

## The Epidemic, Mysticism, and Traditional Beliefs in Old And Modern Indonesian Literatures

*Wabah, Perubatan, dan Kepercayaan Tradisional dalam Sastra Lama dan Modern Indonesia*

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### ABSTRACT

*Narratives regarding epidemics, diseases, traditional treatments, including beliefs in shamans or mystical practices, mantras, herbal potions, have emerged in old Indonesian literatures, whether in form of tales, literary compositions, or novels. Until now, these narratives continue to be produced as settings of events, important parts of the story, or inserts that intentionally displayed by the authors in literary works. This research aims to explore narratives from the past of the archipelago and bring them beyond the space and time into the current context in order to obtain an understanding concerning the formations of societal responses towards the pandemic. The objects of this study are the story of Calon Arang from Bali (1540), the tales of Agung Sakti (1892), the manuscript of Merapi-Merbabu (17th-18th century), Peroesoehan Koedoes (1918), and a collection of short stories entitled Wabah (2021). The meaning of those literary works can be explained by ethnosciences and narratology theories. Ethnosciences emphasizes on knowledge system which is a special knowledge from a certain society/ethnic, and different from the knowledge system of other society. Narratives regarding diseases or epidemic in those literary works not only provides information concerning the arrival of health problems events experienced by the society. However, they reflect inner structure of society, local beliefs and cultural traditions in dealing with health events/problems, and alternative solutions that offered or developed in society. Looking again on old literary works provide insights into deeper interpreting reactions and the way society mitigates chatarsis as well as processing strong emotions in facing public health crises.*

*Keywords: Epidemic; beliefs; old literatures; modern; ethnosciences*

### ABSTRAK

*Pengkisahan tentang wabah, penyakit, perubatan tradisional termasuk kepercayaan pada dukun atau perubatan, mantera dan ramuan herba telah muncul dalam karya sastra lama Indonesia, baik berupa hikayat, surat, mahupun novel. Hingga kini pengisahan tersebut tetap dihasilkan menjadi latar peristiwa, bahagian cerita yang penting, atau sisipan yang sengaja ditampilkan oleh pengarangnya dalam karya sastra. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengulik pengisahan-pengisahan dari masa lampau Nusantara tersebut dan membawanya keluar melewati ruang dan waktu menuju konteks saat ini agar diperoleh pemahaman mengenai pembentukan respons masyarakat terhadap pandemik. Adapun objek kajian dalam makalah ini cerita Calon Arang dari Bali (1540), Hikayat Agung Sakti (1892), naskah Merapi-Merbabu (abad ke-17-18), Poeroesoehan Koedoes (1918), dan kumpulan cerita pendek Wabah (2021). Makna karya-karya sastra tersebut dapat dijelaskan dengan teori etnosains dan naratologi. Etnosains menekankan pada sistem pengetahuan yang merupakan pengetahuan yang khusus daripada suatu masyarakat/etnik tertentu, dan berbeza dengan sistem pengetahuan masyarakat yang lain. Pengisahan tentang penyakit atau wabah dalam karya sastra tersebut tidak hanya memberikan informasi tentang peristiwa datangnya masalah kesihatan yang dialami oleh masyarakat. Akan tetapi, peristiwa itu menggambarkan struktur batin masyarakat, kepercayaan dan budaya tradisi tempatan dalam menghadapi peristiwa/masalah kesihatan dan alternatif cadangan yang ditawarkan atau dikembangkan dalam masyarakat. Menilik kembali karya sastra lama menawarkan wawasan untuk lebih dalam lagi mentafsirkan reaksi-reaksi dan cara masyarakat mengurangkan pengubatan serta memproses emosi yang kuat dalam menghadapi krisis kesihatan umum.*

*Kata Kunci: Wabah; kepercayaan; sastra lama; moden; etnosains*

## INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic that hit the world for at least three years has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including in work culture in Indonesia. Suwignyo (2000) explains that Indonesia experiencing visible cultural stutter in Covid-19 emergency respond period. The event of Covid-19 pandemics differs from natural disasters since it can affect anyone regardless of the strata or characteristics of its economic, political affiliations, and ideologies. Attitudes towards the emergency situation caused by Covid-19 pandemics have demonstrated society structure characters and resilience in various regions. This pandemic situation encourages new knowledge needs by pursuing massive research, not only from health and economy perspectives but also from a cultural science perspective.

The pandemics phenomenon have largely change not only human physical endurance but also the whole aspects of human life, both in structural and cultural manners. From this explanation, the disaster mitigation from cultural aspect is very needed in order to fill empty spaces that have not been explored by previous researches. This research is motivated by the phenomenon of pandemics/pagebluk/outbreaks and natural disasters are problems that unavoidable by Indonesian society which has threaten thousand and even more of people's lives due to their lack of disaster mitigation knowledge or pandemics. This research aims to track, to explore, and to examine folklores, old literatures, and modern literatures contain stories regarding epidemics and natural disasters in various cultural locations in Indonesia. Folklores, old literatures, and modern literatures are reflective works which in fact have provided a series of particular ways in reducing disaster risks or pandemics events that has been implemented by local society.

Narratives regarding pandemics, diseases, traditional treatments including the beliefs in shamans or mystical practices, mantras, and herbal potions have appeared in Indonesian old literatures, whether in forms of tales, literary compositions, or novels. Up to now, those narratives have been produced into event settings, the important part of the story, or inserts that deliberately displayed by the authors in the literature works.

The objects of this study are the story of *Calon Arang* from Bali (1540), the tales of *Agung Sakti* (1892), the manuscript of *Merapi-Merbabu* (17th-18th century), *Peroesoehan Koedoes* (1918), and a

collection of short stories entitled *Wabah* (2021). The meaning of those literary works can be explained by using ethnosciences and narratology theories. Ethnosciences emphasizes on knowledge system which is a special knowledge from a certain society/ethnic, and different from the knowledge system of other society. With ethnographic knowledge of the community related to the researched text, we can understand and interpret the particular cultural context of society being studied. As for narratology, it will assist in explaining the narrative perspective and discourse within the analyzed text.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research that focuses on description. Qualitative research is research that as a whole utilizes interpretive methods by presenting them in the form of descriptions (Ratna 2011:46). According to Faruk (2020), material objects are objects that are the target of research. The material objects in this research are the story of *Calon Arang* from Bali (1540), the tales of *Agung Sakti* (1892), the manuscript of *Merapi-Merbabu* (17th-18th century), *Peroesoehan Koedoes* (1918), and a collection of short stories entitled *Wabah* (2021). Meanwhile, the formal object as a point of view in this research uses the perspective of ethnoscience and narratology theory. Ethnoscience emphasizes knowledge systems which are knowledge that is unique to a particular society/ethnicity, and is different from the knowledge systems of other societies. Narratives about diseases or epidemics in literary works do not only provide information about the occurrence of health problems experienced by the community. However, these events reflect the inner structure of society, local beliefs and cultural traditions in dealing with health events/problems, and alternative solutions offered or developed in society.

The data collection method is carried out using research instruments by the researcher himself (human instrument) who acts as an analyzer of material objects. The data collection process is qualitative and is taken from parts of the text that describe relevant data. Stories as research objects are expected to be able to describe plagues, heresy and traditional beliefs in old and modern Indonesian literature. Data collection techniques in research are obtained from several steps. First, read the whole story. Second, understand the story content of the short story. Third, identify the problems in the story. Fourth, mark and record the research

objects contained in the story. Fifth, classify data related to epidemics, heresy and traditional beliefs in classifying this data. The data analysis techniques used include: first, identifying data that is in accordance with the perspective of ethnoscience and narratology theory; second, analyzing the form of description using the researcher's interpretation; third, summarizing the findings; and fourth, write a research report.

### EPIDEMICS, MYSTICISM, AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Regardless of the type of epidemic that strikes and spreads to various countries and regions, recurrence of events has always occurred since ancient times, including the recurrence of disease outbreaks. This almost similar repetition can develop into a pattern. This can be seen from the connection between other fields in relation to the outbreak. If the main impact of the outbreak was the emergence of victims and giving rise to emergency measures in the fields of health and medicine, the impact of this outbreak spread to other fields that were almost unrelated (Wibowo 2009:5). Epidemics can also affect a person's mental and mental health. There are several studies that focus on lifestyle changes, such as changing our lifestyle connection with nature or lack of exposure to external light. Still others are already considering it social changes such as the rise of individualism, the development of neoliberalism, a culture of narcissism, social mobility, constant exposure to the imagination of those with greater beauty or wealth through the media, and their impact phenomenon in our psyche as a possible cause of the depression epidemic (Wakefield 2016:6).

Those who are interested in that special attitude towards the universe which is now loosely called "mystical," find themselves beset by a multitude of persons who are constantly asking-some with real fervour, some with curiosity, and some with disdain-"What is mysticism?" When referred to the writings of the mystics themselves, and to other works in which this question appears to be answered, these people reply that such books are wholly incomprehensible to them. He will learn that mysticism is a philosophy, an illusion, a kind of religion, a disease; that it means having visions, performing conjuring tricks, leading an idle, dreamy, and selfish life, neglecting one's business, wallowing in vague spiritual emotions, and being "in tune with the infinite." (Underhill 2009:7). Mysticism suffers from somewhat different

cultural distortions, a bit more subtle but no less damaging, to an understanding and appreciation of the particular forms of mysticism that flowered in the late Middle Ages. First of all, it is a basic assumption of mysticism that the mystical experience cannot be exhaustively accounted for in naturalistic (scientific) terms, which runs counter to a materialistic world view that can only account for human behavior and psychological states in scientific terms. According to this perception, mystical experiences represent altered states of consciousness ultimately explainable by biological processes, thereby undercutting an essential component of what a mystical experience entails (Kroll 2005:203-204).

Questions or causal questions, as theism and religion suggest, are meaningful, they can still be applied to truth itself, or to causal reasoning itself. Many find them to be valid and answerable in ways which they take to be coherent, and important enough to persist with theological answers and religious ethics. Theological revelation of the divine will for humans, is usually alleged to be disclosed in some historical scriptures and religious revelations as conceived by an institutional body like a church. This church or religious institution claims to hand down its history through and testimony about significant events. It passes on the faith or revelation in a creed or testimony-based tradition with distinctive practices. In the theist and religious treatments of Natural Law, its content is sometimes but not always regarded as subject to and limited by faith, and some sort of claim to over-ride its imperatives, if God commands (Ardagh 2019:117).

Comprehensively, it can be said that every society has its own health system. It's understandable, if Indonesia consists of various ethnic groups with various origins Various ethnic cultures have different health systems. Each these ethnic cultural groups have developed their health systems, which each other may have many differences and similarities. However, in general their traditional health systems can be distinguished from modern health system originating from the West. Form Traditional health healing can be seen for example in various forms of ritual ceremonies, traditional musical accompaniment, dancing, singing, trance, use of spells and amulets, or healing done by massaging or massaging body parts, giving various types of potions medicines made from plant roots and various taboo. It can also be confirmed that the components will not be found in a modern health system (Sianipar 1989:4).

MYSTICISM, SOCERY, AND EPIDEMICS IN  
*CALON ARANG*

*Calon Arang* is the oldest manuscript in Indonesia that contains discourse regarding pandemic (Suatama et al. 2020:125). It is in ancient Javanese language, written in Balinese script, and dated in year of 1942 Saka or 1540 AD. The pandemic event in this manuscript is marked with statement "... *magring bangēt ikang sanagara...*" (*Calon Arang* 11b). It narrates regarding epidemic event that occurred in the reign of King Airlangga in Daha Kingdom. However, the year of its writing show the late Majapahit period. This manuscript contains the efforts taken by the King at that time, by asking *Mpu* Bharadah to eliminate the pandemic. *Mpu* or *Empu* in Indonesian language can mean honorary title which means master, a person who is considered powerful or a person who is very skilled, particularly an expert in making *kris*. *Mpu* Bharada in Negarakertagama source is known as a Buddhist priest who also an advisor to the king (Mulyana 1979).

The event is described in the following text fragment "...*Sang Yogiswara ta rumuwateng nagara, dening magring kamaranan makweh paratra. Nahan dining nagara kamaranan...*" ('It was the priest who freed the kingdom from disaster, due to disease outbreak many people died, as for the kingdom was hit by the outbreak') (*Calon Arang* 14a) (Suatama et al. 2020:125). It means, the manuscript explains the pandemic that caused sudden death of many people in Doha kingdom between 15th to 16th centuries. The Javanese people calls it as *pageblug*, however in this manuscript the word is called in local language as *gerubuh* or pandemic that caused by socery or *teluh* by the character of *Calon Arang*. The local people strongly believe that *Mpu* Bharadah is the one who can help them from the pandemic and the magic grip.

The story of *Calon Arang* is written in various literature genres in Indonesia, which among them are prose manuscript forms (LOr 4562), poetry manuscripts (*sekarmadia*), and decision manuscripts. Furthermore, *Calon Arang* also appeared in various names. As literature history in Bali developed, people gained different understandings regarding *Calon Arang* in each era. This makes it also present in various genres and forms of understanding. This can also be seen from the titles *Calon Arang*, *Bharadah Carita*, and *Rangda Kasihan*. Every characteristic of each *Calon Arang* text gives rise to the people's

perceptions diversity and the text function (Suastika 2019).

Suastika (2019) states that *Calon Arang Lor* 5387/5279 manuscript functions religiously as a holy book (*lipyakara*) in Buddhism due to the text was born during Gelgel era or when Majapahit occupied Bali. This certainly brings Javanese influence or javanization. The Javanization intensity increased when the Aryans and priests came to Bali. Apart from the text *Calon Arang*, this period also gave birth to paintings with *Calon Arang* theme. *Calon Arang* texts influence each other in linguistic, literary and cultural aspects, particularly text of *Calon Arang LOr* 5387/5279. The following is a brief synopsis of the text *Calon Arang Lor* 5387/5279 pages 1b–51a.

At that time, in a place called Lemah Tulis, there lived a Buddhist priest named *Mpu* Bharada. It is told that he had a daughter named *Wedawati*. However, *Wedawati* always felt sad due to she had lost her mother, therefore she always visited her mother's grave. On the other hand, from Girah Village, there lived a figure named *Calon Arang* who had a daughter named *Diah Ratna Manggali*. *Calon Arang* was a sorceress who practiced black magic until one day, the residents of Daha, the capital of Kediri kingdom, died of *gerubug* or epidemic. After the deaths of Daha's people, the priests gathered to find out the cause of the epidemic. After investigation, it was finally revealed that the cause of the epidemic was sorcery practice by *Calon Arang*.

*Calon Arang* did this based on his disappointed due to his beautiful daughter, *Diah Ratna Manggali*, had not yet found a partner even though she had reach the age to get marriage. It was mentioned that no one dared to propose to *Ratna Diah Manggali* due to she had a mother who practiced witchcraft. At that time, there was a stereotype that a child of someone practicing black magic would also carry out the same practice. Therefore, *Calon Arang* created *gerubug*. The solution offered by the priests to overcome the epidemic was to marry *Mpu* Bharadah's son, *Bahula*, to *Calon Arang's* daughter, *Ratna Diah Manggali*. The purpose of the marriage is to find out how to overcome *gerubug* that is currently hitting the people by stealing the secrets of the black magic practiced by *Calon Arang*. The priests believed that by knowing the secret of *Calon Arang's* black magic, they would discover white magic that could be used to overcome the pandemics (Dermawan T. 2020).

The story of *Calon Arang* conveys the message that epidemics is in fact a result or consequence of what humans have done; when they are negligent,

any disaster can occur (cf. Darmawan 2020). In order to overcome this negligence, humans need ‘sanity’ in the form of scientific rationality and common sense. The meaning and message contained in *Calon Arang* is in fact not much different from what people think when facing Covid-19 pandemic, a global pandemic that occurred worldwide from 2020-2023.

#### THE TALE OF *AGUNG SAKTI*, HAIRLY CATERPILLARS, AND SKIN DISEASE EPIDEMICS

The description of pandemic and diseases also appear in the old literature of Malay tradition, specifically in *Hikayat Agung Sakti* (hereinafter referred to as HAS) by Muhammad Bakir from Batavia in the 19th century. According to the concluding notes or colophon stated in the text, HAS was completed on October 18th, 1892. Unlike earlier Malay texts from previous centuries, in the 19th century authors or copiers provided clearer information regarding, one of them, when the text was written. This information is important since it not only clarifies the identity of the text and manuscript in question, but also indicates a clearer picture of the story content in context outside the story.

HAS tells the story regarding the chaos occurred in Suralaya or heaven where the gods (*Batara*) lived, led by Batara Guru and his minister (*patih*), Batara Narada. This chaos occurred when Batara Guru and Batara Narada, disguised as butterflies, could not contain their lust when they saw the handsome Batara Agung Sakti intimate with the angels. Both of them were unable to restrain themselves when they saw the angel’s body (thighs, calves and torso). Therefore, both of them decided to have intercourse with the female butterfly. In short, no one knows what they did. On the other hand, female butterflies lay numerous eggs wherever they fly and rest. These eggs hatch into endemic hairy caterpillars. They attacked and destroyed entire gardens and parks.

This caterpillars outbreak causes intense itching among the heaven inhabitants. Eventually, they decide to eradicate the outbreak by burning them. While the problem is solved, a new problem appeared. The itching on the bodies of the gods turned into smallpox, scabies, itchiness and sores. Batara Guru and Batara Narada also affected by the disease. They complain due to it transform their appearance from the previous. Moreover, the treatments they attempt also do not produce anything. Even the shamans are also unable to cure them. This can be seen in the following quote.

“...the bodies of all the gods were covered in pox-like diseases. There was no one who was not sick, everyone suffered, their entire bodies covered in sores. The body and face were all affected (HAS, transliteration by Ramadhan 2021:10).

The quote above is one of the narratives that describes the inhabitants of the heaven condition when they hit by smallpox. The disease appears across his body (both body and face) causing his appearance to change. On another page and in the narratives, M. Bakir refers the diseases as scabies and sores. Medically, smallpox, scabies and sores are skin diseases, but each is distinct. However, in this text, M. Bakir equates the three diseases as the same disease. Furthermore, their recovery and healing occurred due to various methods with the advice and assistance of Batara Agung Sakti. Batara Guru and Batara Narada, for instance, recovered after bathing in the springwater in the cave. Batara Indra heals with a magical deception by Agung Sakti. Likewise, the gods in Suralaya recover after receiving a magical medicine that was blown upon them.

M. Bakir would not have depicted to describe the pandemics and diseases as sources of conflict and plot developments if in reality he did not know or even encounter with these diseases. Therefore, the issue of pandemic and disease in this text can be discussed contextually in relation to Batavian society in the 19th century. From the various literature obtained, the researcher did not find a single piece of information regarding skin diseases in Batavia in that century, however the researcher saw that this historical narrative could be reconstructed from several Southeast Asian/Indonesian study sources. Reid (2014:67) states that smallpox was the most feared disease in most of Southeast Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries. This is underlined by Boomgard (2003:609) that in Indonesia, smallpox emerged when the Europeans arrived in those two centuries.

Based on various sources, Boomgard (2003:609) states that slaves, acquired through the slave trade, were the source of the smallpox virus. This may suggest that smallpox was a disease that frequently occurred and attacked society since the early development of Batavia population. Until the first half of the 19th century, precisely in 1804, the smallpox vaccine was brought from Europe to Batavia; until around the end of the 19th century, the Dutch East Indies government specifically established an institution to handle and develop the smallpox vaccine (Fauzi et al. 2023:2740). Meanwhile, regarding scabies, sores and itchiness,

in his dissertation on the hospital system in the Dutch East Indies, Zondervan (2016) explains that the 1902 annual report mentions that scabies and sores are skin diseases requiring medical treatment. While this data is not specifically related to Batavia, the fact that these diseases existed in the Dutch East Indies clearly indicates the possibility of their presence in the environment where M. Bakir lived, allowing him to construct them as an imaginative narrative. Therefore, M. Bakir may have had experience with these diseases. At least he was aware of and encountered them in society. With this real-world experience, he creatively transformed them into a narrative in literary text.

#### THE MANUSCRIPT OF *MERAPI-MERBABU*, THE EPIDEMICS AND TREATMENT MANTRAS

In Modern Javanese literary works, records on disaster and epidemic are contained in one of the works, namely *Babad Sangkala*. The title *Babad Sangkala* was given by previous researchers due to the text contains records of the timing of various disasters and pandemic events. The manuscript of *Babad Sangkala* contains two periods of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occurred, namely in 1563 and 1602.

The disease pandemic occurrences are recorded in *Babad Sangkala* and occurred twice, namely in 1507/1585 AD and 1623 AD. In addition to *Babad Sangkala*, *pageblug* or pandemic events that occurred in those years were also recorded in another text, namely *Babad Momana*. In *Babad Momana* manuscript, it is mentioned that a significant *pageblug* occurred around 1545 which was called *pageblug ageng*. Even though it is not explicitly mentioned, *Babad Sangkala* also records events similar to those mentioned in *Babad Momana*, specifically in the year 1625 AD. *Babad Sangkala* calls it '*sesalad agung*' which is translated as epidemics or pandemics (Ricklefs cf. Kriswanto 2020).

Similar to eruptions and earthquakes, epidemics or pandemics have been one of the events experienced by the Indonesian people from centuries ago until the present. *Babad Sangkala* records an epidemic occurrence in 1625 AD. In addition to records related to the events and the years they occurred, historical records also contain the community's response to the epidemics. This response comes in various forms and continues to

develop over time since humans have long lived alongside the epidemics.

Traditional medicine is related to the beliefs and healing practices that develop within an ethnic community, and its study is referred to as ethnomedicine (Foster and Anderson 1986:6). One of components of traditional medicine is treatment using mantras. These methods have already been introduced in various texts in ancient manuscripts in Indonesia.

Mantras as part of traditional medicine are mentioned in the text called *usadhha*. The *usadhha* text mentions that there are three most common components in treatment, namely the type of diseases represented by the acronym *ta* (*tamba*), the means of treatment represented by the acronym *śra* including medicines and their application methods, and mantras represented by the acronym *ma* (*mantra*) (Kurniawan 2020). Yelle in Kurniawan (2020) expresses that mantras are artificial linguistic phenomenon that differs from everyday language or natural language. Mantra originates from Sanskrit language which consists of the word *man-* which means 'to think' and the affix *-tra* which means 'instrument' or 'tool for the mind'. Mantras users believe that mantras possess the power directly impacts on the real world and that there is no boundary between linguistic phenomena and reality.

In *Merapi-Merbabu* manuscript collection, several Javanese language healing mantras are included. However, it is necessary to consider the interpretation by text users, regardless of the textual variations found in text sources. The meaning attributed by text users is also bound to a certain socio-historical context (Kurniawan 2020). In *Merapi-Merbabu* manuscript collection, there is at least a number of texts containing medication.

Furthermore, in the Katalog of Kartika Setyawati et al. (2002) described around fifty manuscripts, most of which have not been explored by researchers. One of the texts called text P31 is said to have been copied by someone who claimed to be nicknamed (*parab*) Ki Baturalihan and was finished copying it at the foot of Mount Kaniṣṭan on the southeastern side which has not yet been identified. However, Wiryamartana in Kurniawan (2020) estimates that this toponymy is synonymous with Mount Merbabu. In contrast to text P31, another text called PP592 lacks information regarding the date or location of where it was copied. The text information is limited to the colophon containing an apology from the copier regarding the quality of the writing.

Kurniawan (2020) states that based on the character forms, both texts are not listed in Setyawati et al. (2002) are estimated to originate *Merapi-Merbabu* scriptorium. Apart from the

similarity in the character forms, the two texts also share common textual items compiled within them, such as in *angidoni si lara* mantra which is used for spraying patients with saliva.

**P31: 14r**

*ma, angidoni si la,  
ma, om idu bang idu putih,  
mantra bhaṭāra guru,  
aku si wurung, amurungakñēna,  
lara wighnaning janma manuṣa,  
om idhu putih siddhi mantranku*

**PP592: 58v**

*mantra angidoni sing lara  
om idu bang idu putih  
mantra bhaṭāra guru,  
aku si wuwurung  
angilangakñēna  
lara wighnaning janma,  
om idhu putih siddhi mantranku*

The similarities between the two texts lead to the conclusion that they belong to the same space of knowledge. However, there are several variations that differentiate them, such as writing variations to the problem of the text being compiled. Both texts show that the knowledge tradition is a continuous matter even though it is contained in texts written or produced in different periods (Kurniawan 2020).

Most of medical texts originating from *Merapi-Merbabu* scriptorium do not include dating. However, there are several manuscripts that include dates other than the P31 text, namely National Library manuscripts 10 L 218 (1481 Śaka) and 2 L 148 (1606 Śaka) (Kurniawan 2020). Furthermore, the chronology of these two manuscripts can be traced to the period from the 16th century to the early 18th century. Boomgaard in Kriswanto (2020) states that during this period of time, Java was hit by various epidemics or pandemics due to the increasing trade flow in the Southeast Asia region and the growing intensity of interactions between Java and external regions. Boomgaard records several epidemics affected the Javanese population from the 17th and 18th centuries which claimed many victims. In addition to epidemics, other unfortunate events such as droughts, crop failures, endless war and famine were also experienced by the Javanese people during that period. These two unfortunate events are recorded in *Babad Sangkala* manuscript.

Furthermore, in addition to the contain of disaster events experienced by the archipelago community at that time, the manuscripts of *Merapi-Merbabu* scriptorium also include several ways to overcome the occurring epidemics. The following are several terms or dieties found in the mantra texts of *Merapi-Merbabu* manuscripts, which played a role in the process of resolving the pandemics (in

Kurniawan 2020). Zoetmulder in Kurniawan (2020) suggests that there is the term *Iṣṭadewata* which refers to a diety whose assistance is expected to handle something that is believed to be medication. Some figures of *Iṣṭadewata* include Durgā, Bhaṭāra Guru, Brahmā, Wiṣṇu, and Bhīma who are considered as famous heroic figures in Java in the 15th century.

Moreover, in the mantra texts, the name Durgā is the most frequently mentioned due to her position as the goddess who controls disease. Durgā is present as a figure who is revered for bringing down disease pandemic in Kaḍiri region, precisely during Airlangga's reign (Poerbatjaraka in Kurniawan 2020). Furthermore, Kurniawan (2020) also states that Durgā is also positioned as an antidote to snake poison in the mantras contained in texts P31 and PP592. The association between healing practices resulting from snake bites and goddess worship is common occurrence.

In addition to Durgā, Pigeaud and Poerbatjaraka in Kurniawan (2020) argue that since the post-Majapahit period, Bhaṭāra Guru has gained the position as the highest god. The figure of Bhaṭāra Guru refers to none other than Śiwa. Apart from being known by the *Merapi-Merbabu* scriptorial community, these texts are also known by the people of Tengger and Bali. In the healing mantras contained in texts P31 and PP592, Bhaṭāra Guru is portrayed as a figure who has authority in the *ruwatan* ritual.

Furthermore, the deities Wiṣṇu and Brahmā usually appear together in syntactic structural states. These two gods are usually present in mantras used for treating fever and chills (*grḗgḗsḗn* PP: 9r) or spells for obtaining offspring (*arḗp manaka* P31: 15v, PP592: 40v). Pigeaud in Kurniawan (2020) states that the positions of Wiṣṇu and Brahmā in

the second mantra is reminiscent of the narrative found in *Tantu Panggġlaran* when Bhaṭāra Guru sends both of them to create humans. Individually, Wiṣṇu is often associated with treating eye diseases and antidote (*japa upas*, PP592: 46v). Another interesting aspect is the existence of a ‘super’ human figure whose name is mentioned in the mantra, like a god. This figure is Bhīma. The figure of Bhīma is often associated in mantras to obtain reproductive fertility and masculinity (*arġp kita n panak-anaka* PP592: 12v) (Kurniawan 2020).

#### THE PANDEMIC OF SPANISH FLU AND ETHNIC RIOT IN *PEROESOEHAN KOEDOES*

In general, the novel *Peroesoehan Koedoes* is a novel that narrate regarding riots that took place in Kudus city, Central Java, Indonesia in 1918. The riots were based on anti-Chinese sentiments among native population. These sentiments began when Javanese Muslim traders in Kudus city experienced a decline in their business due to the growing and expanding Chinese economy. The economic increasing of the Chinese was caused by the development of *kretek* cigarette industry by Chinese merchants since the early of 20th century. The competitions between Javanese Muslim traders and Chinese traders in *kretek* cigarette and batik clothes industries from 1906 to 1918 led to a collective hatred of the Javanese towards the Chinese in Kudus. The situation worsened when several individuals and groups in Kudus formed the Islamic Union or Serikat Islam (abbreviated as SI). The union was formed by a number of groups with political-economic interests, resulting in a tendency to carry out violence against Chinese ethnic group or the cruelest matter was leading to most extreme cases in the extermination of this ethnic community.

The novel also incorporates the influenza pandemic occurred in 1918, commonly known as Spanish flu pandemic. The influenza or Spanish flu epidemic spread globally during World War I. It is known as the Spanish due to initially, this virus spread in Spain and later spread worldwide through newspapers based in Spain. It was stated in the daily *De Sumatra Post* that this outbreak was referred to as a “mysterious disease”. The term is noted in the title of the July 19th, 1918 post *De geheimzinnige ziekte* (Theelen 2015). Therefore, due to its highly contagious nature, spreading rapidly through respiratory droplets from sneezing, coughing and talking, the flu affected a significant number of people.

In handling influenza pandemic during that time, the community had already adopted modern methods, such as through quarantine and vaccines/medicine administration. Even though they are familiar with modern medicine, the dichotomy between ethnomedicine and medical treatment is still persisted in society. The dichotomy between ethnomedicine and modern medicine is illustrated when ethnic Chinese carry out a practice of exorcising disease to overcome the Spanish flu pandemic. Ethnomedicine in ethnic Chinese takes the form of a procession called *Toapekkong* and this practice is believed by the Chinese people to ward off the Spanish flu epidemic. However, apart from showing the dichotomy between ethnomedicine and modern medicine, the practice of *Toapekkong* also creates greater divisions between ethnic Chinese communities and indigenous communities. The riots which were motivated by the Spanish flu were presented by the author in the novel *Peroesoehan Koedoes* which was adapted to historical facts. The outbreak of the Spanish flu that year was used to carry out social conflict practices based on hatred for a long time.

One of the issue regarding historical facts in the novel *Peroesoehan Koedoes* is the high death rate during the second wave of the Spanish flu, particularly in October 18th, 1918. It caused the people to conduct a religious ceremony called *Toapekkong* as an effort to drive out the outbreak. Additionally, in the Dutch East Indies society during that year viewed Spanish flu as a punishment for immoral actions such as greed, avarice, and bad behavior. This perception led the society to prefer traditional approaches over medical treatments such as vaccination or medication (Ravando 2020). Vaccination may result various effects depending on individual immune responses, creating the society to reject vaccinations due to fear of potential side effects.

In addition to epidemic control through ethnomedicine and medical treatment, the novel *Peroesoehan Koedoes* provides a more detailed explanation of the differences in attitudes between native population and the Chinese ethnic community in facing the pandemic. With symptoms that were both as agonizing and painful as fever, headache, difficulty breathing, even abdominal pain and vomiting, the Spanish flu pandemic claimed the lives of around 40 million people worldwide, including in Indonesia. *Peroesoehan Koedoes* depicts that deaths due to the Spanish flu were predominantly among



the native community rather than the Chinese ethnic community due to existing social class differences. Here is a quote.

“...The numbers who became victims of the influenza pandemic were mostly Javanese rather than foreigners. This might be because the native people did not pay much attention to cleanliness, particularly those living in villages, where hygiene and sanitation were lacking, and people consumed food indiscriminately. Chinese people also died from this, but very few, while Europeans lost only one or two individuals.” (Kim 1920:74).

The above quote indicates that deaths due to the Spanish flu are more prevalent among the native or Javanese people. Additionally, the quote suggests that the deaths among the Chinese community were relatively fewer. This is attributed to the lifestyle differences between them; the Javanese people, particularly the laborers, are portrayed as leading unhygienic (slovenly) lives, making them susceptible to diseases. The portrayal of their lives also implies that the indigenous people are under the poverty line, as they are predominantly laborers working under Chinese merchants. It can be inferred that, apart from the negative perceptions of Dutch-Indies society towards doctors and hospitals, the resistance of the indigenous people to medical treatment may also be rooted in their inability to access such healthcare, reflecting socio-economic disparities.

As mentioned earlier, October 1918 marked the arrival of the second wave of the Spanish flu. During this period, the disease was still widely underestimated due to a lack of awareness. However, when the disease claimed many lives, public perceptions quickly changed. This shift in perception was also experienced by the Chinese ethnic community, who eventually decided to hold *Toapekkong* ceremonies due to the significant number of their laborers dying from the Spanish flu. The ceremony, aimed to drive out the epidemic, took place over four days on 20th, 22nd, 25th, and 30th October, at the same time with the arrival of the second wave of the virus that was spreading widely.

#### THE DEATH AND ANXIETY OVER COVID-19 IN SHORT STORIES “SAYAP- SAYAP DI ATAS PABRIK”

The short story entitled “Sayap-sayap di Atas Pabrik” by Joko Gesang Santoso is one of short stories that included in short stories collection entitled “Wabah.” In short, it narrates around a

man who works as a laborer and enjoys doodling on the office toilet walls with a marker branded “Snowman.” However, the word “Snowman” on his marker is reduced to only “-wman” as the rest is erased due to eroded by his palm. The unnamed man in the story is portrayed as someone who likes drawing wings with the marker and invites everyone to fly with him. He writes a flying invitation along with his phone number. One day, an epidemic breaks out in Indonesia, including the factory where he works. Every employee is required to undergo rapid tests and swab tests assisted by a doctor. The man encounters a female doctor who attends to him, and he invites her to fly with him. Initially, the doctor rejects the man’s invitation until eventually accepting it to grow wings and fly together.

The outbreak or pandemic featured in this short story is the Covid-19 pandemic. WHO data (in Aeni 2021:18), states that as of October 2020, 200 countries had been infected by Covid-19 virus. The easy and rapid spread of the virus has made Covid-19 pandemic considered a dangerous one, claiming the lives of many people in a very short period.

The short story “Sayap-sayap di Atas Pabrik” reflects the attitude and anxiety of Indonesian people in facing the pandemic. It also contains how Covid-19 spreads, the symptoms experienced, prevention methods, and the varying approaches of different countries in dealing with Covid-19. With different levels of fatality in each country, there are differences in how they handle it. Set in a factory, the short story “Sayap-sayap di Atas Pabrik” describes the situation of the workers affected by Covid-19 virus. The factory is regularly visited by doctors for testing and monitoring. Here is an illustration.

“The doctor continued to give the same signal. Without replying words or making a sound because it was a risk of emitting droplets. However, quietly, she glanced at the man’s shirt pocket covered by black ink and a marker that she couldn’t clearly identify the brand. Perhaps Snowman.” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above illustrates how Covid-19 is transmitted. Aeni (2021) suggests that Covid-19 can easily spread through droplets or when humans interact directly within a certain distance. Similar to the Spanish flu’s way of transmission, Covid-19 virus can be transmitted through saliva released when someone talks, sneezes, or coughs. Initially, the average transmission rate of Covid-19 virus can be considered low. However, the virus later evolved and underwent mutations, leading to the emergence of new variants that spread more rapidly. This occurred in the United Kingdom, South Africa,

Brazil, and India (Oosterhout et al. cited in Aeni 2021).

In order to determine if someone is infected with Covid-19, individuals who suffer with the virus will show various symptoms. Covid-19 is a virus that primarily affects the respiratory system, therefore the symptoms are related to respiratory issues such as shortness of breath, cough, or a sore throat. Here is an illustration.

“He would just smile every time he remembered the female doctor. Although to genuinely smile, he had to make an effort to dispel the shortness of breath from his chest. Also, the annoying mucus really irritated his throat. Damn it! He cursed.” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above illustrates the symptoms experienced by someone infected with the Covid-19 virus. It describes a man suffering from shortness of breath and a throat filled with mucus. These symptoms are very painful that one reaches a point where it becomes difficult to smile due to short of breath. Furthermore, it indicates several ways to determine if someone is infected with Covid-19.

“The female doctor left. Another doctor came. The man had a rapid test and was advised to undergo a swab test immediately.” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above illustrates how society determines whether a patient is infected with the Covid-19 virus or not. In the modern era, medical advancements have progressed rapidly, allowing individuals to conduct virus tests independently without the assistance of a doctor. However, in this quote, rapid tests or swab tests for patients are still assisted by doctors. Rapid tests involve using a blood sample, while swab tests using samples from the respiratory tract, either through the nose or throat. Furthermore, in the short story, it describes a change in the situation after two weeks, indicating the transformations experienced by patients after the two-week incubation period of the Covid-19 virus.

“Two weeks later, the situation changed drastically. Forty employees of the golf glove factory died from the virus. The government transformed the factory into an emergency virus treatment hospital. In a spacious covered parking lot, beds were lined up to handle patients. There were more than fifty beds.” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above shows the changed situation after two weeks. The Covid-19 virus spread fiercely and rapidly, resulting in the deaths of forty employees within just two weeks. Apart from

indicating the shift in the situation and the severity of the Covid-19 virus, the quote also shows the community’s response to the situation. The factory transformed into an emergency hospital signifies the community’s preparedness. The number of patients requiring treatment has reached such high levels that regular hospitals no longer have the capacity to treat for Covid-19 patients.

Since ancient times, pandemics or epidemics have posed a significant challenge to communities worldwide and for those who directly affected. The pandemics emerge unexpectedly, requiring communities to adapt to survive. Governments worldwide simultaneously implementing lockdowns or social restrictions for their citizens. Due to the highly contagious and rapid spread of Covid-19, people are advised to limit and avoid interactions with others. Citizens are instructed not to leave their homes, and all activities are restricted to prevent the spread of Covid-19. However, there are some professions that cannot implement lockdowns, such as healthcare professionals and, in this short story, factory workers. The short story states that lockdowns have been implemented in China, Italy, Spain, and other countries that followed.

“While countries around the world were busy closing access, China implemented a lockdown, Italy implemented a lockdown, Spain implemented a lockdown, and other countries followed. Only America had not yet implemented a lockdown.” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above shows the differences in how each country faced the pandemic. China, where Covid-19 originated, implemented a strict lockdown, while the short story suggests that America had not implemented a lockdown despite being a large country. Implementing a lockdown requires careful consideration as it affects various sectors, particularly the economy. High mortality rates can lead to a sense of despair among the population. This despair is also evident in the short story “Sayap-sayap di Atas Pabrik.” Here is an illustration.

“Before I teach you how to fly, I want to tell you that it turns out everyone can fly. In this factory, I’ve seen it many times. Two days ago, the person in the bed to my right flew. His wings weren’t too big. White like dove wings. He smiled at me and then waved as if inviting me to join him. A day ago, the person in the bed to my left also flew. His wings were like dragonflies. Unique but strong enough to lift his plump body. He also waved at me. Well, it turns out I was wrong all along. I’m not the only one who can fly. Those people can fly too!” (Santoso 2020).

The quote above shows that the male character has experienced despair, always desiring to fly. The wings he mentions are representation of freedom. It is mentioned that the man is a Covid-19 patient. The factory condition transformed into a hospital signifies that the people he sees flying are those who have died from Covid-19. Afterward, the man invites the female doctor to fly with him. The short story illustrates that the female doctor feels frustrated due to mistreatment by her husband. The female doctor, initially rejecting the man's invitation, eventually agrees to fly with him.

"They flew in circle while hugging and kissing. The two winged bodies then left the factory. Moving away from the hustle and bustle of the factory and the nauseating smell of medicines. The pair of winged bodies drifted further away. Meanwhile, below, the ambulance sirens kept wailing. This included transporting a pair of bodies lying on the asphalt road of the factory. With the same wailing sound, the ambulance drove away from the factory." (Santoso 2020).

Shortly after they flew, the ambulance arrived. The quote suggests that the ambulance was transporting a pair of bodies lying on the asphalt road of the factory indicates that the pandemic has driven some individuals to a sense of despair, leading them to decide to end their lives. This is emphasized by the assertion that both of them could not bear the hustle and bustle of the factory and the nauseating smell of medicines. Outbreaks and pandemics always have significant impacts on society.

## CONCLUSION

From the above description, several conclusions can be drawn as follows. As living creatures, humans have lived side by side with pandemics for centuries up to the present day. The history of past pandemics has been documented in mythology, ancient texts, and new literary works in Indonesia, demonstrating how humanity has evolved in facing these outbreaks. The oldest pandemic text is found in *Calon Arang*, which continues to exist as mythology alongside Balinese society to this day. During that time, traditional medicines or magic were still utilized to address the occurring pandemics. Furthermore, *Hikayat Agung Sakti* from the 19th century recounts the pandemics experienced by the society of that era. The narrative includes a pandemic caused by an attack of hairy caterpillars, which later developed into other skin diseases such as smallpox, scabies, sores, and manges. During that period, the community still relied on shamans to deal with pandemics.

Additionally, traditional methods such as burning the source of the disease (hairy caterpillars), bathing in cave water, and blowing medicine were still in use. In the end, society rely on modern treatments such as vaccines in hospitals, leading to recovery.

In the scriptorium texts of *Merapi-Merbabu*, for instance, it is explained that people at that time recognized three most common components to overcome pandemics: the type of disease (*tamba*), medicines including their application methods, and mantras. The mantras used to overcome pandemics in *Merapi-Merbabu* scriptorium texts often contain names of Hindu gods, indicating that the society at that time relied on gods as figures expected to overcome pandemics. In the novel *Peroesoehan Koedoes*, published in 1918, the pandemic featured is the Spanish flu. In this early modern period, the society was already utilizing modern treatments such as consulting doctors, going to hospitals, and vaccination. However, a dichotomy between modern medicine and ethnomedicine persisted due to social class differences. Finally, in the short story "Sayap-sayap di Atas Pabrik", the most recent pandemic experienced by global society, namely Covid-19, is depicted. However, this pandemic triggered despair across various social classes as people were constantly demanded to be adaptive. Symbolism and metaphor are used to represent the frustration of Indonesian society during the pandemic. Therefore, the literary treasures, both the past and present, has documented how Indonesian society faces pandemics, both culturally/ethnoscience practices of the time and social solutions alongside modern treatments.

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