



The Symbolism of Heirloom Keris and Political Behavior in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the keris as a cultural entity that reflects the harmonious relationship among humans, nature, and God from a Javanese cosmological perspective. Through a hermeneutic qualitative approach based on literature review, this study analyzes the keris as *Mustikaning Eling*, an artifact that functions as an existential reminder of humankind's divine origins. The results of the discussion show that the process of making a keris involves not only the technical skills of the craftsman, but also spiritual practices, asceticism, and inner communication, thus giving birth to a "sacred power" or *sipat kandel* which is believed to bring protection, authority, and legitimacy of power. Historically, the existence of the keris is closely related to the Javanese political power structure, especially in the palace environment which is the center of cultural reproduction and symbolic authority. The keris is not only a personal heirloom, but an ideological manifestation that confirms the hegemony of the king as God's representative on earth. Although modernization and secularization have permeated various aspects of life, the keris remains an important part of the collective memory of Javanese society, even undergoing reactualization within the context of national identity and cultural heritage. In conclusion, the keris is a holistic representation of spiritual, social, and political values, as well as a bridge between the past and the present. This research confirms that understanding the keris means understanding the Javanese perspective on power, inner consciousness, and cosmic balance.

Keywords: heirloom keris; Indonesian politics; symbol of power.

Introduction

Since UNESCO designated the keris as an intangible cultural heritage, the development of keris making and ownership has become increasingly widespread. Because the keris for Javanese families is part of their identity, even used as *Mustikaning Eling* (Sari memorial of life). Therefore, the keris will always be present and needed by Javanese families. As long as Javanese families still maintain the conventions of Javanese tradition, the heirloom keris will be placed in the final savings to be maintained. As written by Linus Suryadi, that the heirloom keris is a living tool, not just an antique stored in a cupboard, and treated as an accessory for a well-off family. Even though discontinuity occurs along with the process of urbanization that impacts all areas of life, even on the joints of the thick conventions of Javanese family tradition, it is certain that Javanese families have heirloom keris in their savings cupboards (AG, 1993).

For Javanese families, the keris is considered the center of power and authority within the household. Ki Juru Bangunjiwa explained that the keris functions as a *piyandel*, a symbol of faith embodied in the form of a keris and the basis of the Javanese philosophy of life. This philosophy encompasses *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*, *Sangkan Paraning Pambudi*, and *Manunggaling Kawula*

Gusti, which emphasizes the relationship between humans and the Almighty. The keris serves as a sacred reminder that humans are merely sparks of light from God. Symbolically, the keris consists of two main parts: the warangka and the wilah, which are united into one whole. The concept of “satunggal ingkang kalih, kalih engkang satunggal” reflects the philosophy of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi and the harmony between humans and God. Thus, the keris is not only a physical object, but also a spiritual symbol that reminds humans of their origins and their harmonious relationship with the universe and the Creator (Bangunjiwa, 2019).

As a "support" for humans, the keris plays a significant role in everyday life. Its presence is considered capable of helping humans face and understand various problems that are mysterious or difficult to explain. The keris functions as a medium or spiritual tool that provides peace and direction for its owner when facing life's challenges. Thus, the existence of a keris is not just an heirloom, but also a guiding symbol that helps humans find solutions and inner peace in facing the complexities and mysteries of life that cannot always be unraveled by reason alone (Ariwibowo et al., 2017). Even the keris carries the hopes of the maker (Empu) and the user (Pemilik), so the keris is called Sipat Kandel. A belief that is embodied in an object, even gives rise to the understanding or a message that the keris is Mustikaning Eling (Sari memorial of life) (Bangunjiwa, 2019). Therefore, the process of making a keris, is very much determined by the sensitivity of an Empu in reading the needs for what the keris is made, and what rituals can connect between the maker and the owner. The spiritual relationship between the Empu (the keris maker) and the customer (the keris owner) is determined by the sincerity of both parties to accept it as it is (Wahyudin, 2015).

As a medium to achieve the peak of spirituality, the keris in the past was under the control of the Palace, both in the process of its manufacture and who owned it. The creation of the keris was highly dependent on the King, not on the Empu maker, there was a hegemony of power exercised by the King. Therefore, all works of art had a sacred purpose, namely as an offering and intended for the powerful, as an extension or personification of the Almighty God. Therefore, when viewed from their works, they have a concept of hegemony, because in carrying out their work they were closely tied to the influence of the Palace as a cultural center (Kuntadi, 2019). Because the spiritual power of a King was so strong, the King had the right to do anything as a supreme leader in his kingdom. He could regulate the legal system, the government controlled other regions, the strength of the army and even regulate the cultural and religious systems. This was because the King's power was centralized, complete and undivided. As written by Purwadi, the queen binathara had three types of revelations, namely; prophetic revelation, legal revelation, and regional revelation. Prophetic revelation is a revelation that positions the king as God's representative on earth, who has spiritual authority and the possibility of acting wrongly is very small because he is directly guided by God. Second is the revelation of hukumah, which places the king as the source of law with the authority of murbamisesa, namely the Supreme Ruler, his power is unlimited and all his decisions cannot be challenged, because they are considered God's will. Third is the revelation of wilayah, which is a complementary revelation to the two revelations above, positioning the king as the one with the power to provide pandam pangauban, meaning to provide enlightenment and protection to his people.

As the center of legitimacy of his power, a King or Sultan makes the palace the central reference point in managing his territory. The palace or palace is considered a symbol of a complete and majestic state order, rooted in the concept of a microcosm. Thus, the palace becomes an important part of the microcosm that serves as the legitimate source of a King's power. A King or Sultan is required to possess supernatural powers as a manifestation of his ability to carry out his mandate to bring prosperity to the people. This supernatural power, at the very least, serves as a form of personal legitimacy of the King's power, as he is responsible for controlling the territory organized like a mandala, namely a harmonious and structured order. In this context, the heirloom keris plays a strategic role as a symbol of power capable of strengthening the King's authority while uniting the community. The keris is not only considered a physical object, but also a spiritual symbol that facilitates harmony between human power and the universe. Thus, the existence of the heirloom keris supports the legitimacy of the King's power, while also serving as a medium for affirming his political and social identity. The symbolism of the keris reflects the connection between the King's individual supernatural powers, the social order, and the balance of the

universe. By holding a sacred keris, a King or Sultan is expected to be able to lead his territory fairly, maintain social balance, and carry out the mandate to realize the prosperity of the people and harmony in his environment.

Based on the above background, the author wishes to examine the keris as a symbol of power in Javanese culture. Because one of the legitimacy of the Sultan's power, besides supernatural powers, also lies in the heirlooms he possesses. This supernatural power or inner strength can be obtained through mystical unity between oneself and the Creator, a depth and serenity that can foster spiritual development and well-being. Due to the broad dynamics of Javanese culture related to power, politics, and the heirloom keris as a symbol of power, it is necessary to limit the problem in this research. The focus of the problem that serves as a basis relates to the existence of the keris as an heirloom in Javanese society and the Javanese Kings, which is still used today.

Method

This research was conducted using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach, which seeks to understand the meaning of an event based on the direct experiences of cultural actors (Yusanto, 2020). The research data were obtained not only from in-depth interviews with keris experts, keris masters, and heirloom keepers within the Yogyakarta Palace, but also from relevant literature searches from various books, articles, and academic journals discussing the world of keris and palace traditions. The research locations specifically focused on two centers of Javanese culture: the Surakarta Palace in Solo City and the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. These two palaces were chosen because they still strictly maintain Javanese traditions and cultural values, particularly regarding the preservation of heirloom heritage, customs, and cultural ethics that are still maintained in daily life. The authenticity of the traditions and cultural authority of these two palaces make them highly relevant objects for in-depth study. In conducting the research, data were collected from two main types of sources. First, direct sources from the field obtained through observation and interviews with key informants. Second, documentary sources, including archives, manuscripts, and other written references related to palace traditions and the symbolism of the keris in Javanese culture. Data from these two sources were then analyzed simultaneously to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding.

The data collection technique in this study was carried out using two main methods. First, observation or direct observation techniques, namely the process of focusing attention on the research object by involving all of the researcher's senses. Observations were conducted openly so that researchers could see and understand the situation as it is according to the reality on the ground (Suharsini, 1993). Second, an open-ended interview technique was used, which was carried out through several systematic stages (Romdona et al., 2025). The first stage was determining the research location, which was limited to the Surakarta Palace in Solo and the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace in Yogyakarta, considering that both are centers of Javanese culture that still actively maintain traditions. The next stage was determining respondents as the main sources. Selection was carried out selectively to ensure that the information obtained truly comes from competent parties and has authority in the tradition of keris and palace heirlooms. The timing of the interviews was determined flexibly so as not to disrupt the activities of the community or respected traditional figures. Prior to the interviews, the researchers also compiled a list of questions to ensure the discussion process remained focused and did not deviate from the research focus. Interviews were conducted with keris figures, keris masters, and heirloom keepers in both palaces as the main sources of cultural information.

Data analysis techniques are procedures for obtaining structured and systematic research findings from data obtained through interviews, observation, and documentation. The collected data are then organized, classified, and compiled thoroughly to facilitate processing and interpretation. With proper organization, the data provides a strong basis for drawing conclusions and answering questions or problem formulations established in the research. This process allows researchers to understand phenomena in depth, ensure the validity of the findings, and provide a systematic understanding of the object of study being studied (Rohendi, 1992). The analysis is conducted through several important stages. First, the data reduction stage, which is the process of filtering, selecting, and simplifying raw data to retain only relevant information that aligns with

the research focus. This step aims to avoid data that is too broad or unnecessary. Second, the conclusion-drawing and verification stage. At this stage, researchers develop a final understanding based on the findings and ensure the truth and accuracy of the data through cross-checking. This process produces valid and accountable final conclusions (Rahmadi, 2016).

Results and Discussion

The Concept of Power in Javanese Culture and Tradition

The portrait of Javanese people reflects a society unable to separate itself from myths in everyday life. This makes their perspectives and practices appear distinct from those of other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Javanese traditions are unique in their interpretation; they tend to be ascetic and strongly influenced by mystical elements. Belief in symbols is very dominant because symbols are considered sacred and represent life. According to Magnis-Suseno, the Javanese are the native inhabitants of the central and eastern regions of Java Island who speak Javanese as their mother tongue. Koentjaraningrat categorizes Javanese society into three social strata: *wong cilik* (the common people/farmers), *priyayi* (the intellectual-official group), and the nobility whose lifestyle resembles that of *priyayi*. Religiously, the Javanese are divided into two: Javanese *Kejawen* (*abangan*) who are oriented towards pre-Islamic traditions, and *santri* who strive to practice Islamic teachings normatively. In the Javanese cosmological view, God is the center of the universe and the source of balance in life. The relationship between humans and God is depicted in the concept of *kawula lan Gusti*, namely the total unification of humans as servants of the Creator to achieve harmony in life. This view gives rise to a way of life that emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and supernatural powers (Zoetmulder, 1995).

The Javanese philosophy of life is rooted in the belief that human life takes place within the flow of space and time, from "nothing" to "being," and then back to "nothing." Throughout this journey, various rituals accompany each phase of life. This awareness gives rise to a worldview that strongly upholds harmony and the safety of nature. For the Javanese, the empirical world (microcosm) and the supernatural world (macrocosm) are intertwined and influence each other. Nature is considered a force that determines the balance of life, which helps humans understand their existence (Mulder, 1973). For the Javanese, nature is understood as a space that holds supernatural powers, so humans feel highly dependent on it. Nature, along with all events, objects, and life, is seen as a unified, orderly existence that has meaning beyond what is visible. Human birth is considered sacred, and is therefore marked by rituals based on space and time, such as determining market days and *weton*. The symbols in the ritual are understood cognitively and are multi-meaningful, depending on the mystical experience and background of each individual, but all are directed towards harmony and salvation (L. F. Magnis-Suseno, 1984).

The Javanese philosophy of life emphasizes the attitude of *sepi ing pamrih*, which means not pursuing personal interests, and *rame ing gawe*, which means carrying out obligations and work responsibly for the sake of social harmony. The goal is to *memayu hayuning bawana*, beautifying and maintaining the balance of the universe. Humans are understood as the center of the axis of life that moves in space and time, united with the will of God and the power of the supernatural. Every life event, especially birth, is considered sacred, so it is marked by symbolic rituals based on the Javanese calendar such as *pasar* or *weton*. These symbols have different spiritual meanings according to each individual's mystical experience, but all are directed towards the creation of safety, harmony, and cosmic peace (L. F. Magnis-Suseno, 1984).

The most prominent characteristic of Javanese culture is the strong role of symbols in almost every dimension of life, especially in the spiritual realm. Symbols are seen as a subtle and comprehensive medium for conveying moral and religious messages. In Javanese mysticism, human life is completely encompassed by symbols, both cosmic in nature as interpretations of natural phenomena, and organic symbols that predict human destiny. Therefore, the Javanese lifestyle is deeply religious and in harmony with nature. The material world is considered transitory, so desires driven by lust are suppressed in order to achieve oneness with God and nature as the pinnacle of tranquility and perfection in life (Busdiono, 1983).

The unification of humanity, nature, and God is a mystical process that every individual must undergo. Through meditation or ascetic practices, humans seek to communicate directly with

God (the Supreme Kasunyatan). These ascetic practices arise from a pure inner drive, not external coercion, and lead individuals to a profound spiritual experience, known in Javanese tradition as *kebatinan*. Jong explains that spirituality is not based on formal doctrine, but rather is formed from personal experience, so each school of thought has different practices. Belief in symbols and myths is also influenced by a person's background experience and fate. Myths, although considered fairy tales by modern circles, in the Javanese view serve to raise awareness of supernatural powers, provide assurance of strength, and explain the origins of life (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). Through symbols and myths, Javanese people strengthen their belief that the universe is filled with divine energy that enables union with God. Because humans are seen as the center of the cosmos, they are obliged to maintain harmony to maintain a stable order. Symbols become a means of connecting with divine powers, but they only have meaning when framed through mystical experience. Without a sacred dimension, symbols become mere empty forms.

In Javanese mysticism, the process of self-purification is an absolute requirement, including avoiding two primary dangers: *molimo* (drugs, madon, theft, drunkenness, and *mateni*) and *nafsu pamrih* (individual egoism). The essence of Javanese spirituality lies not in the formality of worship, but rather in the awareness of "eling" (mindfulness) to maintain balance and avoid disrupting the order of nature, God, and one's fellow human beings. In Javanese culture, power is understood as a gift from God bestowed upon whomever He wills. While some believe that power can also be attained through asceticism or meditation, Franz Magnis-Suseno explains that on the surface, power stems from one's inner strength, the result of asceticism or the possession of amulets. However, at the deepest level, true power derives entirely from God's grace. Inner power is only temporary and fulfills physical needs, while power derived from God carries a high moral and spiritual responsibility. This awareness leads humans to return to their divine origins, *sangkan paraning dumadi* (F. Magnis-Suseno, 1991).

According to Benedict Anderson, power in Javanese culture is seen as real and concrete, not merely an abstract concept. First, power is considered a mysterious and supernatural force that animates nature, visible in natural elements such as rocks, clouds, and fire. Second, power is singular and homogeneous, originating from a single, undivided source. Third, power is permanent and neither increases nor decreases; it does not arise from wealth, weapons, or organization, but rather predates all. With this view, the legitimacy of power is not questioned, because what matters is its existence, so it has no moral dimension of good or bad (Fachry, 1986). During the New Order era, Javanese culture gained strength as a new political ideology through Pancasila. Pancasila's values, aligned with Javanese views of power, were used to legitimize the dominance of a single power, the military. Through the ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces) concept of dual function, the military not only maintained security but also controlled politics (A. Setiawan, 1998).

In the ideal Javanese power structure, each class—*kshatriyas*, merchants, priests, and builders—had their own roles, without dominating one another, in order to maintain cosmic balance. However, the New Order allowed the *kshatriyas* (military) to monopolize nearly every sector, exceeding their authority. This dominance led to social inequality, the loss of the functions of other components, and the emergence of corrupt practices due to the paralysis of law and justice. Suharto turned Cendana into a center of power, like a palace, where all strategic decisions were formulated behind closed doors, while the state palace served only as a formal stage for policy announcements. As a result, power became highly centralized and closed. The hope for the arrival of the Kertayuga era emerged as a dream for the post-1998 reformation community, with the belief that change would occur if bureaucratic leaders could improve themselves. An ideal leader must possess authority, honesty, patience, and inner strength to embark on a spiritual journey toward the authenticity of life. The process of purifying "feeling" is carried out through a simple life, humility, and self-control to avoid being dominated by selfish desires. People's belief in myths is deeply rooted, as myths have long served as a religious medium for drawing closer to God, maintaining morality, and serving as a guide for facing the challenges of this age (F. Magnis-Suseno, 1991).

One cultural symbol often utilized to shape national character is the art of *wayang* (puppetry). *Wayang* is seen as a multidimensional medium imbued with moral teachings and life philosophies. Its characters represent diverse human traits, while its storylines contain exemplary messages that society can emulate. Even outside of performances, *wayang* figures are often used

as symbols of power and leadership. In the Javanese view, power is believed to be a gift from God, although there is also a belief that power can be achieved through asceticism or meditation. True power is considered spiritual, awakening human consciousness to return to its origin, namely the Divine will (F. Magnis-Suseno, 1991).

According to Benedict Anderson, power in Javanese culture is concrete and real in life, not merely a concept. Power is understood as an invisible, supernatural force that animates the universe and is manifested in natural elements such as rocks, clouds, and fire. Power is considered homogeneous, originating from a single, whole and undivided source, its amount is fixed and unchanging, and it does not depend on wealth or weapons. Power also does not consider moral legitimacy; what matters is that it exists. This centralized pattern of power permeates the socio-political structure of modern Indonesia and is transformed into an ideology (Fachry, 1986). To a certain extent, mastery of knowledge can lead to a position of honor, such as palace poets skilled in literature becoming courtiers. However, in traditional society, the humanities are not vocational skills. Education is directed at developing individuals who are clairvoyant, wise, wirya, and sampurna as the requirements for ideal leadership according to the Javanese view (Kuntowijoyo, 1999). During the New Order, Javanese culture transformed and strengthened as the state ideology through Pancasila. Its values, aligned with Javanese views of power, were exploited to legitimize the dominance of a single political force, the military (A. Setiawan, 1998).

The knights assumed complete control of power, contrary to the Javanese concept of power, which emphasizes the balanced role of each element. Although power is considered homogeneous, each element has a distinct role. The knights were supposed to maintain national security, not control trade or other sectors. Economic responsibilities fell to merchants, while physical development was handled by skilled craftsmen. The priests played a role in the spiritual and moral aspects of society. The New Order failed to maintain this cosmic harmony, as power was centralized authoritarily in the hands of Suharto, who made Cendana the new "palace" and the center of state control. Four supernatural figures were believed to guard and support the Sultan's power: Ratu Kidul, ruler of the southern seas, Sunan Merapi, ruler of the volcano spirits, Sunan Lawu, associated with Majapahit, and Semar, a spiritual figure in wayang (wayang). They provided protection and power in return for the Sultan's offerings (Woodward, 1999).

In addition to the support of four supernatural figures, the Sultan's legitimacy also rests on his supernatural powers and possession of sacred objects. This supernatural power stems from a mystical union with the Creator, seen as a gift that provides divine guidance and an understanding of cosmic laws to maintain harmony and prosperity. Through rituals such as the garebeg, the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth, and the distribution of the blessed gunung (mountains), the Sultan reinforces the palace's legitimacy as a source of blessings for the people. In Sufi tradition, this mystical union is called qutb, the spiritual axis of nature. Therefore, a leader's power depends on spiritual mastery and the ability to conquer desires.

In Javanese divinity, God is understood as "Sangkan Paraning Dumadi," the origin and ultimate goal of all existence. He is the sole source of protection, called Pangeran, upon which humans rely. Sangkan paran is a process of inner self-awareness that demands clarity of mind and heart, and maintains harmony between humans, nature, and God. Union with the Creator is the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey, as an effort to achieve a perfect life. In this view, humans must be able to maintain self-discipline, control emotions, and balance relationships with society and nature in order to achieve peace and harmony. Kejawen, or Javanism, is understood as a Javanese cultural outlook and ethics that emphasizes inner peace, harmony, balance, and acceptance of all events. Rooted in Hindu-Buddhist influences, Javanism encompasses cosmology, mythology, and a system of mystical thought that underpins Javanese social behavior. Kejawen is not a formal religion, but rather a way of life that interprets the natural order as predetermined. This cultural awareness is strong, especially among the priyayi (priyayi) community, serving as a source of cultural identity and pride (Mulder, 1973).

The core belief of the Javanese Kejawen people rests on the existence of invisible spirits, believed to bring harm if disturbed. To maintain inner peace and ward off disaster, they make offerings, or caos dahar, of rice, food, flowers, and incense. Religious practices such as fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, asceticism, penance, and meditation are carried out to strengthen spirituality. Meditation is usually performed in sacred places with the aim of drawing closer to

God and practicing control over desires to achieve inner perfection. Since pre-Hindu times, Javanese society has embraced an animist-dynamist spirituality, believing in unseen supernatural powers. The arrival of Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Islam enriched spiritual practices such as meditation, asceticism, dhikr, and fasting. Kings were viewed as spiritual leaders, while Sufism strongly influenced Javanese religious practices.

In Javanese tradition, there are various types of fasting practices (*pasa* or *tapa*), some aligned with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and others derived from spiritual teachings or Hindu-Buddhist heritage. *Pasa* is closely related to *tapa* because the two are almost always practiced together. These take various forms, such as fasting during Ramadan, *tapa mutih* (eating only rice without salt), *tapa ngrawat* (eating only vegetables for seven days), *pati geni* (not eating food cooked with fire), *ngebleng* (not eating or sleeping), and *kungkum* (water immersion). These practices are guided by spiritual teachers with strong mystical overtones, emphasizing inner experience and feelings over reason, and demanding complete obedience to the teacher. For the Javanese, fasting has three primary meanings: first, as a way to express concern and cleanse the mind; second, as a spiritual practice to strengthen spiritual abilities and establish supernatural communication; and third, as a form of worship in accordance with Islamic law and jurisprudence, especially for students (*santri*) and members of the community accustomed to religious traditions in their environment. Thus, fasting serves a dual purpose: both spiritual and religious.

The Process of Interpreting the Keris as a Symbol of Power in Javanese Culture

Union with God in Javanese tradition can only be achieved if one is able to recognize and interpret natural symbols sacredly. Symbols must be treated with reverence because, without deep awareness, the sacredness of symbols will not have spiritual meaning. For example, wayang puppets, keris (traditional Javanese keris), birds, and heirlooms have deep philosophies; however, without the awareness of their puppeteers or owners, these symbols do not radiate power or blessings. Symbols also appear in life events such as *wetonan* (birth celebrations), fortune telling, or *ngruwat* to ward off disaster as a form of atonement (Muslich, 2016). In Javanese tradition, symbols hold a central place in religiosity and mysticism. For practitioners of mysticism, symbols serve as a means of spiritual journey to achieve perfection of the soul and union with God. Javanese mysticism is not based on a specific doctrine, but rather arises from personal inner experience to understand the origins and ultimate purpose of life (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). The goal is to create eternal harmony between humans, nature, and God as one limitless whole. Uniting oneself with the Creator is seen as the highest peak of spiritual life, as well as a human moral duty to maintain cosmic order and existential harmony (Endraswara, 2018).

The understanding of symbols in Javanese philosophy is heavily influenced by the pantheistic indigenous religion of the Javanese people, as well as by the later teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Koentjaraningrat explains that Javanese ancestors believed that all objects in nature possessed spirits or supernatural powers, both good and evil. Budiono Herusatoto, in his work *Symbolism in Javanese Culture*, divides Javanese religious symbols into three main categories. First, symbols originating from the mythical period or indigenous Javanese culture. Second, symbols influenced by Hindu-Javanese culture, and third, symbols resulting from the fusion of Hindu-Javanese and Islamic-Javanese cultures. These three cultural layers then merged into the traditions and mindsets of contemporary Javanese society. This intersection is possible because both indigenous and immigrant religions speak of the essence of "The Existent," which in a mystical dimension converges in the concept of *sangkan paraning dumadi* as the origin and purpose of existence. Because discussions of "The Existent" are metaphysical, the role of myth becomes very dominant. Peursen explains that myth is not only a story of the past, but is also closely related to rituals, the supernatural world, and the power of the gods. Myths even provide moral direction and guidance for humans in responding to the forces of nature. Therefore, many studies equate mysticism with spirituality. De Jong states that mysticism is at the core of Javanese culture; all Javanese life is suffused with mystical nuances that later crystallized in various spiritual organizations.

The Javanese way of life, influenced by mystical views such as animism and dynamism, makes symbols a primary means of understanding nature and drawing closer to God. However, the meaning of symbols depends heavily on each individual's level of awareness and spiritual capacity.

Symbols lose their value if treated solely as material objects without spiritual meaning. Anton Bakker emphasized that symbols are central, emotional, and existential, but can become empty when separated from life. Toety Heraty added that symbols are multivalent, possessing multiple meanings, and operating in cosmic, oniric (dream) and poetic (creative contemplation) dimensions (Abimanyu, 2021). In the Javanese view, humans are the center of the cosmos and strive to achieve perfection through symbols believed to fulfill inner desires. However, symbols have no meaning without a mystical process; they become profane if not sanctified. True meaning emerges when symbols are connected to spiritual teachings, leading humans to union with God (*manunggaling kawula Gusti*). Awareness of *sangkan paraning dumadi* is the key to maintaining harmony in life, accompanied by ascetic practices to curb *molimo* and *pamrih*.

In Javanese mysticism, worship is understood as a path to the essential, not merely a physical ritual, but rather a conscious awareness to maintain balance with nature, God, and others (K. E. P. Setiawan, 2019). Symbols are understood as images that do not directly represent reality and have multiple meanings (multivalent). Toety Heraty explains that symbols are symptoms with dual intentionality. Therefore, symbols have a cosmic function (related to nature), *onarik* (born from dreams or prophecies), and poetic, namely giving birth to poetry as a form of primordial communication (Herati, 1984).

The symbolism of an object depends on the level of human need and interest. Each individual's understanding of symbols differs, depending on their background and ability to interpret the symbolized object. Not all symbols can be used as a means of communication for humans to understand and unite with nature and God. Symbols will lose their meaning and lack significant power if humans do not strive to fully appreciate what they symbolize. Symbols will even be marginalized from human life. As Anton Baker stated, symbols are central signs for humans that are important, affective, emotional, existential, and even comprehensive and total. However, symbols can become merely tools (without meaning) if they are marginalized from life. Then they become dead, just concepts that then become partial and regional.

The meaning of a symbol is not only based on human needs and interests. It also depends on a person's level of belief and understanding of the totality of the Great Universe and the Little Universe. If a symbol is viewed merely as "possession," it is regional, even partial. However, if a symbol is taken seriously, grounded in self-awareness and understanding of the concept of nature and the realities of life, it has a mystical meaning directly related to aspects of human life. Therefore, the symbol will always have a sacred dimension, not a profane one. The sacred value contained in a symbol can be found if humans control themselves from worldly desires and needs. This is because the most essential human bond is an awareness of the *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*. *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* is the most important totality of human life and its harmony must be maintained. According to Simuh, such activity is called a mystical experience (Musman, 2017). Because mysticism is the belief that humans can communicate directly, or even unite with God (*Kasunyataan Agung*), through inner responses in meditation. Thus, symbols in Javanese philosophy are not merely symbols, but have become teachings or doctrines that must be believed. For Javanese people, symbols are a medium that can lead humans to their spiritual goals. Therefore, believing that the existence of symbols is sacred is very necessary, even mandatory. If humans desire a true life (*sejatining urip*), which can unite themselves, nature, and God (Chakim & Putra, 2023).

The meaning of symbols in Javanese culture is largely determined by human needs, level of awareness, and spiritual understanding. Each individual can interpret them differently depending on the depth of their innermost being and their beliefs. Without complete appreciation, symbols become mere objects that lose their sacred power, even transforming into partial and profane concepts. However, when approached with spiritual sincerity and an awareness of the harmony between the greater universe and the lesser universe, symbols will present a mystical dimension that connects humans with nature and God. In the Javanese perspective, symbols are not merely signs, but rather a path to the perfection of life and the unity of God's subjects. Symbolization in Javanese culture is a cognitive process that transforms experience and knowledge into meaningful representations, both of the visible and the invisible. This process does not always follow the categories of language or logical reality, but rather arises from intuition and spiritual belief. Therefore, symbols are closely related to Javanese religion and tradition, including prophecies that

serve as life guidelines in facing the "crazy era." Myths are considered the truth of the greater universe that influences the lesser universe, so symbols can take the form of sacred objects or utterances that possess power. In general, symbols are divided into two: verbal symbols such as prophecies and poetry, and nonverbal symbols such as heirlooms or natural phenomena that are considered sacred and full of mystical power (Woodward, 1999).

In Javanese mystical traditions, divination plays a crucial role as a guide to life. It takes various forms, including tattoos, mantras, primbon (primbon), and even weton (traditional Chinese calendars), which are used to predict a person's character, fortune, or the good and bad omens of birth. Divination also encompasses interpretations of body structure and natural signs as signs of the times. For Javanese people, life is viewed as a temporary journey from one's origin to another, thus divination serves as a means of understanding the meaning of life. Divinations about good and bad days are used to determine the best times for planting, traveling, marriage, and other important decisions in daily life (Pranoto, 2000).

Symbolism of the Keris in Javanese Culture of Power and Politics

The symbolism of the keris in Javanese culture is not only seen as an heirloom or traditional weapon, but also as a representation of the legitimacy of power and political authority. The keris becomes a symbolic medium laden with philosophical, spiritual, and social meanings, inherent in the leadership practices of kings and the Javanese political elite. The presence of the keris is often interpreted as a sign of authority, protection, and moral legitimacy within traditional power structures (Ismail, 2025). In addition to verbal symbols such as prophecies and advice in the form of poetry, Javanese society also highly values non-verbal symbols, usually manifested through heirloom objects. Such symbols are believed to possess supernatural powers that can protect their owners. Budiono explains that non-verbal symbols are often related to heirlooms or certain animals believed to possess spiritual energy, such as the yoni on a keris or the mystical meaning of the turtledove. In Javanese tradition, belief in the supernatural powers of the keris is inseparable from the concept of pancer, namely the origin or spiritual core of the heirloom. This pancer serves as a fundamental reference in the process of making a keris and is passed down from generation to generation as a primary guideline. Each heirloom keris has its own pancer, such as the Nagasasra keris, the Ngeraja keris, the Sangkelat keris, the Pandawa Cinarita keris, and the Paniwe keris. Each pancer symbolizes a different character and strength. Therefore, each empu or keris craftsman creates a heirloom with holy intentions and noble goals. No empu makes a keris for negative purposes, because for them, keris creation is a form of devotion to maintaining harmony and safety of human life, or what is known as mamayu hayuning bawono (AG, 1993). In the work, Linus divides heirloom keris into three main groups, which are based on the yoni energy and spiritual function of each keris, so that each category reflects a specific purpose in the practices and beliefs attached to the keris as a cultural heritage and spiritual symbol for its owner, namely:

First, heirloom keris containing yoni wahyu are created based on the level of spiritual awareness and civilization of Javanese society. The esoteric power contained within them has varying hierarchies. The depth of this wahyu is greatly influenced by the prayers of the master during the creation process, which is usually adjusted to the position or social role of the person ordering the keris. Therefore, keris with yoni wahyu have different functions depending on the spiritual level and status of their owner. Some types of yoni wahyu known in the heirloom treasury include wahyu ratu, wahyu putih, wahyu begawan, wahyu keraton, wahyu wirausaha, wahyu usaha, wahyu nakhoda, wahyu menteri, wahyu pujangga, wahyu nujum, and others.

Second, heirloom keris that have a yoni mantra sakti source directly from the spiritual power and supernatural powers of the empu. The higher the level of practice and supernatural powers of the empu, the greater the power of the yoni keris produced. In the process of its creation, the empu begins with a ritual and the recitation of a special mantra. One of them reads: "Aum sembahing anantha, tingghalana de trilokasarana, awignham astu, insun empu ... tan awacana, de nirarthaka darpa, dang dahana hagni niraweh sara sudharma." The mantra is a prayer that there are no obstacles during the creation process and that the keris that is born brings blessings and real benefits to its owner.

Third, heirloom keris with animal-like yoni are created by adopting the symbolic power of certain animals considered to possess special energy. Not all animals are used; only a few are believed to be sacred and possess metaphysical powers. Examples of yoni from the animal kingdom

that are often used include dragons (such as the golden dragon and the dragon king), the barong lion, the striped tiger, the white tiger, the snake, and even the elephant. For example, a keris smith who wants to create a Nagasasra keris will invoke the yoni from the spiritual meaning of a dragon as a symbol of great power (Setiadi & Kusumatatwa, 2021).

The work of a keris master demands expertise that is not only technical but also spiritual. A keris to be considered perfect must exude a blend of three main elements. First, the technical value is evident in the variety of shapes and alloys, indicating that the crafting process requires high technique and precision. Second, the artistic element, namely the visual beauty of the keris, reflected in the details of each part, which remain stunning even after hundreds of years. Third, the magical element, namely spiritual power or supernatural powers that are invisible to the naked eye and can only be felt by those who have undergone profound mystical practices. The expertise of a keris master is often measured by his ability to create pamor that has unique characteristics and is not found in the work of other masters (Wijayatno & Sudrajat, 2011).

In the Javanese keris tradition, each master craftsman (empu) has a distinctive style of pamor processing, known as penanggungan. Renowned masters are typically able to create unique, previously unseen pamor. The pamor's name is derived from the visual form or natural character that inspired it. For example, if the pamor's pattern resembles a dried coconut leaf dragged across dusty ground, forming a distinctive trail, the pamor is called Blarak Sineret. If it resembles a kendhuru leaf, the pamor is called Ron Kendhuru, and so on. This reflects the empu's reliance on nature as a primary source of creativity. Most pamor are inspired by motifs of leaves, trees, and other natural elements. The pamor-making process is not carried out haphazardly, but rather considers several aspects, including the customer's request, the purpose of the keris, and the master's intuition and artistic taste. Thus, each pamor reflects a blend of art, spirituality, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, while demonstrating the master's ability to transform natural inspiration into meaningful and aesthetic symbols (Darmojo, 2024). Therefore, each pamor on a keris is not merely visually beautiful, but also carries symbolic and spiritual meaning that aligns with the purpose of creating the heirloom keris. Pamor serves as a reflection of the owner's philosophy, strength, and spiritual identity, while also serving as a means of conveying the values inherent in Javanese traditions and beliefs. Thus, pamor unites aesthetics, symbolism, and spirituality into a harmonious and meaningful whole.

The Relevance of the Symbolism of Heirloom Keris in Political Behavior in Indonesia

In a situation where almost all aspects of national and state life are experiencing rifts and chaos, the people really miss the presence of a leader who...wise, fair, and able to resolve problems without creating new ones. These hopes are embodied in the ideal figure known in Javanese culture as Satria Piningit, a leader who is democratic, courteous, and sincere in carrying out his responsibilities. The presence of Satria Piningit is considered both a historical inevitability and part of cosmic law. This concept isn't limited to a single individual, ethnic group, or religion. Anyone, from any background, has the opportunity to become the Ratu Adil or Satria Piningit, and their emergence is not bound by a specific time or place. Therefore, every Indonesian president who appears during a critical moment is considered a Satria Piningit during their tenure. History records that after independence from colonialism, Sukarno emerged (Rusmulyani, 2020). Following the fall of the Old Order following the PKI rebellion, Suharto emerged. After 32 years of leadership and a monetary crisis, the Reformation era began with Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati. However, the crisis was not over, so a direct presidential election was held. Unexpectedly, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was elected president for the 2004–2009 term (Hisyam, 2025).

In Javanese cosmology, the figure of Satria Piningit is believed to appear every time the nation experiences a major crisis or enters an era of chaos known as the Kalabendu era. Its appearance is interpreted as part of cosmic law, namely its presence to reorganize the order of life towards the Kertayuga era, namely a time when prosperity, peace, justice, and mutual cooperation are re-established without causing harm to any party. Experts interpreting the Ronggowarsito prophecy divide Satria Piningit into several figures as follows:

First, Satria Kinunjara Murwa Kuncara was a leader who experienced detention or restraint, just as Sukarno did. Before becoming Indonesia's first president, Sukarno was in and out of prison repeatedly fighting for independence. His oratory skills and strong self-confidence made him

globally influential, particularly within the anti-colonial Non-Aligned Movement, while also emerging as a respected third-world leader.

Second, Satria Mukti Wibawa Kesandung Kesampar depicts a highly authoritative leader who ultimately fell due to various mistakes or irregularities. This figure is often associated with Suharto. During the New Order era, Indonesia achieved food stability and significant economic growth. However, due to his authoritarian leadership style, widespread corruption, and centralized power in the hands of cronies and family, public trust collapsed, and he was forced from power.

Third, Satria Jinumput Sumela Atur is a leader who ascends to power suddenly to fill a vacancy, without going through a direct election process. This is illustrated by B.J. Habibie, who succeeded Soeharto after his resignation. Despite successfully overseeing the transition period and implementing initial reforms, his position was still shaken by demonstrations, and his accountability report was subsequently rejected by the House of Representatives (DPR).

Fourth, Satria Lelana Tapa Ngrame depicts a wandering leader who travels the world to save the nation from crisis. This figure is associated with Abdurrahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur, who, during the early Reformation era, sought to restore international trust. However, due to his spontaneous and controversial political style, his reign ended before a full term.

Fifth, Satria Piningit Hamong Tuwuh is a leader who was long sidelined or "secluded" by the previous regime, then rose to power with popular support. Megawati Soekarnoputri is considered representative of this figure, as her family was silenced during the New Order. Upon gaining popular legitimacy, she formed a gotong royong cabinet to emerge from the crisis, although the transformational results were insignificant. Sixth, Satria Boyong Pambukaning Gapura represents a leader who opened the gates of a new era. This figure is commonly associated with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), the first directly elected president. He established a democratic system, the rule of law, and limited the role of the military in politics. He opened public access as widely as possible, although he did not fully enjoy the fruits of these structural reforms. Seventh, Satria Pinandita Sinisihan Wahyu is a leader with profound spiritual and religious strength, an ideal leader believed to lead the nation to true prosperity. This myth is rooted in the prophecies of King Joyoboyo, a 12th-century king of Kediri who was considered clairvoyant and wise, and whose predictions remain a spiritual and political guide for Javanese society to this day (Samah et al., 2019).

Ki Sujiwo Tejo, in his writing "Beware of Joyoboyo's 7th Prophecy," mentions the emergence of "rats pithi anoto baris," which is interpreted as a sign of the emergence of a wave of resistance from the people of the archipelago from various corners. This is linked to the chaos of the 2009 Election due to the chaotic DPT (Voters List), conflicting vote results between legislative candidates, and rampant fraud at polling stations. However, the various prophecies in Jangka Jayabaya are essentially symbolic and based on mystical interpretations, so that the time and place of their occurrence cannot be determined concretely. These prophecies are better understood as a form of warning and an inner mirror so that humans are able to respond to the current situation wisely, rather than fostering anxiety. In Jayabaya's view, the journey of human civilization will pass through a dark period called the Kalabendu era, marked by moral decline, economic greed, legal injustice, and social chaos. However, after this phase, the Kertayuga era will emerge, namely the period of recovery and the return of order. An important symbol of this cycle of times is depicted in the story of Kembang Seruni, which is presented to King Jayabaya as a symbol of the coming era of destruction. Kalabendu is described as being born when humans forget their true selves, worship power and wealth, and destroy the cosmic order between God, nature, and humans (Sholikhin, 2011).

In Javanese mystical thought, humans are understood as a microcosm (*jagad cilik*) that has a direct connection with the macrocosm (*jagad ageng*) and the Living. Through external self-control, humans are believed to be able to awaken inner strength to align feelings with a higher truth, namely the sound of silence (*sabda tanpa suara*). When this cosmic harmony is violated, *goro-goro* in the form of natural disasters arise as a consequence of this imbalance. Therefore, humans are obliged to preserve nature and maintain a total spiritual connection with the universe, because humans have the intuitive ability to unite with the source of life (*manunggaling kawula Gusti*) (Harini, 2019). Inner silence is a form of cosmic awareness to maintain the balance of God, nature, and humans. It must be acknowledged that myths have a strong role in the spiritual construction of Indonesian society and are inseparable from the journey of its religious history. From the era of animism-dynamism to the development of Hinduism-Buddhism and Islam-Christianity, belief in myths has continued to exist

as a framework for understanding reality. One of them is the belief in the arrival of the Kalabendu era or the Mad Era, as described in Ranggawarsita's *Serat Kalatidha*. The text describes the collapse of the state's dignity, the destruction of the moral order, the emergence of leaders who are no longer authoritative, the spread of hypocrisy, the glorification of evil and the discarding of truth. In such chaotic conditions, humans are tested by joining the tide of evil in order to survive, or remaining sane and alert in order to gain God's love (Mulder, 1973).

Conclusion

In Javanese tradition, the keris is not simply an heirloom, but a symbol that unites power, identity, and spiritual dimensions. It combines sacred, political, and cosmological elements, making it an integral part of social and cultural life. From the royal era to the contemporary era, the keris is seen as *Mustikaning Eling*, a reminder of humanity's divine origins and a bond between the subjects and the Lord. Through the keris, Javanese people affirm metaphysical beliefs while strengthening social and political legitimacy, especially for kings or sultans, who are considered God's representatives on earth. The keris becomes a symbol of authority and majesty because the process of making it is not merely technical, but involves spiritual practices, asceticism, and inner communication between the master and the owner. From this, the keris acquires "*sipat kandel*," a spiritual power believed to bring protection, authority, and cosmic harmony. The dominance of the palace in keris production and ownership strengthens its position as a center of culture and political legitimacy, allowing the keris's function to transcend the personal realm and become strategic. Although modernization and urbanization have transformed many Javanese traditions, the keris remains an important heirloom in the community's collective memory. It serves as a link between the past and the present, between humans and metaphysical forces, and between external and internal power. Thus, the keris reflects the Javanese philosophy of life, which emphasizes balance, harmony, and spiritual awareness as the foundation for leadership, ethics, and civilization. The keris is not simply a tool or a symbol, but a complex representation of values, spirituality, and legitimacy inherent in every aspect of Javanese life.

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