

A SEMIOTIC STUDY ON KAJATAN OF JAVANESE BUDDHIST RITUAL

Lery Prasetyo¹

¹Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha Negeri (STABN) Raden Wijaya Wonogiri

e-mail: ¹leryprasetyo@rocketmail.com

Abstracts: *Kajatan* is found in *slametan* ritual performed by Javanese people, including Javanese Buddhists. The form is slightly different but still has the same spirit to maintain a relationship with the ancestors. Many symbolic meanings appear behind the strings of *kajat* words. This study is a descriptive qualitative research using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to describe the available data. The data in this study was taken from the utterances spoken by *pengajat* as the main source. The method used observation, interviews, recording, and documentation study. This study produces (1) an overview of the Buddhist *kajat* structure, (2) denotative, connotative and myth meanings that describe Javanese philosophy and the concept of Buddhism, especially those related to filial piety, gratitude, concept of protection, and compassion.

Keywords: Semiotics, Buddhist, Javanese, *Kajatan*

INTRODUCTION

Culture plays an important role in human life and vice versa, human life is very important to produce any culture too. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1963) stated that the quality of culture depends on human life because culture is known as an integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, and behavior that depends on the ability of symbolic thinking and social learning. Therefore, culture is the idea of humans in a particular society manifested in daily life. It has many elements as part of human civilization such as habits, customs, laws, values, social institutions, religion, technology, and language. These elements are essential for humans to live in a society managing horizontal relationships, between humans and humans or vertical relationships between humans and the Almighty.

Javanese people as part of society have various distinctive customs and cultures, it includes all activities in terms of birth, marriage, death, and so on. *Slametan* ritual is one of the Javanese cultural elements that clearly depicts humans in managing horizontal and vertical relationships. Geertz explained that the *slametan* ritual does not only serve to maintain a sense of solidarity between the participants but also to maintain good relations with ancestral spirits (Koentjaraningrat, 1994: 344). The ritual can be performed on some occasions in terms of pregnancy, birth, child naming, circumcision, marriage, death, and religious ceremony. All Javanese generally carry out this ritual, including the Javanese Buddhists.

The significant part of *slametan* is when an elder utters some words or prayers in the Javanese language, it is called *kajatan*. It contains the purposes and objectives of the *slametan* held, the elder usually utters slightly different words in *kajatan* depend on the religion of the host. For the Javanese Buddhists, *kajatan* is usually performed at least once a year before the Vesak day in Vihara besides other occasions. This shows that the ritual is indeed important for the Buddhists, the utterances in *kajat* contain many valuable symbolic meanings.

The attempt to reveal the symbolic meanings is studied in semiotics. Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign (Eco, 1976 cited in Chandler 2007). According to Peirce (1931, cited in Chandler 2007), there are three divisions of signs, one of which is symbols. In semiotics, a symbol is something in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but is purely arbitrary and convention (Pierce 1931, cited in Chandler 2007).

This study based on the semiotics theory of Roland Barthes that is usually called order of signification. It consists of denotation and connotation besides Barthes also mentions about myth. Barthes (1995: 115) described that denotation is the first level of order of signification, it explains the relationship between the signifier and the signified in reality to produce explicit, direct and definite meaning. Connotation is the second that explains the relationship between the signifier and the signified to operate implicit, indirect and uncertain meaning. Then Barthes (1995:132) continued Myth lies in the second order of signification, when a sign has a connotative

meaning, it means that its denotative meaning becomes a myth. It is slightly difference to Chandler (2007:143-145) tends to put myth at third order of signification.

Signifier	Signified	
SIGN Signifier		Signified
SIGN		

Figure 1 Order of Signification
(Source: Chandler, 2007: 140)

Myths is not only something that has association with old or traditional story from ancestor consist of fables with its heroes and gods which is inherited by a certain culture or society by a generation to others generation. However, Barthes (cited in Chandler, 2007:144) stated that myths are the dominant ideologies of our time. In addition, the cultural myths analysis involves an attempt to form the ways in which the codes operate in society with the objective of showing how certain values, attitudes and beliefs are supported but others are not (Chandler, 2007:145).

In attempting to reveal the symbolic meanings of *kajatan* carried out three approaches the interpretation of symbols according to the orders of signification, 1) Denotative meaning, the explicit meaning of the utterances/words. It is what the dictionaries provide the definition. 2) Connotative meaning, the implicit meaning based on the cultural segment. 3) Myths, the meanings influenced by the dominant ideology, in this case is Buddhism ideology.

METHOD

This was a descriptive qualitative study, explaining the symbolic meaning in *kajatan* ritual performed by Javanese Buddhists in Blitar East Java. Sources of data were taken from the utterances produced by the elder while conducting *kajat* as primary data. The interview results, documents, etc as additional data. The process of collecting data through several stages. The first, attending and involving in the *Kenduri* ritual to take observation, noting and recording. Then, conducting interviews. The results of the interviews were transcribed and analysed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation and analysis, it is known the parts of *kajatan*. The elder utters *kajat* through some parts, consist of opening, contents, and closing. The contents part has introductory contents, main contents and companion contents.

Here is some data considered as symbols in *kajatan* ritual.

- 1) ‘.....*caos rakitan arupi sekul suci sak perabotipun...*’ (serving a set of sacred rice and its complements)

Denotatively, the line means that the host prepares rice and its complements which has sacred characters or for sacred purposes. Then in the connotative stage, it is said to be sacred because the rice is white coloured, which is considered as a symbol of the sacred colour. The white coloured rice is presented to the Almighty and The Gautama Buddha as the Buddhists role model.

Furthermore, in the myths, this is related to the first Buddhist Pancasila, the determination to refrain from destroying living creatures. The elder usually utters the phrase ‘*sekul suci ulam sari*’ (Sacred rice and side dishes which completed with chicken dishes) rather than ‘*sekul suci sak perabotipun*’ because it usually uses chicken *ingkung*. However, in this occasion the host did not provide the Chicken dishes, he replaced it with eggs as the implementation of Buddhist Pancasila.

- 2) ‘...*caos bekti hormat dumateng panutan, junjungan guru agung Sang Siddharta Gotama, sak garwo sak putro sakabatipun sekawan...*’ (paying respect to the role model, the lord of the great teacher Sang Sidharta Gautama, as well as his wife, children, and four brothers...)

The symbolic meaning of the sentences denotatively is to express devotion and respect for Sidharta Gautama and his family. While the connotative meaning, apart from expressing devotion to the Great Teacher, it also activates the Javanese philosophy of *sedulur papat limo pancer*. There is a term in Javanese philosophy

called *sedulur papat lima pancer* consisting of *aluamah* or greedy, *amarah* or anger, *supiyah* or beauty in this case is love/lust, and *mutmainah* or excessive desire for virtue. These four things are called brothers for humans. Humans are always filled with these four desires. As a *pancer* or center, human must be able to control the four 'brothers'.

Furthermore, at the stage of myth related to Buddhism, it is closely related to Pancakkhandha. The concept of Pancakkhandha is one of the Buddha's teachings, Wowor (2003:28) explained 'humans are made up of physical '*rupa*' and mental '*nama*' aggregates. The physical and mental aggregates make up the five aggregates '*pancakkhandha*' then called human beings. The five aggregates consist of (1) the physical aggregates: the elements of earth, water, fire, and air. (2) The feeling aggregates: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings. (3) The perception aggregates: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral perceptions; (4) the mental aggregates: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral states of mind; (5) the consciousness aggregate includes all pleasant, unpleasant and neutral consciousness.

- 3) '*Sang Buddha maringiono sinar pepadang, kawilujengan dumateng para umat Buddha...*' (Lord Buddha gives enlightenment and salvation to Buddhists)

In the denotative meaning, it symbolizes that the Buddha as the lord of all Buddhists gives enlightenment and salvation to His people according to the wishes of his devoted followers. At the connotation stage, it is interpreted that the Buddha with his immense power is able to provide enlightenment and salvation to Buddhists so that offerings are given.

In the myths level, this line of *kajatan* holds the unique concept of Buddhism in obtaining salvation and enlightenment. They are not necessarily given for granted. However, the Buddhists should be active to achieve them, The Buddha will not give everything that is asked by his followers, but the Buddha gives instructions through his Dhamma, for those who practice it will get salvation. It is not only by praying, *puja bhakti* or asking but has to be active and practice.

- 4) '*ngaweruhi dumateng bopo rino ibu wengi bopo suryo ibu ndari bopo angkoso ibu bumi, kaki bumi, sumoro bumi*' (tell father day mother night, father sun mother moon, father sky mother earth, feet of earth, womb of earth)

Denotatively the line expresses notice to the father of the sun, the mother of moon, the father of the sky, the mother of the earth, the feet of the earth, the womb of the earth. In a connotative sense, the line expresses concern for father and mother which is likened to a pair, there are Sun and moon, sky and earth, etc. Meanwhile, in the Myths activates the position of father and mother or parents in Buddhism is indeed very high, therefore it must always be considered. According to the Dhamma, parents are often equated with Brahma living in the house. This comparison shows the high level of respect for parents advocated in the Buddha's Teachings. In Buddhist concept, Brahma is a creature that inhabits the Brahma realm whose position is much higher than the gods and goddesses who live in various heavenly realms. In the Anguttara Nikaya, it is explained that in this world there are two people who are most meritorious, father and mother. It is said that even though as a child he always carried his parents for 100 years without stopping, the virtues that the child did were not sufficient to repay the kindness that the parents had done to their child.

- 5) '*Mbok bileh wonten kalepatanipun para umat Buddha, Gusti ingkang maha suci ingkang agung paring pangapunten tinebihno tumindak ingkang lepat katuntuno margi ingkang leres*' (If there is a mistake from the Buddhists, the God almighty forgives, keep away from bad deeds, is guided to the right path)

In the denotation level, the sentence means that Buddhists apologize to the most Holy Spirit or God if they make mistakes, and are keep away from bad deeds and shown to a good path, also get salvation from the Buddha. The connotation level, it means that people who have made mistakes or bad deeds are not always wrong or bad, but the should be guided to the right path in order to correct their mistakes and make them better. Then in the myths, the *kajat* sentence implies an understanding of '*margi*' or path. The right path according to the Buddhist understanding is the path taught by the Buddha Gautama called '*Hasta Arya Marga*' or '*Ariya Atthangiko Magga*' which is translated into English as the noble eightfold path. The path includes Right Action, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Mindfulness, Right Effort, Right Concentration, Right Understanding and Right intention.

- 6) *...ugi ngaweruhi dumateng para pandito, para brahmono, para resi, para samana para pangarso. Pramilo sedaya dipun kaweruhi Sang Buddha nggih tansah paring kawilujengan umat Buddha....* (also pay attention to the pandits, the brahmins, the sages, *samanas*, the leaders. By doing this, the Buddha always provided the salvation to the Buddhists)

At the denotative level, the sentence is about the concern to all religious or spiritual teachers and leaders so that they always get salvation from the Buddha. On a connotative level, it means that the religious teachers and leaders are considered as representatives of the Buddha on Earth nowadays who can guide to the right path to have salvation. Meanwhile, at the Myth level, the *kajat* sentence implies the devotion of Buddhists to religious teachers as stated in the Sigalovada Sutta where there are one's obligations to religious teachers, *samanas* and brahmins, one of which is to love them with a compassionate mind. In the *kajat*, the love can be expressed in the form of taking care and praying for salvation to them.

- 7) *'Cikal bakal ingkang manggen kiblat sekawan gangsal ingkang dipun trep i ...'* (ancestors who are in the four cardinal points, and five the occupied place ...)

The denotative meaning, there are ancestors or predecessors surround the place occupied in the four cardinal points. The connotative meaning of the sentence is related to Javanese philosophy where in the four cardinal points has a symbol which owned by human. The east represents the birth of daylight with a white coloured symbol associated with wisdom. The south is the life daylight, with the red colour associated with health. The west symbolizes the birth of the night, with the yellow colour associated with sustenance. While the north represents the life of the night with black color associated with happiness.

At the Myth level, it associated with the Buddha's teachings, there are also concepts of direction or the cardinal points. They are listed in the sigalovada sutta which explains the obligation to respect all directions as symbols, including: the east for respecting parents, the south to teachers, the West to children and wives, the North to college and friends. In addition, in Buddhism, there are also upward and downward directions, upward to pay respect to *samana*, religious teachers and Brahmins. While the downward direction respect the servants and workers. Thus, always remembering to respect and carry out obligations will bring salvation.

- 8) *...caos pisang ayu ugi kadamel ngaweruhi ibu pertiwi, tetungguling para wanita ingkang saget dados panutanipun para wanita umat Buddha pramilo dipun kaweruhi para wanita umat Buddha sagemo pinaringan tata titi tatas titis pratitis sagemo dados tuladha tumraping keluarga...* (providing *pisang ayu*/bananas is also to taking care of the motherland, the most superior woman, who can be used as a role model by Buddhist women. Therefore, Buddhist women take care of her so that they can be given good characters and abilities as women to be a role model for their family)

In the denotative meaning, it means that bananas used as symbols or offerings to honor the motherland. Then it connote the concept of the ideal characters of women in Java, especially as housewives, such as *tata*: have good and organized plans, *titi*: thorough and careful, *tatas*: nothing is missed, everything planned can be completed, *titis* : right on target, *pratitis*: complete.

In the myth level, it implies the position of women, especially mothers in Buddhism. In Buddhism, a mother is considered as a ladder, a ladder to heaven and a mother is a symbol of selfless love. In the ancient scriptures it is said that a mother is equal to a thousand fathers. Mothers are very precious because they give their most precious possessions to their children, forget about themselves and taking care to their children's pleasures.

- 9) *...nginggil niat maleh ngentun dumateng sedaya pepunden utawi sedaya leluhur, leluhuripun ingkang sampun kondor dumateng zaman kebahagiaan. Leluhur saking tiang jaler, leluhur saking tiang istri. Leluhur jaler istri sepuh anem ageng alit ingkang krimatan lan mboten krimatan pramilo leluhur dipun kentun sagemo mangiho wonten alam kebahagiaan...* (...uphold the intention of sending prayers to all ancestors, ancestors who have returned to the age of happiness. Ancestors from men lineage, Ancestors from women lineage, male, female, old, young, big, small, who are groomed or not, therefore we deliver prayers to ancestors so they can be in the realm of happiness.

It denotes the deliver prayers to the spirits of the ancestors to make them in the realm of happiness. The connotative symbolizes the habit of the Javanese people continue to pay homage to their ancestors in various ways from generation to generation. At the myth level, these utterances activate the concept of *patidana*, a good

deed implemented by a person or relatives to the ancestors or parents or other beings, so that the merits that have been done can make them feel happy and encourage them to be reborn in better life or Realms of Happiness.

CONCLUSIONS

Interpretation through three level of meaning denotation, connotation and myth used to interpret the symbol. Each symbol has a meaning or meaning at each stage. However, the meaning in the myths level is the influenced by Buddhist concepts. The results of this study indicate that verbal symbols in this *kajatan* ritual have various meanings, some in the context of religion, ethics and philosophy. The religious context can be found in some utterances mention the Almighty, is a form of human communication with something cosmic, spiritual communication. The ethical context is in the symbol of *sekul suci sakperabotanipun*, it implies the obedience to the Buddhist Pancasila as the basis of the Buddhists to behave to be good human beings. In the philosophical context, there is a symbol of *Sedulur Papat* which is related to *Pancakkhanda* where humans are covered by several elements that human should be controlled and utilized by humans in such a way for the common good.

The implementation of religious teachings can be performed well without having to leave the existing cultural roots, even many touches harmoniously. Almost in every stanza of *kajat* ends with '*Wilujengo serintene sedalune selamine asalo tambahing pangestu para sederek sepuh anem ingkang sami katuran pinarak mriki sedaya* (may always be safe, get the blessing from those who are here)'. This utterances of hope and prayer are very similar to *Saccakiriya Gatha* where in every stanza also ends with 'May you be blessed always'. This shows the closeness of the concept of Buddhism with *slametan* tradition, especially in the *kajatan* part.

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