

## LIVING SUFISM AT THE PESANTREN AT-TAQY KALIPUCANG JEPARA: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF THE PESANTREN WALL WRITINGS

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### Abstract:

The expressions of Sufi spiritual experience are often shown on verbal media (Sufi language) such as poetry or simple expressions, etc. Reading the expressions requires careful reading so that the esoteric meaning can be captured. The purpose of this article is to read the writing of the walls in the at-taqy Islamic boarding school. To be able to do this reading, the semiotic method is used. Similar research has been carried out, but what makes this study unique is that the writing of the wall is a living sufism at the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School. The result is the writing of the walls in the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school loaded with basic concepts of Sufism, namely about *Fana*, *Wahdatul Wujud*, *Taubat* and *Muhasabah*.

**Keywords:** *sufistic verbal expression, semiotis, Tasawuf concept, Sufi language*

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### A. Introduction

Poetic expressions from Sufis became the media in conveying their spiritual experiences and this method has been carried out by Sufis from the beginning. There are many explanations about the spiritual experience of the Sufis delivered both in the form of anecdotes, the story of allegory, poetry and even strange sufi expression (*syatahiyat*). There are at least two reasons why the methods of conveying spiritual experience using a particular language structure are chosen as one of the media for the expression of mysticism of Sufis. First, Sufism is essentially about the deepest dimension of Islamic teachings. Sufi terms which are primarily related to the inner condition (matters), also concerning the matter of the soul, heart and spirit full of nuances of dzauq are claimed to be better able to be captured by the meaning of the Sufi message by society rather than scientific explanation. Second, the nature of

Sufism itself epistemologically requires knowledge with presence that involves the potential of the heart to be able to understand and feel the teachings of Sufism. Through the heart (Qalb) humans are able to understand divine guidance, inspiration, or revelation that God has conveyed to them. Therefore, the sufi tradition in the form of meaningful poetic expressions is still an alternative to the Sufis (salik) in expressing their spiritual experience. In addition, viewed from the perspective of the history of sufi trajectory, it shows that there are only Sufis or Salik who use the tradition.

This paper aims to read the form of living sufism in the form of sufistic nuances of wall writings applied at the Jepara at-Taqy Islamic Boarding School. The writings on semiotic studies of sufistic writings have been widely carried out but not as much as the phenomenological studies of *suluk* walkers. This can be understood on the grounds that first, *tasawuf amali* or tarekat still dominates the public's attention in understanding Sufism teachings where phenomenological studies are more widely used to explore their spiritual experiences. Second, the trend of writing Sufi poetry in Indonesia is still limited to certain groups of people. Indonesian poets of the 70s, namely Abdul Hadi W.M, Danarto, Kuntowijoyo, Suratjdi Calzoum Bachri, Supardi Djoko Damono, M. Fudzoli Zaini. While the literary figures in the contemporary era, the community knows Emha Ainun Najib (Cak Nun), Mustofa Bisri (Gus Mus) etc. The semiotic study of Sufic poetry that has been done is Sufi poetry by Musthofa Bisri (2015), the Sufistic Dimension in poetry "Aku Juga, Kamu Jua" the work of Jamal (2017), the mystical dimension in the poem "Tapi" by Sutardji (2014) etc. Third, there is a shift in the function of Sufism in the community from what was originally referred to as the Kasepuhan Koran, now Sufism has begun to be known to the public as one of the approaches used in healing processes both physically and psychologically (Sufi healing). The theme of Islamic Psychotherapy (Sufi Healing) has recently become a topic that attracts the attention of academics, which of course the phenomenological paradigm will often be used to dig deeper into the theme. The aesthetic aspects of in sufism is actually not only about poetry and other linguistic structures. For example the Sufi Whirling Darwis dance movement is also one of the studies of semiotics that has been successfully carried out and opens the opportunity for the development of Sufism discourse into a broader domain, as an example of Mahendar's research (2015) about The Symbolic Meaning of the Turkish Sufi Dance Movement Jalaluddin Rumi: Charles Sander Pierce's Semiotic Analysis.

A brief history of the founding of the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School, starting at the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School area, is an empty land that is represented, and is located in the village of Kalipucang Kulon, the village of Jeruk Wangi close to Pring Market, Welahan District, Jepara Regency. From the wakafan land, a building or house was built by the surrounding community, which at first he was asked to teach the Quran by his friends from kalipucang when he was lodged in a nest of flowers, over time the surrounding community asked Kyai Nur Kholis to

occupy it to make a Koran. He is an immigrant ulama who was born in the village of Pasir sub-district of Mijen, Demak Regency. Previously, he did not think to establish a pesantren. Yet, the community surrounding him wanted to establish a boarding school as a place to study the Quran. At first, it was not intended as pesantren since it is only used to study the Quran, and the activities of the religious gathering, after some time it has begun to read a lot and until now it has become a boarding school.

In connection with the history of the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School, known as a pesantren for those who suffer mental disorder, began when a kiai's friend at that time visited his house, then the guest consulted about his sister who had a mental disorder for 12 years, so KH. Nur Kholis advised to leave her sister at the At-Taqy boarding school to be cared for and mentored, finally after being cared for and guided for about 5-6 months with God's permission to heal, and now often sowan 70 to KH. Nur Kholis and this news spread widely. From this the beginning of the introduction of the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School as a mental disorder pesantren, which at first there was never any intention to build a pesantren more than a pesantren. This Islamic boarding school was built since 1990 until now it can still stand strong and has even been renovated to uphold Islamic da'wah.

The pesantren was established around July 10, 1990, called At-Taqy and this pesantren did not stand up to its grandeur and luxurious facilities. But this pesantren is fairly decent. At that time it was only in the form of a building to study the students, because this pesantren did not ask for funds from its students, but if there were those who were willing to give charity, the pesantren was willing to accept it. From his hard efforts and assisted by many parties (donors) and the surrounding community, finally he is now able to build a hall for assemblies in the yard and an office of the secretariat of the management. He has been trying to increase the number of santri rooms, and also renovate the house of KH Nur Kholis located in one complex with boarding schools. Santri who recite at At-Taqy Islamic boarding school are quite numerous and varied. Both young and old and their students are normal and some are mentally ill and there are students living in pesantren there are also students who are (not staying) local residents. Previously, in this pesantren there were only normal students from the surrounding community and from outside the region.

The sufi tradition developed at the at-Taqy Jepara Islamic Boarding School is one example of how the values of Sufism try to be turned on in the midst of pesantren activities. The reading of language symbols on the writings that adorn the corners of the room at Pondok At-Taqy needs to be done for several reasons, first, the typical writing media such as at Pondok at-Taqy have not been found in other Islamic boarding schools. The writing of wall hangings that are usually affixed to other Islamic boarding schools is usually in the form of calligraphy writing with distinctive *khat* (Arabic calligraphy) or rules that are relatively systematic and structured with bullet

and numbering. It is very different from the writing found at the At-Taqy Islamic Boarding School as an example of writing placed in front of the Islamic boarding school hall at Taqy that reads "Hi ... Where are you going?" Where do you want to run? Really you can't go anywhere ... you can't run anywhere ... you know ...? Or "your wing delosorno ... delosorno gulumu ... submit your head ... low to your soul ... sorno sekabehan ..." (lower your wings, lower your neck, lower your head, lower your soul, get rid of everything. -Taqy. Caregivers of the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school have the initiative to write these writings and then install them in every corner of the room with the purpose of reminder. Third, the sufism tradition in the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school also shows an alternative approach to understanding Sufism. The approach in understanding Sufism teachings in some Islamic boarding schools in general is the recitation of sufis' books, congregational prayers, and other rituals. While the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school, in addition to using these methods, use sufic writings that are affixed to several corners of the pesantren.

By using the method of semiotics, this article wants to reveal answers to how the meaning actually contained in written expressions that exist on the walls of the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school. Signs or languages, which in this case are represented by wall writings, are media for expressing ideas as mental events related to the human mind. (Marwan, 2015, p. 21) According to Barthes in Marwan (2015, p. 26) the sign has a level of signification that explains the relationship between markers and markers in which it operates non-explicit, indirect and uncertain meanings. The meaning of these wall writings needs to be revealed so that the message in them is able to be conveyed properly and correctly by the community. Besides this article at the same time want to show that the kesufian tradition like this - outside the ritualistic tradition of worship, needs to be preserved by the community because in reading these writings the community is indirectly led to tafakkur activities or contemplating what is actually intended to be conveyed in the writing.

## **B. Symbolism of Sufi Language and Semiotics in The Pesantren At Taqy**

Sufi literary traditions that develop in the pesantren society have a distinctive style. The themes raised in Sufi literature are certainly a picture of Sufism teachings. At least it consists of three main studies of Sufism and is the topic of conversation in Sufi literature; First, Sufism is understood as a science that contains teachings to draw closer to God through moral / moral formation by means of self-cleansing or *tazkiyatun nafs*. Moral development, which is the main point of Sufism teachings is on the inner formation of human not only on the outward level. The word *Nafs* in the word *tazkiyatun nafs* is to refer to the human self which includes spiritual elements of man, namely mind, heart and lust (will). The concepts of Sufism in *Maqamat* and *Ahwal* themes such as repentance, thanksgiving, resignation, pleasure, *al-uns*,

*mahabbah* etc. are important studies in understanding Sufism. Second, Sufism is also interpreted as the way in which direct knowledge from God is obtained. Direct knowledge from God is commonly referred to as *ladunni*, or divine inspiration or Godly knowledge or enlightenment. In this understanding, the metaphysical dimension dominates. Humans will be confronted between knowledge gained through reasoning or learning and knowledge gained through God directly with the media of *Qalb* (heart). The phenomenon of *ma'rifat* is often associated with this understanding because when a person has reached the stage of *takhalli*, *tahalli* and then *tajalli*, in the last process that man is able to uncover the secret veil of Allah. Third, Sufism is also regarded as a science that discusses the view of reality. The themes of *wahdatul wujud*, *wahdatul adyan*, and *wahdatus syuhud* also become academic conversations that cross the boundaries of space and time. Sufis claim that a Sufi is in his absence means that they are in a situation when they negate everything so that there is only Huwa (Allah) (Rosyidi, 2004, p. 66–67).

Hadi in Marwan (2015, p. 57) said that the Sufi literary category generally described the intensive relationship between humans and God. There is a dialogue between humans and God in every Sufi literature. The dialogue actually depicts how a human soul goes on a spiritual journey from the physical, lower realms, to the higher spiritual realms. The classification of Sufi literary works can at least be grouped into six namely, first, monotheistic poetry and *ma'rifat* namely literature that tends to be narrative can be found in the poetry of the works of Hamzah Fansuri, Boat Poetry, Poetry *Ma'rifat*, macapat song etc. Second, Poetry praises the Prophet Muhammad for example Qasida al-Barzanji, Qaisa al-Burdah etc. Third, is like Ratib or Sufi hagiography, for example Ratib Syekh Abdil Qadir Jailani, Ratib Syekh Nasabandi etc. Fourth, the Sufi Allegory or the story of the Sufi parable is that the writer changes the stories classified as romance or solace into symbolically ascending stages of their spiritual journey. Included in this type are Dewa Ruci fiber, Sukma Winasa, Yusuf and Zulaiha etc. Fifth, the Tasawuf Minutes which are usually included in the Book Literature group such as Hamzah Fansuri (Syarab al-Asyiqin, Asrar al-Arifin and al-Muntahi); Syamsudin Pasai (Mīrat al-Mūminin, Mīrat al-Iman). While Sufistic writings at the at-taqy Islamic boarding school can be said to be included in the sixth classification, namely writing essays containing various shades of view or Sufi science on various issues such as metaphysics, etiquette, eschatology, and psychology etc.

Semiotics is used to deepen the reading of the wall writing in the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school because semiotics studies the relations between the components of the sign, as well as the relationships between these components with the user community. Saussure (2002, p. 16) mentioned that language consists of acoustic images (words and sounds) associated with concepts (objects or ideas). The link between the two is the result of an agreement (convention). The relationship between concept markers is arbitrary (random and arbitrary). He claims language is a

sign system that is involved in a complex signification process. This language has the function of "contrast" (difference). For example, the word "dog" has meaning because we can distinguish "dog" from cat, tree, and so on. Thus, the word exists as part of a net of signifiers that are united in a structure of difference. Saussure also distinguishes between *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). *Parole* is what people say at certain times and times while *langue* is the structure that is in or the whole sign system that underlies *parole*.

The basic principle of semiotics is that a sign is representative, that is, a sign is something that represents something else. Peirce in Sartini (2013, p. 5) reveals that the sign meaning process followed the relationship between three points namely *Reprentatamen* (R) - *Object* (O) - *Interpretant* (I). R is the part of the sign that can be perceived physically or mentally, which refers to something that is represented by it (O). then I is part of the process that interprets the relationship between R and O.

Signs cannot be seen only individually but must be looked out in relation to and combination with other signs in a system. This is because the language (sign) is formed through the operation of two language axes namely the paradigms axis which is a sign (dictionary, vocabulary) through which word choices are made and only one unit of the choice can be chosen. While syntagms are a combination of signs with lan marks of existing devices based on certain rules so as to produce meaningful expressions (Piliang, 2004, p. 191).

Barthes in Piliang (2004, p. 193) also explains about the level of signs in the process of meaning of a sign. The two levels of signification are denotation and connotation. Denotation is the level of signification that explains the relationship between the sign and the sign or between the sign and its reference to reality which results in an explicit, direct and certain meaning. Denotation is the most conventional level of signification in society, namely sign elements whose meanings tend to be socially agreed upon. While connotation is a level of signification that explains the relationship between markers and markers in which operate meaning that is not explicit, indirect and uncertain or meaning open to various possible interpretations. It creates second-layer meanings, which are formed when markers are associated with various aspects of psychology such as feelings, emotions, or beliefs which are then called connotative meanings.

In addition to a combination of signs, semiotic analysis also reveals interactions between signs. Although the forms of interaction between these signs are very wide open, there are two main forms of interaction known, namely metaphor and metonym. Metaphor is a model of relations between signs in which a sign of a system is used to explain the meaning for another system. For example the use of the 'head of stone' metaphor to explain someone who does not want to change his mind. 'Metonym' is the interaction of the sign, in which a sign is associated with another sign, in which

there is a relationship of the part (part) with the whole (whole). For example, the 'bottle' sign (part) to represent 'drunkard' or the 'crown' sign to represent the concept of 'kingdom'.

### C. Result and Discussion

There are about 9 Sufistic nuanced wall posts that adorn the corner of the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school. The writings are not just typed and then affixed with plain paper but neatly written then there are framed there then made banners etc. For example the posts posted on the main gate are "apes, asor, ino, nestopo, elek, bodho, destitute, oro iso opo-opo, ora strong opo-opo, ora kuwoso opo-opo, ora reti opo-opo, even dudu opo-opo?". The writing was written using Javanese language which means "weak, low, contemptible, difficult, ugly, stupid, poor, can not do anything, not strong anything, not power of anything, do not know anything, even not anything". Posts are made using all capital letters with some emphasis in a few sentences, namely in sentences even *dudu opo-opo* (nothing) written in a larger size than other writings. The emphasis is to bring the readers to read and understand the last sentence which is the climax or conclusion of the previous words. So, the sentence even *dudu opo-opo* has a deep meaning and that is the meaning that actually wants to be conveyed in the writing. Overall writing makes humans the subject like typically people who feel such things etc.

In denotation, the words apes, asor ... etc. refer to the bad conditions experienced by humans. Humans generally assume that these bad conditions are things that should be avoided as far as possible. Because humans basically like comfort, pleasure and satisfaction (Waslam, 2015, p. 6). These conditions also refer to the achievement or failure of a person to achieve the things he wants in this world so that conditions emerge as such. For example the word destitute (poor) is used as a word that refers to the condition of someone who does not have property. Or the word elek which means ugly, refers to a bad condition on one's physical or face. The words asor and ino, respectively, mean low and contemptible are words that are usually used for conditions of low social status in society. The word apes or which means bad luck or na as also refers to a person's condition being overwritten by a calamity so that it becomes an obstacle to what he aspires to.

The next word is ora iso opo-opo, ora strong opo-opo, ora kuwoso opo-opo, ora reti opo-opo, which means it can not do anything, does not have the power to do something, does not have the power to do something and not knowing everything. In denotation, these words are contrary to reality because in reality humans can do something, have the ability to become a ruler or who has authority like a President, etc., even according to the Koran, humans are the only creatures who are given the task to become caliphs because of their ability in knowing everything. Asy'arie (2015,

p. 53) states that humans are seen as having conceptual abilities with the character of the necessity of continuous experimentation to demonstrate prosperity and well-being. With all the potential possessed by humans, it is almost impossible for humans to be unable to do anything. Humans are equipped with the ability to learn and have knowledge, as well as knowing by various means for it such as vision, hearing, discussion of thinking and writing. With this potential there is a necessity for humans to always seek and add knowledge (Neviyarni, 2009, p. 47).

Next is the word *dudu opo-opo* or which means nothing. The choice of words that if traced from the beginning refers to humans as the culprit, it becomes odd if they are called nothing. In the language structure, the Pronouns questioner is used to replace something that the speaker wants to know or confirms what the speaker already knows (Kridalaksana, 2005, p. 88). In terms of meaning, what is asked can be about people, goods, or choices. Whose pronouns are used if the person being asked is a person or a person's name. What pronouns are used to ask for inanimate objects or things (Annisa, 2016, p. 761). So, what exactly is meant by human being called by what words and not who?

The tradition of the tarekat in explaining how the process of interaction between *ahlusuluk* and *murshid* is depicted like a corpse in the hands of the person who administers it (Mudin, 2015, p. 407). In *Maqamat* it is referred to as *tawakkal* which literally means entrusting or representing. According to the term Sufism, *tawakal* means entrusting or surrendering all problems to God and representing Him in handling the various problems encountered. According to Zunnun al-Misri (d. 180 H / 796 AD) that *tawakal* is to leave consideration of oneself by eliminating power and strength. A trustee does not see any power and strength, except God's power and strength. Al-Ghazali divided *tawakal* to three levels as well. First, surrender to God, like someone who gives an assignment to his representative after he believes in the truth, honesty, and sincerity of his representative in handling that matter. Second, surrender to God, like a child surrenders all his problems to his mother. Third, surrender yourself to God, like a corpse in the hands of those who bathe it (Kartanegara, 2006, p. 45). So, the word *opo-opo* can be understood as an inanimate object that if it is not energized in it, it cannot move like a table that cannot move if nothing moves. Thus humans are analogous to inanimate objects which actually have no ability if not given the ability by God.

In connotation, the words *apes, asor, ino, nestopo, elek, bodho, destitute, oro iso opo-opo, strong ora opo-opo, ora kuwoso opo-opo, ora reti opo-opo, even dudu opo-opo*, only can be understood the meaning contained in it if it is associated with Sufism or how the relationship between servants and God is trying to be built through Sufism. The choice of words such as *apes, asor, ino, nestopo, elek, bodho, destitute, ora iso opo-opo, strong ora opo-opo, ora kuwoso opo-opo, ora reti opo-opo* have a hidden



meaning which is a form of efforts to humble themselves before Allah Almighty. Sufism calls it *tawadhu* 'or inferiority before Allah Almighty (An-Naisaburi, 2007, p. 198).

While the word *dudu opo-opo*, which means nothing, besides having a denotation meaning about an inanimate object, the word *dudu opo-opo* also has a connotation meaning. There is a hidden meaning in the word. The word contains instructions about the absence of humans before God. Either there is nothing in the form of form or spirit. The *Wahdatul Wujud* concept and the *Fana* concept are appropriate to explain the meaning of the word *dudu opo-opo*.

Mustafa Zahri explained that mortal is the disappearance of the senses or the side of humanity. *Basyariah* human nature tends to encourage humans to meet the needs of lust or desires. But more than that, Harun Nasution explained mortal (1983, p. 81) is self-destruction or the destruction of feelings or awareness about the existence of a gross human body. What becomes human lust is related to the human *basyariah* side or human gross body. This means that if someone has been able to be in divine consciousness, the human physical needs that are the source of lust are no longer their goal. With conditions like this, divine awareness will dominate a person and only in that way things in the form of disobedience, reprehensible traits will change with commendable qualities. So, if it is associated with the word *dudu opo-opo*, it can be interpreted as an expression of awareness about his absence. One's attempt to destroy the physical needs that often become the priority of their lives. Or simply it is physical and physical matters that are not important and even have no price at all especially if you make it a priority in life. So, one must assume that it is not important to have a taste to be appreciated, it is not important to eat and drink something delicious, it is not important to have proper clothes, etc.

Besides having to be associated with the concept of mortal, the word *dudu opo-opo* also needs to be associated with the concept of *wahdatul wujud*. According to the view of the unity of existence or *wahdatul wujud* of existence, that each existing or all existence has two aspects. Outside aspects which are 'Ardh and *Khalq* which have a conquest nature; and aspects that have *Jauhar* and *Haq* which have divine attributes. In other words that in each of the tangible (existing) there is the nature of God or *Haq* and the nature of necessity or *Khalq* (Mahmud, Blanca, & Spanyol, 2012, p. 93). The essence/ Being is essentially one, God, the Absolute, as the unlimited. Absolute being is often referred to by Ibn Arabi as *al-Haqq* (the Real, Lord). The variety of forms in the universe is basically *tajalliyat* (appearance) of the Absolute self in a finite phenomenon. Which is widely called *al-Khalq* (forms of creation, world of phenomena); many are servants, many are diversity (diversity) (Mahmud et al., 2012, p. 98). So, the word *dudu opo-opo*, can also be interpreted as an expression of awareness about the nature of the form of Allah. Everything actually never exists.

There is only God. Awareness of all beings comes from God as the basis for the principle of creation of living things. The nature of living beings is the same, the nature of human beings, animals, plants, the universe is the same, ie there is no form.

Signs of the concept of mortal and Wahdatul form exist in addition to being in the word *dudu opo-opo*, also found in other writings that have similar meanings, "*heh. !! kowe kuwi lo ... opo ?? Kowe kuwi lo. sopo? Sopo anyway kowe kuwi??*" or which means " *heh* (call), you know you, *opo?* Who are you? Who are you?" In this phrase, there is a persuasive element that invites humans to do muhasabah to themselves by asking themselves. The invitation was also inspired by the teachings of Sufism as well as about muhasabah and repentance. Repentance in the book of Manajil al-Sairin according to Rachmat (2000, p. 8) is *yaqzhah* or consciousness. God has a variety of ways to sensitize humans, can be suddenly realized by someone about his mistakes, or can be with one incident that befell him, can also be by activities *pesantren kilat*, get advice or also by doing self-reflection (*muhasabah*).

The so-called *yaqzhah* is *Eid al-Fitr* or return to human nature. Every human being has a nature of holiness that leads to the desire to return to Allah through the path of goodness, beauty, etc. Desire is deep within humans (human subconscious). God places in the human heart a lamp in the heart and the lamp of nature is often closed. According to Rachmat (2000, p. 9), The Qur'an describes the heart like a *misykat*; *Allahu nurus samawati wal ardh, matsalu nurihi Thursday, fiha misbah* (Q.S. 24:35). The light of human nature cannot come out because it is covered with sins and our much attention to the world. However, for those who purify their hearts in earnest, the *misykat* becomes as brilliant as glass.

#### D. Conclusion

The reading of the wall posts in the at-Taqy Islamic boarding school concluded that this brief expression contained Sufistic elements. Sufistic elements are sourced from the teachings of Sufism, namely about mortal, *wahdatul wujud*, *muhasabah*, repentance

Such a religious tradition needs to be preserved because in addition to containing aesthetic elements, the delivery of *da'wah* in that way does not have the impression of patronizing. The reader is encouraged to read then ponder the meaning of the word. It could also be one way how one's consciousness can be present through such a religious tradition. *Wallahu a'lam*.

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