

A Semiotics Study on Siwa-Buddha Faith in Blitar East Java : The Temples and Their Ornaments

Lery Prasetyo^{1*}, Sutrisno¹, Metta Puspita Dewi¹

¹STAB Negeri Raden Wijaya Wonogiri, Indonesia

*Correspondence: leryprasetyo@rocketmail.com

ABSTRACT

Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community as the preserver of the Siwa-Buddha faith has a valuable and important concept depicted through various symbols in its temples. This study aims to reveal the meaning of the temples and their ornaments in the area of Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community. This study shows that there are main temples in the area, namely Siwa/Daha, Brahma/Jenggala, and Wisnu/Kediri. Then the ornaments found consisted of dragons, makaras, woman statues. Those temples and ornaments symbolize some main concepts of the teachings including Triloka Pura as the last Majapahit, worshiping and respecting ancestors in the sangkan paraning dumadi system, and the combined elements of father and mother in the Siwa-Buddha concept.

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1. Introduction

Religion or belief is an essential system that manages human relations with The all-powerful one, nature, and other humans through various methods of worship and teachings of goodness. So that it can play an essential role in society, Bauto (2014) states that religion can trigger integration such as harmony, discipline, and security, even though the community adheres to different religions. In Indonesia, the freedom to embrace religion and belief for its residents is guaranteed by the state through the 1945 constitution article 28 E paragraph 1 and paragraph 2. There are six officially recognized religions in Indonesia, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Besides these religions, Indonesians are still given ample space to practice other religions and beliefs.

Indonesia is known as a rich country of culture that also has consequences on belief systems and religions. (Geertz, 2017) argues that religion can be viewed as a cultural system. In this regard, many local beliefs exist, one of which is the Siwa-Buddha (Shiva-Buddha) belief. A belief that is claimed to have existed since the time of the Majapahit Kingdom. The adheres community of this belief exists in several areas, one of which is in Blitar Regency, the community is named Brahmaraja Triloka Pura.

The Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community was founded in the 2000s as a cultural community rather than a religion, but they practice Shiva-Buddhist beliefs seriously. The community has a particular area to carry out various activities. Inside the area, there are several buildings typical of Shiva-Buddhist followers. This place emphasizes the relationship between culture and belief that gives rise to symbols or symbolic actions that can create solid feelings and motivations in a Shiva-Buddhist follower. The Symbols form a conception of a general order of existence and attach this conception to actual projections, feelings, and motivations will be seen as a unique reality (Geertz, 2017).

In this study, semiotic theory is used to understand the phenomena of sign and symbolization found. Semiotics is a study of signs in order to express the meaning behind the signs implied within the symbols (Prasetyo, 2019). With this theory, it can be revealed what is behind the symbols presented in the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura community that represents the main concepts of the community, especially those that appear in the temple building and its ornaments. The symbol does not have any natural relationship between the signifier and the signified, so it needs to be interpreted to get its

meaning. In this regard, Chandler (1994) proposes three sequences for describing and analyzing symbols, namely, denotation in the first order, connotation in the second, and third in myth or mythology.

Denotation and connotation can not be separated in dealing with the meaning of something. In semiotics, they are indispensable to analyze and derive meaning from symbols. Chandler (1994) says that denotation is the meaning given by the dictionary, the literal and reasonable meaning of a sign. This is supported by Panofsky, in (Susiati, Iye, 2018), who defines that denotative meaning as the meaning obtained by all viewers from the visual image of the sign or what is seen on the sign. In addition, Chandler (1994) explains that connotation refers to socio-cultural and sign associations. The association can be in the form of ideology, emotion, and knowledge.

Barthes (1974, in Chandler, 1994) argues that denotation can be considered as connotation at a higher level. It is said that denotation is not the first meaning, but it is thought to be so. Denotation is another connotation. Connotation produces the illusion of denotation, the illusion of language makes the signifier and signified transparent and identical. Denotation is no more considered a purely natural meaning and nothing is more natural than connotation but undergoes a naturalization process (Silverman, 1983, cited in Chandler 1994).

The meaning of denotation can be accepted by people from the same culture, but it can be unacceptable to people in other cultures. Its meaning is at a literal level shared by most members of the culture. Connotation is not only the result of individual subjectivity, but it is the result of the intersubjectivity of people in a given culture. Existing meanings are the result of the relation of the signifier to a wider cultural segment, such as beliefs, ideologies, behaviors etc. (Silverman, 1983, cited in Chandler, 1994). Chandler (1994) provides an example of a connotation widely recognized by culture, it is a car. Cars, in western culture, connote masculinity or freedom.

Barthes (1957, in Chandler, 1994) describes denotation and connotation in terms of the order of significance. Denotation is the first order of marking. At this level, it is to have two segments, a signifier and a signified to be a sign. Then, the second order of marking is connotation. Barthes uses the sign at the denotative level as a signifier and has an additional signifier to become a sign. Thus, denotation causes a chain of connotations. A signifier at one level can be a signifier at another level. It can be seen that if there is a change in the signifier and the signified is still the same, it will produce different connotations.

It is very important to note that Barthes considers connotations to the same level or order as myths, but Chandler tends to place myths in third place in meaning. According to semiotic experts such as Barthes and Chandler, Myth is not just something that has a connection with old or traditional stories from the ancestors that consist of fairy tales with heroes and gods that are passed down by a particular culture or society from generation to generation (Iye, 2018). However, myth is the dominant ideology when signs or symbols are used (Barthes, in Chandler, 1994). The myth of producing signs, codes, or symbols is not the same as the popular use of the term 'myth' that refers to false beliefs but in semiotics, it can be considered a broad metaphor. It can help to make sense of cultural experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, in Chandler, 1994). Myths is not only something that has association with old or traditional story from ancestor consist of fables with its heroes and gods which is inherited by a certain culture or society by a generation to others generation (Prasetyo, 2021). Furthermore, Chandler (1994) says that myth can explain how conceptually culture is organized.

There are at least two functions of myth, first is based on the statement of Barthes (1977), which says that the function of myth is to naturalize culture. Myth can make dominant culture and historical values, attitudes, and beliefs look natural and reasonable (Barthes, 1977). While the second is proposed by Chandler (1994), which states that myths can serve to hide the ideological function of signs, codes, or symbols. Barthes (1974, in Chandler, 1994) considers that myth operates a bourgeois ideology that transforms culture into nature. Chandler (1994) further says that the analysis of cultural myths involves attempts to shape how codes operate in society intending to show how certain values, attitudes, and beliefs are supported but others are not. When one tries to analyze one's own culture, it is important to reflect explicitly on one's values. Based on this background, this article aims to reveal the meaning of the temples and their ornaments of the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community.

2. Methodology

This study used the qualitative research method as stated by Bungin (2001: 30) that qualitative methods are the only reliable and relevant way to understand social phenomena (human actions). This study was conducted in the area of Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community located in Ponggok, Blitar Regency of East Java Province. Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community is considered as Preserver of the Siwa-Buddha Faith, especially in Blitar area. This faith is contained the teaching concept of Siwa/Shiva (Hinduism) and Buddha (Buddhism).

The collecting data was conducted through some steps such as observation, in-depth interviews, documentation study, transcribing data, and compiling data. There were some informants: founders, members, and elders of the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura Community. The data consisted of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was taken from things or goods found in the area, which were considered symbols. While the secondary was in form of any additional sources such as articles, journals, books, notes, etc to complete the primary data.

The main analysis technique of this study applied the semiotics concept of Roland Barthes (1974). The concept employs some stages of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myths. The process of data analysis was through some steps as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994:10) that consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

3. Result

3.1 The Temples

At the location of the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura community, three main temples stand. The temples are located on three sides of the area, the west side, the south side, and the north side with the central area being a gazebo-like construction for praying and other activities. The explanation of the meaning of these temples is as follows:



Picture 1.1 Siwa/Daha Temple

The Siwa (Shiva)/Daha Temple is denotatively a tall and square-shaped building, decorated with several ornaments, and the shape of the roof is conical tiered. The temple is made of stone, cement, and brick. Unlike the other temples in general, the temples in this area are not ancient temples but new temples that were intentionally built by the community. At the connotative stage, the meaning of this temple-shaped symbol holds social values. The connotative meaning of this temple explains the position of the temple in relation to historical, cultural, and beliefs, giving rise to the mention of the temple as a Siwa or Shiva temple. This is related to *Rajaputri* Majapahit Tribuana Tunggaladewi, as stated by one of the informants, Hermawan, who was one of the founders of the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura community "...formerly the king of Tribuana Tunggaladewi after handing over the throne to his son she moved to Daha. There she held the title Sri Raja Patmi or Bethari Durga which is symbolized as the wife or usually called *Sakti* of Shiva. So it can symbolize that the temple in the south is a symbol of Daha or a symbol of Shiva". Therefore, connotatively the temple building symbolizes Lord Shiva, although it is not appropriate when viewed from the *Dewata Nawa Sanga* in Hinduism concept which places Shiva in the middle. The information from the informant also leads to the meaning in the myth level, it is related to the ideology promoted by this community. As the name implies Triloka Pura, this temple represents one part of the Triloka Pura, namely Daha where Tribuana Tunggaladewi is the king or *Rajaputri*.



Picture 2. Brahma/Jenggala Temple

Picture 4.2 shows the Brahma/Jenggala temple which denotatively shows a tall square building made of brick, cement, and concrete brick. The roof is arranged conical with three levels. The temple is relatively new, not a historical heritage of a kingdom. The position of the temple faces to the east. Connotatively this temple symbolizes Brahma, which is related to the king of Jenggala named Brahmaraja which is symbolized as an incarnation or manifestation of Brahma. The informant, Wahyudi, in the interview said, "It is indeed our custom to make an avatar or manifest an incarnation god or deity in the *Nusantara* according to the *darmabakti* or dedication". Based on this explanation, it is clear that carrying out the manifestation is not a new thing for the people of the *Nusantara*. Thus this community is also carried out for the building of the Brahma temple.

The explanation of the connotation meaning is also closely related to the meaning of the myth level. At the myth level, this temple symbolizes another part of the *Triloka Pura*, Jenggala. In addition, at this level, the *Meru* or roof of the temple also expresses the ideology of the community adheres to the Shiva-Buddhist belief. One of the most powerful ideological concepts is the worship of ancestors or *Kawitan*. The Father and Mother aspects play a central role in this concept. Therefore, the temple construction also refers to the combination of this father and mother. Brahma Temple, the name is based on the male figure, the king of Jenggala, Brahmaraja who is manifested as Brahma. However, the *Meru* in this temple consists of three groups with each group consisting of five that symbolize the mother as stated by the informant, Wahyudi '*Kalau tiga biasanya ibuk, tumpang tiga atau ratu mas itu tiga* (If it is three (levels), it is usually for Mother, three levels or *Ratu mas*)'.



Picture 3. Wisnu/Kediri Temple

The denotative meaning that appears is a tall, conical building made of red brick and cement. This temple building faces south, the door of the building is open without a door. This temple is also relatively new, not a historical heritage of the past kingdom. The connotative meaning of this temple symbolizes Vishnu. Hermawan explained that "*yang utara itu simbol dari kedirinya, Kediri dari dulu raja-rajanya leluhurnya dimanifestasikan sebagai wisnu kalau sesuai asta kosala kosali wisnu itu ada di Utara* (the north is a symbol of Kediri, Kediri since a long time ago the Kings and the ancestors are manifested as Vishnu, according to *Asta Kosala Kosali* Vishnu is in the North". This is also supported by Wahyudi's explanation "*Jayabaya atau trah Wijaya karena kalau di utara trah wisnu. Di dewata nawa sanga wisnu di utara, utara mengatur* (Jayabaya or Wijaya Lineage because in the north is Vishnu lineage. In *Dewata Nawa Sanga*, Vishnu is in the North, the North is to govern".

The connotative meaning leads to the meaning of the myth level which is still related to the explanations of the informants. Still related to the concept of the Triloka Pura, the meaning in the mythical level of the temple is a symbol of Kediri which is one part of the Triloka Pura. In addition, the level of the temple roof commonly called *Meru* in this temple strengthens the meaning at the myth level. There are eleven levels of *Meru* in this temple, Wahyudi said that "*Sebelas tertinggi, itu ibuk juga. Lubang keluaran wanita itu ada sebelas. Kalau laki-laki ada Sembilan* (the highest is eleven, that's also Mother. The woman has eleven excretory holes. Men has nine)". Therefore the informant associates *Meru* with Mother, the female figure has eleven excretory holes, including two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, a mouth, two nipples, anus, and a vagina. Thus this is also an integration of the father and mother dimensions according to the concept of Siwa-Buddha belief. The dimension of the father in this temple is in the form of a figure who is used as the name of it, along with the history of the lineage and the manifestation. Meanwhile, the mother dimension is taken from the *Meru* level.

Another ideological concept that is carried in this symbol is the conical shape of the *Meru* which shows the Javanese concept that is believed by the followers of Siwa-Buddha belief in this community, namely *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*, a concept about where humans come from and where they will return, or in other words about the origin and purpose of human life. This was explained by Hermawan "*namanya orang jawa kita khan ada bibit kawit asal usul, ilmu sangkan paraning dumadi. Kita itu tidak langsung dari Sang maha Pencipta tapi Sang Maha pencipta sudah membuat suatu sistem atau perantara. Bapak dan Ibuk. Bapak ibuk ada karena ada mbah, mbah ada karena buyut, buyut ada karena canggah sampek nang sang maha pencipta sampai sistemnya seperti itu.* (We as Javanese have *bibit kawit* or origin, the concept of *sangkan paraning dumadi*. We are not directly from the Creator, but the Creator has created a system or intermediary, Father and Mother. Father and Mother exist because of our Grandparents. Grandparents exist because of great-grandparents. Great-grandparents exist because of great-great-great-grandparents and so on until to the Creator so that the system is like that)". The mentioned system is about the hereditary origin of humans which in Javanese can be sorted into 11 levels consisting of father and mother, *Mbah, canggah, canggah wareng, udeg-udeg, hanging siwur, kropak sentre, dadung kawuk, Danyang, Creator..*

In broad outline, the three temples form a concept of meaning at the myth level regarding the symbolization of the Triloka Pura. A kingdom that is believed to be the last Majapahit by combining the three regions of the Daha kingdom, the Jenggala Kingdom, and the Kediri Kingdom. Triloka Pura is a descendant of the Majapahit Wilatikta lineage. Hermawan explained that In Majapahit, there are two lineages of Wilatikta and Wilwatikta. The Wilwatikta or Brawijaya lineage is commonly known, while the wilatikta were never taught in schools because the wilatikta lineage still adhered to the elders' teaching that they did not want to give up. Instead of giving up *changing clothes* (converting religion or belief), it was better to *nginep wangsa*, the royal's title was discarded and all moved into commoners, but the teachings of the ancestors were passed down from generation to generation. Then *pelinggih* is made as a symbol of the teachings. The common thread of the three temples is also found in the main ideological concept of Siwa-Buddha followers, respect and worship of ancestors with the *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* system so that there is a blend of elements between father and mother in the construction of the temple. Followers of Siwa-Buddha consider this combination of Father and Mother to be a unity in all things, including Siwa-Buddha itself. Shiva is the Father element and Buddha is the Mother element. Therefore, the two are put together so that there is a slogan 'Shiva does not recognize Buddha is not Shiva, Buddha does not recognize Shiva is not Buddha, Shiva and Buddha are one.

3.2 Temples' Ornaments

The temple ornaments in this study are an additional form that is the unity of the existing temples. The temple ornaments found in this study include the shape of dragons, *Makaras*, and woman statues. These ornaments are certainly not only to beautify the temple but also have a deep meaning that contains certain values. These are the temple ornaments that were found:



Picture 4. Dragon

The three temples in the Brahma Raja Triloka Pura community area always have two dragon ornaments. The denotative meaning taken from this type of ornament is about two long and large reptiles. They are located on the right and left sides of the stairs. The shape of the animals is made of cast cement and sand. Then at the connotation level related to Javanese culture, these shapes have the meaning of guarding the building it occupies. These Javanese dragons are similar to the Chinese dragon but have no legs and wear crowns. This mythological creature has magical powers with various miracles that are identified to them. Meanwhile, in the myths level of signification related to the ideology and concepts held by the Brahma Raja Triloka Pura community. The two forms of dragons on the right and left of the stairs, according to information from the informants, are symbols of a pair of male and female dragons called the *Naga Baruna* and the *Naga Gini*. The two dragons are in charge of protecting and guarding the temple.



Picture 5. Makara

Makara is an ornament found in all temples at the research site. Denotatively *Makara* is a form of temple decoration that is stuck above the entrance. *Makara* is an image of a sinister head with sharp, grinning teeth. *Makara* itself comes from Sanskrit means sea monster or sea dragon. The connotative meaning of *Makara* is one of the mythological creatures during the Hinduism-Buddhism era influence who was considered a gatekeeper and protector of sacred places such as temples. *Makara* is frequently identified with the story of Shiva who wanted to marry Parvati but was then disturbed by the devil's messenger so that Shiva failed to marry. Then the angry Shiva took out his anger in the form of a lion-faced creature and the monster *Makara*. While the meaning of myth level, *Makara* has the meaning of neutralizing negative things, all turning into positive. *Makara* is placed above the temple door as a symbol that none can enter except those with a positive aura. Negative or positive things are not always physical but also spiritual, so *Makara* reminds us of positive values to always carry when we want to pay homage to our ancestors. The mind must also be calm, not in a position of despondency and confusion.



Picture 6. Woman Statue

In the southern temple, which is called the Siwa/Daha temple, on the four corners, there are statue ornaments. At the denotative level of using the statue, the statue shape is in the form of a woman. Carved details on the statue using a bun and dressed like a kebaya. The statue does not depict the figure of a mythological creature or deity. Then in the second level connotation, the statue depicts the figure of a mother. The statue implies the value or nature of a gentle and

loving mother. The statue's placement in the four corners of the temple also implies another nature of mothers who love and care for their children the most. In Javanese culture, there is also a saying *Bopo angkoso, Ibu Bumi* (Father is Sky, Mother is Earth) implies the nature of a mother who is humble like the earth, which is on the bottom position but is very important and primary. Furthermore, in the meaning of the myth level, the statue of the woman reaffirms the Siwa-Buddha concept of respecting or worshiping ancestors through the *sangkan paraning dumadi* system or the concept of father-mother. It is reaffirmed here that life begins with this father and mother pair. That is why all the temples here always combine these two elements. In the other two temples, the mother element appears at the *Meru* level, while in the Shiva/Daha temple it is shown through the statue of a woman or mother. Then the father element, like the other two temples, lies on the name of the temples. In addition, the inspiration source of this Shiva temple is *Rajaputri* Tribuana Tunggadewi who is manifested as Durga, the *Sakti* or wife of Shiva. Although it is not a Durga statue placed in the temple, the figure of a woman or Mother has represented Her.

4. Conclusion

The symbols exist in the Brahmaraja Triloka Pura community represent many values and ideologies attached to the community in accordance with the teachings of Shiva-Buddhist belief. These values describe Triloka Pura as the last Majapahit, worshiping and respecting ancestors in the *sangkan paraning dumadi* system, and the combined elements of father and mother in the Siwa-Buddha concept.

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