



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)
Volume-IV, Issue-II, September 2017, Page No. 50-61
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

Sekaten Tradition: The Ritual Ceremony in Yogyakarta as Acculturation Reality of Javanese Culture in Indonesia

Dr. Ahmad Mulyana

Lecturer at Master of Communication Studies, Universitas Mercu Buana, Indonesia

Abstract

This article contains on the reality of acculturation in Sekaten Ceremony in Yogyakarta. Data were obtained through ethnographic method with constructivist paradigm. Ethnographic method discusses the language, communication and culture together so that can be obtained a picture of the interaction in the social life of a particular society culture. The results of this study obtained a picture that the symbols used in traditional ceremony sekaten is the result of the process of acculturation of Islam and Hinduism and the values of Javanese philosophy. Through ritual symbols, the meaning contained is communicated to society in a sustainable way. Through this ceremony occurs the process of ritual communication so that the inheritance of understanding the meaning of good values to the community. The conclusion of this study shows that the ceremony Sekaten is a process of inheritance values of noble philosophy of java is contained in the form of non-verbal communication in the form of symbols, artifacts and event processions contain meaning and philosophy.

Key Words: *Acculturation, Ritual Communication, Ethnography, Sekaten and Javanese Tradition.*

1. Introduction: Cultural diversity in Indonesia has been preserved from one generation to another through ritual communication transmitted verbally or nonverbally (Schefold, 1998). The cultural ceremony discussed in this research is sekaten ceremony. Sekaten is a ritual ceremony which remains to be preserved in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Sekaten ceremony is a ceremony to commemorate the birth date of Prophet Muhammad (Utami, 2011). It is an Islamic tradition which has been carried out in the early of Demak Sultanate. According to the history (Ni'mah and Soekiman, 2007; Smith-Hefner, 2013), it developed the previous tradition in Javanese people who embrace Hindu and Buddhist religions. In the era of Majapahit kingdom with the belief of Hindu and Buddhist religion, local society commemorated selamatan tradition but it was for gods as well as ancestors' departed spirit. In the context of Javanese culture, sekaten ceremony is held in the 5th date of each month Maulud, i.e. the third month in the Javanese calendar.

The idea of sekaten ceremony came from Sunan Kalijaga, one of Walisongo members when he did Islamic preaching activities in Java (Ni'mah and Soekiman, 2007; Utami, 2011). The tradition was particularly held during the government of sultans who were the descendant of Raden Patah from Demak Sultanate. Mataram sultans were the descendants of Raden Patah and they were divided into two sultanates: Surakarta Hadiningrat and Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat. The two sultanates usually held the ritual tradition as the heritage of his ancestors which got influence from Hindu and Buddhist religion. The ceremony could become people entertainment. To get attention from local people in a kind of the attendance of the ritual ceremony, Yogyakarta Sultan Hamengkubono I ordered to hold karawitan (the gamelan show). The gamelan set played Javanese songs which people like much at that time. Moreover, night market was also held and visitors could go shopping in the ceremony. The show and entertainment were held in public square in front of Masjid Agung (Brinner, 1995); (Barendregt and van Zanten, 2017).

The research discusses how acculturation occurs in a kind of Sekaten ritual ceremony in The Greater Yogyakarta. The ceremony is interesting to study because the ceremony has the commixture of three values from three religions, i.e. Hindu, Buddhist and Islam. A synergy reflects the sublime philosophy of Javenese values as the results of the acculturation process. "The acculturation occurs between Islam and Javanese local culture, and it shows a kind of higher integrated communication." The two elements can meet in an festival held by Walisongo and it was called Sekaten. Gamelan Sekaten particularly made by Walisongo is a communication media in the acculturation process" (Utami, 2011; Smith-Hefner, 2013; Ulum, 2016)

Based on background the problem formulated in this research is:

1. How does acculturation process create the symbols of ritual communication in Sekaten tradition?
2. How can symbols in sekaten ritual ceremony in The Greater Yogyakarta become media of transmitting Java philosophy?

And the objective of the study are:

1. To explain cultural acculturation in philosophical values contained in verbal and nonverbal symbols of Sekaten ritual ceremony.
2. To analyze symbols of Sekaten ritual ceremony in The Greater Yogyakarta as media of transmitting Javanese philosophy.

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study:

Intercultural Communication: According to (Samovar *et al.*, 2014) that inter-ethnic communication usually occurs in situation where communicator and communicants have race similarity but different ethnic origin or backgrounds. Race is a group of people who have the signs of similar biological characteristics (Chen and Starosta, 1996). Moreover, ethnic group is a group who has the characteristics of similar language and origin. Intercultural communication is interpersonal communication among those who have any

difference of cultural background (Chen and Starosta, 1996). When communication occurs between two different cultures, the cultural aspects like language, nonverbal signals, attitude, belief, behavior, value and thinking orientation will be many found as the great difference which frequently causes communication distortion. However, whatever society have cultural difference, common interests will make them to make communication (Chen and Starosta, 1996).

Samovar *et al* (2014) state that intercultural communication occurs between message producer and message receivers with different cultural background. Communicator and communicants come from different culture, they interact with each other to make communication process.

Intercultural communication is communication established among individuals or groups who have different interests and background in order to communicate with one another and know each culture. Communication is transaction (Roach, Cornett-Devito and Devito, 2005). With the transaction it means communication is a process where the elements relate to one another, and communicators act and react as a unity or a whole. The intercultural communication process is the same as other communication process, i.e. the interactive, transactional and dynamic process (Salsabila, 2011).

Intercultural communication occurs if communicator and communicants try to have the similarity of meaning to those are invited to communicate. According to Wilbur Schramm as quoted by (Zaharna, 2000), he states that "communication will be successful if the message transmitted by communicator matches the frame of reference, i.e. the collection of experiences and meanings obtained by the communicants" Therefore, if communicator and communicants or if one of them has already known any difference to one another, the communication will go on smoothly (Rogers and Chaffee, 1994).

Ritual Communication: Communication pattern built from the ritual viewpoint (Radford, 2006) is a kind of sacred ceremony in which each has fellowship and commonality. In this matter, Radford also states that communication pattern from the ritual perspective definitely does not mean that the message sender transmits message to receivers but as a ritual ceremony in which each collectively participates in fellowship and commonality as conducted in holy communion. In the ritual viewpoint, the most important point is the togetherness of society in a kind of prayer, singing and its ceremonial (Sella, 2007).

Moreover, this perspective understands communication as a process through which culture is created, changed and replaced all together. In the context of antropology, communication relates to ritual and mythology. Moreover, in the context of literature and history, communication is art and literature. Ritual communication is not directly to spread information or influence but to create, represent and celebrate illusive beliefs they have together (Radford *et al.*, 2011).

McQuail and Windahl (2015) understands ritual communication as expressive communication. Communication in the model gives higher attention to intrinsic satisfaction

(*intrinsic*) from sender or receivers than other instrumental objectives. The ritual or expressive communication depends on mutual emotion and understandings.

Characteristics of Ritual Communication:

According to (McQuail and Windahl, 2015), some characteristics of ritual communication are as follows:

1. Ritual communication relates tightly to sharing, gathering, fraternizing from a community that has one mutual belief.
2. Communication is indirectly aimed to transmit message but to maintain community integrity.
3. Communication built is not directly to transmit or interpret information but to represent or reproduce common beliefs in society.
4. Communication pattern is built like the sacred ceremony in which each has the fellowship and commonality (for example, doing prayer, singing and other ceremonial activities).
5. Language usage through either artificial or symbolic (generally in a kind of dancing, playing, storytelling and verbal utterances) is aimed for confirmation, to describe something considered important for a community and to appoint something being carried out and weakened in social process.
6. Similar to those in ritual ceremony, communicants are tried to involve in the sacred drama and therefore, they do not only become observers or spectators.
7. In order to make communication involved in communication process, the selection of communication symbols should come from its own community's tradition, like something unique, original and new for them.
8. Ritual communication or expressive communication depends on mutual emotion or feeling in society. It also gives special attention to intrinsic satisfaction from senders or receivers.
9. Message transmitted in ritual communication is latent and ambiguous, and it depends on communication association and symbols used in a culture.
10. Media and message are difficult to separate. Media itself can become message.
11. The symbol usage is directed to symbolize ideas and values in relation to hospitality, celebration or worship ceremony and commonality.

In the context of ritual communication, the three elements (communication, communion/celebration and togetherness) relate to one another. The communication built in relation to ceremony or communion activities/worship in a community.

Ethnography Communication: Ethnography is a theory that explains and understands communication behavior in any culture. In its explanation, it is restricted to a context of certain time and place (Ball and Ormerod, 2000). According to Kuswarno (2008), communication ethnography is the study of language role in communication behavior in a society, i.e. how is language used in society with its different cultures.

Communication ethnography tries to introduce ethnic behavior patterns in certain ethnography in detail. It usually sees language usage in general and it relates to sociocultural values in a society. An ethnographer will tend to learn from society, the owner of culture who becomes the object of research, any causes in order to describe cultural events in society; concerning language, behavior, symbols, artifacts and customs of an ethnographer should be able to feel and undergoe them as the object of research from what is being researched (Ball and Ormerod, 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003; Snow, Morrill and Anderson, 2003).

Based on the concept, Blummer offers three premises as the theoretical foundation from ethnography, i.e. (Spradley, 2016).

- a. Humans do anything on the basis of meaning given by anyone to them (people, crowd, interaction on the basis of meaning contained in themselves while location, time, behavior and instrument are symbols which have special meanings).
- b. Meanings of various things come from social interaction of someone to others.
- c. Meanings are handled or modified through interpretation process used by anyone in relation to various things they undergo.

Moreover, objectives to use ethnographic approach is aimed at understanding any groups of community, so that ethnographic study can provide information concerning cultural relations, understand complex society and human behavior.

3. Methodology: Methods used in the research is communication ethnography. Communication ethnography (Kuswarno, 2008) is the study of language's role in communicative behavior in a society, i.e. how is language used in society with different cultures.

Communication ethnography discusses language, communication and culture conjointly, and then it is related to culture. Each culture provides way to see the world. Culture provide categories, signs as well as definitions on the world where humans live. Culture covers various assumptions on the basic characteristics of reality and specific information concerning this reality (Spradley, 2016).

Therefore, ethnography tries to discover some viewpoints on how culture establishes a world replica. When someone studies culture, for example Javanese culture, the culture of Sundanese people will provide comparison on the world of Javanese people looks like; what about language they use, what about Javanese tradition and customs, the way they dress and others (Snow, Morrill and Anderson, 2003).

The research object of this research is Indonesian society in the Greater Yogyakarta who remain carry out sekaten tradition.

Primary data in the research is obtained from the first data source or the first hand in field. The primary data used by the researcher are participant observation in which the data relate to the symbols in Sekaten tradition. Bungin (2003) states that observation is human's daily activities by using their sense as their main aids plus other senses like ears, smell, mouth and skin.

4. Results and Discussion: Sekaten ceremony is an acculturation reality between local culture and the influence of Hindu and Buddhist religion in Java. The acculturation results are represented in the ritual communication of sekaten ceremony. In the ritual artefact it signs great nonverbal message using the symbols of cultural acculturation. The symbols also relate to philosophy in daily life.

Symbols Used in Ritual Communication of Sekaten Ceremony:

Sekaten Tradition: A lot of Javanese people like gamelan show. When Islamic holiday, gamelan show is held inside mosque. It is aimed at attracting people to come. If people have gathered at mosque, they will get lesson on Islamic religion. In this matter, Walisongo created gamelan set called Kyai Sekati. The ideas from Sunan Kalijaga got approval from other Walisongo members, i.e. in the birth date of Prophet Muhammad pbuh. In the date birth, gamelan show was held at the mosque. In fact many people come to the mosque to hearing Sekaten gamelan sets (Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari). The closing events of sekaten ceremony are divided into two: Gunungan (mountains containing crops, vegetables and various foods) for people who come and they usually fight (*dirayah*) to get the crops and others in the mountains because they believe that parts of the mountains can get blessing. In sekaten ceremony, there are some very interesting traditions conducted here, i.e. Gamelan Sekaten show and Grebek Mulud. The two traditions have very interesting story with full of philosophical meaning. The symbol is a sign or symbol of communication elements which usually contain some purposes and goals. The symbols are used to build certain culture. Communication with the symbols has close relation to Yogyakarta society because all kinds of ceremony that humans do is form of symbolism, the goal and meaning of the ceremony which become humans' purposes and goals to commemorate. The following is symbols used in sekaten ceremony:

a. Gamelan Sekaten Sets : Gamelan sekaten sets consist of *Kyai Guntur Madu* and *Kanjeng Kyai Nagawilaga*. The gamelan sets are played for seven days in public square in front of Masjid Agung during sekaten ceremony. Abdi dalem (*court retainer*) wearing light blue traditional clothes play the two gamelan sets.

b. Numplak wajik: It signs the beginning of making gunungan putri. It is usually conducted in a kind of beating lesung. The seven gunungan sekaten are made in Magangan Kidul. After gunungan sekaten are completed, these gunungan sekaten are brought to Keben.

c. Distributing *udhik-udhik*: The process starts when Sri Sultan *miyos dalem* (presents - the presence of Sultan) at Masjid Agung. In the event there is the attendance of Kraton's noble people, *pengageng Kraton*, *abdi dalem* (*court retainer*) and public. *Udhik-udhik* consist of rice, setaman flowers and coins. *Udhik-udhik* will be distributed to people who come in the ceremony.

d. Gunungan Sekaten: Gunungan sekaten consists of seven gunungan (mountains). These will be paraded and scrambled when the peak of grebek event occurs in the 12th date of Rabiul awal. The mountains consist of *gunungan kakung* (man) totaling three, *gunungan estri* (woman), *gunungan darat*, *gunungan gepak* and *gunungan pawuhan*. *Gunungan kagung* contains vegetables and fruits while *gunungan putri* is arranged with cakes being made of glutinous rice.

Elements of the above symbols are not really from Islamic values. It is the tradition of Javanese local culture influenced by the values of Hindu and Buddhist religion. For synergy and contextual interests, however, various values are summed up in sekaten ceremony. Therefore, the symbols used in sekaten ceremony can be understood and meant if an individual participates in the ceremony directly. Moreover, the researcher did interview with Ms. Dwiyanto, the visitor in the peak of sekaten ceremony, i.e. Grebeg. The interview asked about her understanding on sekaten ceremony. "A symbol used in sekaten ceremony is gunung and gamelan set. Gunungan symbolizes a blessing, and it will be paraded and many people will fight to get it. Moreover, gamelan set is a companion when gunungan and Kraton's soldiers are being paraded."

From information that researcher gets from field, there are various symbols with some interesting meanings. The symbols are definitely communication media representing philosophy, Javanese culture and Islamic influence as well.

Sekaten ceremony does not only present ritual events but also shows the elements of art, social, culture and education. It is expected that the values are able to preserve and apply in daily life, so these are able to establish better life in society. Concerning the relationship of sekaten ceremony and various aspects of life, it will be described as follows:

1. Economic aspects: Economic growth occurs when sekaten ceremony is held. It will influence traders' income who open stalls around Alun-alun Jogja where sekaten ceremony is being held. Many people become amateur traders, and most of them sell food or foodstuff used in sekaten ceremony. Their income will rise because during sekaten ceremony, night market is open for one month. It stimulates economic growth in The Greater Yogyakarta.

2. Social and Cultural Aspects: The life of Yogyakarta people is definitely full of politeness, hospitality and wisdom. People intercommunication is definitely appropriate as exemplary. Mutual assistance and help has been their tradition. They also speak Javanese as their daily language and it becomes special characteristic of Jogjakarta society. When sekaten ceremony is held, people come together to scramble gunungan. The communication

activities are very effective. Despite they do not recognize each other, the visitors greet each other.

Moreover, clothes worn by *abdi dalem* during sekaten ceremony is very unique. People who watch the ceremony is directly introduced with Javanese traditional dresses.

3. Political Aspects: Sekaten ceremony makes intensive cooperation between Keraton and regional government. In the security aspect, regional government provides some police officers with the tasks of securing sekaten ceremony. It goes on from the beginning to the end of sekaten ceremony. In view of public antusias and many people who come together in the location, security should be improved particularly in the peak of sekaten ceremony.

After Kraton prepares security issues, it also makes cooperation with PMI (*Indonesian Red Cross*) for the anticipation of casualties due to dense visitors in the ritual ceremony.

4. Religious Aspect: The belief difference in The Greater Jogjayakarta is not visible because local people honor and appreciate each other. Visitors and those who participate in sekaten ceremony (for example, *abdi dalem*) have different belief and religion but they keep appreciating and working together in the success of sekaten ceremony. Tourism in The Greater Yogyakarta Province has been definitely developed from year to year. With sekaten ceremony, cultural tourism in Jogja will be more known in Indonesia and other countries throughout the world.

The research concept is to understand communication symbols and what meaning should be communicated from the symbols. Therefore, sekaten ceremony just function as a facility to communicate wisdom values of local culture. Media approach in the research relates to how symbols in sekaten ceremony can be used as communication media in transmitting message in a kind of information, education, entertainment and others.

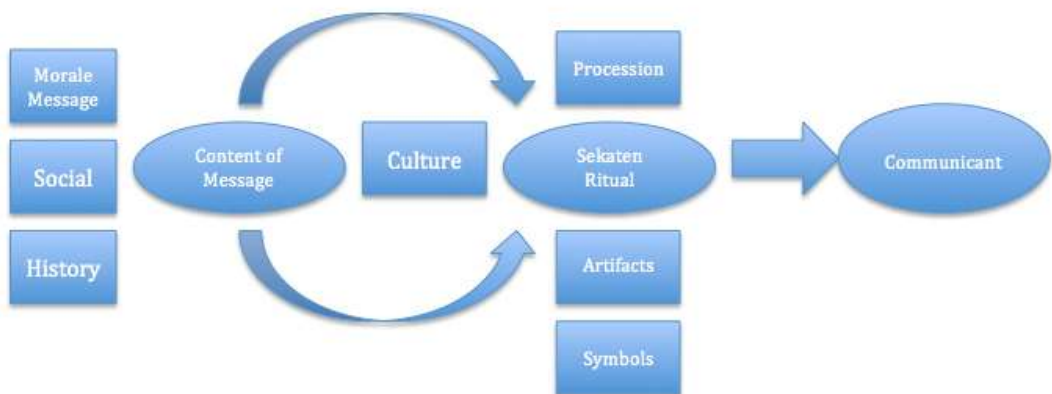


Figure 1: Communication flow at Sekaten Ceremony
Source: research findings

Sekaten ceremony has role as communication media and message transmission of moral, history, values and social and culture. Moreover, it is distributed to communicants to get feedback.

As a traditional communication media, sekaten ceremony definitely has function to preserving Javanese culture. The function of communication in sekaten ritual ceremony is among others as follows:

1. As information media: Sekaten ceremony is the celebration of commemorating the birth date of Prophet Muhammad pbuh with the purpose of syiar to preaching Islamic religion.

2. As entertainment facility: Sekaten ceremony gives entertainment for public with gamelan show and night market. It is expected that public are interested to come to the ceremony.

3. As bridge between king and people: The ritual ceremony is a mandatory facility of a Sultan to give welfare to his people. The event is a connector so that the Sultan can have close relations to his people. The communication events are determined in some characteristics of communication which can influence sekaten ceremony: (1) setting, (2) participants, (3) form of messages, (4) content of message and (5) media. For example, with the presence of participants it can make the exchange of information.

1. Setting: It includes time, place and goal for sekaten ceremony. Sekaten ceremony starts from Rabiul awal 5 to Rabiul awal 12 and the location is in Kraton, the grand complex. Many people watch the ritual ceremony. It indicates that communication activities occur, messages are transmitted and public accept.

2. Participants: Anyone can participate in sekaten ceremony whether they become communicator (the organizing committee/the organizer) or communicants (public/visitors). The involvement between communication actors in interaction activities is a communication process. Participants send message through activities they bring while the spectators accept the information from what they see and feel. We can see clearer when we see activities, such as gamelan show. In this matter public does not only watch but they are invited to know that the gamelan show is a series of sekaten ceremony. Therefore, through the events we can see the form of communication activities where communication activity occurs between communicators and communicants.

3. Form of message: Message in sekaten ceremony is verbal and nonverbal message, and it has informative meaning. The messages is transmitted through a variety of procession, and these start from the opening to the closing. Therefore, sekaten ceremony has the goal of transmitting information, giving education and entertainment to visitors.

4. Message Content: Communication is a process of transmitting information in a kind of ideas, thinking, emotion or feeling. Each procession of activities has each message to be transmitted to communicants. The moral message is intended to transmit to all visitors, like Grebeg event. The ritual ceremony to scramble mountains in grebeg maulid ceremony

contains the meaning that people who want to get some should fight and not easy to desperate.

5. Media/Channel: Each message in communication activity requires media to transmit message. In sekaten ceremony, the message which will be transmitted through various ceremony procession, symbols or artefacts and other. The message transmitted through symbols can be shown from the distribution procession of *udhik-udhik*. It does not only distribute something but it has meaning that Sultan gives sedekah (*charity*) to his people.

Meaning Contained in Ritual Communication of Sekaten Ceremony: The understanding of meaning and values contained in sekaten ceremony gets influence from interaction of individuals to the observable objects. The observation, the search of sources and the interpretation of symbolic meanings will create an understanding in depth to message values that should be presented through sekaten ceremony.

In the beginning of the ritual ceremony, two traditional music instruments called gamelan are shown to public and these will be played for seven days (except when doing Jumat prayer). It is the goal to attract or invite people to come to mosque.

Moreover, there is the ceremony of *Numplak Wajik*. The meaning is symbolically shown in the ceremony as efforts in the making of seven mountains. It is expected to go smoothly without any obstacle. The purpose of making the mountains themselves is the statement of *sedekah* from Sultan to his people as thanksgiving to god because great harvest. In view of the mountains design themselves these consist of various vegetables, fruits and market cakes.

Moreover, in *Miyos Dalem* ceremony at Masjid Agung with the presence of Sultan, regional government officials and abdi dalem. Sultan will distribute *udhikudik*. The ceremony describes an ideal life pattern where society is invited to live together in differences. It is effort in the tighening of relationship between noble people and grassroot people. The last ritual ceremony is Grebeg mulud. The ceremony distributes seven mountains to be marched to Masjid Agung, Puro Pakualaman and Kepatihan. Society scramble to get blessing from the mountains. The ritual ceremony means that human to get something should continuously try in competition and not easy to despair.

5. Conclusion: In this research we can conclude that sekaten ceremony is cultural acculturation. Moreover, it becomes the media of traditional communication and it is preserved until right now. Nonverbal communication in a kind of symbol, artefact and ceremony procession has meaning and philosophy. In this matter, Yogyakarta society trust the existence.

Verbally the tradition also teaches Islamic religion preaching because sekaten itself means Syahadatain coming from the Syahadat words and it means people who come to sekaten ceremony are expected to convert Islam as their religion by uttering two syahadat sentences. Messages presented in sekaten ceremony is packaged in a real and unique form so that it can give education and entertainment for public. Moreover, it begins cooperation

with regional government to opening night market festival for one month before the peak ceremony of Grebeg is closed.

Sekaten ceremony is able to become the special characteristics of Jogjakarta culture tourism. It is full of local values and wisdom as the characteristics of social personality in The Greater Yogyakarta. From aculturation reality, sekaten ceremony can be concluded as well that Javanese society have tolerance attitude and it is able to create new culture. In fact the differences definitely create diversity.

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