

The myth of Ken Dedes in the mother cult of East Javanese society

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History: Received 17 August 2021 Approved 30 October 2021 Published 30 October 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Ken Dedes, mother cult, folklore</p>	<p>Ken Dedes is a figure who is remembered by the East Java community through myth and folklore. The myth of Ken Dedes is related to her figure as the primary woman who keeps the secret of radiant beauty, intelligence, and the mother who gave birth to the kings of Java. This study aims to find the reflection of people's memories about Ken Dedes and to find the cult of the mother from her figure. This research used a descriptive qualitative method with anthropological and psychological approaches. The results of the study show that Ken Dedes is remembered and reflected in the views of the people of East Java. From this reflection, the memory of Ken Dedes' serves as a projection or wishful thinking, an education tool, and a way of justification. In addition, in the context of the patriarchal society of East Java, Ken Dedes is a form of mother cult. In conclusion, the memory and reflection of Ken Dedes in East Javanese society have different variants based on the category of young and adult or old age. Meanwhile, the cult of the mother of a patriarchal society is legitimacy of throne.</p>

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INTRODUCTION

Ken Dedes is the mother and first queen of Singhasari Kingdom in the ancient literary version of Pararaton. Lutfiati et.al (2020) in their research stated that Ken Dedes was the royal consort of the first king of Singhasari, Ken Arok. Ken Dedes is a figure who is remembered and adored by the East Java society, especially the city of Malang.

Ken Dedes as a representative of Mahayana Buddhism (Munandar, 2011) is believed by the people of East Java as the embodiment of Prajnaparamita. Prajnaparamita is the goddess of wisdom in Buddhism. Carus (2010) stated that Prajnaparamita is the perfect wisdom of ancient Buddhism in Java. According to him, the statue is a spectacular masterpiece of the ancient Javanese

people during the Buddha period. She as the embodiment of Prajnaparamita is enshrined in various places in Malang. In addition, Ken Dedes is often used as an icon for celebrations such as Ken Dedes Festival in Malang.

Ken Dedes is tightly closed to the memories of East Javanese people. Her figure is associated with mythical stories. Myths are one of the oral traditions or oral folklores (Dundes in Edraswara, 2009) which tell about supernatural things or the lives of the gods. Ken Dedes in the memory of East Javanese people is folklore that contains verbal and nonverbal elements. Verbal elements of folklore are oral expressions such as stories or fairy tales, while nonverbal elements consist of beliefs,

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superstitions, habits, and celebrations (Endraswara, 2009).

Ken Dedes becomes the ideal figure of East Javanese, from his beauty, behavior, to authority. The myth is related to her figure as the primary woman with radiating beauty, who gave birth to Javanese kings' line of descent, was very intelligent, and gave blessings for anyone who became her husband. Hence, it is not surprising that Ken Dedes is so adored by East Javanese people.

Ken Dedes as the first queen of the 12th century Singhasari Kingdom was recorded in ancient literary text Pararaton. Pararaton is an ancient literary text that tells the genealogy of the kingdom and kings of Singhasari. According to Saputra (2020), Pararaton is one of the sources that discusses socio-culture and ,further, ecology during the reign of Singhasari which was written on lontars. Furthermore, he explained that Pararaton was originally a story from oral tradition that was orally passed down for generations. According to him, the Book of Pararaton is astounding as it mixes historical facts with mythical stories. However, Munawar (2011) previously emphasized that Pararaton was written in prose with a more direct middle Javanese language, in contrast to kakawin which was written in poetry. So, historians are of the view that Pararaton is not royal literature, but folk literature started by oral literature (folklore).

She as a mother and queen was so venerated by the patriarchal society. A patriarchal society is a society whose system traces descent from the father's line and that appoints male as a leader, which Stuers (2008) termed patrilineal system. In a patriarchal society, a mother figure is venerated as noble woman. Permanadeli (2015) asserted that a great ideal mother has a noble image. The cult of the mother became the legitimacy of kings's throne. The mother figure is also exalted in various Abrahamic religions which are patriarchal. As Virgin Mary has become a cult of the mother figure since the 12th century in the West, so does the exalted Mayadewi, who gave birth to Siddharta Gautama (Munandar, 2011). Mayadewi is a cult of the mother from India which is then used as a

metaphor for Ken Dedes. Ken Dedes is a mother figure who is venerated in Java through old Javanese literature, namely Pararaton.

Previous research was conducted by Munandar (2011) stating that Ken Dedes is a symbol of Mahayana Buddhism. The results showed that the marriage between Ken Dedes and Ken Angrok was the union of two major religions, namely Hindu-Saiwa and Mahayana Buddhism. Another research conducted by Dewi (2013) explained that Ken Dedes played a major role in politics and the power struggle, and she was always associated with the state because of the myth of her charisma and greatness which was examined by Pramodya Ananta Toer from Pararaton. Meanwhile, Sari's research (2019) on Ken Dedes' character represented in opera shows that the opera displays various perspectives of Ken Dedes' character in dealing with problems associated with women's problems today.

Different from previous studies, this research is folklore research that aims to find out how myths are recorded in memories and reflected in the life of East Javanese society. In addition, it also aims to find the form of the cult of the mother in Ken Dedes. Previous research on Ken Dedes was mostly based on works of art, modern literature, and the ancient literature of Pararaton. However, throughout the examination, research on Ken Dedes based on public memory (folklore) has never been conducted. Therefore, this research is important to explore the public's memory about Ken Dedes and her myths. Furthermore, how the memory is then reflected in the views of East Javanese people.

The focuses of this research are as follows: (1) How do East Javanese people recall the myth of Ken Dedes? (2) How is the memory reflection of Ken Dedes among East Javanese people? (3) How is Ken Dedes in the cult of the mother of a patriarchal society?

METHODS

This research is folklore research that employed descriptive qualitative methods with anthropological and psychological approaches.

This study seeks to reveal the psyche or the mental activity of the community in their interaction with culture, namely in the form of memories of East Javanese people about Ken Dedes. This was conducted in an interdisciplinary manner. The disciplines used as an approach include the disciplines of anthropology and psychology. People's memory as folklore is a memory site that records history (Vansina, 2002). Memory is a mental process obtained from social interaction in a particular culture. So, this method becomes a logical reason with the considerations that the literary research method is not just a formal procedure that is adapted without considering logical reasons as stated by Faruk (2012).

Research data is verbal data in the form of text or speech. The data sources of this research are divided into primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source is the East Java community who were selected through population sampling based on the criteria of city, age, and gender. There were 30 informants selected based on those criteria. While the secondary data sources are historical documents related to Ken Dedes.

The primary data collection technique was carried out through in-depth interviews with a structured participant strategy. In the interview, the researcher directly appreciated the directed conversation according to the interview guide and data collection guide. The instrument used for the interview is a recorder. Meanwhile, secondary data collection techniques were carried out through library research.

Data analysis was completed in several stages. Some of the stages include first, grouping data based on the degree of relevance. The second stage is conducted by interpreting the data with an interdisciplinary approach. In the third stage, the interpretation of the data is categorized and arranged based on the patterns of problem formulation. The fourth stage is a description of the data based on the interpretation results. Finally, the fifth stage is data inference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

East Javanese Society's Memories of Ken Dedes Myth

People's memory of Ken Dedes is one of the East Javanese folklore. Folklore in the form of myths or folk tales is seen by Geertz (2014) as a complex art that is not refined. He explained that the structure is not intertwined like fine arts, but its existence gives an earthy ethos that is in accordance with the Javanese view of the subtlety of culture as an ideal. For this reason, indeed, the memories of the people of East Java about Ken Dedes have various variants whose story structures are not always integrated. However, the basic motive of the story variant is fixed as in Pararaton.

One of the interviews was conducted with Yosi Indra (37 years old), a staff in Singasari museum. In his interview, Yosi narrated a detailed story about Ken Dedes myth, starting from her figure as a girl to becoming Queen of Singhasari. Yosi has in-depth knowledge of Ken Dedes because it is part of his work at the museum. Although he claimed to be a tourism scholar, he had dug up information about Ken Dedes from various sources, both written academically and folklore which is trusted by people. Later, Yosi Indra talked about Ken Dedes as Srinaweswari or Ardhanaweswari. In many stories he knew, one of them is about Ken Dedes's shining private part. It was a sign that Ken Dedes was a primary woman who would give birth to kings, and whoever married her would become king. In his narrative, the myth really happened in the past, because in the end, all men who married Ken Dedes became kings, then the children of Ken Dedes' descendants also became kings.

The myth of Ken Dedes related to her shining private part was the key to protection so that Ken Dedes could not be married to just any man. Yosi also expressed that Ken Dedes' beauty was renowned that Tunggal Ametung as the ruler of Tumapel looked for her. He brought Ken Dedes as his wife when Mpu Parwa, her father was not around. Out of anger, her father cursed Tunggal Ametung that he would be hit by karma, and his life would not be long.

The beauty of Ken Dedes was also told by Yosi Indra as a beauty whose aura came from

within. Ken Dedes was a Buddhist scholar, who inherited knowledge from her Brahmin father. She who was also a literary expert mastered and practiced the noble eightfold path. Therefore, Ken Dedes' beauty always shone from within.

He also said that Ken Dedes was a representative of Buddha. Meanwhile, Tunggul Ametung and Ken Arok (Ken Dedes' second husband) were Saiwa Hindus. For that, Ken Dedes' marriage was a political one. When Ken Arok dethroned Tunggul Ametung, he actually already had a wife named Ken Umang, so he married Ken Dedes because of political reasons. In the interview, he explained as follows.

...it would be wrong if people now think that Ken Umang was the other woman. Ken Umang was actually the first wife, when Ken Arok married Ken Dedes, Ken Umang was pregnant with Ken Arok's child, and Ken Dedes was pregnant with Tunggul Ametung's.

His statement is a defense of Ken Umang who is usually narrated negatively by general public. Thus, Yosi has a view about Ken Dedes who had great charisma in the Singhasari Kingdom. The myth of the light that shone from Ken Dedes' private part is interpreted as a key to the blessing which is symbolized by purity.

However, Agus (55 years old) as the caretaker of Watu Gong baths has another view on the meaning of shining from Ken Dedes. According to him, it was Ken Dedes' body that emitted light or radiance. He did not mention specifically which parts of the body were shining.

In the Book of Negarakertagama, this baths are referred to as Boboji garden. It comes from the word "building form," that this garden building has a form of beji building. The meaning of "beji" is holy place building. So Boboji means a place of purification. It was explained that Princess Ken Dedes at that time, after being purified in the traditional baths there, merged with natural energy so that she glowed. At the time when she was purified, Princess Ken Dedes was still little, unmarried. The custom of our ancestors was that a princess must be purified. Before marriage she must have been prepared, in order to understand life and her nature more deeply, she was taught to connect

with her ancestors through holy mantras, so that what was said would become a form. There are various forms, there are lights, princess figures, or fragrances. So that Ken Arok was scared and ran away when he saw her and asked his teacher Mpu Lohgawe. He explained that was the characteristic of a woman who would give birth to a king.

In his view, Agus explained that Ken Dedes' light was obtained from her who had been completely purified and unified with nature. Ken Dedes rays were spirit or energy from nature. However, the light had the same meaning or sign as mentioned by other sources. That light was a sign that Ken Dedes would give birth to kings who would rule the land of Java.

Memories of Ken Dedes in the younger generation, aged 21 and under, are different from those of adults and the older generation. The degradation of their differences is striking. The sources with the criteria of adult age and older generation described Ken Dedes with magical beauty related to radiant beauty like the sources from the Book of Pararaton. However, the younger generation sources described in more detail at a visual level.

The source, Sekar (20 years old) as a female student explained Ken Dedes as the wife of Tunggul Ametung who was so beautiful and charming. Ken Dedes as a beautiful princess was contested, until Ken Arok as a subordinate soldier of Tunggul Ametung dared to kill him to win Ken Dedes.

Furthermore, visually, Sekar provided details on Ken Dedes' characteristics as a princess who (1) was beautiful; (2) long-haired; (3) white-skinned; (4) pointed nosed (5) had slightly slanted eyes (6) had thin lips naturally pink; (7) wore a golden crown with the addition of some trinkets such as diamonds or colored gems (red or green) which was large and slightly tall. (8) As the empress, the clothes used by Ken Dedes were a *kemben* that extended to the back with several trinkets that adorned her clothes, and colors that left an elegant impression such as red. (9) She also wore necklaces, crowns, bracelets, and jewelry placed on the upper arms; and (10) had an ideal body shape.

Another thing that was different from younger generation source was stated by Erika (20 years old) as a female student. Erika described Ken Dedes's attitude and behavior as not entirely graceful, gentle, and noble as described by older and more mature sources. Erika analyzed Ken Dedes' story from her attitude and response to being silent when he saw Ken Arok killed her husband. According to her, as a figure of princess and queen, Ken Dedes could have brought plague or disaster to others.

The Reflection of Ken Dedes on the Memories of the East Javanese People.

The existence of folklore has various functions in people's lives, including as a (1) projection system, (2) cultural validation, (3) social control or social norms controller, (4) education tools for children, (5) giving way to society's justification so as not to be superior, (6) and a tool to protest injustice (Hutomo, 1991). As far as the researchers found, people's memory of Ken Dedes has functions as a projection system, an education tool, and a way of justification that depends on each reflection.

Ken Dedes is not only remembered by the people of East Java but the figure is also reflected in her outlook on life. They interpret Ken Dedes as an ideal mother and queen figure who had a noble image as the Javanese view of the mother figure. Although the younger generation reflects from different perspectives, the basic image of Ken Dedes remains or does not change significantly.

The reflection of Ken Dedes as a mother can be seen from a source Legowo (65 years old), a man from Blitar. Since his children were little, Legowo had often told a story as fairy tale to them of his meeting with his wife. He reflected on their mother the image of Ken Dedes. Their mother was very beautiful and her legs were shining dazzlingly. Legowo could not see her face because of the blinding light. The light was a sign of blessing on the mother's feet. "Mother is *pulung* or your father's luck" was what Legowo instilled in his children. What Legowo told is expected to be a lesson to respect mother because her spirit as a mother

brings blessings to the family. This reflection has a function as an education and projection tool.

Another reflection uttered by Yosi from Malang is also not much different. According to him, Ken Dedes as Ardhanawari who emitted light was not only beautiful but also had a noble character. She was a figure with a noble image of a woman that needed to be followed. Ken Dedes was also very intelligent because she studied as a Brahmin, so it was not surprising that she had a big role in politics and government of the Singhasari Kingdom. In addition, Yosi reflected on Ken Dedes as the mother of Nusantara batik. This can be seen from the Prajnaparamita statue that wearing batik-patterned *jarik*. The batik motif is Jelamprang which was patented in Central Java. This reflection also serves as projection, education tool, and path of justification.

Different from Yosi, Agus from Malang reflects on the privilege of Ken Dedes as a noble princess. According to him, all princesses in ancient times were always purified. They obtained education and direction to learn about life and nature in depth. For him, seclusion was not what society imagines today, namely being restrained and locked in a room. Girls who reached adulthood were secluded as training in which they were taught and directed to understand life. They were taught many things about nature. All women were prepared to be something bigger, like Ken Dedes who was prepared to be queen. "It's wrong, if they think the seclusion meant being locked up, the princess was secluded to be prepared to be something big and special, they learnt in that seclusion." That's what he stated during the interview. Then, he reflected on the girls of today who should have received education similar to the seclusion of the past. Girls should have been accompanied to study, not been left alone, so they could become something great like Ken Dedes. Reflection from Agus' point of view, also has the function of projection, justification, and education.

Reflections made by the younger generation are different from those of the older one. They value Ken Dedes more on her images in popular media. One example is Erika, who reflected Ken Dedes on the image of Drupadi in Mahabharata

TV series which was aired on national private television station. In addition, Erika also mentioned that Ken Dedes could be reflected on Puan Maharani who has political power in the government. The reflection was related to Ken Dedes' silence when she saw Ken Arok murdered. According to Erika, as a woman who had authority in politics and government, Puan Maharani tended to keep silent and did little in the dirty political situation. Meanwhile, Pelangi reflected the model and former finalist Putri Indonesia (beauty pageant). According to Pelangi, Ken Dedes is like today's mothers who possess a strong leadership spirit and are able to educate their children and families. Among the younger generation, this reflection can be in the form of projection, namely wishful thinking about Ken Dedes who is related to the present.

Ken Dedes in the Cult of the Mother of Patriarchal Society

Bachofen's theory explains the existence of a major evolutionary phase in human civilization and culture (Formm, 2011). The first phase called hetaerism—a phase with the structure and form of a rough civilization. The second was the matriarchal phase, namely the structure of civilization that drew descendants from the mother's line in which the cultural system was centered on women's productivity. This phase was in the middle, between the lowest phase and the highest phase. The third phase as the highest human civilization was the patriarchal phase, namely the phase of male leadership which drew lineage from the father's line (Stuers, 2008). In the third evolution, which is the patriarchal phase, Bachofen explained that humans were civilized and had higher cultural products such as science, law, government, urban planning, individual rights, and so on. This is a positive aspect of patriarchal culture (Formm, 2011). Bachofen, further explained that each phase of the evolution of civilization had its own positive and negative.

Bachofen's views on the characteristics of the structure of matriarchal society were respect for ancestors, love for tradition, and a view that was pivoted on the past (Formm, 2011). In his research,

Bachofen found that the role of women was central in a matriarchal society, which was found in mythology and goddesses as great mothers or referred to as "Great Goddesses." Within the framework of Jung's psychological theory (2020), the goddesses in myth were forms of the emergence of the maternal archetype. The mother archetype was the basic image and view of the most primitive society (primordial) about the mother figure. The archetype was in the unconscious of society. The mother archetype qualities were ambivalent, namely positive-negative, a mother who gave life but could take it back, a loving mother who introduced heartbreak, a loving and cruel mother at the same time.

Mother is a figure who has been the representation of the universe (Sihobing, et al. 2012) in the West and the East since ancient times. Mother as a representation of the universe has existed since the era of Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations in the West and ancient civilizations in the East. Various predicates on the mother became that representation, such as mother earth, motherland, goddess of justice, goddess of love, goddess of knowledge, *swargaloka* or the womb of heaven (Sundanese-Javanese), and so on.

However, during the evolution of civilization from matriarchy to patriarchy, the image of the primordial mother has changed. In a patriarchal society, the image of the mother is tied to moral values. The mother figure is venerated and reduced from its negative attributes. The positive aspects are then left to stick tightly. Mother is an ideal figure with all her good qualities (Permanadeli, 2015). Ken Dedes is all noble images of mothers in the eyes of East Javanese people. She is a beautiful figure from the outside and inside who is adored by East Javanese people. This is a form of the cult of mother in the patriarchal society of East Java.

Ken Dedes is a great mother figure with beauty and a noble personality as remembered by East Javanese society. The cult of the mother figure in this patriarchal society is an attempt to legitimize the throne. In a patriarchal society, mothers have a *de facto* role and power, not *de jure* (Handayani & Novianto, 2008).

A mother has a big role in the father's leadership in Javanese family. Mothers also have a hand in major family decisions that are discussed in the private room before being delivered to the public space (Handayani & Novianto, 2008). Mother also have a role in determining her husband's political position, through her flexibility to lobby and feminine diplomacy (Handayani & Novianto, 2008). Thus, Ken Dedes as the queen of Singahasari who a had big influence in government, the struggle for power, and the *de facto* political arena—as written in Parataton—can be easily accepted by East Javanese people.

The view of source Legowo who interpreted his wife as a bearer of sustenance and *pulung* (blessings and luck) is a legitimacy. He projected Ken Dedes on his wife. Through his wife, Legowo will become a role model and leader who will be increasingly respected and loved by his children. Then through the myth and cult of mother, Legowo told as a lullaby for his children a fairy tale about mother as the embodiment of Ken Dedes.

Ken Dedes as a form of the mother cult can also be perceived from the views of sources Yosi and Agus. Both viewed that Ken Dedes was a special female figure in her era. Both of them understood that Ken Dedes' privilege was to legitimize the throne of the Javanese kings. They agreed with the view that it was the blessing of Ken Dedes' womb that gave birth to Javanese rulers who then became legends.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this study is that Ken Dedes is still remembered and reflected by the people of East Java. People's memories of Ken Dedes have different variants based on age level. In the adult community with the age level above 22 years old and the older generation above 50 years old, the memory of Ken Dedes is very similar to that of Paraton text and is associated with the beauty myth of Ken Dedes. Meanwhile, the younger generation under the age of 21 has memories of Ken Dedes that are not associated with her beauty myth.

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