

# ***Pendhapa Natabratan: Symbolic Meaning of the Javanese House in Demak, Indonesia***

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**Abstract:** *Pendhapa Natabratan* At Kadilangu, Demak, Central Java, Indonesia was one of the Javanese noble houses which had very strong Javanese symbols. Javanese house contained symbolic meaning, socio-cultural values as well as architectural value, together with a unique structure that was adapted to the environmental and cultural conditions. Javanese houses, as a result of the traditional culture from the Javanese ethnic, had become Javanese cultural heritage that could not be changed. Javanese culture was heavily influenced by the noble power system. This study aimed to reveal the symbolic meaning of the *Pendhapa Natabratan*, especially those related to the Javanese traditional ceremonies held in this place, namely the *Garebeg Besar* and *Ruwatan Sukerta*. The study used an analytical framework that relied on the process of symbolic meaning in the relation of form-function-meaning within the framework of Javanese culture. The result of study showed that *Pendhapa Natabratan* had a domestic and cultural function. The cultural function was shown at the *Garebeg Besar* and *Ruwatan Sukerta* ceremony. From these functions had created important symbols. From the domestic function created a symbol of domesticity, while from the cultural function created symbols; it was a symbol of the permanence of power, and it was a symbol of deliverance from danger and disaster.

**Keywords:** Garebeg, Javanese Culture, Meaning, *Ruwatan*, Symbol

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## **1. Introduction**

Indonesia is a developing country struggle in a mainstream of globalization. Globalization tends to change and determine the direction of human culture in a modern ways. This form of modernization often minimizes the greatness of ethnic culture, and in a way is reducing the symbolic meaning of traditional culture from the ethnic group of the country [1].

In this modern era, Javanese houses or rather Javanese traditional houses, as a result of the traditional culture from the Javanese ethnic, have become Javanese cultural heritage that cannot be changed [2]. Even though Javanese houses are full of Javanese cultural values that are still not widely understood by the Javanese community itself. In the physical Javanese houses not only contained architectural aesthetic values, but also mystical and symbolic values [3].

Javanese culture is heavily influenced by the noble power system. The manifestation of power is reflected in symbols such as concretely manifested in the artistic heritage buildings [4]. Noble houses generally have *joglo* roof have made this

group of people have a privileged position in the eyes of their people [5].

Javanese traditional houses are expressions of the nature of the inhabitants's appreciation of life, cosmological representations or beliefs about the universe, and a microcosm environment that is built with meaningful consideration.

Javanese house riches with symbolic meaning, socio-cultural values as well as architectural value, together with a unique structure that is adapted to the environmental conditions, culture and climate [6].

The traditional Javanese house, generally includes three types, namely the *kampung*, *limasan* and *joglo* [7]. The *kampung* is the simplest type. Above the middle of the living room covered with a saddle-shaped roof or often known as the form of the *kampung*. This house is mostly owned by farmers or grassroots groups. The *limasan* type, in principle, is the same as the type of *kampung*; in the middle of the room is closed with a roof shape shield or often known as the shape of the *limasan*. *Limasan* type is a house for families who are richer or have higher social strata compared to families in the

*kampung* type. The *joglo* type is considered the best and most perfect form, inhabited by rich families or the highest social strata, such as the nobility and the royal family. In the central part of the room is closed with a *limasan* roof which is rather high and steep (higher and steeper compared to the *limasan* type), built on four main pillars (*soko guru*).

In general, the layout of the Javanese house is not much different from the palace (king house). But, the palace are more diverse and complex.

The core of the layout of Javanese house is the existence of three cubicles in the interior of the house (*Dalem Ageng* or *Omah Jero*), usually located near four *sokoguru* columns. All three are named *Senthong Tengen* (Right *Senthong*), *Senthong Tengah* (Central *Senthong*) and *Senthong Kiwo* (Left *Senthong*). Although sometimes there is the development and addition of space, but it is made as far as possible does not reduce the dominance of that three cubicles. *Senthong Tengah* (Central *Senthong*) or also called *Krobongan* has a high sacred value, as the central space of Javanese society, starting from the ordinary people and the noble family. [8].

At Kadilangu, Demak, Central Java, there is a Javanese house that can be classified as a noble house. It is one of the Javanese noble houses that until now is still functioning, especially for activities related to Javanese traditions. The house is known as *Pendhapa Natabratan*; it has very strong symbols.

In every step of their lives, Javanese people often use symbolic expressions. The forms of symbolism in Javanese culture are very dominant in all fields of life. This is seen in the daily actions of Javanese people, as a realization of their outlook and attitude [9].

The complicated philosophy of life of the Javanese people, is also implied in their houses. The Javanese houses (or *omah* or *griya*) is not just a physical building structure, but it is a symbolic, social and practical unit. As a traditional house, it is meaningful, because not only talking about the use of space for daily use, but able to create spiritual values in order to achieve peace of mind. [10, 11].

This study aims to explore the symbolic meaning contained in the Javanese house-*Pendhapa Natabratan* by interpreting the existing expressions and important events that take place in it.

During this time, there has never been a study of the symbolic meaning of the *Pendhapa Natabratan*. So, this study is important.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1. Symbols

Symbols can be seen as: (a) A word or object or action or event or pattern or personal or real thing; (b) Those representing or describing or signifying or conveying or evoking or revealing or reminding or referring to or standing in place of or displaying or relating to or in accordance with or referring to or taking part in or restating or associated with; (c)

Something bigger or transcendent or highest or last: a meaning, reality, an ideal, a value, an achievement, a belief, a community, a concept, an institution, and a situation. [12].

From the division of the three aspects above, the first aspect refers to something that is more visible, more audible, more palpable, closer, more real, than the third aspect. What about symbol functions? Symbols function to connect or bridge the first aspect and the third aspect. The first aspect is a symbol and the third aspect as a referent in which one is interdependent. When a symbol is present as a word, image, object that is general in nature and can be digested by the senses, that's when the referent seems to be waiting to give meaning.

The symbol is defined by Victor Turner as quoted by Amri Marzali, as what is seen according to mutual agreement as 'naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought' (something that gives nature or describe or recall something by having the same quality or by imagining it in reality or mind) [13].

Turner distinguishes symbols from signs. Symbols have multiple meanings and broad implications. Signs tend to be univocality (referring to a single sense); linking the signifier with the signified based on arbitrary, and conventional relations; organized in closed systems; and used or involved in the sign and information system process. Meanwhile, symbols have the quality of multivocality or polysemy (referring to multiple meanings, a symbol has a spectrum of meanings), complex reference relationships, ambiguity (open-ended), open-endedness (open to various interpretations), prioritizing feelings and wishes rather than thought in its interpretation, and tends to split further into semantic subsystems.

In the discipline of social anthropology, there are two major approaches to seeing symbols: originating from Clifford Geertz on one side and from Victor Turner on the other. For Geertz, symbols are cultural vehicles, therefore the symbol's meanings are not examined from the symbols themselves but rather for what society expresses symbols. Turner's approach to symbols is very different from Geertz's. Turner is more interested in examining symbols as operators in social processes and believes that symbolic expressions of shared meaning are in human relations. Turner believes that the symbol's function as an operator is in terms of context and rules that result in social transformation. This social transformation binds people in society to the norms of society, resolves conflicts, and helps change the status of an actor.

Next, Turner divides symbols into two classes, namely symbolic articles and symbolic actions. The first type of symbol can be briefly defined as material goods used in a ritual. Some articles in this case can be for example powder, medicines, trees, temples, and so on. The second type of symbol means not only action in a positive sense, like a real action, but also includes some prohibitions or taboos that should not be carried out during ritual implementation, for example, is a prohibition on eating and having sex. [14]. In

this study using Turner's symbolic conception, because it is more suitable with this study.

### 2.1.2. Javanese Culture

Culture is a blueprint or guideline for the life of a community that owns the culture. In this perspective, culture is seen as consisting of sets of reference systems or cognitive models that apply at various levels of feeling and awareness. Proponents of the culture concerned use that culture selectively, which they feel is the most suitable or the best to encourage the realization of meaningful interpretations of and about the situations and symptoms they face and to guide the actions in their environment, through prevailing institutions and customs. These actions can be seen as encouraging the fulfillment of the needs to be able to live as a human being or as responses or stimuli or stimuli derived from the living environment. [15].

Thus, Javanese culture is a guideline for the life or worldview of Javanese people in an effort to meet the needs of the lives of their members, which are shared.

Javanese people worldview is related to God and nature; it has formed the relationship between Javanese people with God, nature, society, and the person.

The relationship between humans and God is contained in the concept of mystical teachings about *Kawruh Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*, which is a teaching of mysticism about where we come from (*sangkan*) and where we will go after death (*paran*). The core teachings of Javanese mysticism are that humans must be able to achieve the perfection of life which means reaching the deepest foundation of reality. The deepest reality is not in the outside world, but in the human person. To look for what the Javanese call the *Kawruh Sangkan-Paraning Dumadi*, it can be through the unification of the Javanese man-God (*Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti*). This is the essence and mystical speculation of Javanese mysticism [16, 17].

In the relation of Javanese people with nature, humans are considered as a microcosm (*jagad alit*), while the universe is considered as a macrocosm (*jagad gede*). Human existence is very dependent on nature so humans have an obligation to place themselves in harmony with the cosmos if they want harmony and achieve authenticity.

According to Javanese culture, nature is created, not only in the form of natural world (*alam kodrati*) that can be captured by the five senses, but also the supernatural (*alam adikodrati*), i.e the unseen world (*mahkluk halus*), such as devil (*setan*), jinn (*jin*), *memedi*, supernatural creature (*lelembut*), *danyang*, *tuyul*, and *dedemit*. One of the efforts to maintain the harmony of the cosmos, Javanese people also offer something to these spirits. [18, 19].

In the relation of Javanese people with society, Javanese people are trying to find safety and order in this world. Relationships with the surrounding society become very important. In relations with society, Javanese people maintain harmony, respect the feelings of others, and in particular be tolerant of matters relating to religious views. For this purpose,

Javanese families and communities organize *slametan*. [20].

The Javanese people personally regards their personal affairs as their inner secret. This mind is truly a microcosm of all-encompassing life. The inner affairs of the Javanese are expressed in the practice of concern and other forms of asceticism and spiritual training. For Javanese, ancestors must be respected as they live. Especially in *Ruwah* (Javanese month) or *Sya'ban* (Islamic month) Javanese people do *yadran*, visit their graves. [21].

Javanese people life is inseparable from magical powers, forces outside of their physical; they are very afraid of that power, and try to respect things that are magical. This fear and respect cause Javanese people often use symbolic language in various ways.

### 2.2. Object of Study: *Pendhapa Natabratan*

Object of study is *Pendhapa Natabratan* located at Kadilangu village, Demak District, Demak Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. Building complex occupies an area around of 4 hectares. [Figure 1].

The presence of the *Pendhapa Natabratan* cannot be separated from the figures of Sunan Kalijaga and Kadilangu Village.

Kadilangu was the *perdikan* area given by the Sultan of Demak to Sunan Kalijaga. As was known that Sunan Kalijaga was the *wali* respected in the kingdom of Demak. In the past, the *perdikan* village was exempt from taxes and the obligation to work for the king, but the inhabitants were given the task of caring for the holy sites in the area and the maintenance costs were taken from the village income. After Sunan Kalijaga died, the head of *perdikan* was held by his heirs. *Pendhapa Natabratan* was built in 1885 by Natabrata while serving as head of *perdikan*.

*Pendhapa Natabratan* is still used by his heirs as a residence and a place to hold the cleansing ceremony of the relics of Sunan Kalijaga, namely *antakusuma* clothes and *kyai crubuk* kris on every *garebeg*, every 10th of *Dhulhijjah* in the Islamic calendar.

### 2.3. Methods

In this study, it uses an analytical framework that relies on the process of symbolic meaning in the relation of form-function-meaning [22]. The relation of form-function-meaning in architecture is used as a theoretical approach to understanding the symbolic meaning of the *Pendhapa Natabratan*.

The meaning process is carried out by interpretation and through several steps. First, explore and correlate forms (spaces) with functions (activities) in them. Second, identify and correlate the symbols contained in the form (elements of space). Third, identify and correlate the symbols used or involved in activities. Fourth, relate the existing symbols on the elements of space with the symbols involved in the activity. Interpretation activities are carried out at each stage and within the framework of Javanese culture. [Figure 2].



Figure 1. Map of Demak Town and Route of Garebeg.

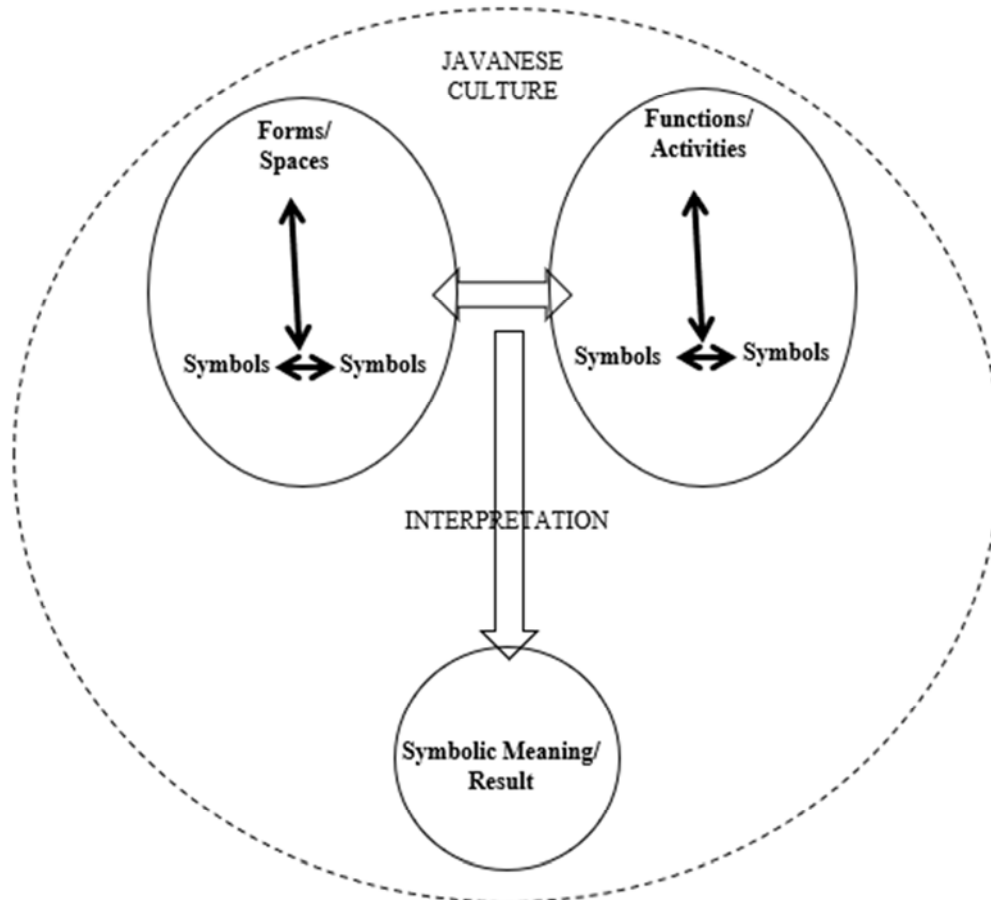


Figure 2. Diagram of Analytical Framework.



### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1. Pendhapa Natabratan Building

Pendhapa Natabratan building facing north and consist of kuncungan, pendhapa, pringgitan, dalem ageng, gadri, pungkuran, and pawon. [Figures 3-5]. In the Pendhapa Natabratan complex there are also lumbung, langgar and mager sari.

The frontmost building, is the kuncungan; vehicle stop. Kuncungan is a new building added later in 1998. This building has a limasan roof with a 4×4.7 m<sup>2</sup> floor plan. The building has 4 columns made of wood.

The next building is the pendhapa, which serves as a public meeting place. This building has a joglo roof with a 21×14.5 m<sup>2</sup> floor plan. The building has columns: 4 soko guru, 16 soko rowo, and 16 soko emper, all made of wood.

The building to the south of the *pendhapa* is *pringgitan*, as a place for puppet shows. This building has a *joglo* roof with a smaller floor plan than a *pendhapa*. The building has columns: 4 *soko guru* and 12 *soko emper*, all made of wood.

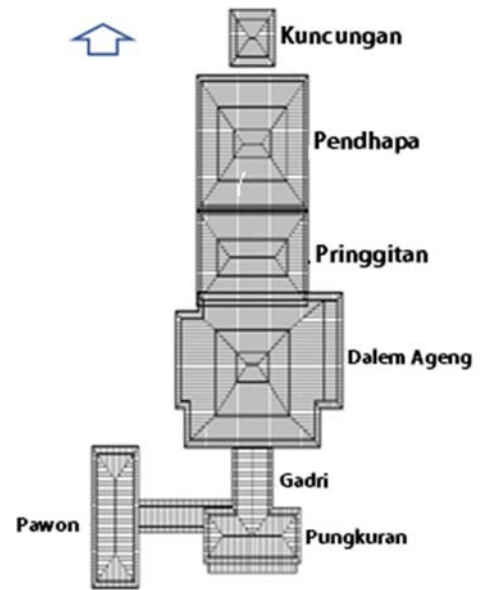


Figure 3. Building Layout of the Pendhapa Natabratan (Drawing by Ashadi).

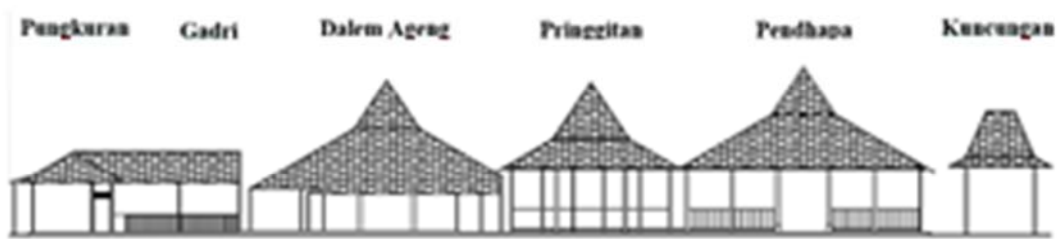


Figure 4. Side View of the Pendhapa Natabratan (Drawing by Ashadi).



Figure 5. Pendhapa Natabratan (Photo: Ashadi).



Figure 6. Senthong Tengah in the Dalem Ageng: Pendhapa Natabratan (Photo: Ashadi).

The building to the south of *pringgitan* is *dalem ageng*, which is the main building and the most sacred part [Figure 6]. Inside there is *senthong* which is a sacred space in the spatial of the Javanese house. The building has a *joglo* roof with a 17.75×13.5 m<sup>2</sup> floor plan. The building has columns: 4 *soko guru*, 12 *soko rowo*, and 20 *soko emper*, all made of wood. The walls of the rooms inside the *dalem ageng* are made of wooden boards.

As is usually the Javanese house, the core of *dalem ageng* is three parts, namely *senthong tengah*, *senthong kiwo*, and *senthong tengen*. *Senthong kiwo* and *senthong tengen* are now bedrooms. Whereas *senthong tengah* is being functioned as a storage place for heirlooms.

In the south of the *dalem ageng* is *gadri*, as a dining room; it was at the same time as a link between the *dalem ageng* and *pungkuran*.

The very back is *pungkuran*, which has a *kampung* roof with a 4.65×7.5 m<sup>2</sup> floor plan. *Pungkuran* now serves as a place to store household goods.

In the west of *pungkuran* there is a *pawon*, as a dirty kitchen. From *pungkuran* to *pawon* is connected with a hallway. *Pawon* has a *kampung* roof with a 4.65×13.15 m<sup>2</sup> floor plan. *Pawon* walls are made of woven bamboo called *gedhek*.

### 3.2. *Pendhapa Natabratan as a Symbol of the Power Permanence*

In the *Garebeg Besar* ceremony held on the 10th of *Dhulhijjah* in the Islamic year, one of the agenda of the event is the washing of the heritage of Sunan Kalijaga.

The ceremony started from the *pendhapa* of regency near *Alun-alun* to the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, and was attended by around 40 thousand participants, traveling a distance of about 2 kilometers.

The ceremony began with the procession of the *Jamas* oil from the regency guarded by tens of soldiers and followed by government and community leaders. The regent and his family along with Demak District Government officials also took delivery of *jamas* oil by riding the golden chariot. This *jamas* oil would be handed over to the Kadilangu Elders (*Sesepuh* Kadilangu). [see Figure 1].

At about the same time, the Kadilangu elders along with their companions departed from the *pendhapa natabratan* by bringing along the heirlooms considered as relics of Sunan Kalijaga to the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, about 200 meters away. Arriving at the *cungkup* of the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, the Kadilangu elder guarded the heirloom of *kutang antakusumo* and the *kiai Crubuk* kris with *jamas* oil brought from the *pendhapa* of regency. [Figure 7 dan Figure 8].



Figure 7. The *Jamas* oil accompaniment procession (Photo: Ashadi).



Figure 8. The *Jamas* oil accompaniment procession (Photo: Ashadi).

The ceremony of *Garebeg Besar* involves three main elements: the *pendhapa* of regency, the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, and the *pendhapa natabratan*. The *pendhapa* of

regency is related to the authorities, the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga is related to *wali* (the saint), and the *pendhapa natabratan* relates to the heirlooms. In the Javanese Culture, heirlooms (can be *tombak*, *keris*, *bende* and *panji*) are an essential part of the king's power.

There was a belief that without all that heirlooms a Javanese king would not be able to gain the trust and loyalty of the people and thus he would not be able to rule the kingdom. Some Javanese people believed that certain heirlooms owned by the Javanese king had magical powers that helped the permanence of every king who ruled.

*Garebeg* ceremony allegedly appeared at the beginning of the Sultanate of Demak, then underwent significant changes and developments during the kingdom of Mataram under Sultan Agung in the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD, and found its form in the 19<sup>th</sup> to the forties of the 20<sup>th</sup>. [23].

*Garebeg* ceremony in the kingdom of Mataram, then in the kingdom of Surakarta and Yogyakarta, in essence is a form of ceremony of the old belief that has a *Kejawen* character. Parading palace heirlooms in the *garebeg* ceremony is a reflection of old traditions and beliefs. The conception of *dewaraja* according to old beliefs, which assumes that the king has the attributes of a god, is more or less reflected in the *garebeg* ceremony.

To maintain the stability of power, kings or rulers are required to continue communicating with the world of *adikodrati* or *supranatural* that is not visible. The communication is done in a way give offerings to places that are considered sacred like the tombs of the ancestors. In addition to these sacred places, objects heirloom also plays a role important for the king's power. The sacred sites and royal heirlooms are believed to be the sources of spiritual power that the king needs. [24].

Likewise, the Demak ruler, the Regent, of course also wants to endure his power and the success of his government, so that he needs to connect his power with the heirlooms and the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga. Sunan Kalijaga is one of *Walisanga*, nine saints who are considered sacred and highly respected by most traditional Javanese people. A regent of Demak must ask for approval from Sunan Kalijaga with the intermediary of his heirlooms and tomb.

Sunan kalijaga heirlooms, which are considered sacred and which are the source of spiritual powers, are stored and washed in the *Pendhapa Natabratan*. Therefore, the building can also be considered a sacred building and a source of spiritual power, which then become symbols of the permanence of power needed by the authorities of Demak.

### 3.3. *Pendhapa Natabratan as Symbol of the Deliverance from Danger and Disaster*

*Pendhapa Natabratan* also held a *Kejawen* tradition called *Ruwatan Sukerta*. This tradition is held twice a year, in the *Rejeb* and *Suro* months of the Javanese calendar or the month of *Rajab* and *Muharram* in the Islamic calendar.

*Ruwatan Sukerta* is an ancient ritual of self-cleansing that was well known to Javanese people long before the celestial religions in Indonesia. *Ruwatan sukerta* tradition aims to rid



oneself of *sukerta* - the impurities of the soul, negative aura, and evil spirits. *Sukerta* can be caused by past sins and mistakes that are a barrier to success.

According to Javanese belief, some children who need *ruwatan* include: *ontang-anting* (only child), *pancuran kapit sendang* (three children, boy in the middle), *sendang kapit pancuran* (three children, girl in the middle), *uger-uger lawang* (two sons), *kembang sepasang* (two daughters), *kendhana kendhini* (two children, a boy and a girl), *pendhawa* (children of five, all men), *mancalaputri* (five children, all women), and twins. There are also children who need *ruwatan* related to the condition at birth, for example: *julung wangi* (born at sunrise), *julung pujud* (born at sunset), *julung sungsang* (born midday), *tiba sampir* (born bearing the placenta), and *lawang menga* (born during *candikala*, when the sky is yellowish red). People who are born with *sukerta*, in Javanese belief, must undergo *ruwatan* to free themselves from the bad forces that surround themselves. If not, they will experience hardship, bad luck, and disaster. [25].

In the year 2019, around 465 people from *sukerta* joined the mass *ruwatan* procession in the *Pendhapa Natabratan*, Kadirilangu, Demak. They came from various regions in Indonesia. Among others, Demak, Grobogan, Kudus, Blora, Pati, Rembang, Jepara, Ngawi, Kediri, Jakarta and other areas.

The sounds of Javanese music and Javanese songs began the *ruwatan* procession. Dressed in white, hundreds of participants *ruwatan* (*sukerta*) led to the *Pendhapa Natabratan*. The *ruwatan* procession was led by *Dalang Kandabuwana*, who performed a shadow puppet performance with the *Murwakala* play in the *pringgitan*. All participants who wore white cloth with slings like *ihram* clothes sat cross-legged watching the puppet show to the end in the *pendhapa*. After the performance of the puppets, *Ki Dalang Kandabuwana* led the participants to perform *sungkem* to their parents, followed by the elders of Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga's heirs in the *pringgitan* [Figure 9]. The highlight of the event was a shower of seven spring flowers and cutting of hair, nails and *tali lawe* in the courtyard and *pendhapa*.

The essence of the *ruwatan* ceremony at the *Pendhapa Natabratan* is a puppet show with *ruwatan murwakala* play. [Figure 10]. Puppets in Javanese culture, not only functions as a spectacle and aesthetics, but it also stores the values of Javanese people's way of life in facing and overcoming all challenges and difficulties of life. In the *ruwatan* ceremony, the puppet shown usually takes the *murwakala* play, which tells how the *Bathara Kala*, the giants, were chasing the *sukerta*. But apparently they can be saved by the gods.

Puppet show is considered as a magical act related to events in the universe. Magic in the act of *ruwatan murwakala* has a special meaning; it means rejecting the danger and catastrophe that is predicted to befall if it is not carried out. It is a symbol of rejecting the danger and catastrophe.

Symbolism is not only in the puppet play or stories, but also in the means of puppet shows. Therefore, the *Pendhapa Natabratan* as the place of the puppet show, then it is a symbol of deliverance from danger and disaster.



Figure 9. *Sungkem* in the *Pringgitan* (Photo: <https://travel.kompas.com>, accessed Dec. 7, 2019).



Figure 10. *Puppet Show* in the *Pringgitan* (Photo: <https://www.kabaredemak.com>, accessed June 18, 2019).

## 4. Conclusion

*Pendhapa Natabratan*, as a noble house, has domestic and cultural functions. Daily domestic functions are carried out by Sunan Kalijaga's family heirs, and cultural functions are carried out by heirs and Javanese people in Demak and surrounding areas. There are two important cultural functions, namely the *Garebeg Besar* and the *Ruwatan Sukerta*, both of which become important symbols for Javanese people. The *Garebeg Besar* ceremony makes the *Pendhapa Natabratan* is a symbol of the lasting power of a ruler. All spaces and parts in the *Pendhapa Natabratan* contain these symbols. The ritual of *Ruwatan Sukerta* makes the *Pendhapa Natabratan* is a symbol of deliverance from danger and disaster. Parts of the *Pendhapa Natabratan*: *pringgitan* and *pendhapa* contain these symbols.

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