

## **The Concept of a Social Organism: The Response of Javanese Society to Modernism in the Serat Wedhatama by Kangjeng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Arya (K.G.P.A.A.) Mangkunegara IV**

**Sahid Teguh Widodo**

*Javanology Institute, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jl. Ir. Sutami 36A, Kentingan, Surakarta 57126, Indonesia*

### **ABSTRACT**

The specific goal of this research is to discover the socio-cultural response of Javanese society to the wave of modernism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on the ancient Javanese manuscript, the *Serat Wedhatama*, written by Kangjeng Gusti Pangeran Adipati Arya (K.G.P.A.A.) Mangkunegara IV. The form of the current research is qualitative. The type of research is a library research, which includes a literature review and makes use of the Javanese manuscripts found in the Reksa Pustaka library in Pura Mangkunegaran Surakarta. The philological approach was used for this study, which includes: (1) an inventory of the manuscripts, (2) a description of the manuscripts, (3) reading of the texts, (4) translation of the texts, and (5) comprehension of the texts. Results of the research showed the existence of a concept for a social organism which describes the figure of modern man in the socio-cultural life of a Javanese society, which is harmonious, mutually synergising and able to preserve the “Javanese world”. The concept of a social organism is a response by intellectuals and writers (poets) from the Karaton and also the Javanese people who have an inclination to preserve the existence of the Javanese culture that has belonged to them for centuries.

*Keywords:* Social organism, Javanese, *Serat Wedhatama*, Mangkunegara IV

### **INTRODUCTION**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of an era of modern industrialisation on the Island of Java. The court, or *karaton*-centric orientation of the social lives of the Javanese community, began to be criticised by members of the middle class aristocracy themselves.

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*E-mail address:*

sahidteguhwidodo@yahoo.com (Sahid Teguh Widodo)

Grangasang (1989) states that at that point in time, the Javanese society was constructed in a rigid, strict fashion, which had begun to show no harmonious functional relations (Darsiti, 1989). Abidin (2000) adds that the ideal life structure of the traditional Javanese society can be understood mechanistically by its single measure, or the availability of facilities and infrastructure which formed a chain of linear and monotonous causal relations. Javanese man was positioned as an object that was controlled and determined by the systemic organisation of his social group. The onset of a new era of capitalism was considered to have damaged the principles and rules of the predecessors (Pruwitt & Rubin, 1996) of the Javanese society and go against the reality of life in the Javanese society, which had been well established with its own social structure and system for centuries.

The weakening of social bonds, due to the damaged social structure, encouraged the literary scholars or writers of the court, or *karaton*, to create literary works which were educational (*wulang*) in nature and would help rebuild the autonomy of the Javanese social system, its structure and the inbuilt function of Javanese man. Just before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, classical Javanese literary works began to appear and were aimed to restore the integrity and creativity of Javanese people (both physically and mentally) by renewing and recycling the world of civilisation without straying away from the grandeur of the classical Javanese aesthetics, morals, and knowledge (Mulder, 2001).

One of the more popular and well-known Javanese literary works is the *Serat Wedhatama*, which was written by a leader in the Mangkunegaran court by the name of K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunegara IV (1853—1881), and subsequently by Geels (1997), referred to as the “*Renaissance of Modern Javanese Letters*” (1757–1873 AD). There are two versions of *the Serat Wedhatama*: version A (consists of 72 verses) and version B (consists of 100 verses). Version B No. Ca. A 215 consists of 100 verses and 5 types of songs, namely, *Pangkur*, *Sinom*, *Pocung*, *Gambuh*, and *Kinanthi* (Simuh, 1996). In general, *the Serat Wedhatama* is understood to contain moral teachings on how to attain the identity of a Javanese. The characteristics and noble characters of the Javanese are described through symbols with an “average” distance to the field of meaning, making which is not too difficult to understand or comprehend.

One of the values presented in *the Serat Wedhatama* is the concept of a social organism, which may be referred to as a new conceptual framework stemming from a life process that has moved dynamically in Javanese society since just before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The value of a social organism has become an alternative for Javanese society in its response to modernisation, while retaining the existence of the “Javanese world” so that a new and more flexible (internal-external) social structure could be created. The concept of a “Social Organism” in the context of social science essentially describes a structure of the social life of a holistic Javanese society. Each part

of this life is connected harmoniously, with mutual synergy and an essential interdependence that leads to an organismic working interpretation like that of a body, among various kinds of bodies within the universe (Sahid, 2010).

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The type of this study is library research, or research which is carried out by making use of the data from texts or manuscripts stored in libraries, or in this case, specifically the *Reksa Pustaka* library in the Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta. The approach used is a philological approach, as recommended by Baried (1985). The research makes use of the five steps of a philological study, namely; (1) an inventory of the manuscripts, (2) a description of the manuscripts, (3) reading of the texts, (4) translation of the texts, and (5) comprehension of the texts.

The inventory of the manuscripts was carried out by recording the contents of the manuscript catalogue in the *Reksa Pustaka* Library at the Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta using a catalogue study (Baried, 1985), which succeeded in establishing the *Serat Wedhatama* as a data source for the research. The next step was to carry out a description of the manuscript by making comprehensive notes about the manuscript (Darusuprpto, 1984). The reading of the text was carried out by translating the text into Indonesian. The next stage was understanding of the texts (Miles & Huberman, 1992), which required a display of the data based on the problem and concluded with a verification of the entire

contents of the *Serat Wedhatama* in order to discover the new values in line with the goal of the research.

## RESULTS

### *Contents of the Serat Wedhatama*

The genre of the *Serat Wedhatama* can be categorised as *sastra wulang* (educational literature), which contains teachings on the eminence and perfection of life of the Javanese. All the elements found in the teachings of the *Serat Wedhatama* form the ideal figure of a Javanese person who has (spiritual) vitality and (physical) strength for life, originating from “nobleness and power” (*wiry*), “prosperity” (*arta*) and “knowledge” (*winasis*). All three works in such a way that the “ultimate truth” will appear:

... /melok tanpa aling-aling/ kang  
ngalingi kalingling/ wenganing  
rasa tumlawung/ keksi saliring  
jaman/ angelangut tanpa tepi/  
yeku ingran tapa tapaking Hyang  
Suksma (Serat Wedhatama, Sinom,  
16)

(trans)... clearly visible with no  
obstacle, that which obstructs  
it is eliminated, a resounding  
feeling is opened, until the entire  
horizon appears, deserted and  
without boundaries, all called  
contemplation in the way of God.

Based on the structure of the *Serat Wedhatama* text, its values and teachings

are related to morality, self-identity, human quality, true Javanese spiritual teachings and the identity of the Javanese (see Darusuprpto, 1975).

It is evident in the *Serat Wedhatama* that the traditional Javanese spiritual values are given the main priority in an endeavour to cleanse one's moral character (Mangadeg, 1975; Dhanu, 2010), to always remain humble, and to "take pleasure in pleasing others" – all of which are given special attention in the *Serat Wedhatama*. The sentence "take pleasure in pleasing others" appears three times in the text, using a variety of different terms, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the manuscript. The variations of this sentence are:

- a. *Amamangun karyenak tyasing sesami* "always work to make other people happy" (*Sinom*, verse 1)
- b. *Wigya met tyasing sesami* "skilled at refreshing the heart/bringing happiness to the heart of others" (*Sinom*, verse 17)

- c. *Mung ngenaki tyasing liyan* "only to please other people" (*Kinanthi*, verse 13)

All the three sentences above have the same prerequisite, namely, the "ability" and "skills" that are presented explicitly in the *wirya*, *arta* and *wasis*. *Karyenak tyasing sasami* is a concept of "serving" other people in order to gain a higher level of "service" for themselves. The concept of serving and being served is not in the sense of bartering (*mechanic-normative*), but it is rather reciprocal, complementary, creative and innovative (organic) in nature (Fodde & Denti, 2005). As a starting point, I wish to use the *Serat Wedhatama* to explore the collection of social teachings presented by K.G.P.A.A. Mangkunegara IV.

The *Serat Wedhatama* not only shapes the figure of an eminent human being as a person, but also as a social figure who will develop and be able to show his identity with a Javanese character (...*rehne ta sira*

TABLE 1  
Content of the teachings in the *Serat Wedhatama*

No. of Verses (pada)	Name of Song	Value of the Text ( <i>Content of the Text</i> )
14	<i>Pangkur</i>	Identity, education, knowledge, human character, competence, etc.
18	<i>Sinom</i>	Desire, personality, professionalism, social identity, life obligations, social position, spiritual foundations
15	<i>Pocung</i>	Knowledge of life, philosophy of process (Javanese), noble character in social life, education, basic social and religious resources
35	<i>Gambuh</i>	Homage, Javanese identity, process of strengthening the spirit, body, self, micro & macro cosmos, and divine source
18	<i>Kinanthi</i>	Various forms of concept by which to live one's life, examples and social symbols, knowledge and eminence of life

*Jawi*). The writer’s awareness of the reality of the universe and totality of human life is described as the destiny of life in a much broader and more perfect dimension.

*The Concept of Modern Man in the Serat Wedhatama*

The *Serat Wedhatama* is the representation of a Javanese intellectual and literary movement, which responded to the conditions of society in its age. The value of humanism that is offered is none other than to uphold human value and dignity so that a person is able to take his place (*manggon*) in an important and (even) central cosmic position in this modern era. Unlike the teachings of Western philosophy, in which man is at the centre of reality

(anthropocentric), the *Serat Wedhatama* views human beings as cosmocentric, as human beings who are part of the universe and must perfect their lives in order to receive “guidance from God” (*wahyuning Gusti Allah*).

Description on improving the quality of a human being (to become perfect), which is one of the central themes in the *Serat Wedhatama*, is presented in steps (see Table 2).

This (ideal) concept of modern man, of course, needs to be reinterpreted in accordance with the context of the present day. Today, Javanese man faces a damaged social environment, as indicated by the appearance of various diseases of civilisation. An increase in social depression, a decline

TABLE 2  
Central themes in the *Serat Wedhatama*

No. of Verses (pada)	Name of Song	Themes of the Text
1 – 14	<i>Pangkur</i>	the writer explores more about identity, the importance of knowledge, human nature and character, competence, and the concept of perfection for describing the figure of a complete Javanese human being (descriptive-static)
1 – 18	<i>Sinom</i>	Elaborates on a Javanese person who has been given clothes, has identity and character, is professional, is aware of his rights and obligations, and knows the spiritual foundations for life.
1 – 15	<i>Pocung</i>	The section which explains the position and status of man in the cosmos, that is, the importance of striving to gain knowledge to obtain <i>wirya</i> (power), <i>arta</i> (wealth), and <i>wasis</i> (skill) as the basic requirements of life.
1 – 35	<i>Gambuh</i>	The concept of Javanese Sufism, the mystical concept of the union between man and God ( <i>manunggaling kawula-Gusti</i> ). In order to attain a deep understanding of this union with God, a formula known as <i>sembah catur</i> , or “four kinds of homage”, is described (body, mind, soul, and feeling) as a way of gaining the grace of God
1 – 18	<i>Kinanthi</i>	Contains the teachings or concept about how to live life well

in social quality, an increase in crimes, violence, accidents, suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse and a decline in the mental condition of the young generation (resulting in vandalism, a lack of self-confidence, in addition to other problems) have all led to social defects that are difficult to cure. Diseases such as stroke, liver problems, cancer, diabetes and HIV have become the primary causes of death on a grand scale.

The questions that need to be asked are: is the figure of modern man in the *Serat Wedhatama* still able to remain eminent “in the life of society today” (*samangsane pasamauan*)? Or has he become like “useless trash” (*yekti sepi asepa lir sepah samun*)? Is he able to prevent and overcome this? Can the teachings still be beneficial? Are all the points in the teachings of the *Serat Wedhatama* relevant to be used (at least) as an alternative hold on life?

#### *The Concept of a Social Organism: An Offer*

The figure of the modern man in the *Serat Wedhatama* is a figure who can always be accepted by and engage in dialogues with nature and his surroundings and is able to represent a state of “existing and meditating in the universe” (*keningratan: ka-hening-ing-rat-an*), as reflected in the noble attitude and speech of a well-respected Javanese person. An aristocrat is a person who endeavours to “make other people happy” (*karyenak tyasing sasama*) so as to avoid conflicts. This kind of attitude can only exist in a person who continually “engages in self-appraisal or introspection” (*mamangun*

*martamartani*) so that he does not behave wrongly, continues to display the correct attitude, and his actions do not hurt others.

A person who always “refines and perfects his character” (*masah amemasuh budi*) will not have a character that is easily prejudiced, likes to gossip about and slander others (Rasjidi, 1971) or “always underestimates the ability of others” (*pendhak-pendhak angendhak gunaning janma*), which ultimately leads to shame and anger. The *Serat Wedhatama* offers a character, who is forgiving as he “forgives other people’s mistakes and avoids wrong actions” (*...den ngaksama kasisipaning sesami, sumimpanga ing laku dur*). In another section, it includes the words, “genuinely accepting a loss without regret, being patient when done wrong by showing grace and surrendering to God” (*lila lamun kelangan nora gegetun/ trima yen ketaman/sakserik sameng dumadi/tri legawa nalangsa srah ing Bathara*).

The above explanation shows a personal relationship with other figure from “The Beyond”. A human being becomes a tiny unit of a society, and as such, this teaching wishes for an organic inter-element relation within the immanent construct of a human being, both with his natural and social environment. The *Serat Wedhatama* offers a life concept which is simple, romantic and dynamic. It is this life concept that I refer to as the concept of a Social Organism. In the *Serat Wedhatama*, a social life which is supported by a high-quality personal life shows the presence of three basic principles for a dynamic life:

### **a. Principle of Self-Control**

The principle of self-control is an independent social system and as such, a human being is encouraged to prepare himself as well as possible in the midst of a life with other people. Every person must have the ability to control and improve the quality of internal elements organically. In the *Serat Wedhatama*, the principle of self-control is manifested in an understanding of the importance of a person having identity, education, knowledge, character and certain skills in his life.

### **b. Principle of Self-Renewal**

A principle of self-control that is implemented well will give rise to the ability for a life system to engage in a continual process of renewal in order to maintain the integrity of a person's overall awareness. Every person is required to have the ability to cooperate with others, complement each other and synergise according to his own competence and professionalism, and must always endeavour to solve all problems peacefully, without conflict, as an essential asset of his social and religious life.

### **c. Principle of Self-Advantage**

This is the ability of a life system which is creative, that is, creative outside the physical and mental boundaries, in the processes of knowledge, development and evolution. A superior human being is recognised by his ability and commitment to live life, his social symbols and his virtuous life.

## **DISCUSSION**

The concept of a social organism in the *Serat Wedhatama* can ultimately be understood as a systemic-modern life view. The values contained in the teachings of the *Serat Wedhatama* can be summarised in three basic principles of support, which indicate clearly the existence of a line of connection that is organic-systemic rather than being constructed with the aim of creating new static-mechanistic norms. The concept of a social organism provides direction for conceptual guidance in a life that is harmonious, contextual and dynamic, whereby all three are issues of modernity that the writer has managed to capture.

*Serat Wedhatama* offers an alternative to face various turmoil of era. The emergence of transitional phases, each with their own characteristics, forms and characters, is an important lesson that can be used as reflection, data and valuable information for the society's life at the present moment. The concept of a social organism in the *Serat Wedhatama* also describes a strategy to achieve a condition of dynamic balance which guides the life of a modern human being in the midst of a constantly and dynamically moving natural and social environment. The quality of a person's life in terms of his character, morals, knowledge, skills and intelligence is presented as a complementary dialectic, and for this reason, it has an essential inter-element dependence.

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