakola, Raimo. *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity: A Social Identity Approach*. (New York: Routledge, 2015)

⁵³ http://shmuel.sandbox.sefaria.org/English_Explanation_of_Mishnah_Niddah.4.1?lang=bi downloaded September 25, 2020

⁵⁴ Antiquities 11.84, 114; based in baYoh 8:48, Luke 9:52-54

⁵⁵ Sung Uk Lim, "Josephus Constructs the Samari(t)Ans: A Strategic Construction of Judaeon/Jewish Identity through the Rhetoric of Inclusion and Exclusion," *Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (2013): 404–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flt083>.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Bourgel, "John 4:4-42: Defining A Modus Vivendi between Jews and the Samaritans," *Journal of Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flx215>.

⁵⁷ W Heth, "Marital Imagery in the Bible: An Exploration of Genesis 2:24 and Its Significance for the Understanding of New Testament Divorce and Remarriage Teaching," *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 3 (2016), p 575.

Later in the narrative, the woman shows herself as conversant with both the Samaritan as well as the Jewish religious tradition.

Compared to the narrative in the Gospel, *Suluk Samariyah* consists of something unusual in the narrative. The writer portrays the woman as much more attentive to Jesus' words compared to the narrative in John 4:4-42. Her emotional response is also portrayed more explicitly in *Suluk Samariyah* compared with whatever John 4:4-42 shows. To conclude, the Samaritan woman is a marginalized person who is not happy with her condition although she manages to survive in her life path. A disruption to her equilibrium causes wonder in her mind but later openness.

The next characterization is about Jesus. *Suluk Samariyah* faithfully follows the narrative in John 4:4-42 with Jesus as the character who initiates the encounter. Also, Jesus takes the liberty to cross the ethnic-cultural identity and religious boundaries in His effort to offer God's grace to the woman. Furthermore, Jesus also conveys His messages through several metaphors: living water, food, worship in spirit, and truth. It is easy for people to listen only to the surface of His words and fail to understand the complexity and depth of His message.

The crucial aspect of the characterization of Jesus in this narrative of *Suluk Samariyah* is in the name used for Him: Nabi Ngisa Rohullah (Jesus, the Prophet, The Spirit of God). The term is Arabic which indicates the writer uses it purposely for his readers which is Javanese Indigenous Believers who might have more familiar with Islamic terminology or have taken Muslim identity while still hold their inner spirituality intact. The complete title of Jesus according to Al Quran is Isa Rohullah wa Kalimatullah (Prophet Jesus, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God). For the Muslims, the basic title of Jesus as prophet indicates the function of Jesus. It means that He is inspired and equipped with the 'spirit' of God to speak the 'word' of God. Thus, the titles 'spirit of God' and 'word of God' must be understood, according to the Islamic view of Jesus, from the perspective and function of prophethood while in the Gospel of John, those titles mean to signify the divinity of Christ.

If the author of *Suluk Samariyah* only uses such a title to explain about Jesus to the Muslim, the grand poetry seems to be a syncretistic work. However, if his readers are Javanese Kejawen or Kebathinan believers who do not view the term as such, further

analysis is needed. In fact, in the *Suluk Samariyah* he uses many more titles to portrays Jesus.

1. In Asmaranda stanza 7

In *Asmarandana* stanza 7, the author writes

Nabi Ngisa wrangkanèki | dadya loroning atunggal | kang babarkên sih piwlase |
mring wanodya Samariyah | tanapi para jalma | singa tèmên mêsthi nêmu | kang sru
ngudi mêsthi panggya

*The Prophet Jesus blends to become **Two-in-One** who spreads His Nabi loving care to the Samaritan Woman and the humanity, whoever make effort persistently and work hard will find it.*

Does the term “Two-in-One” mean the union of the Spirit and the Man, Jesus? It can be related to further analysis

2. In Dhandanggula (last part)

In the last part of Dhandanggula, a term appears *ngeruwat*.

Nabi Ngisa tan samar pangèksi | mring pawèstri kang tigas kawuryan | kadadyanira
ing tèmbe | sinawang calon punjul | bisa tampi wasitèng gaib | wus pinasthi dening
Hyang | rahayu tinêmu | ing dunya praptèng ngakerat | kangjêng nabi arsa ngruwat
mring pawèstri | tarunaning tyasira ||

The term *ngeruwat* as has been mentioned earlier roots in the myth about Batara Guru, the Supreme God who made a mistake, and then, God Kala came to existence and ate human beings whose life cause problems. Due to many victims, God Kreshna incarnated to become a wise man who could heal, reconcile, and return life to normalcy. Thus, by portraying Jesus who intends to *ngeruwat*, it could be concluded that Sie Siau Tjong sends an embedded description about Jesus: He is not simply a prophet sent by God, but much more. Only a God can transform the universe or human beings back to the original status and condition after the calamity.

3. In Sinom stanza 7

An unusual term appears in this part of the stanza: Salvation and Grace

ping kalih sasmitanira | jêng nabi maring pawèstri | wau sintên mundhut toya |
punika prasêmonnèki | tumrap angga jêng nabi | gyannya mayu wèh rahayu |
yuwana mring pra jalma | kang yun wruh sandining urip | lan nanggapi
nugrahanira Hyang Suksma ||

the second teaching from the Prophet to the woman who takes the water is the expression of the Lord Prophet to give salvation to each person who wishes to understand the secret of life and be thankful for God's grace.

The term “to give salvation” or “grace” is something not Islamic at all in its. The term ‘secret of life’ belongs to the indigenous or folk belief. The word “salvation” can be interpreted by the indigenous believers differently compared by the Christians but can become a starting point for further dialogue.

4. In Gambuh 28,

When explaining the ethical steps to be taken after receiving the Living Water, the sentence in Gambuh 28 is full of mystery as Sie Siauw Tjong portrays Jesus as the Gate to the Supreme God where he stays. It is very unusual to portray a prophet or someone special as a person who stays with God except for a condition: He is God.

ping catur lire kukuh | uwat-uwat pikêkahing sujud | imanira ngimankên juru
basuki | plawanganira Hyang Agung | Jêng Ngisa rohullah manggon ||

The Fourth, just convince the strength to worship, your persistence to believe that the Peace-giver as the gate to the Supreme God where Jesus, the Spirit of God stays.

Based on those descriptions of Jesus in *Suluk Samariyah*, implicitly the author uses many Kejawen or popular Islamic terms, but he redefines them by adding a new meaning through several other Christian terms that Kejawen believers will not get confused but summarize as God's mystery as they are used to view God as full-of mystery and no human word is sufficient to describe the Almighty.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis are as follow

1. The author is very conversant and thorough in his understanding or mastery of the Javanese culture, especially their spiritual poetry. He also masters the spiritual or cultural concepts of the Javanese indigenous beliefs and dares to use them as bridges to convey his messages. Through such mastery, he embeds his main interpretation of John 4:4-42 in *Asmarandana Macapat*. This fact indicates his deep appreciation of the Javanese culture or even allow some dimensions of the Javanese spiritual insight to enrich his faith perspective
2. The author chooses a couple of frameworks of the Javanese indigenous spirituality to portray Jesus. Within the concept of *ruwatan*, he introduces Jesus as God, thus he is faithful to the conventional Christology.
3. Although the author uses the title Jesus, the Prophet and Spirit of God which is a popular Javanese indigenous-Islam term, he stepped further by adding new terms like salvation and forgiveness in his description of Jesus. Then, he introduces new spiritual concepts and perspectives, such as God's grace, compassion, love, or God who crosses boundaries to bring reconciliation or recovery. With such terms, he might lead the readers or listeners to maintain their original beliefs about Jesus as a prophet, but he also triggers them to consider that He is more than just an ordinary human being. In short, no human words suffice to describe Him. Thus, indirectly or embedded in his translation or cross-cultural hermeneutic he posits Jesus as God who primarily wants to relate, engage, and love human beings instead of simply giving a spiritual knowledge that most of the Javanese Kebathinan adherents expect from a prophet. Such indirect communication that the author uses is an indication that he deeply understands the Javanese cultural mode of communication.⁵⁸

The results give hints for those who are into a process of cross-cultural hermeneutics and contextualization that they should consider several pre-conditions. First, having appreciation and mastery of the indigenous spirituality

⁵⁸ Heather Bowe et al., "Direct and Indirect Messages: The Role of Social Context Identified by Grice and Searle," in *Communication Across Cultures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511803925.004>.

or beliefs regardless of the alien pattern of thoughts is the first step. Second, openness to being enriched both at the emotional and the theological domain as well is needed. Third, a recognition that various forms of literature, discourses, or even arts have the potentials to be used in a communication process to convey messages explicitly or through embedded ones. Last but not the least, cross-cultural hermeneutics or contextualization process is always at risk of syncretism which to some extent is acceptable as far as the core belief is intact.

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