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The Influence of Islam on Sex Education in The Serat Centhini

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Abstract: *Serat Centhini* is a monumental and renowned work of traditional Javanese literature. Its fame stems not only from its captivating narrative but also from its extensive and diverse content. *Serat Centhini* encompasses knowledge on plants, cuisine, geography, arts, Javanese astrology, language, literature, history, religion, and much more. Notably, it also includes education on sexuality. The sexual education presented in *Serat Centhini* is influenced by Islamic values, thus can be considered a Javanese version of sex education, given its status as a work of Javanese literature. The term "sexual education" is used because the text contains prohibitions and recommendations regarding sexual relations between husband and wife. This study explores whether Islamic influences are present in the sexual education content of *Serat Centhini*. The research data is derived from the prohibitions and recommendations for husband-wife relationships, known as saresmi, found in *Serat Centhini*, particularly in the first volume. The study aims to reveal the influence of Islamic teachings on sexual education in *Serat Centhini*. The results indicate that there is an influence of Islamic values on the sexual education presented in *Serat Centhini*.

Keywords: *sex; influence; education*

A. INTRODUCTION

Serat Centhini is a monumental traditional Javanese literary work. It is also referred to as the "pangawikan Jawa," meaning the mother of Javanese cultural knowledge. As the mother of Javanese knowledge, *Serat Centhini* was composed based on an extensive survey or deep study

of all aspects of Javanese culture. The contents of *Serat Centhini* encompass Javanese knowledge from the western Pasundan region to the eastern island of Bali. As a monumental work, it includes various aspects of Javanese knowledge, such as cuisine, flora, fauna, geography, arts, language, literature, philosophy,



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history, mathematics, Javanese sexology, antiquities, religion, and more. In the realm of Javanese literature, *Serat Centhini* provides extensive information about Javanese society, covering sociological, anthropological, psychological, religious, and political aspects (Susilo, 2022). For instance, *Serat Centhini* reveals various types of traditional foods and drinks. It includes a wide range of foods and beverages, as well as hundreds of types of snacks, such as *nasi uduk* or *sêga wuduk* (rice with coconut milk), *nasi kêbuli* (rice cooked with spices and served with chicken), *nasi kuning* (yellow rice due to the addition of turmeric), and various meat dishes like *age* (meat dish), *gêpuk* (beaten meat), *bêkakak* (whole roasted or grilled meat), *bêsêngèk* (meat cooked with a small amount of sauce), *gêcok* (sliced meat), and others. For beverages, there are *dhawêt*, *kahwa* (coffee), *wedang rondhe*, tea, chocolate, *sêrbat*, ginger, *lêgèn*, *lahang*, *cêmoe*, *asle*, *cao*, sweet beer, *beras kencur*, and more (Nurnaningsih, 2010: 18).

Sexology in *Serat Centhini* can be classified into two categories: sex education and sexual behavior. Due to the extensive portrayal of sexual behavior in *Serat Centhini*, it is often known as a work filled with pornographic content. It is frequently referred to as the "Javanese Kamasutra" due to its rich content in sexology. This designation is not exaggerated, as *Serat Centhini* also describes deviant sexual behavior (extramarital relationships) involving characters such as Jayengraga, Cebolang, Adipati Wirasaba, and others. Meanwhile, sex education is found in the first volume of *Serat Centhini*, containing

prohibitions and recommendations for a husband and wife in engaging in sexual intercourse (referred to as *saesmi* in Javanese). For most Javanese people, sex education is still considered taboo, and discussions about sex are often viewed as indecent. However, *Serat Centhini* manages to present sex education in an interesting, polite, and metaphorical manner (Nurnaningsih, 2010). Due to the extensive content on Javanese life, *Serat Centhini* is recognized as a great, monumental, and extraordinary work, and the "baboning pangawikan Jawa," meaning "the mother of Javanese knowledge" (Wibawa, 2013; Nurnaningsih, 2015 and 2016; Muslifah, 2013; Suratno, 2016 and 2020; Haryono, 1998; and Junanah, 2008 and 2010).

This research is based on the background question of whether Islamic values influence sex education in *Serat Centhini*. The research data are taken from prohibitions and recommendations for a husband and wife in engaging in sexual intercourse in the first volume of *Serat Centhini*, specifically in chapters 30 (*Sinom*) from verses 30 to 43, and chapter 31 (*Asmaradana*) from verses 1 to 39, spanning pages 94 to 99.

It is suggested that the sex education in *Serat Centhini* is influenced by Islam. Islamic teachings emerged first, followed by the creation of *Serat Centhini*. Influence is an abstract concept that cannot be seen but can be felt in its existence and usefulness in the life and activities of humans as social beings. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (2017: 1247), influence is the power that arises from something (a

person or object) that helps shape someone's character, beliefs, or actions. This is further emphasized by Surakhmad (2012) and Poerwadarminta (1986), who state that influence is a force that emerges and can affect others or new products. Additionally, influence is a power that originates from a source and can impact cultural products, such as Islamic values influencing the creation of *Serat Centhini*, particularly in sex education. Islamic religious values are teachings with a strong influence in encouraging new cultural products or *Serat Centhini* to adopt or incorporate Islamic values, especially in sex education. Thus, Islamic teachings are incorporated into the sex education teachings in *Serat Centhini*. Consequently, many Islamic teachings are found in the sex education content in *Serat Centhini*.

B. METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES

This study employs a descriptive-analytic method, utilizing data recording techniques through a literature review. Initially, sex education in *Serat Centhini* is described, encompassing both prohibitions and recommendations regarding the practice of sexual intercourse (*saresmi*). This includes describing the conditions that are prohibited and recommended for sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Subsequently, the descriptive findings are correlated with the values of Islamic teachings to examine the presence of influence in sex education within *Serat Centhini* and Islamic teachings. However, it is important to note that not all aspects of sex education in *Serat Centhini* can be

compared or correlated with Islamic teachings.

C. SEX EDUCATION IN *SERAT CENTHINI*

Sex education in *Serat Centhini* addresses prohibitions and recommendations regarding sexual intercourse (*saresmi*) between husband and wife. This education is conveyed by Datuk Bakni to Gathak and Gathuk (servants of Raden Jayengresmi, who later became known as Sheikh Amongraga). The advice and prohibitions pertain to the timing of sexual intercourse, with the intention of ensuring the act is performed for the purpose of procreation. Nearly all instances of *saresmi* are aimed at producing offspring rather than merely for sexual pleasure, as the primary focus is on procreation.

In religious studies, issues of sex are seldom given adequate attention, except in specific contexts such as marriage, where discussions are typically normative and dogmatic (Kristianto, 2021). The sex education presented in *Serat Centhini* is influenced by Islamic teachings, as the work was composed during the Islamic period under the rule of the Islamic Kingdom of Kasunanan Surakarta. In chapter 30, it is stated that the source of this sex education comes from the words or teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to his daughter, Siti Fatimah, and his son-in-law, Ali bin Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him). This indicates that the sex education in *Serat Centhini* is indeed influenced by Islam, as the Prophet Muhammad is the bearer of Islamic teachings. It is mentioned that the Prophet advised his daughter, Siti Fatimah, and his

son-in-law, Sayyidina Ali, regarding issues of *saresmi* with his wife.

Iki karesmen winarna, kang pangandika Jeng Nabi, Salalah alihi wasalama, rikala amituturi kang putra estri, Siti Fatimah kang luhung, lawan dhadhawuh marang putra mantu Sayit Ngali, riyallahu nganhu babing masalah (Serat Centhini 1, 1991).

"This is advice on intimacy given by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he was counseling his esteemed daughter, Siti Fatimah, and discussing matters of intimacy with his son-in-law, Sayidina Ali (may Allah be pleased with him)" (Serat Centhini, 1991).

Firstly, intimacy is prohibited at the beginning and end of the month. The beginning of the month refers to the first day of the Islamic or Javanese month, and the end of the month refers to the thirtieth day of the Islamic or Javanese month. Secondly, intercourse is discouraged on Sundays and Sunday nights. It is feared that violating this prohibition may result in the child being born with a tendency towards criminality or immorality. Thirdly, intimacy is not advised on Wednesdays and Wednesday nights, as it is believed that a child born from such a union may face misfortune. Fourthly, engaging in intimacy at dawn is also discouraged, as it is thought that the child born at this time may face significant hardships. Fifthly, intercourse is not recommended on '*malem barabat*,' a term that does not appear in Javanese dictionaries, such as the Bausastra Djawa

(1939), and is difficult to find in Arabic as well.

The closest term is '*brahat*,' which refers to the night of *Ruwah*. Javanese people typically perform spiritual practices and feasts on the night of *Ruwah*. In the *Ruwah* month, there is a day known as '*nifsu syaban*,' which is commonly believed to be a day for accounting for annual deeds. On this night, it is advised to stay awake and engage in remembrance of Allah rather than intimacy. The *Ruwah* month, which is the eighth month in the Javanese calendar, corresponds with the month of Sha'ban in the Islamic calendar. The month of *Ruwah* begins with the practice of '*nifsu syaban*,' which is observed by Muslims as the annual accounting of deeds in the month of Sha'ban. Consequently, this month is often referred to as the month of souls or Sha'ban. Violating these guidelines is thought to result in the child suffering from prolonged illness.

Intercourse at midday is believed to potentially result in a child becoming involved in occult practices. Additionally, intimacy is discouraged on the nights of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. It is believed that engaging in intimacy on Eid al-Fitr night may result in a child being disrespectful to their parents. Similarly, the nights of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha are considered inappropriate for intimacy because these occasions are meant for glorifying Allah. Engaging in intimacy on Eid al-Adha night is thought to cause the child to suffer from '*siwil*,' a condition where flesh grows on the body, impairing health. This information is detailed as follows.

Lan aja sanggama, wektu pajar tan becik, lamun dadi larenira, tuna liwat lareneki, lan aja karon saresmi, nalika tengange iku, lamun dadi bocah, dadi juru teluh ugi, lan anja sanggama malem riyaya.

Wit ri lamun dadi bocah, duraka mring bapa bibi, lawan aja sanggama, maleme, riyaya iki, Besar kalamun dadi bocah, siwil adatipun, lan aja sanggama, ingkang katlorong Hyang Rawi, lamun dadi bocah adoh begjanira (Serat Centhini 1, 1991: 94).

"Do not engage in intimacy at dawn, as it is believed that a child born at this time may face significant misfortune. Similarly, avoid intimacy at midday, as it is thought that such a child might become involved in occult practices. Also, refrain from intimacy on the night of Eid,

as it is believed that the child may become disrespectful to their parents or suffer from a condition known as 'siwil,' which involves excess flesh growth on the body. Finally, avoid intimacy when the sun is at its zenith, as this is thought to result in a child who may face a lack of prosperity."

Serat Centhini also provides guidance and prohibitions regarding sexual intercourse or *saesmi*. There are certain conditions under which intercourse is discouraged. First, it is advised against engaging in intercourse while talking or singing. If a child is born under such circumstances, the child may exhibit traits of being *juweh*, which signifies a tendency to reveal the flaws of things. Second, intercourse should not be conducted when

one is full or after eating, as it is believed that the resulting child might suffer from cough-related ailments. Third, intercourse should not occur when the body is in a state of impurity, as the child may turn out to be *crobo* or careless. If flatulence occurs during intercourse, it is recommended to withdraw the penis from the wife's *parji* (vagina) immediately. If intercourse is forced to continue despite the flatulence, the child may become excessively miserly or *bakil*. These are all considered prohibitions or negative outcomes. Fifth, it is advised against engaging in intercourse on Saturdays until Saturday night, as there is a concern that the child might drown. Additionally, it is recommended to use fragrance during intercourse to ensure that the child will be *resikan* or cleanliness-oriented.

Furthermore, there are specific recommendations for engaging in *saesmi* on particular days. Intercourse on Monday night until Monday afternoon is said to produce a child who is *sregep ngaji* or diligent in religious studies. Engaging in intercourse on Tuesday night until Tuesday afternoon is believed to result in a child who is loved by others (*ditresnani wong akah*). Intercourse on Thursday night until Friday morning, which is often referred to as *sunah Nabi* (a recommended practice by the Prophet), is associated with having a child who becomes a religious leader or *pengulu*. Intercourse on Friday night until Friday morning is also recommended to produce a child who is intelligent or *pinter*. This practice is endorsed in Islam as mentioned in the Hadith reported by Imam Baihaqi:

"Are you unable to engage in sexual relations with your wife every Friday? Sexual relations on Friday bring two rewards: the reward of the husband's own bath and the reward of the wife's bath" (H.R. Baihaqi).

Certain conditions prohibit individuals from engaging in sexual intercourse or *saesmi*. For instance, intercourse while standing is discouraged due to concerns that the child born from such an act might suffer from frequent urination. Islam similarly prohibits intercourse in a standing position. This prohibition aligns with Islamic views. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the sex education outlined in the *Serat Centhini*, which includes a prohibition on standing intercourse, reflects the influence of Islamic teachings. This guidance aims to ensure the well-being of the future child. Although the exact reasons are not specified in Islam, the *Serat Centhini* notes that frequent urination is a condition that may affect both males and females. This is articulated as follows:

Lan malih aja sanggama, sambu ngadheg datan becik, mangka lamun dadi anak, duwe alara beser benjang, lan aja karon resmi, nalikane dina Sabtu, miwah ing wenginira, iku lamun dadi bayi, bilaine adate kelebeng toya (Serat Centhini 1, 1991: 94).

"Do not engage in intercourse while standing, as it may cause the child to suffer from frequent urination. Also, avoid intercourse on Saturdays and at night, as children born under such circumstances are typically at risk

of drowning" (Serat Centhini 1, 1991: 76).

There are numerous prohibitions related to specific actions during intercourse. Firstly, intercourse while touching the genitalia is discouraged as it may result in a child with poor manners. Secondly, intercourse while speaking may lead to a child lacking self-awareness. Thirdly, intercourse while observing the genitalia is feared to cause the child to suffer from blindness (known as *lara wuta*). Fourthly, intercourse beneath a tree may result in the child being maltreated (*dadi niaya*). Fifthly, intercourse in lodgings may lead to severe misfortune for the child. Sixthly, intercourse during menstruation is prohibited due to concerns that the child may suffer from a rash-like illness (*budhug* or measles).

Intercourse while observing the genitalia is considered *makruh* (disapproved). Such actions should be avoided, reflecting the influence of Islamic teachings. This is supported by a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as follows:

"The second part addresses the permissibility for a husband to view his wife's body and that of his female slave, whom he is allowed to enjoy. It is permissible to look at their bodies while they are alive, as this is where enjoyment occurs, except for their private parts (vagina), which are permitted. Looking at the vagina is considered makruh (discouraged) if there is no specific need, and viewing the inside of the vagina is highly makruh."

Sexual relations are not allowed when a wife is menstruating. This is explained in the Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah.

“And they ask you about menstruation. Say, ‘It is harm, so keep away from wives¹ during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves,² then come to them from where Allāh has ordained for you. Indeed, Allāh loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves” (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 222).

During menstruation, sexual relations are prohibited. At that time, a woman is considered to be in a state of impurity. Islam forbids sexual relations when a woman is menstruating. It is stated in Islam that marital relations are not allowed when the wife is in a state of menstruation (Surah Al-Baqarah, 222).

This is also mentioned in several Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In the *Serat Centhini*, it is stated that sexual intercourse should be preceded by reciting the *Basmala* (in the name of Allah). Moreover, it should even begin with reciting the *Ta’awwudh* (seeking refuge in Allah). This reflects the influence of Islamic teachings. A Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad indicates that sexual intercourse should start with reciting the *Basmala*. Although the Hadith does not specify the detailed purpose of reciting the *Basmala*, the *Serat Centhini* asserts that engaging in sexual intercourse with the

Basmala will result in the birth of intelligent or clever children. Conversely, initiating intercourse with the *Ta’awwudh* will lead to the birth of virtuous children. If the *Ta’awwudh* is not recited, the child may become less virtuous. The concepts of good and bad pertain to behavior.

In addition, we are advised to choose one's female partners carefully during intercourse. A man is forbidden from engaging in sexual relations with *lonthe*, a 'prostitute,' or *taledhek*, a 'tayub dancer,' due to the risk of contracting *benggang*, a term referring to syphilis or leprosy. Furthermore, one should avoid sexual relations with women of poor character, even if they are physically attractive. Engaging with such women is believed to result in numerous diseases. The *Serat Centhini* 1, pages 95-99, outlines several prohibitions concerning intercourse on specific dates. For instance, intercourse is prohibited on the 13th of Sura or Muharam, which is associated with the event of Prophet Ibrahim being cast into the fire by King Namrud. Similarly, it is advised against on the 3rd of the Mulud month, marking the descent of Prophet Adam from heaven to earth. Intercourse is also forbidden on the 16th of Rabiulakir, coinciding with the event of Prophet Yusuf being thrown into a well. The prohibition extends to the 5th of Jumadilakir, which aligns with the occurrence of the ark in the time of Prophet Nuh. Additionally, intercourse is barred on the 24th of Sela, corresponding with Prophet Yunus being swallowed by a great fish. On the 25th of Besar, intercourse is also prohibited in relation to the event where Prophet Muhammad was pelted with stones by the

infidels. These prohibitions are linked to specific days and dates in the Islamic calendar, reflecting significant events in Islamic history related to the lives of the prophets, including Ibrahim, Musa, Yusuf, Yunus, and Nuh. Such restrictions serve to honor these important dates and commemorate the trials faced by these beloved prophets. Although it is challenging to find Hadiths explicitly forbidding intercourse on these specific dates, it is clear that these prohibitions are rooted in Islamic historical events. This demonstrates the influence of Islamic teachings on sexual education within the *Serat Centhini*.

D. CONCLUSION

Serat Centhini, as a literary work from the Islamic Kingdom of Kasunanan Surakarta, undoubtedly incorporates Islamic values. This includes its teachings on sexuality, which are influenced by Islamic doctrines. Specifically, these influences pertain to the prohibitions and recommendations regarding sexual intercourse, as well as the conditions deemed appropriate or inappropriate for engaging in sexual relations.

The prohibitions related to intercourse involve specific days and times, while recommendations are associated with certain days deemed suitable for sexual relations. The conditions for sexual activity include those that are permitted and those that are forbidden. All these guidelines are aimed at ensuring the conception of a child who meets expectations—one who is physically healthy and socially accepted. Physical health refers to the absence of

illness, while social health pertains to being well-received by the broader community.

This study provides a preliminary exploration of the influence of Islamic teachings on sexual education within *Serat Centhini*. Future research could delve deeper, particularly examining sexual behaviors of specific characters, such as Cebolang, Jayengraga, Wirasaba, and others. It is essential that such studies focus on the original *Serat Centhini* rather than its adaptations. Adaptations, such as the novel *Centhini: Kekasih yang Tersembunyi*, have significantly deviated in their portrayal of sexual relations involving characters like Syekh Amongraga and Niken Tambangraras.

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