

# Health Wisdom in the Traditional Healing of the Panaragan Java Subethnicity: The Case Study of *Warok* Ponorogo

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## Abstract

The Panaragan Java Subethnicity has a customary leader called *warok*. This leader is known for his ability to possess supranatural powers which may heal diseases. This traditional skill is obtained from the ancestors. It uses natural materials complete with the mantras. The aim of this research is to know the local wisdom in the field of health, especially in the art of *Reyog* from Ponorogo. This research uses a descriptive-qualitative design. The data is obtained through the technique of observation and interview. The results show that there are three types of health wisdom in the Panaragan subethnicity which are the wisdoms of health profession, medicine, and healing.

**Keywords:** Health Wisdom, Warok, and Ponorogo

## Introduction

The province of East Java, Indonesia, has ten cultural subareas which are Mataraman Java, Panaragan Java, Arek, Samin (*Sedulu Sikep*), Tengger, Osing (*Using*), Pandalungan, Madura Pulau, Madura Kangean, and Madura Bawean.<sup>(1)</sup> These ten cultural subareas have various cultural characters which are different from one and another. These variations exist in the language, the arts, and the culture. One of the interesting cultural subareas is the Panaragan subarea.

According to a Western observer,<sup>(2)</sup> the Panaragan Java subethnicity is included in the Mataraman subarea which includes Madiun, Magetan, Trenggalek, Pacitan, and Ngawi. This is different from the opinion of an Indonesian researcher<sup>(3)</sup> who suggests that the Panaragan subarea is separate from the Mataraman subarea. The justification is that the Panaragan ethnicity subarea has a different language, traditional costumes, and traditional arts. It is also an autonomous area which was formerly known as the Wengker area before there was an acculturation from the Mataraman culture.

Wengker came from the words *wewengkon angker* (a mysterious place).<sup>(4)</sup> As reflected from the etymology of the word “Wengker”, this place is known as sacred. There are many ancestral traditions which include mystical-magical rituals, which are still practiced by some of the Panaragan subethnicity until now. These traditions include *larungan sesaji*, *bedhol pusaka*, and *kirab pusaka* Ponorogo, which are practiced on the night of the first of every Sura (the first month in the Javanese calendar).

These traditions are continually practiced generation to generation by the Ponorogo people. The discussion on Ponorogo people cannot be separated from the customary leader, who is called the *warok*. *Warok* has a high social status in the society. This social status makes a *warok* become respected. Thus, it is not strange how the *warok* has the role as the patron and protector of the society. If viewed from the meaning of the *warok* term, no clear terminology has been found up to now. According to Poerwawijaya *warok* came from the word *waro'I* or *wirangi* (in Javanese language), which means *wis pana*, *wis mangerti banget marang agal alus lahir batin*, *tumindake mung kangge tetulung marang liyan*.<sup>(5)</sup>

The *warok* is a central character in the art of *reyog*. His closeness with the spiritual world makes the *warok* identical with the mystical and magical world. It is believed that a *warok* must master *reh kamusankan*

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*sejati*, which is the 'path to true humanity'. It is obtained through the attitude of concern, fasting, penance, and even meditation. Because the *warok* has magical power, it is not seldom that people ask them for help regarding traditional healing. At least, there are two types of healings carried out by the *warok*, which are the non-physical healing and the traditional physical healing.

Examples of the non-physical healing are the action of healing diseases caused by ghosts such as witchcraft, trance, exorcism, etc. The *warok* also heals physical diseases such as sores, stomach ache, colds, etc. The two types of disease are healed through different treatments. The non-physical diseases are healed through rituals and mantras. Then, the physical diseases are healed by using traditional herbs or other media, depending on the type of disease.

Based on the two types of healing – which are the healing of the physical and the non-physical diseases – there is a similar view of the Panaragan people, both for the traditional and the modern healing. For example, in the modern view, stomach aches are believed to be caused by unhygienic foods, flus, the minimal condition of the immune system, or the unfriendly weather. It may also be caused by the violation of prohibitions determined by the ancestors, such as the consumption of certain foods and drinks which are prohibited as they endanger the body.

The description above, it becomes interesting to analyze the local wisdom of the Panaragan Java subethnicity in the field of health, with the case study of the Panaragan *warok*, in the case of their method of healing, their mix traditional medicine, supernatural prayers, or the combination of these things which are applied in the society.

### **Method**

This research uses the method of qualitative research approach, as it is naturalistic. The reality is plural, heterogenous, and holistic, thus it cannot be measured or separated fragmentally. The researcher and the research objects are interrelated. They are inseparable, as the interact with each other to reveal the analyzed worldview. In the context of traditional healing, the effort to understand the local wisdom within traditional healings are not limited to what is visible. Yet, it tries to reveal what is hidden, so that we may see the ideology, the understanding, and the world view of the *warok* from

Ponorogo.

This is a descriptive research, as it describes and explains the traditional healing by the Panaragan subethnicity. It tries to reveal the phenomenon of local wisdom. The descriptive method uses the ethnographic method, which has the characteristics of holistic, integrative, and which has thick description. The qualitative analysis is aimed to obtain the native's point of view.<sup>(6)</sup> There are two types of data in the qualitative method, which are the primary and the secondary data.

This research uses two main methods to obtain and to present the data. The *first* is observation. *Second*, the researcher carries out an interview. The type of interview used is the in-depth interview. *Third*, the researcher carries out a document analysis by collecting supporting documents such as journals and books. The analysis is created by study and development. This research uses a criterion-based sampling technique to obtain purposive samples to accommodate all possible data in the research field. Thus, there are no deviant cases or those which are forced to be part of a certain category.<sup>(7)</sup> The data analysis technique is carried out through these steps: *Domain analysis, Taxonomy analysis, Componential analysis and Cultural theme analysis*

### **Results**

The health wisdom is the method carried out by the society in solving cases related to health problems, both which are physical and non-physical wisely.<sup>(8)</sup> In the Panaragan Java subethnicity, especially in the art of *reyog* Ponorogo, there is the classification of three important domains related to health. These domains are the medical profession wisdom, medicine wisdom, and treatment wisdom. These three domains are inseparable as they are integral. This health wisdom is contained in several kinds of wisdoms, which are classified by the writer as follows:

#### **a. Medical profession wisdom**

This wisdom of medical profession is related to the skills of the Panaragan Java subethnic people in solving problems of various diseases. This profession is based on the *warok's* type of expertise in handling some problems related to health. This expertise is ordained to the people because of their capabilities in handling various health problems. For example, there is the type of *warok* who is an expert in the field of health. Generally, they are

called *dukun* (shaman). This *dukun* usually heals general diseases, both which are physical and non-physical.

There are also *dukun* who have a specialization in healing diseases of muscles, such as *sprain*, *twisted muscles*, and broken bones. People call them the massage *dukun*. For example, Mr. M and Mr. IR. Mr. M is known as a *dukun* who can heal the disease of madness, but his specialization has shifted into massaging, even though he still heals people with the disease of madness. Meanwhile, a *warok* who has specialization for children are called the baby *dukun*. They usually handle diseases suffered by babies, as done by Mr. S and Mr. M. They handle diseases including *sawanen* (a condition where children are thought to be disturbed by ghosts), and they massage babies, and they also help anything to do with babies.

### b. Medicine wisdom

The medicine wisdom is the method in handling types of diseases by making use of traditional herbal medicine. The traditional medicine used are from plants, including ginger, galangal, turmeric, *laos*. The usage of the herbal medicine is according to the type of disease, as each herbal medicine has its own use and function. Apart from herbal medicine, they also use other traditional medicine such as water and salt, which are believed to be able to neutralize negative aura in the human body. The wisdom of these medicine is according to the type of disease; thus, the type of medicine is based on the disease. For example, the type of medicine used by *warok* in the *Reyog* art of Ponorogo are as follows:

#### 1) Achy rheumatic potion

Red onions, ginger, clove oil, and water are mixed together. They are mashed up by grinding. Then, this potion is smeared on the painful parts of the body. The red onions and the ginger are believed to be able to warm up the body, and that it may increase the blood flow. The achy rheumatic is usually suffered by the *Reyog* players, and they are usually healed by using that traditional method.

#### 2) Head ache potion

Bitter coffee or eucalyptus leaves. Bitter coffee is believed to be able to ease the tensed-up nervous system. Then, the sufferer is advised to sniff ground cajuput leaves are believed to be able to ease the tensed-

up nervous system and to ease the mind. Usually, in the *Reyog* art group, there are people who cannot take the aroma of the offerings, so they become dizzy. These simple methods may ease their dizziness.



#### 3) Fever potion

(The documentary photo of Mr. P, with Coffee, Turmeric, and Water placed on a tray in front of *Reyog*)

The turmeric is one of the elements in the *Reyog* offering, with water and coffee. The philosophy of turmeric is *nirajim*, the water is clarity of thought, and coffee gives off pleasant aroma.

#### 4) Potion to treat *sawanen*

*Dlingo* leaves are a type of soft-stemmed plant which has an aroma similar to garlic. Part of the society believes the myth that these leaves may shoo away genies, as the smell is not liked by Satan.

#### 5) Potion for possessed people

Water and salt are believed to heal those who are possessed by evil spirits. This non-physical disease comes from the disturbance of genies, and it can be healed by using salt and water. Water is believed to be able to neutralize Satan's disturbance. Satan is made of fire, and fire can be extinguished by water. Salt comes from sea water which has the philosophy that the sea is never dirty, as all rubbish that comes to the sea will be pushed to the shores.

### c. Treatment wisdom

The treatment wisdom is the manner practiced to heal diseases suffered by a person so he/she may be healthy as before. The players of the *Reyog* art, which is a form of dance which uses physical moves, usually experience pains in the joints, muscles, and achy rheumatic. These types of conditions are caused by lack of warming up. It may also be caused of lack of practice of unpredictable

accident.

The type of health condition is then treated by *urut* (which literally means to order). The lexical meaning is to massage certain parts of the body which is in pain, such as strain, twisted muscles, pains, pinched nerves, and bruises. Before massaging the painful parts of the body, the *warok* will chant a mantra as follows:

*Assalamualaikum Kakang kawah, adi ari ari, kiki kipu nini kipu, bahu tengen bahu kiwa, awalane srina sewengini sedulure putuku nek ngembani panjang umur rejekine anteng, eyang eyang singngungkuli bapa biyong, sing ngayomi anak putuku paringi sehat, lara encok loro ayu lara dengen, oleho sak njobone sumsum aja sak njerane belung sri tolah ada tolah wasalamualaikum* (Mr. M).

After praying, the *warok* will massage the painful parts of the body. He will smear red onions and oil on the body parts while massaging it, so that the body will feel warm. Another condition which appears to those around the *reyog* art show is *sawanen*. It is usually suffered by little kids after having watched the show. If there is a little kid who experienced *sawanen*, thus the *warok* will chant the following prayer.

*Kakang kawah adi ari ari sedulure batur aja mincok ning manungsa panggonamu ning.....ning ara ara asal balik neng ara ara, asale ning duwur balik neng duwur, asale ngisor balika ngisor aja mincok ning drema manungsa* (Mr. M)

The *warok* will pray by *suwuk* while kissing the little child's forehead. Usually, people can tell if a kid experienced *sawanen* by seeing the indicators. Usually the kid with *sawanen* will often cry and throw tantrums.

The *reyog* art show, there are usually spectators who experienced disturbance from the mystical realm. They may be possessed by evil spirits. The symptoms of this non-physical disease are the sufferer having a blank mind, daydreaming, or screaming unconsciously. The disease may be healed by reading the following mantra.

*"Dhedhemit podo morat marit, Jin setan mawut ra karu-karuan, Kaya watu bledug dadi awu, kun faya kun kersaning Allah, Laillahailallah Muhamadar Rosullullah"* (Mr. P).

After reading that mantra, the *warok* will smear salted water to the possessed person's face or forehead.

The water or *toyo petak* which has been given the mantra may absorb the positive energy of that mantra. Thus, it may help neutralize the negative effects in the person's body.

## Discussion

The traditions which exist in the society is the traditional healing. The society's capability in mixing potions and also medicine and potions which may heal diseases are traditions from the previous generations. Based on the results of the research, there are local wisdoms in the aspect of health among the Panaragan Java subethnicity. This wisdom includes the wisdom of the medical profession, wisdom of medicine, and wisdom of healing.

The skills in the field of traditional health are obtained from the previous generation. Indonesians have long known and used plants with medical properties as one of the efforts to solve health problems. The use of natural products has been used by the ancestors since centuries ago. The evidence is that people still believe in the effects of herbal medicine to solve health problems.<sup>(9)</sup>

The ability to mixing medical plants are usually followed with the ability to manage the mind, as done by the *warok* of Ponorogo. They believe that sometimes, diseases are not caused by visible things. They may also be caused by invisible things which come discreetly. Thus, the medicine is also from non-physical things. As carried out by *warok* P, who used the supernatural therapy to heal the diseases of someone being possessed by evil spirits or *sawanen*, by giving water with mantra.

This is in accordance with the opinions of Foster and Anderson.<sup>(10)</sup> They stated that some parts of the society still believed that the source of some diseases are from the disturbance of invisible creatures. Further, they stated that this phenomenon is called ethnomedicine. Ethnomedicine is a practice regarding diseases which is a result of an original culture. It is explicit and does not come from modern medical science.

## Conclusion

The conclusion of the health wisdom in traditional healing by the Panaragan Java subethnicity with the case study of *warok* Ponorogo are as follows. First, there is a wisdom of the healing profession, where someone has

the profession as a traditional healer. This profession is adapted with different specific abilities, such as child *dukun*, baby *dukun*, and general *dukun*. Second, the medicine wisdom, which is medicine which comes from natural plants, such as *dlingo* leaves, turmeric, coffee, and *cengkeng*. The third is the healing wisdom, which are all methods taken to heal a sick person, such as massage, blows, and smearing potions to the hurt body parts.

**Conflict of Interest :** No

**Ethical Clearance :** Yes

**Source of Founding :** Authors

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