

Cultural Beliefs of *Kejawen* as Life Form of the Javanese in Islamic Theology Perspective

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Abstract:

Kejawen is the belief of a multi-ethnic people on the Indonesian island of Java. Kejawen philosophy is based on Javanese thinkers' religious beliefs. This study aims to analyze the cultural beliefs of Kejawen from an Islamic Theology perspective with the objectives of this study are to determine the ritual of Kejawen in daily life from Islamic perspective and the materials used such as flowers and offerings in Kejawen which will be studied in Islamic perspective. This is an ethnographic study with the location of this study being in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Solo. Documentation and observation are the instruments which are used for this study. The result found that Kejawen is an example of this fusion, with many Islamic elements. In Kejawen, God is known as Sang Hyang Taya, which is connected to the Islamic idea of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah is the one God and that no other gods exist. From an Islamic theological stance, Kejawen emphasizes the importance of inner spirituality, human experience, and the interconnection of all things in the cosmos. There are many connections between it and Islamic ideas, including as the concept of God and the power of prayer.

Keywords: Cultural Belief, Islamic Theology, Kejawen, Rituals

INTRODUCTION

Javanese people who believe in *Kejawen* are relatively obedient to their religion. Where they still carry out religious commands and stay away from the prohibitions of their religion. Essentially, the teachings of *Kejawen* philosophy do encourage humans to remain obedient to their God. Before Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam entered Java, the original beliefs adopted by the Javanese people were animism and dynamism, or shamanism. since time immemorial (Salapudin et al., 2021), Javanese people have been known to recognize the oneness of God. That is the main core of *Kejawen's* teachings, known as '*Sangkan Paraning Dumadhi*', which means 'from where the servant of God comes and returns' (Ricklefs, 2008); (Abimanyu, 2021). The *Kejawen* philosophy usually develops in line with the religion of its followers. Hence the terminology of *Kejawen* Islam (Woodward, 1988: 80; (Asmuni, 2021), *Kejawen* Hinduism (Hefner, 2021), *Kejawen* Buddhism, and *Kejawen* Christianity. In fact, there are still many Javanese people who carry out traditions to this

day (Hilmy, 2018); (Wulandari, 2021). For example, the rituals of *nyadran*, *mitoni*, *tedhak siten*, and *wetonan*. *Nyadran* is a ceremony carried out by Javanese people before Fasting arrives (Kamayanti & Ahmar, 2019); (Sari et al., 2020a). The form is to make a pilgrimage to the graves and spread flowers (Kristina, 2021); (Idham, 2021); (Oetomo, 2020). This can be said to be a cultural belief in the *Kejawen* people who are Muslims (Sukerta et al., 2020). The Javanese tradition is a reflection and application of the Javanese people to the teachings of Islam on God's command to mankind to spend part of the fortune given by God as stated in the holy book of the Qur'an (Soenjoto, 2022); (Fauziah & Fadli, 2022); (Al Amin et al., 2020).

Pranata et al. (2021) claimed that cultural beliefs are concepts and thoughts shared by multiple people that control the interaction between these people, as well as between them, their gods, and other groups and they vary from knowledge in that are neither empirically found nor analytically proven. This might be religious, traditional, philosophical, or customary. Meanwhile, previous research (Pesurnay, 2018) stated that the local wisdom could give lessons in life such as respect for elders, family values, individuality, and equality are examples of cultural values. Cultural values are passed down from generation to generation, ensuring the preservation of traditions among a group of people. Previous research by (Nawafi, 2020) stated that *Kejawen* as a perspective of life can be said to be a cultural belief of the Javanese society, this has a lot of local wisdom, one of which is the Javanese ritual tradition, especially the monthly *sedekahan* ritual tradition, such as the tradition of *Suran*, *Saparan*, *Muludan*, *Rejeban*, *Ruwahan*, *Selikuran*, *Syawalan* etc. which is often carried out by Javanese people is a form of expression of the faith of Javanese people in embracing Islam. Moreover, research by (Anindita & Hamidah, 2020) claimed that the tradition is also a Javanese expression of equal rights and obligations among fellow humans as God's people. However, (Wasisto, 2021) showed the ritual *Kejawen* such as in the ritual tradition of '*sedhekahan*', the value of togetherness can be embedded, where fellow creatures of God so that no one needs to be humbled in their status as alms recipients, nor is anyone required to give alms to others because they are considered to have a higher status.

However, this is inseparable from the perspective of Islamic theology which teaches that one must follow the guidance of the holy book of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, this is under the hadith narrated by HR. Malik; Al-Hakim, Al-Baihaqi, Ibn Nashr, Ibn Hazm who explained "You will not go astray as long as you hold on to the two, (namely) the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger." Many traditions of *Kejawen* are still practiced by Javanese people, besides of course being preserved for generations. However, they seem to have lost the philosophical meaning of *Kejawen* itself. Therefore, they perform *Kejawen* traditions but only consider them as Javanese customs.

Previous research explains the description of *Kejawen* people's view of life in Islamic teachings (Arifin et al., 2019), (Pratyaksa, 2019), (Wasisto, 2021), but no one has explained the understanding of *Kejawen* beliefs in Javanese society from the perspective of Islamic theology. Furthermore, this problem gap will contribute to intellectual property in

the field of Islamic theology and cultural studies. However, various opinions and previous research explain that *Kejawen* is part of people's lives as an intangible heritage, but other studies explain that mystical things such as giving something to nature are not part of Islamic teachings (Sari et al., 2020b), (Islami & Enggarwati, 2019) (Pratisti, 2018), (Makhmudah, 2017). this will be emphasized in this study. The purpose of this study is to analyze the view of cultural belief in the Javanese view of life, namely, *Kejawen* in the perspective of Islamic theology. So that the objective of this study is to analyze the rituals of the *Kejawen* community in the view of Islam, analyze and provide an overview of Islamic theology on the giving of offerings by the *Kejawen* community to nature (Mamahit, 2021), (Syafiq & Putri, 2022), (Al-Hakim et al., 2023).

This research is an ethnographic study that analyses the description of cultural beliefs of *Kejawen* in the Javanese community and the perspective of Islamic theology. In addition, the authors also describe the ritual and local wisdom formed in *Kejawen* which represent Javanese people in Java. the type of ethnographic research focuses on realist ethnography which will describe facts in detail and report what is observed and heard from group participants while maintaining the objectivity of this research. This type of ethnographic research focuses on realist ethnography which will describe facts in detail and report what is observed and heard from group participants while maintaining the objectivity of this research. Realist ethnographic research is believed to contribute directly in the form of descriptions and explanations of regularities and evaluations in behavior both in the form of cultural studies and Islamic Theology related *Kejawen*. The location of this study is Yogyakarta and Solo, with the percentage of people still believing that *Kejawen* has more population in another area of Java. Meanwhile, Data collection will be documentation as primary data collection and Observation will be secondary data collection. The process of data collection will start with collecting documentation such as a processing ritual of *Kejawen* photos, which could be collected on the internet and location, authors will capture the photos and observe the ritual.

DISCUSSION

***Kejawen* is A Principle Of Javanese Society**

Kejawen, also known as Javanism or *Kebatinan*, is a Javanese religious tradition that incorporates elements of animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It is deeply rooted in Javanese history and religiosity, aiming to harmonize various religious aspects. Java's history has made it a diverse cultural and religious melting pot, with beliefs ranging from animism to spirit cults. Around 1500 CE, Java adopted Islam, leading to the development of Islam *Kejawen*, which combines Islamic values with Javanese culture. Initially embraced by the elite and upper classes, Islam's acceptance was facilitated by its fusion with indigenous beliefs. Sufism and Folk Islam also found a comfortable place within Java's existing folk religion, contributing to the syncretic nature of *Kejawen*. In essence, *Kejawen* seeks to impart teachings that promote ethical conduct, noble values, and a civilized understanding of divinity, reflecting its long history of cultural and religious interactions in Java (Kristina, 2021): (Soenjoto, 2022): (Lasfeto et al., 2022): (McCabe, 2007).

The educated variants of Sufi Islam and Shari'a-oriented Islam were incorporated at the courts, mixing with the existing Hindu-Buddhist ceremonies and mythologies. As Hindu influences faded, the Kyai, the Muslim scholar of the writ, emerged as the new religious elite. Although Islam does not recognize a religious hierarchy or a formal priesthood, the Dutch colonial administration constructed an extensive rank structure for mosques and other Islamic preaching institutes. Students and even peasants from the school contributed to his necessities. Javanese people who believe in Kejawen are relatively obedient to the teachings of Islam. Where they still carry out religious orders and stay away from the prohibitions of their religion. The teachings of Kejawen philosophy encourage humans to remain obedient to their God ((Ridwan & Basith, 2021), (Tambunan, 2022), (Marta et al., 2022), (Nawafi, 2020), (Fibrianto, 2019).

The entry and spread of Kejawen Islam in Javanese society cannot be separated from the beliefs of the ancestors. Before the introduction of Hinduism into the archipelago, especially in Java, animism and dynamism beliefs flourished. Javanese people from various castes and circles believed in the existence of ancestral spirits and magical powers found in objects, plants, animals, and anything that was considered to have magic power. Over time, Hinduism entered and spread from the nobility to the common people. Intellectuals who understood Sanskrit then wrote the script into Javanese, giving birth to Javanese literature connected to *Kejawen* beliefs. With this literature, it became easier for people to adapt to new things. When the Majapahit Kingdom collapsed, Islam spread. However, animism and dynamism did not disappear. This condition eventually gave rise to *Kejawen* Islam, which is the teaching of Islam combined with Javanese mysticism (Hudayana, 2021), (Fauziah & Fadli, 2022), (Pratisara, 2020), (Watini, 2018), (Ariyanti, 2019).

Concept of the Divine in Kejawen Teachings

In *Kejawen* Islamic belief, God is seen as an integral part of human life, with both physical and spiritual aspects originating from God. This perspective emphasizes the unity between humans and God, to return to God, known as *manunggaling kawula gusti*. Achieving this union with God in the world involves mystical practices such as *semedi*. The relationship between humans and God is referred to as *roro ning tunggal*, signifying two entities becoming one: God to be worshipped and humans as worshippers. This concept differs from Quranic teachings, where God is transcendent, beyond the universe. In *Kejawen* Islam, God is considered immanent, dwelling within humans. While the Quran emphasizes *tanzih*, purifying God from resemblance to His creations, *Kejawen* adheres to *tasywih*, signifying likeness or fusion between humans and God. *Kejawen* views God as abstract yet an absolute creator of the universe, beyond representation or imagination. However, those who detach from worldly concerns and engage in rituals can attain a heightened religious experience known as *manunggaling karsa kawulo lan karsa gusti*, granting them extraordinary abilities. This statement is similar to informant (initially) Agus (45 years) stated

“manunggaling kawula gusti is the ultimate purpose in human life, which is the attainment of unity between the worshipper and the God they worship.

This ability is attainable through spiritual practice, involving genuine surrender to God. This surrender, achieved with the aid of spiritual practices, ensures that all outcomes are guided solely by God's will. In Islamic Theology, *manunggaling kawulo gusti* signifies God's presence in every living being, emphasizing that humans perceive creatures as manifestations of God. However, Islamic teachings emphasize that God remains unseen, aligning with QS al-An'am:103, which underscores Allah's invisibility. From a different perspective, the concept of unity with God implies that God is omnipresent, including within us, as supported by Surah Qaf verse 16, emphasizing Allah's knowledge of our inner thoughts and His proximity to us.

In *tasawwuf*, this term signifies a servant's deep love and closeness to God, leading to a sense of unity where they feel inseparable from God. It's akin to sugar dissolving in water, distinct yet indistinguishable. When iron turns red from fire's heat, they blend, and whoever touches one is affected by the other. This concept mirrors Javanese leadership theory, suggesting that effective governance relies on the unity of ruler and people, resonating on the same wavelength. Reciprocally, people must comprehend the ruler's, or *gusti's* (Allah's), intentions for harmony and prosperity. This is similar to (initially) Joko (38 years) stated:

“In Javanese, if we say Dhuh Gusti, we mean Allah or Gusti Allah. However, Allah is given the "position" of the prince, so when we say Dhuh Pangeran, we are referring to Allah.

Sheikh Siti Jenar's *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* explains the essence of life and mysticism. It emphasizes the need to sense the presence of the Supreme Creator, as God cannot be physically located anywhere, whether in the heavens, on Earth, or in any specific direction. This aligns with Islamic theology, rejecting the views of heretical sects like Jahmiyah and Mu'tazilah. The Ahli Sunnah wal Jama'ah, by the Quran, hadiths of the Prophet, and the consensus of early Muslim scholars, affirm that Allah resides above the Throne, transcending all His creation. An example of this is the words of Allah Almighty according to Taha verse 5 and Al-A'raf verse 54).

Islamic Theology Perspective Toward Cultural Belief of Javanese People on Kejawen Rituals

Nyadran, the Ritual of Javanese People before the Holy Month Ramadhan

Nyadran is one of the traditions that is still inherent in the life of Javanese people. *Nyadran* comes from Sanskrit "*Sraddha*" which means belief. The *Nyadran* tradition is a culture of praying for deceased ancestors and over time undergoes a process of cultural development so that it becomes a custom and tradition that contains a variety of cultural arts. *Nyadran* is one of the Javanese traditions performed in the month of *Sya'ban* (Hijri calendar) or Ruwah (Javanese calendar) to express gratitude collectively by visiting the

tombs or graves of ancestors in a neighborhood or village (Ibda, 2018). This is similar to informant (initially) Tono, (27) stated :

“Nyadran is performed by the Javanese community in the month of Ruwah or the month before the month of fasting in the Javanese calendar, nyadran purposes to send prayers to the Ancestors and to forgive each other before carrying out fasting in the month of Ramadan. (Translate into English).



Figure 1. The process of Kembul Bujono (eating together) is one of the process in Nyadran (Source: detik.com)

Nyadran serves multiple purposes: it acts as a means to pray for departed ancestors, serves as a reminder of the inevitability of death for all humans, preserves a culture of societal cooperation, and fosters neighborly harmony through communal eating activities known as *kembul bujono*. In Islamic theology, *Nyadran* can be seen as a form of grave pilgrimage. Notably, there is no specific time for such grave pilgrimages mentioned in the Quran or hadith. Some Islamic scholars argue that the practice of grave pilgrimage ahead of Ramadan was not established or practiced by Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Anam, 2017). Instead, the Prophet SAW merely encouraged Muslims to make grave pilgrimages solely to remember death.

وَوَا الْقُرُونَ رَابِعًا نَدَّ كَرُّكَ مَالِ خِرَّةٍ

“Make a grave pilgrimage, because it will remind you of death.” (Hadith Muslim)

Based on the evidence in the hadith above, there is no doubt that grave pilgrimage is permissible and even recommended (*sunnah*). The recommendation to perform this grave pilgrimage is general, whether visiting the graves of the righteous or visiting the graves of Muslims in general. However, regarding the grave pilgrimage, in the process of *nyadran*, there is a communal meal that should not be occupied with eating and drinking, chatting, and the like. However, if one feels the need to eat or drink, then it is not forbidden. *Kembul Bujono* and *Tasyukur*, after praying together, continued with eating together. The community holds *Kembul Bujono* or eats together. Every family that attends the *kenduri* must bring their food. The food that was brought was in the form of traditional food, such as *ingkung* chicken, liver fried chili sauce, vegetable ointment with spices, *prekedel*, tempeh and *bacem*

The *Wetonan Slametan* is celebrated every 35 days in Javanese culture, and it's essential to determine one's birth *weton*, which can be found on both the Christian and Javanese calendars. Birthdays in the Javanese calendar, or *weton*, occur every eight days. This ceremony is typically conducted by Javanese people after 6 PM, aligning with the lunar

calendar system's beliefs. This tradition is viewed proportionally, similar to the *Ahlussunah wal Jamaah* perspective, where celebrating a birthday involves offering congratulations to fellow Muslims. It's an expression of joy and gratitude for reaching a new age, signifying increased maturity, improved thinking, and the ability to engage in positive life activities.

Function Of Flowers For *Kejawen* Ritual in the View of Islamic Theology

God, according to the Islamic faith, is present in all things, including plants and flowers. This idea is represented in the use of flowers in Islamic rites and festivities, such as the use of flowers to decorate mosques and homes during *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*. Flowers are also said to be endowed with spiritual force or "power" (*ilmu*) in *Kejawen*, which may be utilized for a variety of reasons. Certain flowers, for example, are thought to have therapeutic powers and can be utilized in traditional medicine. Other flowers are utilized in spiritual practices, such as making floral mandalas or *rangkaian bunga* to aid in meditation and prayer. Flowers are also said to be endowed with spiritual force or "power" (*ilmu*) in *Kejawen*, which may be utilized for a variety of reasons. Certain flowers, for example, are thought to have therapeutic powers and can be utilized in traditional medicine. Other flowers are utilized in spiritual practices, such as making floral mandalas or *rangkaian bunga* to aid in meditation and prayer. In *Kejawen*, flowers symbolize various qualities; for instance, the lotus represents purity and enlightenment, while jasmine signifies beauty and elegance. The importance of flowers in *Kejawen* is closely linked to the Islamic concept of *tawhid*, signifying God's oneness and presence in all things, including plants. In *Kejawen*, flowers are seen as carriers of divinity and spiritual energy, serving purposes such as healing, spiritual rituals, and representing spiritual values. The hibiscus flower, for example, is thought to have antihypertensive qualities, whilst the frangipani flower is used to cure fever and cough (Fajfrlíková, 2018), (Ahmad, 2017), (Lasfeto et al., 2022), (Mustolehudin & Muawanah, 2017).

In the *Kejawen* tradition, the role of flowers is very diverse, ranging from bathing flowers, giving offerings to nature, and the use of flowers at the grave. In Islamic teachings, the sowing of flowers or flowers on the grave is based on a *saheeh* history which states that the Prophet Muhammad put wet branches on the grave to alleviate the torment of the grave.

ولادليل ما ورد في الحديث الصحيح من وضعه عليه الصلاة والسلام الجريدة الخضراء، بعد شقه
نصفين على القبرين اللذين بهما، ويؤله ابلخفيف عنهما ما لم ييبسا أي خفف عنهما بريلة
تسبحهما؛ إذ هو الكمل من تسبيح اليااس، ما يف الخضر من نوع حياة

The evidence for this is the narration in the saheeh hadeeth that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) placed fresh green branches after splitting them into two pieces over the graves of two people who were being tortured. The purpose of placing this wet branch is to alleviate the torment of both of them while the two branches are not dry, namely to alleviate both of them with the blessing of the prayer of

the two branches. The reason is that the blessing of wet branches is more perfect than the blessing of dry branches because fresh green contains life force. (Source: www.nu.or.id)



Figure 2. Using flowers as offerings to the ancestor in the public market

Source: Data Collection 2023

In Islamic teachings, flower baths for personal cleansing are acceptable as long as there are no associations with supernatural beings or black magic. In Islam, offering flowers or other items as offerings is considered haram and deviates from Islamic teachings. *Sesajen*, or offerings, typically food, are presented to ancestral spirits. Believers offer these to seek increased agricultural productivity or protection from various disasters. This is similar to the informant (initially) Mbah (67 years) stated:

“The meaning of roses, is life is colorful, the meaning is the last supporting flower, but you must thank those who make life.” (Fig 2).

The ritual of offering sacrifices or offerings to spirits that are considered to be the guardians or rulers of certain sacred places is a habit of shirk (associating Allah *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* with creatures) that has been going on for generations in Javanese society. They believe that these spirits can give good or cause harm to anyone, so by offering sacrifices or offerings they hope to reduce the anger of these spirits and to have all their requests fulfilled.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزِيدُنَّكَ لُجْلًا مِمَّنْ لَمِ يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا أَسَدٌ يَسْتَعِينُونَ
 لِيُزِيدُوا لُجْلًا مِمَّنْ لَمِ يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا أَسَدٌ يَسْتَعِينُونَ

“And that some men from among men sought refuge with some men from among the jinns, so the jinns increased for their sin and guilt.” (Qs. al-Jin: 6)

Cultural Belief of *Kejawen* toward ‘*Sesajen*’ (Offerings) to Nature

In *Kejawen*, the natural world is seen as a divine manifestation, deserving of reverence and respect. Offerings are a practice aimed at maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature by acknowledging its sacredness. Mountains, rivers, trees, and animals are recipients of these offerings, expressing gratitude for their blessings and seeking ongoing protection and support. Offerings are made on various occasions, including major life events like births, marriages, and deaths, as well as to seek blessings and protection for

important endeavors such as agriculture, fishing, and trade. This is similar to the statement (initially) Anton (41) stated:

“Offerings are a medium to get closer to nature and its creator. The following is the philosophical meaning contained in each symbol in the offerings.”

Reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of giving in *Kejawen*, symbolizing gratitude for nature's gifts and seeking ongoing blessings in return. This reciprocal relationship between humans and nature is crucial for universal balance. The form and content of *Kejawen* offerings vary depending on the occasion and purpose, including flowers, grains, fruits, and symbolic items like money, candles, and incense. These offerings are often arranged in specific patterns and may involve prayers or ceremonial gestures. The role of the *dukun*, a spiritual leader, is vital in overseeing the giving process and ensuring proper execution and intentions. Seekers of blessings or protection through giving may also receive guidance from the *dukun*. It fosters social bonds and reinforces cultural identity, often occurring during community celebrations and gatherings.

Offering serves as a crucial means of passing down cultural knowledge and beliefs from one generation to the next in *Kejawen*. Some view giving as superstitious or outdated. Nevertheless, offering remains integral to Javanese culture and spirituality. In Islamic jurisprudence, offering food is forbidden if it involves wasting wealth by leaving the offerings unused. Exceptions are made when offerings are given to ward off harmful jinn behavior. It is important to emphasize that absolute benefit and harm come only from Allah. Resembling customs from the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah era, known as *tasyabbuh*, is prohibited when done with the intent to imitate or revive those traditions.

However, the ruling on *tasyabbuh* is very dependent on the intention of the perpetrator. The reason for this is that although this tradition was originally a tradition of the Jaahiliyyah, it has become a common practice among the Muslim community who are ignorant and far from religion, so whether it is haram or not depends on the intention of the perpetrator. If the person does not believe that the *jinn* or spirits that guard the mountain or the sky can provide benefits and harms (*madhorot*), or has the intention of worshipping these creatures, then he does not fall into shirk or kufr, but if he does, then he may fall into shirk or disbelief.

CONCLUSION

Kejawen is a spiritual belief system used in Java that incorporates animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. It is an example of this syncretism, and it has numerous Islamic influences. The notion of God in *Kejawen* is known as Sang Hyang Taya, which is related to the Islamic concept of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah is the one God and that there are no other gods. Similarly, Sang Hyang Taya is regarded as the ultimate wellspring of all creation and the sole God in *Kejawen*. In contrast to Islam. There is also a belief in the existence of spirits or deities known as *dewas* or *dewi* in *Kejawen*, which are comparable to the Islamic idea of angels. Angels, according to Muslims, are created beings of light with no free choice and are entrusted with carrying out Allah's commandments.

Similarly, dewas are viewed as intermediates between people and Sang Hyang Taya in Kejawen, and they are frequently called in rites and festivities. This study has limitations on the lack of information that might give a negative impression or even discrimination against a group, so some items such as personal information and informant identity will be omitted. In addition, some activities or behaviors of strong Kejawen culture are not examined in this study. Finally, Kejawen is a syncretic belief system that incorporates a variety of religious ideas and rituals, including Islam. Kejawen emphasizes the value of inner spirituality, human experience, and the interdependence of all things in the cosmos from an Islamic theological standpoint. Many parallels exist between it and Islamic beliefs, such as the notion of God, angels, karma, balance and harmony, and the power of prayer and meditation.

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