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

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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 Payolih (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 hanapatrihara, (2) brata hanekadasi, (3) brata yupawāsa, (4) brata nimbakarana, (5) brata hamandawa, (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 (kaωicakṣaṇan) 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 Saṅhyantarawāsaptabratatet (hereinafter referred to as STB) Merapi-Merbabu text, which is one of the texts compiled in the Dharma Payolih 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: vṛatta). Specifically, the word brata can refer to worship or a moral behavior which represents certain iṣṭādevatā, as described in the concept of asṭabrata in the kakawin Rāmāyana XXIV.52-60 (Poerbatjaraka, 2010: 862-68), which includes: Indrabrata, Yamabrata, Surryabrata, Śaśibrata, 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 (Jynnboll, 1906:49): “…Ndātansahurikesaṅṛṣi, apasādēṇmironabratar...” (‘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 *brata-upawāśa-tapa* are closely related can be seen in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* manuscript written during the era of King Dharmawangsa-Tēguh around 991-1007 AD (Zoetmulder, 2006: 17). This text depicts competition in the methods of *tapa-brata-upawāśa* chosen by three brothers: Daśamukha,Kumbhakarṇa, and Wibhiṇa. Meanwhile, the *kakawinŚiwaratrikalpa* written by MpuTanakung between 1466 and 1478 AD (Teeuw, *et al*., 1969:18) describes the nature of *brata-upawāśa* in their relation with the concept of *brata-Śiwarātri* (pupuh 37.7-8) which is the most important among various types of *yajña-tapa-dana*. Further, The Sanhyaṇ Camahāyānikaṃ 50.20 (Kats, 1910: 50) asserts that *brata* also refers to the concept of *yoga* as follows: “...yoganidrāṆaryany, aturū tan āra guru...” (Yoganidra is sleeping without dreaming...as it is a result of the entire *yoga*, the entire *samādhī*, and the entire *brata*). Therefore, it can be understood that the concepts of *brata* and *upawāśa* as described in Ancient Javanese texts basically indicate a person’s sacred way of life. In the *Wyhaspatitattwa* text, the sacred way of life is specifically linked to the three concepts of *laku-kawikon*, namely: *kayika-brata, jīna-brata*, and *yogīśwara* (Devi, 1957: 63).

3. Concept of *Brata* and *Upawāśa* in the *TatwaBrata*Merapi-Merbabu Text

The *STB*Merapi-Merbabu text is one of the texts compiled in the *Dharma Payolih* (L 69) manuscript. Based on information in the catalog (Setyawati,* et al*., 2002: 62), the manuscript measures 27.6 x 3.1 cm with the number of pages amounting to 13 lēmpir. The text is written in Merbabu script or “Buda” script. It also contains the *Pararapon* text and the *kidungRumēksainWĕngi*. The *STB* text itself is written in 8 lēmpir. The text was written on the slopes of Mt.Pamrihan or Merbabu, but the year of writing is unknown.

The types of *brata* and *upawāśa* mentioned in the *STB* text include: (1) *bratapatrāhara*, (2) *bratahamaṇcamona*, (3) *brataṇupawāśa*, (4) *brataṇumbhakarṇa*, (5) *bratahamaṇḍawa*, and (6) *brataamaṇḍamaṇa*. In the beginning of the text (lēmpir 23 recto), it is mythologically narrated that the knowledge and teachings of *brata* are created from the water in the place where Bhaṭāra Guru washes his face when he performs *yoga* (“...hanabrata-hanamjil-sakši-parahupanBhaftara Guru...”). It is essential that SaṅSewaka Dharma or the “disciples of Dharma teachings” are aware of the knowledge and teachings of *brata-upawāśa* 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 *brata* and *upawāśa* is discussed as follows.

3.1 Bratapatrāhara

The concept of *brata-patrāhara* is an Ancient Javanese construction that is unknown in Indian traditions. However, based on the text it can be understood that *patrāhara* is one of the types of *upawāśa* of the vegetarian tradition. The *STB* text explains the meaning of *brata-patrāhara* in the following quote (lēmpir 24r): “...hanabrata, patrāharaṇaryany, amanajrondon sari-sari, SanhyaṇŚiwaraṇa, paḥlanyamulhmamisvarggaBhaftara Guru...” (it is called *brata-patrāhara*, which means eating the essence of leaves, Sanhyaṇ Śwara is the god, the reward is going to the heaven of Bhaftara Guru). *Brata-upawāśa* specifically recommends eating the shoots or the buds of leaves (*patra*) as practiced in the vegetarian tradition.

3.2 Bratahamekadasi

The concept of *brata-upawāśaekadasī* or *aṅekadasī* generally connected to the lunar cycle of the *Candra* calendar year (lunar system), specifically the 11th day before the full moon (*purnima*) and new moon (*tilēm*). Therefore, the time for *yekadasī* occurs twice in one month. In line with the lunar cycle, in Vedic traditions there are 26 ekadasī in one year, namely: *Utpanna, Mokṣada, Saphala, Putrada, Sat-tila, Jaya, Vijaya, Amalaki, Papamocani, Kamada, Varutini, Mohini, Apara, Nirjala, Yogini, Padma, Kamika, Putrada, Aja, Parivartini, Indira, Papaykusa, Rama, Haribodini, Padmini, and Parama* (Candrawati, 1997: 43-44).
The *STB* text explains the meaning of *brataaŋekadasi* in the following quote (lêmpir 25r): “...hanabrama hanêkasadijaranya, hanaŋkênpurnamanînîkasapuluḥhamatihara, olihatigaṅkasapuluḥ...” (it is called *brataaŋekadasi*, which means fasting every *purnama* [full moon] of the 10th month for three years). Based on the quote, it can be concluded that the concept of *brataekadasi* in the *STB*Merapi-Merbabu text has undergone a significant change from the concept of *upawâsaekadasi* in Vedic traditions. In this text,*brata-upawâsa* is meant so that one can enter the realm of Saṅhyânlîṣwa, and be reborn to become a divine Śiwa-Buddha brahmana.

### 3.3 Brataŋupawâsa

*Brataŋupawâsa* is a hyperbolic way to assert the intensity of meaning of the avowed *upawâsa*. The *STB* text describes the meaning of *brataŋupawâsa* in the following quote (lêmpir 27r): “...hanabrataŋupawâsa, pituînįgisamayanya, siṅsakarēpkatēkan, wiṟyalawinasihanînHyâṅ...” (there is *brataŋupawâsa* vowed for 7 nights, everything that one wishes for will be granted, namely power and love from God).

### 3.4 Brataŋumbhakarṇa

The concept of *brataŋumbhakarṇa* is an Old Javanese thought construction adapted from the behavior of the character Kumbhakarna in the tale of Râmâyana. In the *Uttarakânda* 17.21 text (Zoetmulder, 2006:17), it is told how Kumbhakarna 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 ciraṅkâlasupta, namely: *aturwasewutahunlawasnya* (‘asleep for a thousand years). *Brataŋumbhakarṇa* is a metaphor in the *STB* text which has its own particular meaning. This can be seen in the following quote (lêmpir 27r): “...hanabrataŋumbhakarṇaŋaranya, hāturu tan palihān, nehēraŋpawâsa, līuṇṭahunsamayanya, phalanyumulih i sargga Saṅhyânl Rudra, sasarnyaajamamantri, labdarisaīnprabhâ...” (there is *bratasimilarg* to *brata*Kumbhakarna, sleeping without differentiating the two, then vowing 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 Kumbhakarna is a *raksasa*, 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 Kumbhakarṇa* discussed quite prominently by the author in the *STB*Merapi-Merbabu text.

### 3.5 Bratahamandawâ

The concept of *bratahamandawâ* 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 *bratahamandawâ* in the *STB* text is described in the following quote: “...hanabrata hamaṇḍawâŋaranya, holihalimaṅ kēpēlsarahina, limâṅ leksamayanyakasadguṇāṅ kitakasambhāṅ paripūrṇa...” (it is called *bratahamandawâ*, which means eating only five balls of rice each day, do that for five months, and you will receive *sadguṇa* to assist in achieving perfection). According to Zoetmulder (1982: 1587), *sadguṇa* 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 *bratahamandawâ* implies how *lakubrata* was practiced by Javanese kings in the Ancient Javanese era. The specific purpose is to absorb the power of *kesadguṇa* from the five Paṇḍawa who are victorious in the war against the Korawa. The effort to achieve the mighty knowledge of *sadguṇa* is symbolized through *brata-upawâsa* 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-upawāsa that is practiced by being silent or not speaking. In the kakawin Śivarātrikalpa 37.1 it is said that the character Lubdaka performs Śiwalārircana (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, nomamajjan, monananaupu, monarasmī, monasusur, monapisiṁ...” (there are five types of bratamona, 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 Bhaṭāra 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, lakunonabrata is considered an important behavior and is equal to lakutapa-brata-yoga itself. The Kidung Sinangsaya text, one of the Merapi-Merbabu kidung literature written around the year 1592 Śaka (Kriswanto, 2012: 245) describes the monabrata behavior with the term habratamatigēni or habātirāga 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 raga sinakūn, sinbrata-taswuskeriṁ...” (the amatirāga 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 Gīta 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 ajar 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 kawicaksananswabudayaīs 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 Sangkana Parata, 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 Bhaṭāra Guru washes his face. In Ancient Javanese (9th-15th centuries AD) and kejawen religious thought framework, the character Bhaṭāra Guru is the Supreme God who leads the group of gods ruling the eight directions of the wind (Pigaud, 1924:57-58), holding his throne in the highest heaven called Windhupēpēt (Suparta, 2016: 337). Theologically, the name Bhaṭāra Guru itself is a form of local genius, as it reflects religious-Javanese wisdom. The Purwaka Bhumi text explains that Bhaṭāra 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 Śiwa is the king of all ascetics; hence, he is called by the name Mahāyogi or Sadayogin who maintains social and natural harmony (Sanjaya, 2001: 64). Therefore, the relationship between concept of brata and the myth of Bhaṭāra 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 SaṅŚewakaDharmma who practices lakubrata-upawāsa not solely for purposes of physical health or self-transcendence with SangkāParaningDumadi, 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 SaṅŚewakaDharmma, marapwankapaññihkasiddhanya, wruhajyatmika, samahyanhumoktaknajanma, ṇ kadyaṅganinadanye sun...” (the teaching of brata should be practiced carefully by ŚewakaDharmmaor the spiritual disciples, so thatthey 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-upawāsa 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-Upawāsa in Social Harmony](image)

The above figure shows how the conceptualization of brata-upawāsa 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, bratahaṇaliwwan, bratahaṇekadasi, brataṇupawāsa, brataṇumbhakaraṇa, bratahaṁdaṇawa, andbratamaṇiçamona in the STB text explicitly reveal mystic-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-upawāsa also implicitly contains a meaning of wisdom in connection to social harmony. Thirdly, in relation to social harmony, lakubrata-upawāsa is generally intended to: (a) maintain harmony with the universe and the Creator, and (b) foster and “free” all human beings (umoktaknajanmakadyaṅganikadaŋ), which can be placed in parallel with the concept of rahmatanlilalamin in Islamic theology. Fourthly, the STBMerapi-Merbabu text is a document of knowledge (kadhyatmikan) or Javanese kawicaksan (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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