The Tatwa Brata Merapi-Merbau Text: A Study of Javanese Wisdom and Its Relevance with Social Harmony

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The Tatwa Brata Merapi-Merbau Text: A Study of Javanese Wisdom and Its Relevance with Social Harmony

I Made Suparta

Universitas Indonesia, Kampus UI Depok 16424, Indonesia
Telp: +62217864075, Fax: +62217270038
E-mail: imd.supartha@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper examines lakubrata (vow) and upawāsa (fasting) in Javanese religious traditions based on the Tatwa Brata Merapi-Merbabu text. The text is written in "Buda" or Merbabu script and compiled in the Dharma Panyolih (L 69) manuscript, a collection of the National Library of Jakarta. The methods applied to examine and understand the text are textual criticism and semiotics, as well as a religious approach. The text mentions various types of laku brata and upawāsa, namely: (1) brata hanaapatrahara, (2) brata hane-kadasi, (3) brata nyapawāsa, (4) brata nimbhakarana, (5) brata ha-manḍawa, (6) brata mañcamona, and other brata. The conclusions are: (1) in one of the Javanese attitudes, tapa and samādhi are vital elements associated with the practices, (2) lakubrata and upawāsa are generally intended to: (a) maintain physical and spiritual health, (b) maintain harmony with the universe and the Creator, and (c) foster social harmony with fellow human beings, and (3) the Tatwa Brata Merapi-Merbabu text is a document of knowledge that describes Javanese wisdom (kaoricakṣanam) and the way of life which refers to the social harmony system of the sixteenth century.

Keywords: Tatwa Brata, upawāsa, Javanese wisdom, social harmony

1. Introduction

Lakupuasa (derived from Sanskrit: upawāsa) or fasting, which Javanese people still practice to this day, has a lengthy history that can be traced back to a similar tradition in the Ancient Javanese era. The historical fact about the tradition, apart from being carved on temple reliefs during the Hindu-Buddhist period in Java, is also revealed through written documents in the form of Ancient Javanese inscriptions and manuscripts. In those written sources, the tradition of upawāsa or puasa is always intertwined with lakubrata and tapa. In that regard, this paper specifically aims to examine and reveal the meaning and interpretation of several types of lakubrata and upawāsa in the SaṅhyatatwaBrata (hereinafter referred to as STB) Merapi-Merbabu text, which is one of the texts compiled in the Dharma Panyolih L 69 manuscript, a collection of the National Library of Jakarta. The principal problem analyzed is several types of brata and upawāsa as well as their meaning in the context of Javanese wisdom and their relevance with social harmony. Semiotics and the religious approach are applied to study and understand the types of brata and upawāsa.

2. Concept of Brata and Upawāsa in Old Javanese Literature

The term brata (Zoetmuler, 1982:260) as it is known in Ancient Javanese traditions generally refers to ‘a vow, a sacred way of life, the act of fasting, and becoming an ascetic’ (in the sense of brati, Skt: vṛatam). Specifically, the word brata can refer to worship or a moral behavior which represents certain iṣṭadevatā, as described in the concept of aṣṭabrata in the kakawin Rāmāyana XXIV.52-60 (Poerbatjaraka, 2010: 862-68), which includes: Indrabrata, Yamabrata, Suryyabrata, Śāśibrata, Bāyubrata, Dhnadabrata, Barunabrata, and Bahnibrata. With regard to ‘a sacred way of life’, the concept of brata actually also implies the meaning of upawāsa, which refers to ‘fasting, abstaining from food and drink’ (Zoetmuler, 1982: 2138). Such an understanding of the concept can be seen in Adiparwa 49.14 (Juyndboll, 1906:49): “Ndātansahurikesaṇrī, apasēḍēniramobrata...” (‘sangṛṣi does not answer at all, for he is abstaining from speech’). The concept of monabrata (Skt: mauna) in fact also includes the meaning of brata (vow), upawāsa (fasting), and tapa (asceticism).
How the concepts of \textit{brata-upawāsa-tapa} are closely related can be seen in the \textit{Uttarakāṇḍa} manuscript written during the era of King Dharmawangsa-Téguh around 991-1007 AD (Zoetmulder, 2006: 17). This text depicts competition in the methods of \textit{tapa-brata-upawāsa} chosen by three brothers: Daśamukha, Kumbhakarna, and Wibhiṣana. Meanwhile, the \textit{kakawinŚiwaratrikalpa} written by MpuTanakung between 1466 and 1478 AD (Teeuw, \textit{et al}., 1969:18) describes the nature of \textit{brata-upawāsa} in their relation with the concept of \textit{brata-Śiwarātri} (pupuh 37.7-8) which is the most important among various types of \textit{yajña-tapa-dana}. Further, The \textit{Sanhyyān} \textit{Kamahāyānikān} 50.20 (Kats, 1910: 50) asserts that \textit{brata} also refers to the concept of \textit{yoga} as follows: “...yoganidranārayaṇa, aturū tan panīpi...apansiraphalaniśarbwayoga, sarbwasamādhi, sarbwabrata...” (Yoganidra is sleeping without dreaming...as it is a result of the entire \textit{yoga}, the entire \textit{samādhi}, and the entire \textit{brata}). Therefore, it can be understood that the concepts of \textit{brata} and \textit{upawāsa} as described in Ancient Javanese texts basically indicate a person’s sacred way of life. In the \textit{Yṛhaspatitattwa} text, the sacred way of life is specifically linked to the three concepts of \textit{laku-kawikon}, namely: \textit{kayika-brata}, \textit{jīnānabratat}, and \textit{yogīśwara} (Devi, 1957: 63).

3. Concept of \textit{Brata} and \textit{Upawāsa} in the TatawaBrataMerapi-Merbabu Text

The \textit{STBM}erapi-Merbabu text is one of the texts compiled in the \textit{Dharma Pagolihi} (L 69) manuscript. Based on information in the catalog (Setyawati, \textit{et al}., 2002: 62), the manuscript measures 27.6 x 3.1 cm with the number of pages amounting to 13 \textit{lĕmpir}. The text is written in Merbabu script or “\textit{Buda}” script. It also contains the \textit{Pararaton} text and the \textit{kidungRumēksainWĕni}. The \textit{STB} text itself is written in 8 \textit{lĕmpir}. The text was written on the slopes of Mt.Pamrihan or Merbabu, but the year of writing is unknown.

The types of \textit{brata} and \textit{upawāsa} mentioned in the \textit{STB} text include: (1) \textit{bratapatrahara}, (2) \textit{bratahaṅgekadasa}, (3) \textit{brataupawāsa}, (4) \textit{brataumīkamona}, (5) \textit{bratahamācanama}, and (6) \textit{bratamaṅcamona}. In the beginning of the text (\textit{lĕmpir} 23 \textit{recto}), it is mythologically narrated that the knowledge and teachings of \textit{brata} are created from the water in the place where Bhaṭṭāra Guru washes his face when he performs \textit{yoga} (“...hanabratamijilsakiṇparahupanBhaṭṭāra Guru...”). It is essential that SaṅSewaka Dharma or the “disciples of Dharma teachings” are aware of the knowledge and teachings of \textit{brata-upawāsa} so that they can master the knowledge and wisdom in order to “free” all human beings as though they are their own family. The interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the types of \textit{brata} and \textit{upawāsa} is discussed as follows.

3.1 \textit{Bratapatrahara}

The concept of \textit{brata-patrāhara} is an Ancient Javanese construction that is unknown in Indian traditions. However, based on the text it can be understood that \textit{patrāhara} is one of the types of \textit{upawāsa} of the vegetarian tradition. The \textit{STB} text explains the meaning of \textit{brata-patrāhara} in the following quote (\textit{lĕmpir} 24\textit{r}): “...hanabrata, patrāharaŋyaprayaṇa, amanjarondon sari-sari, Sanhyāinīswaradewatanyā, phalanayamulihmariswarggaBhaṭṭāra Guru...” (it is called \textit{brata-patrāhara}, which means eating the essence of leaves. Sanhyāinīswara is the god, the reward is going to the heaven of Bhaṭṭāra Guru). \textit{Brata-upawāsa} specifically recommends eating the shoots or the buds of leaves (\textit{patra}) as practiced in the vegetarian tradition.

3.2 Bratahaṅgekadasa

The concept of \textit{brata-upawāsakadasa} or \textit{aṅgekadasa}s generally connected to the lunar cycle of the Candra calendar year (lunar system), specifically the 11th day before the full moon (\textit{purmina}) and new moon (\textit{tilēm}). Therefore, the time for \textit{gekadasa} occurs twice in one month. In line with the lunar cycle, in Vedic traditions there are 26 \textit{ekadasa} in one year, namely: \textit{Utpanna}, \textit{Mokṣada}, \textit{Saphala}, \textit{Putrada}, \textit{Sat-tila}, \textit{Jaya}, \textit{Vijaya}, \textit{Amalaki}, \textit{Papamocani}, \textit{Kamada}, \textit{Varutini}, \textit{Mohini}, \textit{Apara}, \textit{Nirjala}, \textit{Yogini}, \textit{Padma}, \textit{Kamika}, \textit{Putrada}, \textit{Aja}, \textit{Parivartini}, \textit{Indira}, \textit{Papaykusa}, \textit{Rama}, \textit{Haribodini}, \textit{Padmini}, and \textit{Parama} (Candrawati, 1997: 43-44).
The STB text explains the meaning of brataaŋekadasi in the following quote (lĕmpir 25r): “...hanabrata hanaŋekadasiṣjarananya, hananakĕnpurnamanmanikkasuluḥhamatihara, olihitgaṅkasuluḥ...” (it is called brataaŋekadasi, which means fasting every purṇama [full moon] of the 10th month for three years). Based on the quote, it can be concluded that the concept of brataaŋekadasi in the STBMerapi-Merbabu text has undergone a significant change from the concept of upawāsaekadasi in Vedic traditions. In this text, brata-upawāsa is meant so that one can enter the realm of Saṅhyaśvara, and be reborn to become a divine Śiwa-Buddha brahmana.

3.3 Bratanjupawāsa

Bratanjupawāsa is a hyperbolic way to assert the intensity of meaning of the avowed upawāsa. The STB text describes the meaning of bratanjupawāsa in the following quote (lĕmpir 27r): “...hanabratanjupawāsa, piteviṃjisayamanya, sīnsakarēpēkatēkan, viryādavaninasihaniṅHyaṅ...” (there is bratanjupawāsa vowed for 7 nights, everything that one wishes for will be granted, namely power and love from God).

3.4 Bratanjumbhakarṇa

The concept of bratanjumbhakarṇa is an Old Javanese thought construction adapted from the behavior of the character Kumbhakara in the tale of Rāmāyana. In the Uttarākāṇḍa 17.21 text (Zoetmulder, 2006:17), it is told how Kumbhakara is so devout in his tapa-brata that he only drinks by sucking in dew drops continuously for a thousand years. When he receives grace from the God Brahma, he mistakenly says cirakālasupta, namely: aturwasewutahunlawasnya (‘asleep for a thousand years). Bratanjumbhakarṇa is a metaphor in the STB text which has its own particular meaning. This can be seen in the following quote (lĕmpir27r): “...hanabratanjumbhakarṇaṣjarananya, haturu tana palihan, nēhērajupawasa, ilūtanahumamayanya, phalanumulī śasasrnyajamamantri, labdarsehprabh...” (there is bratasimilar to brata Kumbhakarṇa, sleeping without differentiating the two, then vows for to fast for three years. The reward is returning to the heaven of the God Rudra, and later being reborn to become a minister, or an accomplished king).

Although the character of Kumbhakaraṇa is a rakṣasa, his loyalty in defending his homeland is set as an important example in the world of Javanese wayang (puppetry). This is perhaps one of the reasons why the concept of brata Kumbhakarṇais discussed quite prominently by the author in the STBMerapi-Merbabu text.

3.5 Bratahamandawa

The concept of bratahamandawa is an Ancient Javanese thought construction derived from the name of the Paṇḍawa, the five sons of Paṇḍu. The metaphor of this brata is apparently unknown in the Indian concept of brata. The meaning of bratahamandawa in the STB text is described in the following quote: “...hanabrata hamanḍawasaṣjarananya, holihalimaṅ kēpēlsarahina, limaṅ leksamayanyakasaggum kitoraksambhanān pariṣpurṣṇa...” (it is called bratahamaṇḍawa, which means eating only five balls of rice each day, do that for five months, and you will receive sadgūna to assist in achieving perfection). According to Zoetmulder (1982: 1587), sadgūna refers to the six actions or efforts performed by a king in wartime, namely: sandhi (peace), wigraha (battle), yāna (marching), āsana (sitting at camp), dwaidhi-bhawa (dividing troops), and samśraya (seeking protection from a more powerful king).

Based on the explanation, it can be interpreted that bratahamaṇḍawa implies how lakubrata was practiced by Javanese kings in the Ancient Javanese era. The specific purpose is to absorb the power of kesadgūna from the five Paṇḍawa who are victorious in the war against the Korawa. The effort to achieve the mighty knowledge of sadgūna is symbolized through brata-upawāsa by eating five balls of rice each day for three years. The five balls of rice carry a symbolic and mystical association with the characters of the five Paṇḍawa, who continue to be lifestyle role models in Javanese society today.
3.6 Bratamañcamona

The concept of *mona* or *mauna* (‘silence, to be silent, not speaking’) refers to a type of *lakubrata-upawāṣa* that is practiced by being silent or not speaking. In the *kakawin Śivarātri kalpa* 37.1 it is said that the character Lübda performs *Śivānalārcana* (the worship of Śiva’s fire) through *upawāsa* and *mona* (*duluranopawāsasahamona*).

The particular meaning of *mona* in the concept of *bratamañcamona* is explained in the *STB* Merapi-Merbabu text as follows: “...*hanabrata mañcamona, nomamarjan, monananapuh, monarasi, monasusur, monajisih...*” (there are five types of *bratamonas*, namely: silent while eating, silent while sweeping, silent during intercourse, silent while brushing hair, and silent during bowel movement). Practicing *bratamañcamona* diligently earns one the reward of returning to the heaven of Bhaṭṭāra Guru, and later being reborn as a person who is good looking, is talented in *gamelan* and *kidung*, and excels as a human being.

In Ancient Javanese traditions, *lakumonabrata* is considered an important behavior and is equal to *lakutapa-brata-yoga* itself. The *Kidung Sinang saya* text, one of the Merapi-Merbabu *kidung* literature written around the year 1592 Śaka (Kriswanto, 2012: 245) describes the *monabrata* behavior with the term *habrata matigēni* or *hamatirāga* as practiced by the character Ki Ragadharma. The same expression is also found in the *Kidung Surajaya* (Merapi-Merbabu L 208), written around the year 1618 Śaka (Setyawati, 2015: 530). In the text, the character Ki Surajaya says: “...*hamati rajag sinakun, sinbrata-laswuskerih...*” (theamatirāga method is truly applied, *brata-penghabisan* is also practiced).

Based on the above explanation it can be seen that the *brata-upawāsa* concept, aside from being present in the *STB* text, can also be found in other Merapi-Merbabu texts such as the *Kidung Gita Sinang saya* and the *Kidung Surajaya*. This indicates that until the end of the 17th century various parts of knowledge about *brata-upawāsa* and *tapa-yoga* were still being studied and responded to by manuscript authors, and possibly even still practiced by *ajaran* or ascetic communities because of the close links to their religious traditions passed down from the Ancient Javanese era.

4. *Brata and Upawāsa* as a Reflection of Javanese Wisdom

Javanese wisdom as mentioned here refers to the ideas of H.G. Quaritch Wales, who uses the term local genius (Soebadio, 1986: 18), or cerlangbudaya (Ayatrohaedi, 1986: 111). In this case, local wisdom or *kawicaksananswabudaya* is the entire attitude, outlook, and ability of a community in managing its spiritual and physical environment in harmony with its sociocultural dynamics. In line with the above, it can be understood that the discussion of several types of *brata-upawāsa* in the *STB* text clearly reflects the thought and knowledge systems of Javanese society in the Merapi-Merbabu mountainous areas in around the 16th to the 17th century. The thought and knowledge systems expressed through the text indicate a deep mystical union (*uniomystica*) between humans and SangkanParan, as well as with divinity and the universe. The concept is mythologically constructed as a sacred value in the narration that *ontogenybrata* is created from the water with which Bhaṭṭāra Guru washes his face. In Ancient Javanese (9th-15th centuries AD) and *kejawen* religious thought framework, the character Bhaṭṭāra Guru is the Supreme God who leads the group of gods ruling the eight directions of the wind (Pigeaud, 1924:57-58), holding his throne in the highest heaven called Windhupēpēt (Suparta, 2016: 337). Theologically, the name Bhaṭṭāra Guru itself is a form of local genius, as it reflects religious-Javanese wisdom. The *Purwaka Bhūmi* text explains that Bhaṭṭāra Guru is an epithet and emanates from the God Śiva (Hooykaas, 1974: 26).

In relation to the tradition of *tapa-brata*, the *Śiwa Purāṇa* book describes that the God Śiwais the king of all ascetics; hence, he is called by the name Mahāyogi or Sadyogin who maintains social and natural harmony (Sanjaya, 2001: 64). Therefore, the relationship between concept of *brata* and the myth of Bhaṭṭāra Guru in the *STB* text significantly implies Javanese Śiwaism. The constellation of the *brata-upawāsa* concept from the *STB* text in the context of social harmony is cosmologically connected to the Merapi-Merbabusastra-ajaran (ascetic-literary) realm. The author of the *STB* text
symbolically identifies as a SanŚewakaDharmma who practices lakubrata-upavāsa not solely for purposes of physical health or self-transcendence with SangkanParaningDumadi, but most importantly the spiritual knowledge of brata is meant to “free” (umoktakna) all human beings as though they are one’s own family. The STB text explicitly says:

“...kayatnakna de SanŚewakaDharmma, marapwankapāṇīnjakasiddhanya, wruhajyatmika, samahyanhumoktaknajanma, ṇ kadyaŋganinadannye sun...” (the teaching of brata should be practiced carefully by ŚewakaDharmma the spiritual disciples, so that they can achieve spiritual knowledge and wisdom, in an endeavor to free the human race as though they were their own family).

Based on the above quote, the meaning and interpretation of the brata-upavāsa concept as a crystallization of Javanese wisdom in the context of social harmony can be seen in the figure below:

Figure 1: Constellation of Brata-Upavāsa in Social Harmony

The above figure shows how the conceptualization of brata-upavāsa is the basic value that forms the cosmological order in the thoughts of the ascetic-literary communities in the Merbabu or Damalung mountains which is a mandala or kadewaguruan as referred to in the kakawinNagarakṛtāgamapupuh 76.3d (Pigeaud, 1960, I: 59). Religious wisdom, humanity, and nature (bhuwana, rāt) inherited from the Majapahit era were still well connected with the Merapi-Merbabu manuscript traditions in the 16th-17th centuries AD. Part of the expression of religious-mystic-cultural wisdom is still being passed down and responded to in the world of kejawen to this day, as seen in the expressions manunggalingkawulagusti, or mamahayuhayuningbhawana.

5. Conclusion

Several conclusions can be made based on the discussions above. Firstly, the method and behavior of bratapatrahara, bratahaŋaliwwan, bratahaŋekadasi, brataŋupawāsa, brataŋumbhakarṇa, bratahanmanda, and bratamañcamona in the STB text explicitly reveal mystico-theological-religious and cosmological wisdom. The wisdom has become part of Javanese people’s lifestyle attitudes, which are tapa and samadhi (Jong, 1984: 23). Secondly, brata-upavāsa also implicitly contains a meaning of wisdom in connection to social harmony. Thirdly, in relation to social harmony, lakubrata-upavāsa is generally intended to: (a) maintain harmony with the universe and the Creator, and (b) foster and “free” all human beings (umoktaknajanmakadyaŋganikadaŋ), which can be placed in parallel with the concept of rahmatanlilalamin in Islamic theology. Fourthly, the STB Merapi-Merbabu text is a document of knowledge (kadhyatmikan) or Javanese kawicakṣanan (local wisdom) that reflects a way of life in the 16th century. Nowadays the famous tradition of “Puasa” actually derivated from the Sanskrit word Upavāsa.
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