

KI AGENG SURYOMENTARAM'S PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR POSTMODERNITY

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Abstract

Postmodern society has related to the terms of relativism, it is kind of the rejection of certain universal forms (grand narrative). In this case, the uncertainty of ethic is being one of the problems of humanity that exist in postmodern society. It implies that there is no true moral principle. The accuracy of all moral principles are relatively accommodated to the concerned or selected individual environment. The difficulty is how to marry such values to respect for diversity. Some agreements on the principles of social justice are desirable. Human has to position themselves between 'absolutism' and 'anything goes'. Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, one of the Javanese Philosophers, formulated a set of philosophical views called to deal with human life. It is not an absolute concept to follow. Neither is it a form of totalitarianism reconstruction. Yet, it can be included as one of what so called by Lyotard as a small narrative. So in postmodernism view, the concept of Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, be it about harmony or manungsa tanpa tenger (human without signs), mawas diri (self-cautiousness), and mulur mungkret (state of being developed and shrunk) can be regarded as knowledge that qualifies to be publicized. It fits to some degree into a postmodern society for creating a harmonious life.

Keywords: philosophy, Javanese, Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, and postmodernity.

A. Introduction

The problem of existence always changes together with the change¹ of human civilization. From traditional and modern phases, until now which well known as postmodern era. Like what Heidegger argues that existence inhabits. When someone inhabits in this world, he leads a poetic life, as a member of "being".² It means, in every phases, human is a central dimension of all "being."³ Human lives at the era of the

¹ "The Change" is more neutral word for describing the history of human. Not the advancement which gave the effect of some phase better than the other phase, some phase is more civilized than the other phase. See Yasraf Amir Pialang, *Dunia Yang Dilipat*, 2nd Pub. (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2006), 32.

² Eric Lemay, Jeniffer A. pitts, *Heidegger Untuk Pemula*, trans. by Hardono Hadi, (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2001), 97.

³ Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hiperrealitas Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), 15.

dramatic pot. Some defense structures from generation to generation are being pulled down. The change is also going on the concept of “me” and “not me”, about class, ethnic, and nation. Perception in which we are on special phase of the history of human is after the modernism phase which called as postmodern era.

The human, like or dislike, will always bring their history, it seems with the thought that always bring the characteristic of its shaped elements and the cultural reality inside. Because of it, the thought is made.⁴ Every existence is born agree with each local wisdom. As Heidegger argues that the outside world is composed of objects and is only in use of every action and the purpose of human activity. But even so, the action of human knowledge is not apart with the surrounding objects.⁵

Heidegger argues that every human being (every “Dasein”) is shaped by culture completely. It is because they cannot control "the flung" of their social environment, one becomes a part of a culture, and consequently the entire behavior is learned from the culture studied.⁶ As the existence of western philosophy born from the Greek and European local wisdom, Islamic existentialism is born from the local wisdom of Islamic religion, and Javanese existentialism is also influenced by the local wisdom of java.

However, the West⁷ comes with the big influence to this world with its discourses of modern philosophy. Hegel argues that the modern people do not need a basic value, the truth, and legitimating. There is no other basic which can support the independent subject except from the subject intelligence itself that will substitute the myth, legend, and revelation.⁸

Western appears as the universal culture, sole culture, it extend the concept and technology invention that ignite the global civilization, it is named as postmodern era; moreover it is called as the “western” culture. It is indicated by consumerism, junk food, clothes, entertainment, rock music, television, media, pop hero, and media figures and the others.

Postmodernism proclaims and spreads the plurality and diversity without any limitations. Postmodern culture has left much rationality, universality, certainty and the arrogance of modern culture. The world now, especially the art and the philosophy are faced with the kind of line, legal, and values uncertainty.⁹ As if there is no boundary of law,

⁴ Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, *Kritik Nalar Arab*, (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2003), 29.

⁵ Save M. Dagun, *Filsafat Eksistensialisme*, (Jakarta :Rineka Cipta, 1990), 80.

⁶ Lorens Bagus, *Kamus Filsafat*, (Jakarta: PT GramediaPustaka), 147.

⁷ The west is aimed to address United States and Europe dominated by white race, England, Australia, Israel, and Uni Soviet. See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Posmodernisme Bahaya dan Harapan Bagi Islam*, translated by M. Sirozi, (Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 110.

⁸ Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hiperrealitas Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), 17.

⁹ Akbar S. Ahmed, *Posmodernisme BahayadanHarapanBagi Islam*, translated by M. Sirozi,(Bandung: Mizan, 1993), 111.

morality, rationality, ethic, aesthetics in postmodern- boundary between moral or immoral, good or bad, should or should not be, rational or irrational, reality or fantal, form or meaning, message or media.

B. Discussion

Indonesia and Javanese Culture

With regard to the diversity of culture, Indonesia has numerous rules of life since it has thousand islands inhabited by different races, tribes and cultures. One of which is Java where it has a concept or guidance in life which is different from the west. Primarily, Javanese mindset believes that everything is one, the unity of life. The Javanese people do not separate the individual from their environment, group, era, situation, and condition, even from supernatural. They think that it is impossible to separate between elements of this world and elements of supernatural.

Thereby, people have a moral duty to respect the orderly existence. They have to accept life as it is, they form state of inner peace and emotional serenity. Surrender to the will, desire and passion for indulgence are reprehensible because it will be corrupt personal, social, and cosmic. So, people have to control their own selves in or out to form life beautifully.¹⁰

Javanese religious concept not only gets from ratio and reasoning but also from sense. *Cipta, rasa, and karsa* (creation, sense, and will) are God's gifts for human to understand all of the truth i.e., the universe, God's creations, and the creator itself. Community, for Javanese people, is the source of security. It also applies for nature which inspires and is a source of power that will make certain about the salvation and the destruction. From the social environment, they learn that nature can be the threatened, and give a favor and rest, it means that their existence depends on the universe. For the Javanese people, the sensory nature is the spirit world expression that it is the mystery of the power around it, from this they get their existence and hanging.¹¹

The concept above is different from the dominate existentialism type in this era which is a given by consumption lifestyle, as Herbert Marcuse said about "one dimensional man", it means just maintaining the establishing and refusing the opposition. Notwithstanding the opposition that shows as the contrary thing, but in reality, it continues from the system before.¹²

¹⁰ Heni Astiyanto, *Filsafat Kejawen (Menggali Butir-Butir Kearifan Lokal)*, (Yogyakarta; Warta Pustaka, 1999), 454.

¹¹ Franz Magnis Suseno, *Etika Jawa (Sebuah Analisis tentang Kebijakan Hidup Jawa)* 9th edition, (Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2003), 85.

¹² Listiyanto Santoso, *Epistemologi Kiri*, 9th edition, (Jogjakarta: Ar- Ruzz Media, 2012), 120.

Instrumentalization as a keyword of the technological view, a form of thinking or a basic of the technique that emphasize at the efficiency, productivity, fluency, certainty, mathematic, and loss and profit account.¹³ Human create and manipulate something, nature, and machines, to make light of their life. Here, human will be in power and technological manipulation. And human is so dependent with technology. Technology is developed to fill the requirement, and it is walked under human determination. In fact, human has to adapt to science and technology determination.¹⁴

For the Javanese community, if people disrupt the harmony in society and nature with their behavior, they also disrupt the cosmic alignment in which case bring the dangers to the actor itself and the whole society. This course is very different from the view of the technological society now.

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram was born at 20 Mei 1892 with the child name or the noble name B.R.M (BendaraRaden Mas)1 BendaraRaden Mas is a knighted for royal Kudiarmadji, as the 55th son from 79 children of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwana VII, who has reigned in keratin Ngayogyakarta Adiningrat. His Mother has name B.R.A (Bendara Raden Ayu) Retnomandoyo, the daughter of Patih Danurejo VI who has noble as Prince Cakraningrat. At his 18 years old, Ki Ageng Suryomentaram had became a prince, so he changed his name as BendaraPangeranHarya (BPH) Suryomentaram.¹⁵

Having completed his primary education at the Srimenganti Palace School, he went to prepare for the Klein Ambtenaar (junior civil servant) examination, which enabled him to take up an administrative position at the Yogya Residence; he appeared to have held this position, he needed knowledge of Dutch, for two years. He also learned Arabic—in the course of his religious studies —and English, and he said to have made up for his lack of formal education by prodigious reading.¹⁶ He has a hobby of reading and learning, especially about the history, philosophy, Java, and religion. He studied religion from KH. Ahmad Dahlan.¹⁷

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram has title as “Prince of Surya Mataram” then he took his prince degree and call himself as Ki Ageng Suryomentaram. It began when BPH Suryomentaram ever participated in a group of Jagongmanten to Surakarta. In his train journey, he saw farmers working in the field.¹⁸

¹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁵ Marcell Bonneff, *Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, Javanese Prince and Philosopher*, 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷ M. Hariwijawa, *Islam Kejawen*, 2nd edition, (Yogyakarta: Gelombang Pasang, 2006), 344.

¹⁸ Abdurrahman el-Ashi, *Makrifat Jawa Untuk Semua*, (Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2011), 14.

What was seen by BPH Suryomentaram touched him and he thought how heavy the burden of farmers. It became his first skepticism to this world. Started questioning whether it is proper for farmers to be unhappier than the prince. Since then, he was often out of the palace to meditate in places where had been usually visited by his ancestors such as Langse Cave, Semin Cave and Parangtritis. He went to wander in the Kroya, Purworejo and experienced working various odd jobs such as a pole batik trader, farmer and laborer.¹⁹

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram's life embraced simplicity. He had a career in politics, one of them is that he had a role in the establishment of the Taman Siswa along with nine other people. He was a Javanese reformer who always kept in touch with a Javanese philosophical life in doing things that do not hurt others, and having sublime mind and behavior. He became a teacher from a school of psychotherapy called Kawruh Begja (science of happiness). He devoted his life to investigate the psychological nature by using himself as the experimentation. Many results of his investigations are formed as books, essays, or lectures.

His Philosophical Thought

According to Ki AgengSuryomentaram, human as living thing has a mind. Human act with their thought which is shaped as some understanding accumulated become a science. It is what makes human distinct from animal which acts based on their instinct only. human beings are social creatures. So human life is to get along and socialize.²⁰

Obviously his thought is also suitable with the values of Javanese people, where they uphold on the concept of human harmony. Human existence cannot be separated from other human existence, nature, and God. *"Who are looking for good without reassure the others (the neighbors), as well as round up on his own neck."*²¹

The human soul is Kramadangsa, which means that human is essentially a God creature who is always has elements of the physical and spiritual on them. The nature of Kramadangsa accompanying some life notes underlying the existence of individual as a human.²²

According to Ki Ageng, the essence of human is the sense. The sense is divided into a sense of body, a sense of life, sense of self, and a sense of the eternal. Sense of body is there on the human body, for example; hungry, sick, cool, hot, thirsty, hot, and cold. The sense of life is a basic willingness of life characterized by the desire of survives. A sense of ego is the sense of having a tendency of personal gain. The sense of perennial is level of

¹⁹ Marcell Bonnef, *Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, Javanese Prince And Philosopher*, Vol. 57, 1994, 51.

²⁰ Ki Fudyartanto, *Psikologi Kepribadian Timur*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003), 83.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²² Ki AgengSuryomentaram, *Falsafah Hidup Bahagia Jalan Menuju Aktualisasi Diri*, Vol. 2, trans. by Ki OtoSuastika, (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2003), 60.

universal truth reaches, eternal law, part of nature, in the same fate and it has a will to accept the fact that “here, like this and now” life. The sense is a manifestation of the soul.²³

Kawruh Jiwa is more accurately described as knowledge (it can be classed as the human philosophy or psychology). Since it has a base material and a clear method, presented in a systematic and logic, it can be used to analyze and solve the problems of daily life functionally. *Kawruh Jiwa* is the soul knowledge, or knowledge to know the properties of the soul. The soul is invisible part of the human; the soul cannot be received by five senses, it is different from the human body which is the visible part of human. *Kawruh Jiwa* is not a religion, asceticism or abstinence behavior.

The human soul is understood as a mortal thing that can be damaged or destroyed. It experiences birth, obtains essential experiences and then will be turned off. With the coming of the death, soul is gone to abolish the individual domination or influence. Those experiences will produce some recordings summarized in the memory. When human soul has been cleared or turned off by his personal core as a human being, that human will be well-ordered and guided properly, so their life will feel peaceful and serene or happy.

His Moral Tenets in Dealing with Post Modernity

Postmodern has skipped over rationality, positivism, universality, certainty, instrumentalism, and the other thing from modernism. It is also a desire to abandon the excessive need for myths, narratives, or knowledge. And it makes the world of art and philosophy faced with a kind of 'uncertainty towards ' (indeterminacy), ' legal uncertainty ' and ' uncertainty value'. It seems like human have been being on a maze.

As if there is no legal limit, moral of rationality, aesthetics, and ethics, there is no boundary between the moral or immoral, rational or irrational, good/ bad, the message or media, should or should not be, reality or fantal, form or meaning. As if no message is conveyed, no more division or distinction between media, message and cause. In fact, according to Marshall McLuhan, 'media' itself has become the message.

Even how many people who have given some meaning to what is postmodernism, it still submit itself to the understanding of every individual who thought about it. Postmodern is often blamed as irresponsible culture, which allowed anything (anything goes!), There are no rules or legal certainties though this is as the impact of its positive goal to eliminate universalism and re-actualize a variety of alienated sciences by modernization with no justify them on being an absolute justification.

Postmodernism can be seen as a relativist trend. In this era, every value is created by and is only relevant to a particular circumstance (every culture). There is no global

²³ M. Hariwijawa, *Islam Kejawaen*, 2nd edition., (Yogyakarta: Gelombang Pasang, 2006), 116.

agreement about what constitutes justice. It implies that there is no reason to say that Western worldviews must be followed and replaces others.

Lyotard rejects the single truth or what he calls as the Meta narrative, and now there are only small narratives (mini narrative) which legitimize the practice of all kinds of knowledge. The similar concept is also introduced by Ki Ageng Suryomentaram on self-knowledge or *Kawruh Jiwa*.

Postmodern society has related with the terms of relativism, it seems the rejection of certain universal forms. In this case, the uncertainty of ethic as one of the problems of humanity that exist in postmodern society, it means that there is no true moral principles generally, the accuracy of all moral principles are relative accommodated to the concerned or selection individual environment

However, human community has guidelines (customs, morals, values) in their self-actualization of their life. Basically, they, as community, adapt to their respective environments, and some goals of each group to create harmonious, calm, and ordered social relations.

Kawruh Jiwa is more accurately described as the science (it can be classified in human philosophy or psychology), because it has a basic material and a clear method, it has been presented systematically and logically, so that it can be used to analyze and solve the problem of daily life functionally.²⁴

It does not rule out the problem of postmodern society, some extended concepts by Ki Ageng Suryomentaram are not intended as an absolute concept that must be followed. Nor they are as a form of totalitarianism reconstruction. His teachings can be classified as one of what has been called by Lyotard with a small narrative; those have a goal to establish a humane individual.

One of the keywords of postmodern according to Lyotard is to create some new ideas which come from such mini narratives. There is no grand narrative but some mini narrative from the series of local requirement. With heterogeneous rules to search for the diversity of such opinions he create some new ideas. Javanese nuances color Ki Ageng Suryomentaram's thought which can be drawn from how he is an open-minded person to new challenges. One of such challenges is postmodernism.

According to Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, *Pengawikan Pribadi* or learning about the sense of the human self can be equated with the study of human and humanity. Because people are included in the part of the creature called a Human. Then when they learn about a sense of themselves and can understand it properly, they will understand the general people automatically.²⁵

²⁴Afthonul Afif, et.all, *Matahari dari Mataram*, (Depok: Kepik, 2012), 68.

²⁵Abdurrahman el-Ashi, *Makrifat Jawa Untuk Semua*, (Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2011), 52.

Pengawikan Pribadi as a form of the desire control that tends to be relentless and always increase, with the understanding of “me” will make human have ability to know what should they do every time and space they are, and how to solve it, imply with the entry of postmodernism. It is not a rejection or an extreme cult choice. But they will be able to control themselves to face it through their own evaluation.

Small narratives such as myths, fairy tales, and others are produced by postmodernism with ideas and purposes from the owners’ narratives. But, many of their followers have taken the narratives blindly. It will not happen for people who have known about themselves, because they will make a decision or take a choice based on understanding of what they critically deal with. Those values have been believed seriously, and it is not only based on guessing.

In his book of “For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign,” Jean Baudrillard has developed his concept of the 'signified simulation'. In Baudrillard's view, today society is the 'colonizer' of signs and the codes into almost every commodity, commodity change as a 'dispenser' signs and power (pleasure, status and symbol).²⁶

The concept of human happiness or unhappiness is caused by fulfill or insatiable of their basic needs. The need will come to the human being relentlessly, then come the secondary needs which are derived from the own human mind to obtain momentary pleasure, status, and prestige in their community. Then, humans become the victims of the needs they have made that come from their desires.

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram mentioned that desire is very influential, especially in three areas: wealth (*Semat*, a general trend towards material pleasures such as finding riches, enjoyment, and pleasure), public recognition (*Drajat*, one's position in the social hierarchy to search for glory, pride, and virtue), and magical powers (*Kramat*, seeking power, trust to be respected and praised).²⁷

The desire of those three things happen when human are simply controlled by their ego, pleasures for their selves, and do everything as they want. They tend to get rid of something that is unprofitable or fun for their selves, and look for something that can lead to comfort on their selves. It is humane.

Jean Baudrillard names it with the world of simulation. Human are being on reality space where the distinction between the real world and fantal, the real and imitation are very thin. Spaces which have no paid attention on such real categorizes, apparent, true, false, fantal, reference, representation, reality, image, production, reproduction. All of them have emerged in signs.

²⁶Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Semiotika dan Hiperrealitas*, (Bandung: Matahari, 2012), 155.

²⁷ Ki AgengSuryomentaram, *Falsafah Hidup Bahagia Jalan Menuju Aktualisasi Diri*, Vol.I, trans. by Ki OtoSuastika , (Jakarta: Grasindo), 4.

Image is more interesting than reality. Postmodern society has spread in mass media where it creates the way-out meaning explosion in order to beat down the real reality when the object is not seen by its profit but from its meaning and symbol value.

According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their book of “Anti Oedipus”, 'desire' or 'passion' will never be fulfilled, it is always reproduced on higher forms by what is called as 'desiring machine' (used term to describe the reproduction of “deficiency sense' (lack) on themselves continuously). Once the desire has fulfilled, it will appear the higher desire and consider more perfect and more relentless. Human beings have a desire of an object which is not due to the natural lack of the object, but it comes from 'deficiency sense' that has been produced and reproduced from human.

As Deleuze and Guattari argues that Desiring machine is always be different, something else. There is no desire for the same thing, for something that is already owned. And the risk of this can sink into the controlled subject under their control sign, confusing or contradictory, that is contained in a series of different objects. The object of consumption that flows is unending inside the arena of consumerism will never fulfill the need.²⁸

Product, style, images that come and go, just create the interplay and contradictory jungle signs and it also create an overlapping network of sign which has been called by Lacan as “schizophrenic”. Every time people consume the product, sign, or new image. Those are the responses of information, question, appointment, persuasion from that era.²⁹

In the language of Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, human need always develops (*mulur*) and shrinks (*mungkrut*). Although the need has been fulfilled and satisfied, there will be other urgent demands to follow. There are also moments where the human interest cannot be satisfied, but it is considered as not urgent for their desires.

One of the characteristic of modernism is the revival of tribalism, it make society in committed groups by strong spirit of unity and spirit of unity in politic organization which has togetherness solidarity to face the outsiders, it is a mentality to favor his own tribe or group. Postmodernism has been rejected this ideology.

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram upheld the concept of harmony as his background as the Javanese people which has the concept of social harmony ethic which is interpreted into two principles, namely the principle of harmonious and respectful principle. Both of them have aim to establish a society in a state of harmony. Not only in the scope of his fellow Javanese, even the human sphere, but also it is between humans and the fellow human being, nature, and the Sacred.

²⁸Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hiper-realitas Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1996), 106.

²⁹*Ibid*, 106.

Ki Ageng Suryomentaram's tenets and postmodernism are in one line, not only in their idea of the harmony, but also in the postmodern critique of the modern dualistic view which divides the whole reality into subject and object. The view in turn results in the excessive natural objectification and arbitrary natural depletion that causes the ecological crisis.

C. Conclusion

The philosophical view of Ki Ageng Suryomentaram leads to an accommodative rationality which puts a sense of people's lives in achieving truth and happiness. In postmodern society, the accuracy of all moral principles are relatively accommodated to the concerned or selection individual environment. However, human communities have guidelines (customs, morals, values) for their life.

In the views of Ki Ageng Suryomentaram, there are some approaches to human desire that, to some degree, is still appropriate to deal with the postmodern era. His philosophical stances might bring up harmonious life of society. Postmodern society tends to be individualistic and Ki Ageng's view of human-human unity could be the cure for such kind of individualism. In Indonesian context, Ki Ageng's views remain a great philosophical formula for keeping local wisdom and diverse community alive and continuous.

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