Javanese Existence As Human Being In Linus Suryadi’s Pengakuan Pariyem

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Abstract

Linus Suryadi is Indonesian writer who often use a lot of Javanese diction in his writings. One of his famous lyrical prose is Pengakuan Pariyem who tells about the life, thoughts, and spiritual belief of Javanese woman that still hold her strong culture and customs. This paper is aimed to find the existentialism aspect in the lyrical prose by using qualitative descriptive methods. It emphasizes on the habit of Javanese people according to the tradition, customs and spiritual belief that depicted in the lyrical prose to reveal the way Javanese people show their existence and looking for the meaning of life as human being. This study find out that Javanese people according to Linus Suryadi is theistic and somehow even though they have faith in the existence of God, they still mixing up between religion and ancient belief. The existentialism aspects that are portrayed in the lyrical prose are the freedom to choose, responsible of the choice, anxiety feeling, and existence precedes essence.

Keywords: belief, custom, existentialism, Javanese, tradition

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as the country that has numerous cultures and tribes. One of them is Javanese which has its own unique way of living, thoughts, traditions, customs and belief. If we talked about Javanese belief, we cannot separate it from the relation between human and God. But somehow, Javanese people have their own way to “communicate” with God. Furthermore, Raffles in his History of Java explained that most of Javanese people have Mahomedan as their religion since supreme Hindu empire of Majapahit was enthroned, but Mahomedan religion is strangely blended with ancient Pagan worship. Raffles later quoted Hogendorp’s Memoir on Java (1800) that those
strange blended made Javanese people far from bigots to their religion as the common Mahomedans\textsuperscript{1}.

In above explanation, Raffles mentioned about Mahomedan that refers to Islam religion. It can be inferred that Javanese people in the age of Majapahit was mostly Hindu, later on after that greatest Hindu kingdom was enthroned other religious influence come to Java. Even though most Javanese is Islam, there are another religions that also come to Java like Christian, Catholic, etc. But according to Raffles documentation, Javanese people cannot purely accept the new religious teaching. They combine the new faith with the ancient custom of the country. Indeed Raffles mentioned that the new religions that exist in Java until nowadays only seem to penetrate the surface of Javanese people’s self.

The Mahomedan religion, as it at present exists on Java seems only to have penetrated the surface and to have taken but little root in the heart of the Javans. Some there are who enthusiastic, and all consider it a point of honor to support and respect its doctrines\textsuperscript{2}. It can be seen from the explanation above that religion only take the surface and little of inner heart, while most of Javanese inner heart still attached into their ancient teaching.

The ancient teaching of Javanese people who already mingled with their new religions built the new customs and traditions that somehow become a unique culture. However, Javanese spiritual belief and tradition is famous with its magical and spiritual power of several rites and ritual. Javanese people tend to believe in sacred magic things, place, and spiritual power. They believe that every move of human being represents deep philosophical things. Not only every move and act, Javanese people have a deep philosophy in certain thing. The philosophical could relate with God, nature, and other human beings, take for an instance the egg. For Javanese people it symbolizes the beginning of human life that is pure and know nothing, then the core of the egg will become a human itself that can be bad or good creature. That’s why most of Javanese people are common with searching for such an identity and guide to become a great human. Javanese believe that in order to become a good human being, they have to harmonize with other human and nature in order to get God blessings and mercies.

\textsuperscript{1} Raffles, \textit{The History of Java}, (London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1830).
\textsuperscript{2} Raffles, \textit{The History of Java}, (London: John Murray, Albemarle-Street, 1830).
Linus Suryadi is Indonesian writer who born and grow up in Javanese culture. His literary works somehow give the reader an insight also the understanding that he grow up in the middle of strong Javanese custom and tradition, since it is reflected and strongly influence his literary works. Linus often uses Javanese diction and words, moreover he also taking up issues related with Javanese people in his writings. One of his famous writing is Pengakuan Pariyem in a form of lyrical prose that tells about Javanese woman’s life, thought, and spiritual belief. Linus uses a lot of Javanese words in this lyrical prose. He also portrayed about Javanese way of living, traditions, customs, issues related with the caste, the rites and ritual, and spiritual belief. In the end of his lyrical prose, he also gives the translation of Javanese vocabularies, traditional songs, and idioms. It can be said that this work would rather be a little insight to know and understand about Javanese people.

This paper will try to reveal the existentialism aspects that exist in the lyrical prose. It will be focused on the way Javanese people live, how they do their traditions and customs also their belief that portrayed in the lyrical prose Pengakuan Pariyem. Thus can be the red line to figure out the path that Javanese people do in order to show their existence as human being and how they are looking for the meaning of life as human being.

This paper applied existentialism theory to analyze the literary works. A German philosopher, Heidegger mentioned about existentialism is the philosophy which meditates on what it feels like to be alive. The existentialist is concern about questioning being oneself as human being. One have to done certain things in order to feel as human and “alive”. Further, Heidegger stated that we are human subjects only because we are practically bound up with others and the material world and these relations are constitutive of our life rather than accidental to it. The Existentialist considers that to be an existent one has to be capable of being conscious that one exists. In a short, the term existentialism is about to find a significance of life through freedom of choice, willing and responsibility in its own self.

The main themes of existentialism are existence precedes essence, freedom, choice and responsibility, anguish, anxiety, dread and despair, alienation, nothingness, anguish, death, authenticity and inauthenticity, individualism, facticity, anti-intellectualism and intentionality. The expert stated that above aspects and themes of existentialist should be done by human being in order to show their existence.

According to existentialist, one aspect to show the existence of human is freedom. To proof the existence of human being one should have a freedom to choose, to express and freedom to do everything they wanted to live their life. Man's freedom involves a 'life of toil and much suffering and many dangers' whether we like it or not, toil, suffering, and danger are our lot. Men have strived throughout history to free themselves from danger and from loneliness, anxiety and anguish by seeking recourse in the supernatural or in the social collective. Man has tried the religious escape, the cultural escape, and all manner of escape, but if he wants freedom, he must not escape from himself Buried in the social collective, the individual rarely is able to extricate himself and thus loses the very freedom which is the essence of man's behavior. Freedom doesn’t mean to run away from all life troubles. But according to existentialist, the freedom is rather to live with all the troubles. How human faces their trouble is the true freedom.

Something that follows the freedom is the responsibility. Azhar stated that “The focus on freedom in existentialism is related to the limits of the responsibility one bears as a result of one's freedom.” This notion of 'existence' is reserved for those who distinguish themselves-as individuals, forging their thoughts and values with the impulse of a creative freedom and above all living a life of commitment and responsibility. Beside freedom and responsibility, there is also anxiety as one aspect of human existence. Existentialists view anxiety as a moment of truth, an authentic experience and maintain that it cannot be eliminated inspite of hard efforts made by man.

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7 Kneller, Existentialism and Education. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958)
One cannot escape anxiety. Man has the continual pain of anxiety that he has to live a bogus life which he cannot and doesn't want to live\textsuperscript{10}.

Existentialism has both theistic and atheistic forms. Theistic Existentialists consider God to be 'the source of one's being', 'the ground of all being', or 'one's ultimate concern'... The atheistic existentialists' presuppositions and belief systems preclude any supernatural or any idea of God\textsuperscript{11}. It can be understood that there are two types of idea about existentialism. Theistic is for the notion that the source of all being and the universe comes from God as spiritual thing, whereas atheistic believe that the existence of human have no relation with supernatural being of God.

**METHOD**

This paper uses qualitative descriptive method to analyze the data, according to Myers, the methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live\textsuperscript{12}.

The main source of data is the lines in the lyrical prose that pointing out existentialism aspects.

Later on after find out the lines that contain existentialism aspects, the writer classified and sorted the lines according to the themes of existentialism itself.

The key term of qualitative methods is the researcher itself. They are the one who formulate the concept of the research, gathering data, and analyze data. The form of the data mostly is the descriptive text, interview or dialogue transcription, books, and other written data. The analyze process of this method involved the personal subjectivity experiences of the researcher towards the world where they are living.

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

*Pengakuan Pariyem* tells about Javanese woman, Maria Magdalena Pariyem who comes from small village that still holds the ancient tradition and belief. She worked as a maid in the house of Javanese noble family Kanjeng Raden Tumenggung Cokro Sentono that had two children, Raden Bagus Ario Atmojo and Putri Wiwit Setiawati. Later then, she was impregnated by Raden Bagus Ario Atmojo. They could


\textsuperscript{12} Meyrz, *Qualitative research in information systems*. (MIS Quarterly, 21(2), 2007) 241-242
not hide the pregnancy and they did not have other choice except telling the truth to the Raden Tumenggung Cokro Sentono. Thus the words Pariyem’s confession comes from.

Pariyem in the lyrical prose represents the common Javanese woman that still holds its culture, tradition and belief. The opening of the lyrical prose is telling about the birth of Pariyem

- *But pardon me*
- *I forget my birthdate*
- *But I remember my weton*
- *The Wuku is Kuningan*
- *Under the protection of god Indra*
- *The day is on Wage Friday.*

Javanese people have their own calendar system, each day have certain philosophy and prophecy. Moreover the day of birth in Javanese calendar system can determine one’s personality, luck, unlucky, suitable job, proper future spouse, etc. Each *wuku* is believed to be guarded and protected by gods or goddess. If according to the birth date they will face unluckiness, they will hold *ruwatan*. It is the sort of certain ritual that involved offerings, flowers, and prayers. The ritual actually the symbolization of prayers and hopes to the God so that they will not facing the unluckiness.

The way Javanese people believe and make their own calendar system is one of many ways that is done to show their existence as human being. It is include in the freedom of choice and responsibility. However, the belief of prophecy according to calendar system is to prevent bad things happen in their life. After knowing the things that are going to happen according to prophecy, they are free to determine and choose their next step in life. Thus, they have an understanding that whatever the choice, it will bring a consequences and responsibilities that must be faced. Since as human being, one’s absolutely feel and suffer from the pain, danger, anxiety, sadness, depression, and all life troubles. To face, dealt with troubles and keep live the life is the proof of human existence and the process of looking for meaning of life. The way human solves the problem and free from their troubles whether they use supernatural or social way is also called as human freedom. The lyrical prose also mentioned that Javanese people also believed in the protection of certain gods according to their birth date. That is the proof

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13 Ag, *Pengakuan Pariyem.* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
that Javanese people use supernatural way to show their existence and it is included in theistic existentialism.

It also can be said that the Javanese calendar system and the belief of weton and wuku is the way Javanese spiritual way looking for the meaning of life. As explained above, Javanese believe that the character of oneself can be determined by looking at their birth date. The character is include the good and the bad nature of one self. The function to know their own nature character is to take a control of their own self in everyday life. Thus purpose is for the quest of life meaning and become a good human being.

Another freedom of choice that is done by most Javanese people and depicted in the lyrical poetry is about the ritual of new born baby. In Java, the placenta of the new born baby will be buried with several things in order to prevent bad things happen to the children in the future. The things that buried together with the placenta are egg, rice, coins, garlic, shallot, sugar, salt, ginger, and specified Javanese spice. All things together with placenta are put in the pot and buried in front of the house.

Yeah, yeah, Egg: is the symbol of new born baby
Can not do anything – pure –
All depend to the elders
Rice and coins: symbols of hope
So that the wealth is always pouring the baby
In the case of clothes, foods and money
Shallot and garlic, sugar, salt
Ginger and galangal: symbols of the sweet and the bitter of life
What will be faced and felt, so that:
They are neither deadly sad nor deadly happy in facing the life.

The ritual of new baby born above is one of many rituals that Javanese people usually do when they are going to face or experience the big moment and phase of their life. Somehow in general, the purpose is to send lots of prayers and hope to God. However the prayers is mingled with the tradition and custom and this is the way Javanese people to express their freedom. The kind of freedom that is used in above new baby born ritual is the choosing of ingredients that buried along with the placenta. The writer explained that the ingredients and things have certain symbol and meaning. In accordance of existentialist freedom is also relate with the responsibility, Javanese

14 Ag, Pengakuhan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
people by using freely their freedom to choose the ingredients, they also responsible to explain the reason that the ingredients are contain certain symbol, meaning, and indeed life teaching.

Yeah, yeah, my name is Pariyem
Father said that my name brings a good luck
He gave the name when I was five days old
“Sepasaran”, we call it
So, the mat is prepared on the floor and in the ground:
Red jenang: symbol of the baby’s chastity
White jenang: symbol of the light that brighten up the world
Chicken ingkung: symbol of the wholeness of human body

The prayers was led by the chief
Prayers for mother’s salvation after having birth
And prayers for the salvation of new baby born
To the Mightiest God who preserve the universe – whispering gratefulness
Whispering thankfulness
Hopefully the birth is accepted and blessed
By the universe and all beings\textsuperscript{15}.

The above stanza of lyrical prose is also tells about Javanese ritual that often called as slametan. It can be seen that in this ritual Javanese people also use certain things that represents or symbolizes something during the procession. As explained above, that is the way Javanese people use their freedom of choose and they responsible of it. But further, it also give an insight that the aspect existence precedes essence is exist in Javanese customs and tradition. It can be inferred that the symbols of every single thing which involved in the ritual is connect with God. Somehow, the existence of things precedes the essence or the symbols of those things. The existence of human being precedes the essence of life, looking for the mercy and blessing from God. In a short, Javanese people in the term of showing their existence as human being and in the term of searching the meaning of life always involved God.

The real essence of the name is:
Bambang and Endang are the children of Hermitage
But nowadays ther is neither hermit nor ancient priest
The times already grind them
And it crushed with the universe
Those names is taken by the wealthy people
Then they give it to their children\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{15} Ag, Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)

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Name becomes the identity of oneself as human being. It has no exception for Javanese people as well. In the lyrical prose the writer give an insight about the importance of name in Javanese culture. The main character named Priyem, it comes after pari Javanese word for rice. It is because her father was merely a farmer that looks after rice field. In a short, her name represents her family status. In above stanza there is another Javanese name, Bambang and Endang who also represent family status. It is said that in the past time name Bambang and Endang are for noble Javanese family. That is why people from small village did not use that name. They feel ashamed if they named their children after the name of noble family. It reflects the existence precedes essence. The existence of the name in Javanese tradition precedes the essence of human being depend on the social background.

Yeah yeah, my name is Pariyem
My belief is:
Javanese mystic
But in my identity card
Written by Mr Headman
My religion is Catholic17.

Further in the above stanza, the main character tells about her belief. Briefly she said that her religion as catholic is formality and for documentation purpose only. While she confesses that her true belief is Javanese mystic. Moreover in the next stanza she tells about the concept of religion according to Javanese people. She claimed that religion is merely a status, like what is stated that “isn’t belief, like our ancestors said is the essence of the power source? It is not proper thing to carelessly talked openly about it”. The lyrical prose depicted Javanese people’s point of view about belief. Belief is not something that have to said out loud in order to grab other attention or to. If human beings do that, it would be the source of disaster. A lot of people who saying out loud about their religion and belief ended up fighting, shouting, further killing each other. And everything bad is becoming legal and true under the name of religion and belief. Belief is something that has to be reflected in every action. That is the way Javanese people show their existence by doing their own way to worship and close with the God.

16 Ag. Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
17 Ag. Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
In another stanza, the writer tells about the concept of sin in Javanese perspective

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\begin{align*}
\text{You are Javanese people} \\
\text{But why asking about the sins} \\
\text{Yeah, have you forgotten?} \\
\text{Javanese but not too Java – granny said –} \\
\text{Because forget about the customs} \\
\text{Just one thing that need to be understood} \\
\text{Don’t bargain or negotiate} \\
\text{If ones is true Javanese} \\
\text{There is no need to ask such question}^{18}.
\end{align*}
\]

The main character confesses and said that in a term of sin as human being, she claimed that she did not know a single thing about it. Later on she said that the true Javanese will never questioning about sins, since it is beyond human’s control. It is the God’s realm. The things that have to be understood is that as good human being one should never break the rules and always maintain their relationship with other human, not to hurt or harm others also nature and universe. In a short, one should undergo their duties in the world as human being. Thus is where the term of existence reflected.

In below stanza the writer tells about the way Javanese people live their life

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\begin{align*}
\text{I just want to let it flow} \\
\text{I love being inside of it} \\
\text{Every living things has a rhythm} \\
\text{A rhythm in his life} \\
\text{Every living thing has weather} \\
\text{Weather inside their inward} \\
\text{If the rhythm of life is messed up} \\
\text{The inward is messing up as well} \\
\text{If the inward weather is dark} \\
\text{The self-universe is dark as well}^{19}.
\end{align*}
\]

It is clearly tells about the Javanese people who live their life no matter what happen. Even if they face problem, disaster, sadness, pain, bad things they will go through it. That is the existence as human being is reflected. To be exist as human being, one have to go through and dealt with every problems that come in their life. They must not running from those problems. Further, the writer also tells the reason why Javanese people could through the storms that come into their life. It is because they believe that

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18 Ag, Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
19 Ag, Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia,2009)
the source of all strength come from inward part of human. Thus understanding brings Javanese people in the search for meaning in life. They believe in order to reach the highest rank as human being they have to be able to control their inward. So, they will have all the wisdom of life.

Since the ancient time
Here exist in our world
Millions people
In many centuries
Faithfully squeezing the tear\textsuperscript{20}.

In above stanza, the writer tells that since ancient time the first existence of human in the world, human have to deal with sadness, fears and tears. Later in the lyrical prose he also tells about main character’s anxiety towards the confession that she had to make that she was impregnated by her employer’s son. Those are the aspects of existentialism that exist in the lyrical prose. The natural feeling of human that have to be experienced in order to be alive as human being.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the lyrical prose according to existentialism theory, it can be concluded that Javanese people include in theistic existentialism as they believed in the existence of spiritual things and God as the source of every being. They do prayers, worship to the God by doing rites that involved certain sacred things full of symbols. In fact, everything that they use either in ritual or in their everyday life are the manifestation of the remembrance about the one holy spirit who created the universe and everything in it. It is also supported by the historical record of Java that mixed their ancient belief with the new religions that invaded the island.

The ways Javanese people show their existence that is portrayed in the lyrical prose are the freedom to choose, responsible of the choice, anxiety feeling, and existence precedes essence. Further, it can be inferred that every aspect to show the existence as human being that is done by Javanese people is to search the meaning of life. The meaning of life for Javanese people is to be close to their creator by always remembering and seen the creator in every aspects of their life.

\textsuperscript{20} Ag. Pengakuan Pariyem. (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009)
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