

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SACRED PLACES FROM “THE TRIAD” OF MENDUT TEMPLE – PAWON TEMPLE – BOROBUDUR TEMPLE : PERSPECTIVE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SEMIOTIC

Niken Wirasanti^{*)}, Timbul Haryono^{*)}, Sutikno^{**)}

^{*)} Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University

^{**)} Faculty of Geography, Gadjah Mada University

wirasanti.niken@gmail.com

Abstrak

Letak Candi Mendut - Candi Pawon -Candi Borobudur berada dalam satu garis (imajiner) yang dikenal dengan tiga serangkai. Rangkaian tersebut merupakan sistem tanda yang oleh masyarakat Mataram Kuna abad IX Masehi diberi makna sesuai dengan konvensi yang berlaku pada waktu itu.

Membuktikan ketiga candi yang merupakan sistem tanda dengan sebuah makna dapat dijelaskan dengan pendekatan semiotika struktural (Ferdinan de Saussure) yang mendasarkan pada elemen- elemen semiotika yaitu tanda (penanda-petanda), dan poros tanda (sintagmatik dan paradigmatic). Elemen tanda dari lingkungan yang dapat dirunut yaitu penanda ruang, elevasi, jenis tanah, dan sumber air; sedangkan elemen tanda dari candi yaitu arsitektur, arca, dan relief cerita. Tanda tersebut tidak dapat dilihat secara terpisah-pisah tetapi dilihat dalam relasi dengan tanda yang lain dalam poros sintagmatik dan paradigmatic. Untuk itu urutan tanda dimulai dari Candi Mendut-Candi Pawon-Candi Borobudur yang tersusun dalam susunan tertentu (jukstaposisi) dengan masing-masing makna simbolisnya.

Tanda-tanda pada Candi Mendut – Candi Pawon – Candi Borobudur yaitu lokasi, tanah-batuan, sumber air, elevasi, arca, dan relief cerita, tersusun dalam rangkaian yang memperlihatkan sebuah struktur yang bermakna. Susunan tersebut bersifat linier yakni mengikuti aturan tertentu. Apabila aturan penataan tersebut berubah maka maknanyapun akan berbeda. Hal inilah yang membuktikan bahwa ketiga candi tersebut membentuk kesatuan rangkaian perlambang yang mengacu pada makna simbolis berdasarkan konsep ajaran agama Buddha pada masa Mataram Kuna abad IX Masehi.

Kata kunci : tiga serangkai candi, Mataram Kuna IX-X Masehi, ajaran Buddha Mahayana, semiotika.

1. Introduction

Research on Mendut, Pawon, and Borobudur temples in relation to their founding figures, stories in the reliefs, architectures, and religious backgrounds will be continuously conducted in the future.

This indicates that there are many potential cases to examine from these three temples. One of the interesting problems is the position of the Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temples which lie in one (imaginary) line from the northeast to the west.

They are often called the triad in one straight line, and they also have specific meanings.

The meanings are often associated with Waisak ritual (Waicakha) which is held annually from Mendut temple until Borobudur temple. Nevertheless, current Vesak ritual is not necessarily similar to the rituals held in the ninth century AD. There are no sources mentioned about the information of the rituals procedures which always utilized these three temples as a series of Buddhist rituals.

China news mentions that Buddhism grew and

developed in the area of Borobudur around the eighth century AD pioneered by a Buddhist priest named Yoh-na p'o-to-lo or Jnanabhadra (Poesponegoro, 2009., Munoz, 2009., Raharjo, 2011). A specific article about a religion of Mahayana Buddha in Borobudur temple has been examined in Nurhadi Magetsari's dissertation (1982). However, the explanation of meanings of the triad of temples based on the philosophical foundation of Buddhism in the eighth – tenth century AD has not yet given a satisfied conclusion. One of the obstacles is the difficulty in identifying Pawon temple which is located between Mendut temple and Borobudur temple. In fact, they are located in one straight line. The most common reason is the lack of archeological data regarding the excavation results or inscription. Therefore, Pawon temple has almost never been discussed in the discussion of the triad of temples.

Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur are sacred places, and each of them is separated with Elo river, Progo river, and a lake. These three temples are located on the different altitudes which causes different meanings as well. There are some signs from Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur and a set of signs from the environment which are interrelated to establish a sign system.

This paper will examine the structure of meaning existing behind the arrangement of three temples arranged in one straight line. Semiotic approach (Ferdinand de Saussure) was used in this research. Therefore, it is the meanings from the three sacred places can be explained as a narration which reveals people's knowledge and methods at that time in building such sacred places.

2. Methodology

Analyzing the sign of the sacred space Mendut-Pawon-Borobudur refers to semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure who sees the sign as a meeting between "signifier" and "signified". The signs of environmental components and signs on the temple interpreted by society as a sacred on the assumptions that the temple environment established at a location reflects the activity at those places. The relationship between signifier and signified is conventional or agreement based on the religious knowledge of communities (Buddhist Mahayana).

To analyze the meaning of the relation Mendut-Pawon-Temple -Borobudur, the signs system of the

temple environment is analyzed in a way as is done by the linguists (Ahimsa-Putra. 1999, Piliang., 2012., Barthes, 2012). The system is like the grammar of the language, analogies the components forming sign of the temple environment with the language (grammar). To express its symbolic meaning, the three analyzed based on two axis signs: syntagmatic and paradigmatic.

3. The Signs of A Sacred Place in Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur Environment

A temple building which is located on an environment shows that there is regularity in choosing a location. Such regularity is indicated through a number of sign elements from environment which can be traced from the signifier of spaces, elevation, type of soil, and water sources. The sign elements of temple include architecture, statues, and reliefs of stories.

a. Sacredness of Space

Natural Phenomena around Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur are marked with Menoreh mountain in the west side to the south, Sundoro, Sumbing, Telomoyo, Andong mountains are lined in the northwest side to the north side. Furthermore, from the east side to the south side, there are Merbabu and Merapi volcanoes. Among these mountains, there are a line of hills. In the valley between volcanoes and hills, there is a vast plain which eventually chosen to build the triad temples of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur. Soekmono (1981) has argued that in the circle of the mountains and the hills stretches a vast plain of Kedu in which Kunjarakunja mentioned in inscriptions of Canggal, an area surrounded by sacred rivers. Nieuwenkamp (Bernet - Kempers, 1976) also argues that it is like a lotus floating in a pond in the middle of a garden in Java island.

b. Sacredness of Elevation

The triad of temples looks like located in one straight line. However, a side view (cross-section) shows a difference of elevation (topography) of each temple. Mendut temple is at an elevation of 230 meter above sea level, and Pawon temple is at an elevation of 240 meter above sea level.

Both temples head for Borobudur temple which is at the top hill at an elevation of 296 meter above

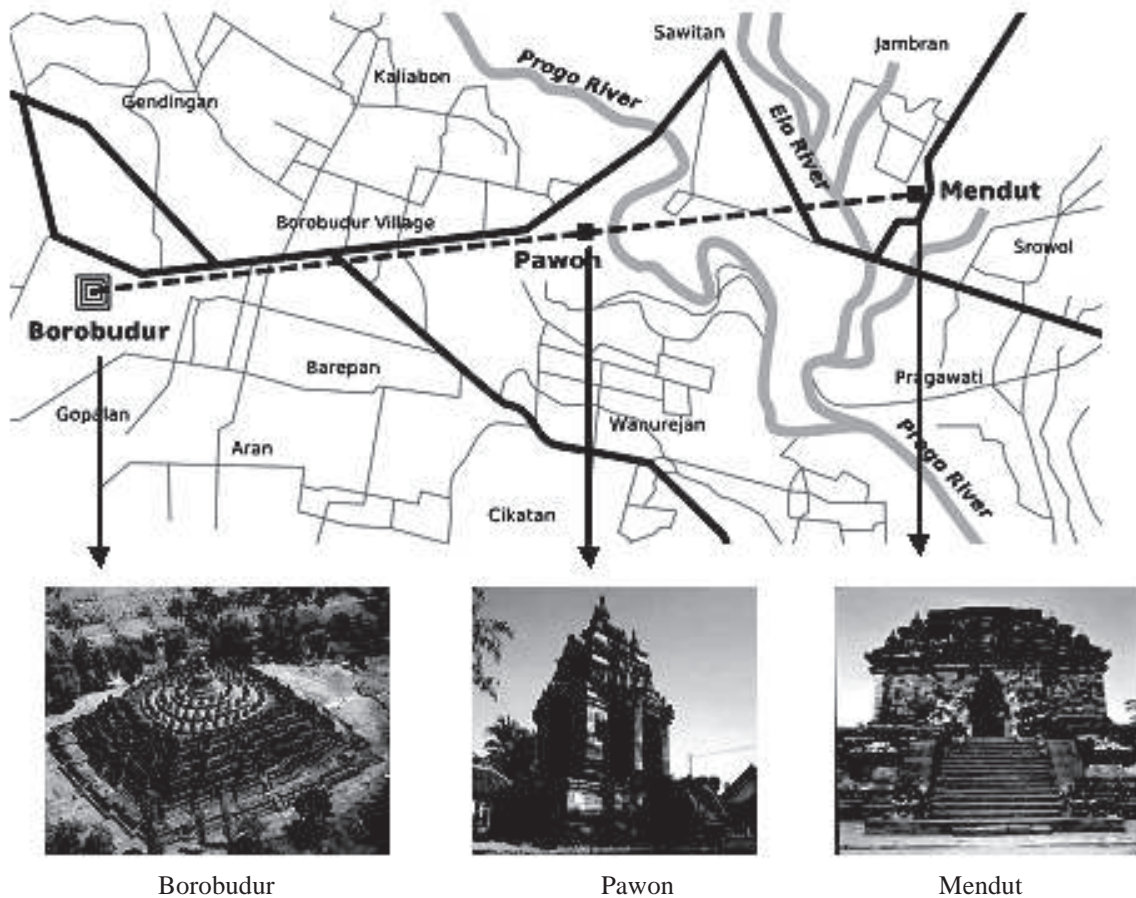


Figure 1 : The Imaginary Line of the triad of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temple
(Source : John N. Micsik, 2002., A.J. Bernet Kempers,1976)

sea level (figure 1 and 2). Observed from the elevation, it indicates that Mendut temple is in the lowest position, the plain, Pawon temple is in a higher position, and Borobudur temple is in the highest. This typical placement indicates religious messages in relation to the spiritual journey of human to achieve spiritual perfection.

c. Sacredness of Soil

Type of the soil is another significant sign located around the temples. The type of soil around Borobudur is a mixture of brown latosol and grey regosol, while around Mendut and Pawon is grey-brown regosol (Murwanto,2011). This type of soil is relatively fertile and potential to support agriculture and settlement.

A research of IGN Anom (1997) proves that types of soil for temples in Central Java and Yogyakarta are Brahmana, Ksatria, and Vaisya. These criteria are based on the color and the texture of soil as written in *Manasara* script. Based on such criteria, the type of soil around Borobudur is Ksatria which has sand texture and mixture of mud or clay. Soil is a symbol of survival. According to Dillistone (2006), the sacredness of soil exists in all agrarian society. Soil is referred to as Ibu Pertiwi, and rituals performed are symbols to sustain human life. This is in accordance with one of Canggal inscription dated 732 AD which depicts soil fertility in Java Island by mentioning and abundant agricultural products, especially rice (Casparis,1986., Poesponegoro,2009., Poerbatjaraka, 1982).

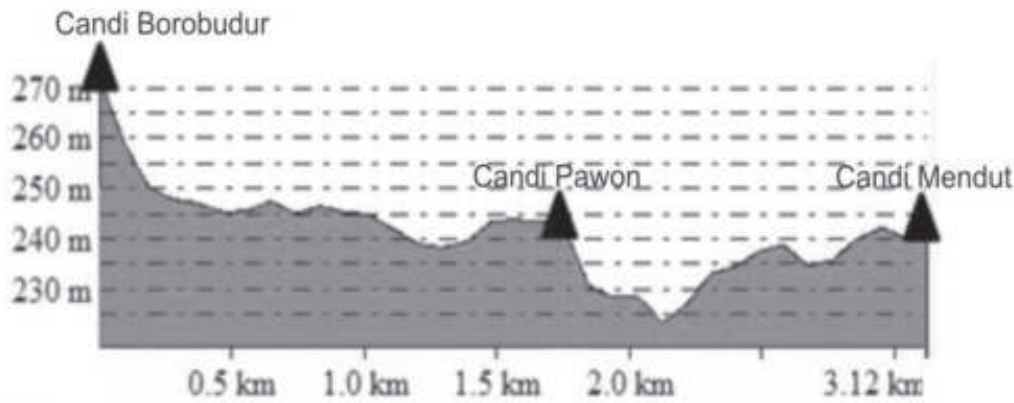


Figure 2 : Side View Profile of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur Temple
(Drawn by : Rakhmat Fithri Adi,2014)

d. Sacredness of Water Source

Having springs from Sindoro and Sumbing volcanoes, the main rivers, namely Progo, Merawu, Tangsi flow in the region of south Kedu. Elo river flow from Merbabu volcano and Andong river. Pabelan, Keji, Blongkeng rivers are from the southwest of Merapi volcano. Also, Sileng river flows from the rthern slope of Menoreh mountains. These rivers flow to Borobudur area and continue to flow to the southeast through the eastern slope of Menoreh mountains until the Indian Ocean (Murwanto,2011).

Having its upstream at Mount Merbabu, Elo river is written in Tuk Mas inscription (approximately 578 AD or the mid of seventh century AD), which is defined as a holy water source as Gangga river in India. This inscription is carved on a piece of stone in the upstream of Elo river in Lebak village, Grabag Subdistrict (Magelang). Such abundant potential of water source and clean water owned by Elo river is a hierophanic event and people at that time believed that it was a sign of fertilizing.

The existence of a number of rivers and springs in the area of Borobudur is a potential sign of an abundant water source which support agricultural activities and settlements. In addition to being close to major rivers such as Progo and Elo river, Borobudur area is believed to have a lake. The existence of this lake is mentioned by Nieuwenkamp (1931) whose theory mentions that Borobudur is analogous to a lotus floating on a lake. This theory has also been proven by a study of Murwanto (in 1996 and 2011).

Using geomorphological and geological approaches, he finds that there was a basin known as a lake environment. This basin still became an issue until 1271 AD and ended in 1288 AD as indicated with volcanic materials consisting pyroclastic deposits and thick sediments which covered Borobudur Lake and made it dried and turned it into a plain until now.

e. Sacredness of Temple Architecture

Temple is a personification of a holy mountain. In the myths of Hindus-Buddhists, a holy mountain is located in the center of the world. Mountain always exists in the description which mentions a relationship between the sky and the earth. Therefore, people believe that mountain is in the center of the world (Soediman, 1991., Lundquist,1993., Santiko, 1995., Mangunwijaya, 1988., Eliade, 2002).

In some cultures, the sacredness of a mountain is often mentioned in various myths that mountain is located on the center of the world such as in Meru, India. Hindu-Buddhist cosmology describes that: 1) people believe that a holy place is located in the center of the world, 2) temple is a replica of the cosmic mountain; therefore, it is a connector between the earth and the sky, 3) the temple foundations are portraits of subordinate area (Acharya, 1927., Soediman, 1991). Because it is located in the center of cosmos, a temple is believed as a place, house, or resident of god (*dewalaya*). Temple architecture is a realization of the hierarchical structure the cosmos. Arranged in terraced structure, the yard of the temple is an expression of mountain slopes.

Therefore, climbing the terrace of the temple's yard is analogous to making a journey to the center of the world.

Another sign in the temple is statue. There is a statue inside of Mendut temple which portrays a figure of Dhyani Buddha. It is often associated as *Shakyamuni* (known as Buddha in the history of Sidharta Gautama) with his *dharmackramudra* gesture which symbolizes giving knowledge of dharma.

The chamber of Pawon temple is an empty state and there has been much debate on whether it is really empty or an artifact disappeared before the restoration in 1903. The lack of archeological data about Pawon temple is a major obstacle in interpreting its role in between Mendut and Borobudur temple.

A signifier of Borobudur temple can be traced from the shape of the building which is usually associated with a *mandala*, a square diagram

describing cosmos in three-dimensional shape (Bernet kempers, 1976). Another signifier is a relief of the story carved in *Kamadatu* stage (story of Kaemawibangga) and *Rupadatu* stage (story of Lalitavistara, Gandavyuha, and Badracari) which symbolically become source of knowledge for *bhakta*. Such reliefs of stories become a part of ritual process *bhaktas* who attempt to obtain spiritual knowledge and eventually reach a perfect enlightenment (Stutterheim,1956., Kandahjaya, 1995). However, the meanings of these stories cannot be interpreted individually but are still related to the statue of Dhyani Buddha which is placed on the wall and balustrade of *rupadatu* in a meditative posture.

A set of signs of environment and a set of signs of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temples are designed to represent a structured sign system. The collinear design of these three temples has symbolical meaning which represents the sacred place of worship (Figure 3).

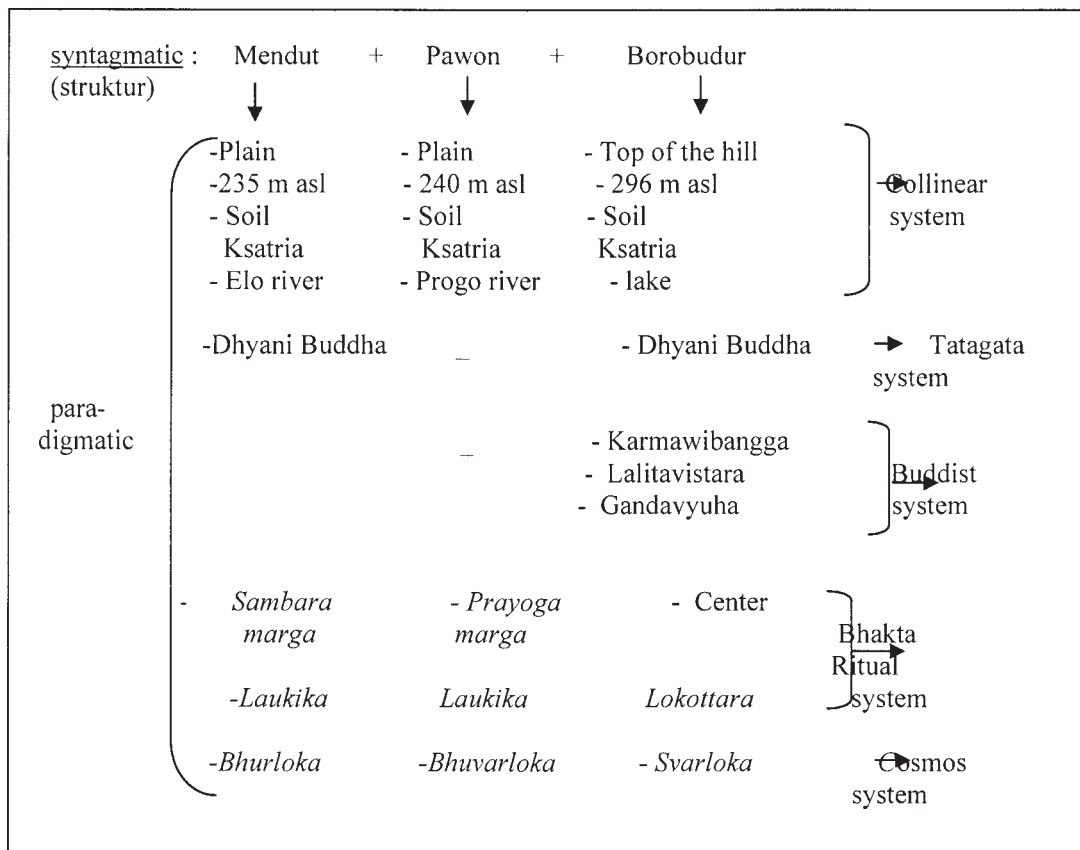


Figure 3 : Sacred Space System in Temple Environment

In the semiotic approach, structural properties in the temples and the environment are considered to produce a single meaning or not dynamic system of sign. In fact, dynamic sign, whose meanings can shift, produce tiered meanings leading to connotation. Furthermore, Roland Barthes (Ekomadjo, 1999., Hoed, 2011) develops structural semiotic model that a signified can produce another signifier which establishes a system of sign whose interpretation is multi-interpretable.

4. The Significance of Sacred Space in The Triad Temples

These three temples become a symbol that represents a structure because they consist of elements of signs which are interrelated to one another creating a unity. Such structural characteristic (Ferdinand de Saussure) can be developed to denotative and connotative (Roland Barthes) meanings in order to produce a hierarchy of meaning.

The location of Mendut temple is at an elevation of 230 meters above sea level facing Pawon temple at an elevation of 240 meters above sea level. Both temples face the east side of Borobudur temple which is at an elevation of 296 meters above sea level. This becomes a signifier of ritual orientation toward Borobudur temple as the final journey of *bhaktas* to reach Buddhism. The location of Mendut and Pawon temples at the plain signifies worldly matter (*laukika*), which is a holy place to prepare to reach the destination of perfection as Buddha. The order of the temple from the low to the high location (Figure 2) represents a relation of temples which are arranged based on the syntagmatic order (Figure 3).

The ways that *bhaktas* should take to reach the perfection are divided into two. First, they should go through the path of preparation. In Buddhist, this path of preparation is differentiated into two: *Sambharamarga* and *Prayogamarga* which represent worldly environment (*laukika*). *Sambaramarga* is a preparation place to obtain religious knowledge which is identical with Mendut temple. In the chamber of Mendut temple, there is a Buddha statue with a hand gesture named *dharmacakramudra*, (a posture which symbolizes knowledge of dharma). At the bottom of the throne of the Buddhist statue, a signifier of a wheel between two deer is carved. This signifier has symbolical

meaning about the first teaching of Buddhist from the Buddha, Sidharta Gautama (Shakyamuni) in deer park, Sarnat, near Banares (India). The wheel is a signifier known in Hinduism and Buddhism that has a meaning of regularity in cosmic law. It means that the wheels of life keep turning, and there is no power can stop it. This is in line with the Buddhist consciousness saying that human is bound with three biological phases: born, finding self-identity, and die in perfection. This lead to an interpretation that Mendut temple is a place for *bhakta* to prepare and obtain knowledge of way of life that must be taken to achieve nirvana in the future life.

Second, the next ritual journey is heading to Pawon temple which is also called the path of preparation (*Prayogamarga*). The Pawon word itself consists of the word *pa-awu-an*, and the word *awu* (ash) is related to ashes of a dead body (Wirjosuparto, 1958). Many opinions have interpreted that there are dead-body ashes buried on the temple. This opinion is difficult to prove due to the lack of archeological data which can prove buried dead-body ashes in Pawon temple. Furthermore, this opinion obscures the meaning of the triad of the temple as a unit of sign system.

The name of Pawon meaning kitchen which is still related to the ashes is a sign system which have a denotative meaning. The sign system is a human product that can be changed continuously by the society as needed. Therefore, the word Pawon is defined more broadly as the door to reach perfection in Borobudur temple. The word Pawon (*awu* = ash) can also be defined as a place to burn something that can produce ashes. Tantrayana's teaching (Pot, 1966., Santiko, 1987) defines that ash is identical with as a place to burn dead-body or become a cemetery. This place signifies as a place to losing *ahangkara*, the loss of materialism and individualism. In this burning-place, the physical body will disappear and the spirit or the soul will be clean to reach the soul of universe. Hence, this place becomes a border between worldly and transcendent nature. This will provide an understanding about the role of Pawon temple as a border or a door to enter sacred spaces of Borobudur temple. In regard to such matter, Pawon is a signifier of preparation place (*prayogamarga*) for Buddhists, meaning that in such place all materialism and individualism will disappear to reach perfection (*mahaparinirwana*) as a Buddhist. This

path should be taken through 10 levels, *dacabodhisatwabhumi*, at Borobudur temple.

After going through to both paths, it is continued to the next levels until reaching the tenth level, *lokotara* (above of the world), and is identical with Borobudur temple (Casparis, 1986., Wirjosuparto, 1958., Bernet Kempers, 1976). The signified of above the world can be traced through the location of Borobudur which is on top of the hill (figure 2).

The plain position (Mendut temple – Pawon temple) to the top of the hill (Borobudur temple) is a signifier which means a ritual symbol of a journey to a center of the world (cosmic center). A journey to 10 levels of Borobudur temple signified as an easy journey which can be made easily but sometimes through a long, climbing and heavy road. According to Mangunwijaya (1988), a journey to the holy places (center of the world) can be defined as an attempt of a human to purify and release himself from worldly matters. It means that human should make a journey that is full of struggle and self-restraint so as to purify, be silent, and free from form, lust and desire. In the highest level (*arupadatu*) of Borobudur temple, this is realized in a circle without any reliefs of stories which symbolizes formless and clean.

5. Conclusion

Some important matters can be concluded from the analysis of sacred spaces of the temples and environment with a semiotic approach as follows:

1. By examining sacred spaces of the temples and environment by using a semiotic approach, we can arrange the functions of the temples which are related to surrounding value system. This is interesting because temples and their environments reflect certain value system that developed at that time such value of knowledge, and value of socio-cultural system.
2. Examining relation among signs of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temples using a semiotic approach will help to explain the attempt of Hindu Mataram society in understanding sacred signs surrounding which are arranged into a unit of sign system to which people give meanings based on the social convention.
3. Signs in Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temples include location, soil-rock, water source, elevation, statues, relief of stories which are

arranged in a syntagmatic order which indicates a structure.

4. Syntagmatic order can be seen from the arrangement of Mendut – Pawon – Borobudur temples in a certain order (juxtaposition). Such order is linear based on certain rules. If the rules change, the meanings will also change. This indicates that these three temples establish a unit of symbolic chain which refers to a scope of meaning based on the Buddhist concept in the era of Hindu Mataram in the ninth to tenth century AD.

References

- Acharya, Prasanka Kumar, 1927, *Indian Architecture, Manasara-Silpasaatra*, the Oxford University Press
- Ahimsa-Putra, Heddy Shri, 2002, *Tanda, Simbol, Budaya dan Ilmu Budaya*, Dialog Ilmiah Bulanan, FIB UGM, unpublished
- _____, 2006, *Strukturalisme Levi-Strauss Mitos dan Karya Sastra*, Yogyakarta, Kepel Press.
- Anom I.G.N, 1977, *Keterpaduan Aspek Teknis dan Aspek Keagamaan dalam Pendirian Candi Periode Jawa Tengah (Studi Kasus Candi Utama Sewu)*, *Disertasi*, UGM.
- Barthes, Roland, 2012, *Elemen of Semiologi*, terj, Yogyakarta: Jalasutra.
- Bernet- Kempers, A.J., 1976, *Ageless Borobudur*, Servire Wassenaar
- Boechari., 1980, *Candi dan Lingkungannya*, *PIA*, pp. 219-341
- Casparis, J.G de, 1986, "Same Notes on Relation Between Central and Local Government in Ancient Jawa", *Southeast Asia In the 9th to 14th Centurist Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore*, pp. 49-93.
- Darmosoetopo, Riboet, 1997, *Sima dan Bangunan di Jawa Abad IX-X Masehi*, *Disertasi*, Yogyakarta, Penerbit Pena.
- Dillistone, F.W, 2006., *the Power of Symbols*, Yogyakarta Yayasan Kanisius.

- Ekomadyo, Agus,S., 1999., Pendekatan Semiotika dalam Kajian terhadap Arsitektur Tradisional di Indonesia, *Naskah Arsitektur Nusantara* 1999, pp. 1-17
- Eliade, Mircea, 2002, trans., *Sakral dan Profan*, Menyingkap Hakekat Agama, Yogyakarta, Fajar Pustaka Baru.
- Hoed, Benny, 2011, *Semiotika dan Dinamika Sosial Budaya*, Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu.
- Kandahjaya, Hudaya, 1995., *The Master Key for Reading Borobudur Symbolis*, Bandung: Yayasan Penerbit Karaniya.
- Lundquist, John M, 1993, *The Temple Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth*, London Thames and Hudson Ltd
- Magetsari, Nurhadi., 1982, *Pemujaan Tatagata di Jawa Abad Sembilan*, *Disertasi*, Jakarta, Universitas Indonesia.
- Mangunwijaya, 1988. *Wastu Citra*, Jakarta: PT Gramedia.
- Mundardjito, 1993, "Pertimbangan Ekologi dalam Penempatan Situs masa Hindu-Buddha di daerah Yogyakarta, Kajian Arkeologi Ruang Skala Makro", *Disertasi* Jakarta UI.
- Munoz, Paul Michel Paul, 2009., *Kerajaan-kerajaan Awal Kepulauan Indonesia dan Semenanjung Malaysia, Perkembangan Sejarah dan Budaya Asia Tenggara (Jaman pra Sejarah – Abad XVII)*, Yogyakarta, Penerbit Mitra Abadi.
- Murwanto, Helmi, 2011, *Mengenal dataran Kedu Selatan Berdasarkan Tinjauan Geologi, Menyelamatkan Candi Borobudur dari Erupsi Merapi*, Balai Konservasi Peninggalana Borobudur, hm73-84.
- Piliang, Amir Yasraf, 2012, *Semiotika dan Hipersemiotika*, Bandung: Penerbit Matahari.
- Pott,P.H., *Yoga and Yantra*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff,1966.
- Poerbatjaraka, 1982, *Riwayat Indonesia I*, Jakarta Yayasan Pembangunan.
- Poesponegoro, Marwati Djoened dan Nugroho Notosusanto ed, 2009, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* Jilid II, Jakarta Balai Pustaka.
- Rahardjo, Supratikno.,2011, *Peradaban Jawa, dari Mataram Kuna Sampai Majapahit Akhir*, Jakarta Komunitas Bambu.
- Santiko, Hariani, 1987., *Kedudukan Bhatara Durga di Jawa pada Abad X-XV Masehi*, Disertasi, Jakarta : Universitas Indonesia.
- _____,1995, *Seni Bangunan Sakral Masa Hindu-Buddha di Indonesia (Abad VII-XV Masehi) ; Analisis Arsitektur dan Makna Simbolik*, Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar, Jakarta Fak. Sastra Universitas Indonesia.
- Stokes, Gillian, 2001., *Buddha a Beginner's Guide*, London, Hodder & Stoghton.
- Stutterheim, WF., 1956, "Candi Borobudur, Name, Form, and Meaning", *Studies in Indonesian Archaeology*, The Hague – Martinus Nijhoff, p. 48.
- Soediman,1991, "Makna dan Fungsi Candi Ditinjau dari Sudut Pandangan Keagamaan", *Bahasa, Sastra, Budaya*, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada Univ Press, pp. 661-683.
- Soekmono, 1976, *A Monument of mandkind*, Unesco.
- _____, 1981, *Candi Borobudur Pusaka Budaya Umat Manusia*, Jakarta, Pustaka Remaja.
- Subandriyo, 2011., "Sejarah Erupsi Gunung Merapi dan dampaknya Terhadap Kawasan Borobudur", *Menyelamatkan Candi Borobudur dari Erupsi Merapi*, Balai Konservasi peninggalan Borobudur, hlm 85-98.
- Wirjosuparto, Sutjipto, 1958., *Borobudur Ditilik dari Agama Buddha Mahayana*, Makalah di Radyapustaka, unpublished.