
Wawacan as a Medium for Da'wah: Islam and Sundanese Culture in the Story of Perbu Kean Santang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* as a traditional Sundanese literary text that represents Islamic preaching through a cultural approach. The character Kean Santang in the wawacan is positioned as a symbolic figure who reflects the process of acculturation between Islamic teachings and Sundanese culture in the context of Islamization in West Java. This study aims to analyze the form, content, and strategies of Islamic preaching conveyed through the text's narrative and symbolic structures. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a philological and cultural literary focus. The data consists of text excerpts that convey Islamic teachings, such as tauhid, akhlak, worship, and moral values. The results show that Islamic preaching in *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* is conveyed through symbolic narratives and heroic figures that are in harmony with the Sundanese way of life, thus enabling the peaceful acceptance of Islam without negating local traditions. This study confirms that wawacan functions not only as a literary work but also as a medium for preaching and a means of cultural acculturation in the process of locally based Islamization.

Keywords: cultural acculturation, Islamic preaching, Kean Santang, Sundanese literature, wawacan

1. INTRODUCTION

The name Kean Santang occupies an important position in the collective memory of the Sundanese people. The figure of Kean Santang is even more popular than the other sons of Prabu Siliwangi, such as Prince Cakrabuana, who later became the ruler of Cirebon, or Prabu Surawisesa, who continued the leadership of Sri Baduga Maharaja in Pakuan Pajajaran (Danasamita, 1983). Kean Santang's popularity has not only survived in historical records and folklore but also endures, passed down through Sundanese oral traditions and literature.

In Sundanese oral culture, Kean Santang is believed to have spread Islam in Tatar Sunda, the former territory of the Pakuan Pajajaran Kingdom. He is described as an unrivaled warrior who later underwent a spiritual transformation to become a devout Muslim (Marzuki et al., 1992). This representation shows that Kean Santang is not merely a historical figure but also a cultural symbol of the encounter between Islamic teachings and Sundanese culture.

Historically, Kean Santang is more commonly portrayed as a folkloric or mythological figure than as a historical one. However, myths cannot be viewed as ahistorical narratives. Kuntowijoyo (2025) asserts that myths are part of Indonesian culture and have historical power, shaping how people understand their past, identity, and collective values. Therefore, the study of myths—including the figure of Kean Santang—is important for understanding how the Sundanese people represent the process of Islamization through cultural media.

One of the main media of this representation is *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang*. In Sundanese culture, wawacan is a form of traditional literature rooted in oral tradition and intended to be heard by an audience, not read individually (Sumardjo, 2015). Composed in the form of a pupuh with a specific meter pattern, wawacan allows for the aesthetic and communicative delivery of moral, religious, and ideological messages in accordance with the worldview of the supporting community.

From a philological perspective, manuscripts are understood as the physical form of ancestors' written relics. At the same time, texts refer to the content and narrative structure that convey ideas, messages, and the community's worldview at that time (Supriadi, 2011). Thus, *Wawacan Perbu Kean*

Santang not only has literary value but also functions as a cultural text that conveys Islamic teachings through symbols, heroic figures, and storylines that harmonize with local Sundanese culture.

Although *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* has been discussed in numerous studies as a Sundanese folkloric and traditional literary work, research that specifically places this wawacan as a medium for Islamic preaching and a means of cultural acculturation remains relatively limited. Previous studies tend to focus on the mythological aspects of the character Kean Santang or position him within the framework of local history. At the same time, systematic analysis of the form and content of Islamic preaching represented in the structure of the wawacan text has not been widely conducted. Furthermore, studies linking the wawacan text to the historical context of the arrival of Islam in the Sundanese region, using a cultural, literary, and philological approach, remain rare.

Given these Research gaps, this study analyzes the form and content of Islamic preaching in the *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* and its role in cultural acculturation in the Sundanese region. This study also makes a limited comparison with historical sources regarding the entry of Islam into the Sundanese region to examine the position of wawacan as a cultural representation of the Islamization process. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the study of Sundanese literature, Islamic history, and culture-based da'wah studies.

2. Research METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The object of this Research is the *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* manuscript, a traditional literary text that represents Islamic da'wah values within the context of Sundanese culture. A philological approach is used to examine the text as a product of past culture, including analyses of its structure, narrative content, and religious symbols.

A cultural literary approach was applied to interpret the relationship between the text and the sociocultural context of Sundanese society during the Islamization process. The Research data consists of text excerpts that convey Islamic preaching, including monotheism, morality, worship, and other moral teachings. The data were collected through literature reviews, intensive reading of manuscripts, and a review of literature on the history of Islamization and Sundanese literary studies.

Data analysis was carried out through the stages of identification, thematic classification, and interpretation of the texts' symbolic and ideological meanings. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation by comparing the results of the wawacan text analysis with relevant historical references and academic literature.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang as a Product of Sundanese Islamic Literature

One of the main manuscripts that serves as a source of stories about Kean Santang is *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang*, which has been researched and transcribed by Marzuki et al. and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1992. This manuscript is an ancient Sundanese literary work consisting of 427 verses and arranged in seven pupuh structures. Written in Sundanese using the Latin alphabet, this wawacan is important evidence of the Sundanese writing tradition after the arrival of Islam.

Based on the information in the opening of the text, *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* is sourced from *Babad Godog* or *Babad Raden Gagak Lumayung*, which has also been transliterated and published by the same institution. This shows that the wawacan is part of a rewriting tradition that expands the reach of ideological and religious values among the Sundanese people.

In the context of Sundanese culture, wawacan is a literary form that emerged after the arrival of Islam, unlike the pantun, which developed in the pre-Islamic period (Sumardjo, 2015). Although they differ in medium—wawacan is written, and pantun is recited—both serve the same social function: collective communication for a wide audience. Therefore, wawacan not only functions as a reading text, but also as a medium for performance and transmission of cultural values.

The Background of Pre-Islamic Sundanese Beliefs and the Acceptance of the Concept of Tawhid

In the past, the Sundanese people inhabited the Sundanese region, which covered the western part of Java, with the Citanduy and Cijulang rivers as its eastern natural boundaries (Iskandar & Budiwati,

2011). Although the Sunda Kingdom, or Pakuan Pajajaran, is often categorized as a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom, the Sundanese belief system differs from Hinduism in India and Central and East Java.

In Sundanese cosmology, Hindu-Buddhist gods and goddesses do not occupy the highest position. The *Sang Hyang Siksa Kandang Karesian* manuscript mentions a spiritual hierarchy that places Hyang—known as Batara Seda Niskala or Sang Hyang Tunggal—as the highest entity (Munandar, 2011). The gods and goddesses are instead portrayed as beings devoted to Hyang.

This concept of the One Supreme God shows that the Sundanese people already had a local monotheistic framework before the arrival of Islam. This condition became one of the cultural factors that made it relatively easy for the teachings of monotheism in Islam to be accepted, as they did not completely contradict the Sundanese way of life.

Representation of Tawhid Da'wah in the Kean Santang Narrative

The *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* narrative explicitly presents Islamic preaching from the outset. The wawacan begins with the phrase *Bismillah*, accompanied by recommendations to perform wudu and read short surahs from the Qur'an, such as Al-Fatiha, Al-Ikhlâs, An-Nas, and Al-Falaq. This opening structure emphasizes that the text is not merely literary, but also has a religious function.

One of the core messages of the wawacan is the teachings of tawhid and shahada. Kean Santang's defeat at the hands of Sayyidina Ali and the Prophet Muhammad SAW is interpreted as a spiritual realization that true power comes from Allah SWT, not from supernatural powers or worldly knowledge. This realization prompted Kean Santang to recite the shahada and convert to Islam.

"I want to follow the Holy Religion and have the intention to change my nature," said Kean Santang in verse 107. (Marzuki et al., 1992)

The process of converting to Islam is not described as coercion, but rather as an inner transformation. This is reflected in Kean Santang's confession that he wanted to "follow the holy religion and change his nature" (Marzuki et al., 1992). Thus, Islamic preaching in wawacan is presented as a process of moral and spiritual awareness.

The Figures of the Prophet and His Companions as Symbols of Cultural Acculturation

In the wawacan, the Prophet Muhammad is described as a figure with a refined character and authority, and as *the Seal of the Prophets*. Meanwhile, Sayyidina Ali bin Abi Thalib is positioned as a knightly figure capable of matching Kean Santang's supernatural powers. This representation depicts the process of localizing Islamic figures from a Sundanese cultural perspective, which glorifies the mighty knight.

The supernatural powers attributed to the Prophet and his companions—such as Ali's ability to pull out a stick or the Prophet's ability to hold Kean Santang with just his elbow—reflect the storytelling style typical of Sundanese oral tradition. Islamic figures are adapted to the collective imagination of the Sundanese people to make them easier to accept and admire.

This acculturation shows that Islamic preaching was not conveyed solely in a textual, normative manner, but also through local cultural symbols familiar to the community.

Practical Da'wah: Circumcision as a Medium for the Spread of Islam

In addition to theological teachings, Wawacan also presents Islamic preaching through social practices, such as circumcision. Circumcision is described as an obligation for Muslim men, but an expert must perform it. The narrative about Kean Santang's failure when he first performed circumcision, which resulted in death, shows a moral message about the importance of knowledge and responsibility in practicing religious teachings.

Thus, Islamic da'wah in wawacan does not stop at the symbolic level, but also touches on concrete social practices in community life.

Myths, History, and Sundanese Collective Consciousness

Historically, there is a chronological discrepancy between the lifetime of Kean Santang and the Prophet Muhammad SAW. However, from a cultural-literary perspective, this discrepancy is not

intended as a historical fact but rather as a mythological construction that strengthens the legitimacy of Islam in Sundanese lands.

The narrative that Islam in Sunda originated directly from the Prophet Muhammad SAW reflects the Sundanese people's desire to associate the golden age of Pajajaran with their Islamic identity. In this context, the myth of Kean Santang serves to shape collective consciousness, not as a factual historical record.

As Sumardjo (2015) notes in cultural studies, a community's collective consciousness toward a figure is often more important than the figure's factual existence. Therefore, *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* is important for understanding how the Sundanese people built their Islamic identity through literature and myths.

CONCLUSION

Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang shows that traditional Sundanese literature functions as an effective medium for Islamic preaching through cultural and symbolic approaches. Islamic teachings, particularly tauhid and syahadat, are expressed through the spiritual transformation of the character Kean Santang and are combined with social practices such as circumcision, so that preaching is not only theological but also contextual to the community's lives. The representation of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions within the framework of powerful knights reflects the process of acculturation between Islamic teachings and the Sundanese cultural imagination, allowing Islam to be accepted without negating local traditions despite containing historical inaccuracies, the mythological narratives in the wawacan play an important role in building the collective consciousness and Islamic identity of the Sundanese people. Thus, *Wawacan Perbu Kean Santang* has significant literary, cultural, and religious value for understanding the process of Islamization in the Sundanese region, as reflected in local culture.

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