



## Aesthetic Representation of Sufi Femininity: Women's Costumes and Symbolism in Wayang Wali and Wayang Sambung

This article examines the aesthetic representation of female characters in Wayang Wali by Ki Sunan Sunhaji and Wayang Sambung by Ki Muhammad Mukti as part of the Islamic cultural da'wah strategy in Java. Drawing on visual semiotics, the analysis focuses on the depiction of female figures through physical appearance, ornaments, costumes, and bodily expressions as interconnected systems of cultural signs. The findings indicate that the representation of women in Wayang Wali and Wayang Sambung deliberately avoids sensuality and luxury, instead emphasizing simplicity, modesty, and spiritual values aligned with Islamic teachings. Elements such as soft color tones, modest clothing, and restrained bodily expressions are employed to construct an idealized image of femininity grounded in Sufi philosophy and Javanese-Islamic ethical principles. Women are represented not as objects of desire, but as symbolic figures embodying grace, humility, and spirituality. In conclusion, the visual aesthetics of female characters in these wayang traditions demonstrate a unique synthesis of religious values, local cultural identity, and artistic expression. As forms of cultural representation, Wayang Wali and Wayang Sambung function not only as artistic media but also as significant instruments of Islamic cultural transmission, offering an alternative model of beauty and femininity rooted in ethical and spiritual ideals.

**Keywords:** Wayang, visual aesthetics, female characters, Javanese Islam, cultural da'wah.

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi representasi estetik karakter-karakter perempuan dalam *Wayang Wali* karya Ki Sunan Sunhaji dan *Wayang Sambung* karya Ki Muhammad Mukti sebagai bagian dari strategi dakwah kultural Islam di Jawa. Dengan bertumpu pada semiotika visual, analisis difokuskan pada penggambaran figur perempuan melalui penampilan fisik, ornamen, busana, serta ekspresi sebagai sistem tanda budaya yang saling berkaitan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa representasi perempuan dalam *Wayang Wali* dan *Wayang Sambung* secara sengaja menghindari unsur sensualitas dan kemewahan, dan sebaliknya menekankan kesederhanaan, kesopanan, serta nilai-nilai spiritual yang selaras dengan ajaran Islam. Elemen-elemen seperti warna-warna lembut, busana tertutup, dan gerakan tubuh yang halus digunakan untuk membangun citra femininitas ideal yang berakar pada filosofi tasawuf dan prinsip etika Jawa-Islam. Perempuan tidak direpresentasikan sebagai objek hasrat, melainkan sebagai figur simbolik yang mewujudkan keanggunan, kerendahan hati, dan spiritualitas. Sebagai kesimpulan, estetika visual tokoh perempuan dalam tradisi wayang ini menunjukkan sintesis yang khas antara nilai-nilai religius, identitas budaya lokal, dan ekspresi artistik. Sebagai bentuk representasi kultural, *Wayang Wali* dan *Wayang Sambung* berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai media artistik, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen penting dalam transmisi budaya Islam, dengan menawarkan model alternatif tentang keindahan dan femininitas yang berakar pada nilai-nilai etis dan spiritual.

**Kata kunci:** Wayang, estetika visual, karakter perempuan, Islam Jawa, dakwah kultural.

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## Introduction

The modification of *wayang* performances, long associated with the *da'wah* model of the *Walisanga* in their integration of Islamic and Javanese cultural elements<sup>1</sup>, has continued into the present day. Contemporary *dalang* who are deeply committed to Islamic preaching appear to emulate these earlier strategies when adapting the narratives of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Through such adaptations, they create forms of *wayang* performance designed to resonate with Islamic values, thereby reflecting an ongoing process of transformation. The focus of this emulation lies in adjusting the representational form of *wayang* to align with changing social and cultural conditions. One notable shift can be observed in the depiction of female puppet figures by two contemporary Javanese *dalang*, Ki Sunan Sunhaji and Ki Muhammad Mukti. Both artists reinterpret the visual characterization of women from *Wayang Purwa* (the oldest form of *wayang kulit*), where female figures are traditionally portrayed in an idealized and dramatic manner, by presenting them with a distinctly contemporary sensibility. Ki Sunan Sunhaji develops this approach in his *Wayang Wali*, while Ki Muhammad Mukti articulates it in *Wayang Sambung*. A striking feature of the female figures in these works is their more modest appearance, complemented by a color palette that favors softer tones. Additionally, the narrative structure emphasizes themes of courtesy and ethical refinement by

closely linking the portrayal of female characters with the moral messages conveyed in the stories. Through this configuration, female *wayang* figures are presented in a distinctive and meaningful manner. This aesthetic and narrative framing demonstrates a continuing evolution of the *Walisanga's da'wah* model, seeking to represent contemporary Islamic Javanese femininity through the symbolic language of performance.

Anchoring observations of female representation in modern *wayang* to the adaptive *da'wah* model of the *Walisanga* remains relatively uncommon in recent *wayang* scholarship. Many existing studies more frequently frame contemporary *wayang* performances as media for Islamic education, often emphasizing cultural preservation.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, these performances are even incorporated into the instructional practices of Islamic educational institutions.<sup>3</sup> Within this body of work, modifications are commonly discussed in relation to the delivery of moral messages and Islamic values presented in ways considered more accessible to society, especially younger audiences.<sup>4</sup> In such studies, the effectiveness of communication tends to be the principal analytical focus.<sup>5</sup> Although the educational context is significant, particularly in highlighting *wayang* as a medium of *da'wah*, a broader and more macroscopic perspective

<sup>1</sup> Shiska Sumawinata, Toto Suryana, and Ganjar Eka Subakti, "Wayang as a Media for Spreading Islam in the Archipelago," *El Tarikh: Journal of History, Culture and Islamic Civilization* 3, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 96–111, <https://doi.org/10.24042/jhcc.v3i2.8927>.

<sup>2</sup> Cecep Whinarno and Bustanul Arifin, "Pesan Dakwah Dalam Pementasan Wayang Kulit Lakon Ma'rifat Dewa Ruci Oleh Dalang Ki Enthus Susmono," *Jurnal Kopsis: Kajian Penelitian Dan Pemikiran Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 2, no. 1 (August 6, 2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.33367/kpi.v2i1.1046>.

<sup>3</sup> L Lutfianto and Abdul Munip, "Descriptive Analysis on the Plays of Wayang Kekayon Khalifah: A Collaboration Among Calligraphy, Wayang Arts, Islamic Dialogue, and Java Culture," *Proceedings of the 2nd Annual*

*Conference on Education and Social Science (ACCESS 2020)* 556, no. Access 2020 (2021): 506–10, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210525.137>.

<sup>4</sup> Yosita Nadila Rahmi et al., "Flashback of the Wayang Puppet Wali Songo Media Period and Its Relevance in Modern Life," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Science* 1, no. 2 (October 15, 2022): 85–89, <https://doi.org/10.58330/prevenire.v1i2.30>.

<sup>5</sup> A. Alvian Fitrianto, Sulaeman Sulaeman, and Herdianto Wahyu Pratomo, "Implikasi Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Agama Islam Pada Pagelaran Wayang Santri Ki Enthus Susmono Dalam Keberagamaan Masyarakat Kabupaten Tegal," *Al-Mau'izhoh* 5, no. 1 (May 27, 2023): 12, <https://doi.org/10.31949/am.v5i1.4799>.





should not be overlooked.<sup>6</sup> Observing the representation of women in *wayang* within the wider context of Islamic Javanese culture allows these figures to be understood as symbolic constructions shaped by particular discursive interests that ultimately center on the creative authority of the *dalang* himself.

The constructed symbolism constitutes a significant element within the framework of feminine aesthetics in a given culture. This framework posits that the aesthetics of womanhood do not necessarily reside in sensuality or bodily exposure but rather in the symbolic articulation of values such as gentleness, purity, and spirituality within specific cultural contexts. Accordingly, this study pursues three main objectives. First, it seeks to describe the visual characterization of female figures in *Wayang Wali* by Ki Sunan Sunhaji and *Wayang Sambung* by Ki Muhammad Mukti. Second, it analyzes the Islamic values represented through the appearance and portrayal of these female characters. Third, it aims to uncover the role of feminine aesthetics as part of cultural *da'wah* within contemporary traditional performing arts. In short, the study examines the tension between the visual representation of female figures and the ideological meanings projected by the *dalang*. Based on these objectives, the research adopts visual semiotics as its primary analytical framework. Visual elements such as bodily form, facial expression, costume, color, and ornamentation are not understood merely as fixed moral or religious symbols; rather, they are approached as systems of signs constructed and embedded within particular discursive interests, in line with the semiotic perspectives of Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce.<sup>7</sup> From this

perspective, the visualization of female characters can be interpreted as a form of visual reconfiguration that reflects an ongoing negotiation among Islamic values, Javanese traditions, and specific ideological tendencies. Therefore, it is not simply a vehicle for transmitting normative moral lessons within a dramatic narrative.

This study further argues that *wayang* functions as a cultural mechanism through which Javanese female identity is regulated and normalized within the socio-historical context in which the puppeteer operates. As a medium of *da'wah* within Javanese tradition, *wayang* becomes a space where Islamic values are negotiated, visualized, and projected, including the construction of idealized images of femininity that correspond to specific historical and social conditions. From these tensions, the concept of cultural *da'wah*, as articulated by Kuntowijoyo<sup>8</sup>, provides an analytical bridge to contemporary issues such as the discourse on the hijab, the Arabization of symbols and language, and the evolving dynamics of Javanese Islamic thought today.

This study is grounded in primary qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with two *dalang* whose works constitute the central objects of analysis: Ki Sunan Sunhaji and Ki Muhammad Mukti. Both *dalang* remain actively engaged in *wayang* performances across Central Java and the Yogyakarta region, regularly participating in cultural festivals, religious gatherings, and community celebrations. The interviews were conducted to explore their perspectives on the creative processes behind *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung*, particularly regarding the visual representation of female characters and

<sup>6</sup> Anik Farida and Zakiyah Zakiyah, "Local Wisdom and Disseminating Moderate Islam; A Study of Wayang Golek Purwa," 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220408.089>.

<sup>7</sup> Giorgia Aiello, "Visual semiotics: Key concepts and new directions." *The SAGE handbook of visual research methods* (2020): 367-380.

<sup>8</sup> Kuntowijoyo, "Strategi Dakwah Muhammadiyah dan Persoalan Budaya Lokal" in Muhammad Azhar and Hamim Ilyas (eds), *Pengembangan Pemikiran Keislaman Muhammadiyah: Purifikasi dan Dinamisasi*. (Yogyakarta: Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Muhammadiyah, 2000), 294.





the integration of Islamic values into traditional performances. Through these conversations, the research examines how each *dalang* consciously negotiates between the inherited conventions of Javanese *wayang* and contemporary concerns related to Islamic preaching. Their testimonies provide important insights into the motivations, aesthetic considerations, and ideological intentions that inform the modification of female puppet figures. By situating the analysis within the lived experiences and interpretive frameworks of the *dalang* themselves, the study gains a richer understanding of how cultural *da'wah* is articulated through the medium of *wayang* in present-day Javanese society.

### Visualization of Female Characters: Symbols of Simplicity and Purity

In *Wayang Wali* by Ki Sunan Sunhaji and *Wayang Sambung* by Ki Muhammad Mukti, female characters are portrayed with an aesthetic intentionally distinct from classical *wayang* conventions. Visual features such as oval faces, downward gazes, and proportionate yet fully covered body forms convey gentleness and refinement. Dominant color palettes; including purple, pink, blue, white, and earthy brown, combined with *jarik* cloth, evoke associations with purity, humility, and a close connection to nature. These qualities align with ethical ideals found in Islamic teachings. The visual design deliberately avoids aesthetic elements that emphasize sensuality or luxurious ornamentation, which are common in conventional *wayang* representations. Interviews with the two *dalang* reveal that this visual approach reflects a conscious reinterpretation of female representation in contemporary *wayang* performance. The focus shifts toward moral disposition and spiritual symbolism rather than physical allure.

The female figures depicted in these performances include the wives of the *Walisanga* and the transformed figure of Dewi Uma, represented as Umi. These characters are portrayed wearing garments that cover the body and include a head covering. In interviews, Ki

Sunan Sunhaji and Ki Muhammad Mukti describe the hijab and veil as visual elements imbued with layered Islamic meanings. These garments are understood not merely as coverings but as symbols of moral discipline, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility within Islamic thought. The Qur'an emphasizes modesty and ethical conduct, as expressed in QS. al-Nūr [24]:31, which instructs believing women to lower their gaze, guard their modesty, and refrain from displaying adornment except what is ordinarily visible ("And say to the believing women, 'Let them lower their gaze, guard their modesty, and not display their adornment except that which is usually visible'"). Within this interpretive framework, the hijab and veil signify obedience to divine guidance and an awareness of religious obligation.



Figure 1. depiction of a woman wearing modest clothing in *Wayang Wali*

Figure 2. depiction of a woman wearing modest clothing in *Wayang Sambung*.

Both *dalang* explain that the use of head coverings in their puppet designs serves as a marker of Muslim female identity. This visual choice signals piety, moral commitment, and participation in a broader Islamic social ethos. The attire conveys values associated with modesty and dignity that resonate across diverse Muslim cultural contexts. Narratively and visually, the figures of the wives of the *Walisanga* and the transformed Dewi Uma embody an Islamic ethical framework that integrates





spiritual devotion with social identity. The costume design not only indicates compliance with religious prescriptions (*sharia*) regarding *'awrah* (something to be covered), but also reflects an effort to visualize piety and moral integrity within the aesthetic language of contemporary *wayang* performance.

### Clothing and Accessories as Islamic Visual Codes

The female characters' attire consists of long garments that cover the body, a headscarf, and traditional *kain jarik*. There are no excessive ornaments or flashy jewelry. This style reflects Islamic dress norms while preserving the refined and graceful aesthetics characteristic of Javanese culture. These visual symbols function as part of cultural *da'wah*, subtly conveying Islamic values through artistic elements familiar to the community. Messages about the importance of *'iffah* (modesty), *tawādu'* (humility), and *taqwā* (God-consciousness) are effectively communicated through the presence of female characters on the *wayang* stage.

In addition, this attire serves as a symbol of self-protection against negative perceptions and judgments within society. By wearing the *jilbāb* and headscarf, a woman demonstrates her commitment to preserving her dignity and shielding herself from views that conflict with Islamic ethics. As stated in the Qur'an, QS. al-Aḥzāb [33]: 59: "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be recognized and not be harassed." The concept of *ḥijāb* is not merely a religious garment but also plays a vital role in shaping a Muslim woman's identity and influences how she is perceived and treated in society.

Social perceptions of the *jilbāb* and headscarf vary across cultures and often serve as symbols of resilience and identity. A study conducted in Palestine found that the *jilbāb* and headscarf are not only worn as expressions of piety but also function as tools of resistance against social and political pressures.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, a demographic study in Iran revealed that perceptions of the *jilbāb* and headscarf are influenced by age and educational background. Younger generations with higher levels of education tend to view the *jilbāb* and headscarf as expressions of identity and morality, whereas older generations are more likely to associate them with adherence to social and religious norms.<sup>10</sup> In Islam, the *jilbāb* and headscarf are not merely garments but also symbolize protection, dignity, and identity for Muslim women. In the context of *Wayang Wali*, the depiction of the wives of the *Walisanga* wearing modest clothing conveys a moral message about the importance of preserving personal honor and obeying Allah's commands in everyday life. This same principle is reflected in *Wayang Sambung*.

Furthermore, Ki Sunan Sunhaji and Ki Muhammad Mukti emphasize that the *jilbāb* and headscarf symbolize a woman's self-respect. By covering their *'awrah* and avoiding physical attention, women demonstrate their desire to be valued not for their physical appearance but for their character, knowledge, and moral integrity. This also reflects an attitude of humility and a conscious effort to avoid drawing excessive attention from others, particularly from the opposite sex. The *jilbāb* and *ḥijāb* are not only symbols of piety but also fundamental expressions of Muslim women's identity in modern social life. A study in Australia highlights how the *ḥijāb* functions as a declaration of Muslim identity, reflecting a woman's commitment to Islamic values and

<sup>9</sup> Samira Alayan and Lana Shehadeh, "Religious Symbolism and Politics: Hijab and Resistance in Palestine," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 6 (May 3, 2021): 1051–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1883699>.

<sup>10</sup> Yaghoob Foroutan, "Demographic Analysis on Social Perceptions of Hijab in Contemporary Iran: Dimensions and Determinants," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 5 (October 20, 2022): 736–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2020.1847041>.





serving as a form of protection against objectification based on physical appearance. Additionally, research conducted in New Zealand reveals that Muslim women wear the *hijāb* to assert their identity in a pluralistic society, while also using it as a personal expression of integrity, modesty, and control over how they choose to be perceived by the world. The teachings of Islam regarding the *jilbāb* and headscarf emphasize not only adherence to religious law but also respect for oneself and the expression of moral values within society. In the context of *Wayang Wali*, the portrayal of the wives of *Walisanga* wearing the *jilbāb* conveys a powerful message about how Muslim women can uphold their dignity and identity through clothing that embodies Islamic principles.

Moreover, women who wear the *hijāb* are generally committed to living in accordance with Islamic teachings, both morally and behaviorally. They strive to maintain positive social interactions, avoid actions that could compromise their moral integrity, and work to improve themselves spiritually and socially. In this context, the *hijāb* and headscarf serve as symbols of noble character and inner purity. A woman who wears the *hijāb* aims not only to preserve her outward appearance but also to cultivate a pure heart and virtuous conduct.

There is profound wisdom in the *hijāb* and headscarf, primarily to avoid *fitnah* (temptation or slander) that may arise from a striking appearance. The *hijāb* and headscarf serve to protect women from various unwanted social disturbances that could damage their reputation or cause difficulties in social life. As stated in a ḥadīth narrated by al-Tirmidhī: “Indeed, a woman is *‘awrah*, so when she leaves the house, Satan tries to tempt her.” The concept of the *hijāb* and headscarf as social protection and symbols of modesty in Iran reflects the view that they are means to preserve women’s dignity and prevent objectification in modern society. Furthermore,

in England, the experience of young Muslim women wearing the *hijāb* demonstrates that it functions not only as protection from social harassment but also as an expression of identity and solidarity within the Muslim community.<sup>11</sup> In Islam, the *hijāb* and headscarf are not merely articles of clothing but also serve as forms of protection, symbols of dignity, and ways to affirm social and religious identity within the community. In the context of *Wayang Wali*, the portrayal of women wearing the *hijāb* illustrates how Islam teaches modesty, protection from *fitnah*, and the importance of safeguarding oneself from social disturbances that could harm a woman’s morality and honor.

The *hijāb* and headscarf also symbolize respect for women’s rights. In Islam, women are regarded as noble beings deserving honor and protection. These garments serve to ensure that women are valued not only physically but also spiritually and morally. By wearing the *hijāb* and headscarf, women assert their right to live with dignity, without being judged solely by their outward appearance. The *hijāb* and headscarf are seen not only as religious symbols but also as tools for Muslim women to affirm their rights in various social contexts. Muslim women in Australia use the *hijāb* as an expression of identity—not only as an act of religious observance but also as a statement of their rights and freedoms to define how they wish to be perceived by society. The *hijāb* provides a sense of safety and protection and helps Muslim women claim their place in the public sphere without compromising their Islamic values. In New Zealand, the *hijāb* and headscarf serve as means for Muslim women to demonstrate their equal rights in various aspects of social and professional life.

In Spain, Muslim women who wear the *hijāb* and headscarf encounter both challenges and opportunities in the workplace. Although discrimination persists, the *hijāb* has become a

<sup>11</sup> Fatima Khan, “Relocating the Veil: The Everyday Lives of Young Hijabi Britons under Ideological Culturalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 16 (December





powerful symbol for Muslim women to advocate for their rights in professional and social spheres. Beyond representing modesty and protection, the *hijāb* and headscarf are integral to Muslim women's efforts to assert their rights.<sup>12</sup> In the context of *Wayang Wali*, the depiction of women wearing the *hijāb* conveys that Islam holds women in high regard and underscores the importance of preserving their dignity and rights within society.

The *hijāb* and headscarf are also expressions of a Muslim woman's identity. In a diverse society, these garments symbolize a person's faith and their choice to live according to Islamic teachings. They serve as a way for women to affirm their identity as devout Muslimahs who uphold the principles of their religion. Spiritually, the *hijāb* and headscarf are not only about maintaining social appearance but also about strengthening the spiritual connection with Allah. By wearing the *hijāb* and headscarf, a woman acknowledges that every action she takes, including how she dresses, is part of her worship and obedience to the God.

The *hijāb* and headscarf are not only religious symbols but also tools for expressing Muslim women's identities across diverse global societies. A study conducted in New Zealand illustrates how Muslim women use the *hijāb* to assert their identity within various social contexts, where the *hijāb* serves both as a symbol of faith and as a means to demonstrate their integrity as members of the Muslim community.

Furthermore, the *hijāb* and headscarf contribute to shaping the spiritual awareness of Muslim women. They are associated with heightened self-awareness and a deeper connection with God, as the *hijāb* and headscarf serve as reminders of their primary purpose in life: to worship Allah and uphold good character in all aspects of their lives.<sup>13</sup>

The experiences of Muslim women who wear the *hijāb* and headscarf in Western countries demonstrate that the *hijāb* serves as a tool to advocate for religious freedom and the rights of Muslim women within pluralistic societies. The *hijāb* enables Muslim women to control how they are perceived by the world, without conforming to the beauty standards imposed by Western culture. The *hijāb* and headscarf are not merely religious garments; they carry broader meanings related to identity, spirituality, and the rights of Muslim women in social life. In the context of *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung*, the portrayal of women wearing the *hijāb* conveys a powerful message: these garments are not only meant to cover the *'awrah* (parts of the body to be concealed) but also represent Islamic values embedded in the daily lives of Muslim women.

### Women as Moral Custodians in Dramatic Narratives

In the *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* performances, female characters are not depicted as passive figures; rather, they serve as moral guardians within the narrative. They often appear as reminders of virtue, motivators who encourage the main characters to act righteously, or even as sources of wisdom. This underscores the significant role of women in *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* as conveyors of ethical messages. This portrayal contrasts with classical stereotypes that often depict women as temptations or obstacles in spiritual journeys. Thus, *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* present women not only as aesthetically beautiful but also as embodying profound religious and cultural significance.

In a social context, women who wear such attire are reminded of their responsibilities as members of the Muslim community. They are expected to uphold proper behavior and

<sup>12</sup> Carme Garcia-Yeste et al., "Actions to Promote the Employment and Social Inclusion of Muslim Women Who Wear the Hijab in Catalonia (Spain)," *Sustainability* 13, no. 13 (June 22, 2021): 6991, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13136991>.

<sup>13</sup> Athanasios Poulis et al., "Branding Muslim Hijabi Fashion: Exploring Influencer Trends and Impact," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, September 27, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-02-2024-0024>.





conduct, serving as role models for others, particularly regarding modesty and dress. Within Muslim society, the *hijāb* functions not only as a religious symbol but also as a component of collective identity that reinforces commitment to Islamic teachings and shapes social behavior in accordance with religious norms.

The *hijāb* and headscarf also serve as symbols of solidarity among Muslim women committed to following Allah's commandments. They are associated with adherence to Islamic ethics and are regarded as forms of self-protection and respect for the standards of modesty upheld within Muslim communities. The *hijāb* and headscarf play a significant role in shaping the moral and social consciousness of Muslim women and serve as a means of resisting social pressures rooted in the objectification of women. More than expressions of religious obedience, the *hijāb* and headscarf symbolize a commitment to morality, integrity, and social responsibility. In the context of *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung*, the depiction of women wearing the *hijāb* reflects Islamic teachings on maintaining virtuous character, Muslim identity, and respect for social and religious values.

The *hijāb* and headscarf also embody the value of simplicity in both dress and lifestyle. A woman who wears the *hijāb* aims not to overly emphasize her outward appearance but instead focuses on her inner self, character, and relationship with God. Through this manner of dress, a woman expresses her choice to live humbly and avoid becoming entangled in a consumerist lifestyle.<sup>14</sup> The concepts of simplicity and humility (*tawādu'*) have long been integral to Muslim ethics, emphasizing the importance of avoiding arrogance and materialism. Throughout Islamic history, simplicity in dress and demeanor has been a defining characteristic of those who are God-

conscious, distinguishing them from those who seek worldly praise. This simplicity extends beyond clothing; it is reflected in one's actions and overall way of life.

Furthermore, the social perception of the *hijāb* and headscarf in Iran illustrates that Muslim women who wear them are often associated with simplicity in both dress and daily life. The *hijāb* and headscarf are not only religious expressions but also serve as a rejection of capitalist beauty standards that promote excessive consumption. In various Muslim cultural contexts, the *hijāb* and headscarf are seen as means of resisting lifestyles centered on the display of luxury and as forms of spiritual protection against the negative influences of consumerist culture. They are not merely symbols of modesty and obedience to religious commandments but also represent a way of life that emphasizes simplicity, integrity, and moral values in Islam. In the context of *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung*, the message of simplicity reflected in the use of the headscarf teaches the importance of maintaining good character and building inner strength beyond mere outward appearance.

### ***Biyung* and *Umi*: The Concept of Motherhood in Javanese-Islamic Tradition**

The concepts of *biyung* and *umi* as representations of motherhood in the Javanese-Islamic tradition reflect a blend of local Javanese values and Islamic teachings. While the term *biyung* is more commonly used in traditional Javanese culture and *umi* originates from Arabic (used in an Islamic context), both emphasize the noble status of mothers in the spiritual, social, and family life of the Javanese-Islamic community.

In Javanese culture, *biyung* is an honorable term for mother, symbolizing love, gentleness, and sacrifice. The mother in Javanese tradition fulfills not only a biological role but also a

<sup>14</sup> Guntur Aji Pamungkas and Ratmon Ratmono, "Pengaruh Harga, Citra Merek, Preferensi Merek Dan Gaya Hidup Hedonisme Terhadap Keputusan Pembelian Jilbab Zoya Di Kalangan Mahasiswa (Studi Pada Mahasiswa Di

IAIN Metro)," *Jurnal Manajemen DIVERSIFIKASI* 1, no. 3 (June 11, 2021): 595–611, <https://doi.org/10.24127/diversifikasi.v1i3.697>.





spiritual one. She is regarded as the guardian of family harmony and a bridge between the physical world and the spiritual realm. This concept is often symbolized in Javanese mystical teachings, such as in *Serat Sastra Gendhing* by Sultan Agung, which outlines the relationship between humans and God within a Sufi philosophical framework, where the mother's role is central to the development of a child's moral character and spirituality.

The term *umi* in Arabic (*umm*) means mother and is commonly used within Muslim families. In Javanese-Islamic society, especially following the *Islamization* associated with the Walisanga, this concept merged with local Javanese values such as love, patience, and devotion, often intertwined with traditional notions of motherhood. Studies on the syncretism of *Kejawen* and Islam highlight that the Islamization process in Java developed through adaptive cultural strategies, including in the understanding of motherhood. Islamic values emphasizing respect for the mother were integrated with established Javanese ethical principles and cultural practices. In modern interpretations of Islam, such as those articulated by Asma Barlas, the mother occupies a sphere of profound symbolic respect, reflecting the ethical orientation of believers toward family and divine responsibility, as alluded to in QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 1.

The Javanese-Islamic tradition does not discard Javanese values such as *biyung* but harmonizes them with Islamic terminology and ethical perspectives, such as *umi*. This integration developed because Islam in Java spread through cultural accommodation. The interaction between *Kejawen* teachings and Islamic principles allowed local cultural expressions to continue within an Islamic framework. The concepts of *biyung* and *umi* in the Javanese-

Islamic tradition, therefore, illustrate a harmonious blending of local wisdom and religious values, both representing deep respect for the mother as the spiritual and moral center of the family.

The depiction of Dewi Durga or Dewi Uma from Hindu-Buddhist mythology—later adapted to reflect Islamic values—forms part of the long process of cultural acculturation in *wayang* traditions. This transformation reflects Islamic missionary efforts carried out through cultural approaches similar to those employed by the Walisanga in spreading Islam throughout the Nusantara.

After the Islamic adaptation, the character receives *hidayah* (guidance) and begins to embody virtuous qualities, with earlier negative attributes transformed into positive virtues. This illustrates how figures originating in Hindu-Buddhist mythology can be reinterpreted within Islamic frameworks without erasing their cultural roots. The transformation of the name Uma into *Umi* also reflects an effort to introduce Islamic nuance into the character, where attributes previously associated with divine status are reinterpreted as those of a human figure who receives blessings from Allah SWT. In this way, *wayang* adapted with Islamic values functions not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for conveying moral teachings aligned with Islamic principles. The Islamization of performing arts thus produced new forms of *wayang* that maintain local cultural traditions while communicating ethical and religious messages relevant to Muslim communities.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Ki Muhammad Mukti explains that the intended meaning aligns with Islamic teachings regarding the role and function of the *umi*. In Islam, the *umi* or mother holds a noble and highly respected position.<sup>16</sup> Islamic

<sup>15</sup> I Made Wiradnyana, "Wacana Islam Geguritan Nurcaya Nursada (Tuan Semeru): Bentuk Moderasi Pemikiran Dan Sinkretisme Islam-Hindu," *Jurnal Ilmiah Religiosity Entity Humanity (JIREH)* 5, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 168–74, <https://doi.org/10.37364/jireh.v5i2.137>.

<sup>16</sup> Tahira Jabeen Khushi Muhammad, Syeda Muneeba Hassan, and Abdul Wahab Jan Al-Azhari, "The Role of Mothers in Building the Great Historical Islamic Personalities," *Journal of Islamic and Religious Studies* 8, no. 2 (December 20, 2023): 131–49, <https://doi.org/10.36476/JIRS.8:2.12.2023.05>.





teachings strongly emphasize the mother's role in human life, particularly within the contexts of family, education, and nurturing. Numerous hadiths of the Prophet Muḥammad and verses of the Qur'an highlight the virtue of the mother, portraying her as a figure deserving profound respect, affection, and honor. Islamic teachings elevate the status of the mother, sometimes even placing her above the father in terms of moral obligation.<sup>17</sup>

This is reflected in a well-known ḥadīth: "A man came to the Prophet Muḥammad and asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, I want to fight in the way of Allah; may I do so?' The Prophet asked, 'Are your mother or father still alive?' The man replied, 'My mother is still alive.' The Prophet said, 'Then do good to your mother, for Paradise lies beneath her feet'" (narrated by Aḥmad and al-Nasā'ī). This ḥadīth highlights the elevated status of mothers in Islam, sometimes even prioritizing their care over *jihād* in certain circumstances. It underscores the profound importance of honoring and serving one's mother in Islamic teachings.

A mother is depicted as a figure embodying love, sacrifice, and boundless affection for her children. Islam teaches that a mother endures significant challenges during pregnancy, childbirth, and the subsequent care of her child.<sup>18</sup> The Qur'an reminds: "And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, increasing her in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be

grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the final destination" (QS. Luqmān [31]: 14). This verse highlights how a mother patiently and selflessly endures the physically and emotionally demanding processes of pregnancy and breastfeeding.<sup>19</sup>

In Islam, the mother is widely regarded as the primary educator of her children. The Prophet Muhammad stated, "A mother is the first school for her children. If she is good, then her children will be good as well" (narrated by Ibn Mājah). As the first educator, the mother plays a central role in shaping the character and religious development of her children.<sup>20</sup> Islamic teachings emphasize that mothers bear significant responsibility in transmitting moral values, manners, and religious teachings from an early age. A mother who educates her children with care and affection contributes to the formation of positive character traits that influence their development throughout life.<sup>21</sup>

Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of honoring one's mother as a fundamental act of devotion. The Qur'an highlights the obligation to show kindness to parents: "And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the final return" (QS. Luqmān: 14).<sup>22</sup>

This verse highlights the esteemed status of the mother in Islamic teachings and the profound respect granted to her role. Mothers are

<sup>17</sup> Ida Afidah, "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment: A Quranic and Hadith Perspective on Women's Roles in Islam," *Diroyah : Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis* 7, no. 2 (April 28, 2023): 252–70, <https://doi.org/10.15575/diroyah.v7i2.25177>.

<sup>18</sup> Zahratul Azizah, "The Development of the Role of Women as Islamic Educator in Family Through Activity of the Quran Recitation Forum," in *Proceedings of the 1st Non Formal Education International Conference (NFEIC 2018)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2991/nfeic-18.2019.33>.

<sup>19</sup> Eko Zulfikar, "Peran Perempuan dalam Rumah Tangga Perspektif Islam: Kajian Tematik dalam Alquran dan Hadis," *Diya Al-Afkar: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran Dan Al-*

*Hadis* 7, no. 01 (June 30, 2019): 79, <https://doi.org/10.24235/diyyaafkar.v7i01.4529>.

<sup>20</sup> Sri Mulyani, "Peran Ibu dalam Pendidikan Karakter Anak Menurut Pandangan Islam," *An-Nisa* 11, no. 2 (2019): 511–25, <https://doi.org/10.30863/annisa.v11i2.336>.

<sup>21</sup> Siti Robi'ah and Nur Hidayat, "The Role of Mothers in Building Children's Character According to an Islamic Perspective," *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 16, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v16i1.123>.

<sup>22</sup> Gulnaz Naeem and Sadia Mahvish, "The Honor and Respect of Women: A Comparative Study Based on Quran o Sunnah and Current Practices in Pakistan," *Rahatulquloob*, January 2, 2021, 40–46, <https://doi.org/10.51411/rahat.5.1.2021/192>.





acknowledged as individuals who make significant sacrifices in raising their children, as emphasized in various Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions. Accordingly, Islam places the mother in a revered position within both the family and society, where she serves as a central figure in providing nurturing, education, and emotional support to her children.

Prophet Muhammad also emphasized the importance of honoring one's mother in a well-known hadith. When a companion asked who deserved the best treatment, the Prophet mentioned the mother three times before mentioning the father. "A man asked the Prophet, 'O Messenger of Allāh, to whom should I show kindness first?' The Prophet replied, 'To your mother.' The man asked again, 'Then whom?' The Prophet said, 'To your mother.' The man asked once more, 'Then whom?' The Prophet said, 'To your mother.' The man asked again, 'Then whom?' The Prophet replied, 'To your father.'" (narrated by al-Bukhārī).

The emphasis on honoring one's mother in Islam aligns with the values of filial piety found in other cultural traditions. Both Islamic teachings and Confucian philosophy, for example, emphasize respect for parents as a fundamental moral duty.<sup>23</sup> In a broader social context, filial devotion to parents has significant implications. Numerous studies show that fulfilling responsibilities toward parents positively impacts the psychological well-being of both children and parents, thereby promoting family cohesion and individual well-being.

Devotion to one's mother is closely linked to the concept of divine blessing in Islamic teachings. The Prophet stated, "Whoever wishes to have a long life and ample provision, let him

maintain family ties" (narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim). Although this hadith generally refers to maintaining kinship relations, honoring one's mother is often considered one of its most important expressions. Contemporary studies also suggest that filial devotion toward parents is positively associated with psychological well-being and overall quality of life.<sup>24</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also emphasized that devotion to one's mother is a significant path to attaining Paradise. In a hadith narrated by Aḥmad, he stated, "Among the most important gates of Paradise is being dutiful to one's mother." This narration highlights the central importance of honoring and serving one's mother within Islamic ethical teachings. Research on family relationships similarly suggests that filial devotion strengthens intergenerational bonds and contributes to the emotional well-being of parents.<sup>25</sup> Children who consistently strive to respect and fulfill their mothers' rights are thus regarded as engaging in an ethically commendable act within the Islamic moral framework.<sup>26</sup>

In addition, a mother's prayer is often regarded as having particular spiritual significance. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: "Three prayers will undoubtedly be answered: the prayer of the oppressed, the prayer of a parent for their child, and the prayer of a traveler" (narrated by Abū Dāwūd). Within Islamic belief, a mother's supplication for her child is considered especially meaningful and is frequently associated with divine mercy and protection. Studies on religious practice also indicate that prayer can have positive spiritual and psychological effects, including within the

<sup>23</sup> Lee Oh Ryun, "Chinese Islam's Understanding of Zhongxiao 忠孝: Jin Tian-Zhu's 金天柱 Qing Zhen Shi Yi 清真釋疑," *Asian Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 163–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2023.2183567>.

<sup>24</sup> Wencheng Zhang, Merrill Silverstein, and Ying Xu, "Intergenerational Solidarity and Filial Piety Perceived By Older Adults in Rural China," *Innovation in Aging* 7, no. Supplement\_1 (December 21, 2023): 954–954, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igad104.3065>.

<sup>25</sup> Ad Maulod et al., "The 'Good' Caregiver: Does Filial Piety Necessitate Self-Sacrifice?," *Innovation in Aging* 7, no. Supplement\_1 (December 21, 2023): 366–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igad104.1218>.

<sup>26</sup> Stephanie Bergren, Qun Le, and XinQi Dong, "Children's Filial Piety and Parents' Depressive Symptoms: Findings From a Dyadic Study," *Innovation in Aging* 5, no. Supplement\_1 (December 17, 2021): 198–198, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igab046.766>.





parent-child relationship.<sup>27</sup> In this context, parental prayers may contribute not only to spiritual meaning but also to a sense of emotional support and well-being.

Beyond imparting knowledge, mothers also instill values such as patience, responsibility, and perseverance. In the process of raising children, mothers often face numerous challenges and difficulties. Through their endurance and dedication, they exemplify resilience in responding to life's obstacles. Family education grounded in Islamic principles thus plays a crucial role in shaping children's personalities, helping them become responsible and ethically guided individuals.

The Qur'an also addresses the complexity of parental influence in moral guidance. Allah states: "And if they (both mother and father) urge you to associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. To Me is your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do" (QS. Luqman: 15). This verse highlights the significant yet complex role parents play in the moral and religious development of their children. Mothers, in particular, often serve as role models of piety and devotion to God. Empirical studies indicate that mothers with higher levels of education and religiosity tend to offer more comprehensive guidance in their children's moral and spiritual education.<sup>28</sup>

A mother who demonstrates a strong religious commitment can contribute to the internalization of values such as obedience, honesty, and integrity in her children. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of parental example in daily life, as a mother with a sound understanding of religious values can create a

nurturing environment that supports her children's spiritual development.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

The representation of female characters in Ki Sunan Sunhaji's *Wayang Wali* and Ki Muhammad Mukti's *Wayang Sambung* offers an aesthetic interpretation that deliberately diverges from the classical *wayang* paradigm. Through visual forms that appear simple yet symbolically rich, these female figures embody Islamic values such as purity, gentleness, modesty, and wisdom. Their bodily posture, calm facial expressions, and the use of modest clothing signal a conscious reinterpretation of feminine beauty within an Islamic ethical framework. In contrast to the more ornate and aristocratic visual conventions commonly found in classical *wayang kulit*, the female figures in these performances emphasize restraint, moral composure, and spiritual dignity. These visual strategies indicate that aesthetic representation in *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* is not merely decorative but functions as a semiotic medium that communicates religious values to the audience. Within the structure of the performance, the female characters frequently occupy narrative roles that reinforce ethical reflection, guidance, and social harmony. Through this visual and narrative integration, Islamic teachings are conveyed subtly through the cultural language of *wayang*, allowing religious messages to resonate naturally within the familiar artistic traditions of Javanese society.

Within this interpretive framework, the feminine aesthetic present in *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* can also be understood through the lens of Sufi femininity, where gentleness, compassion, and inner refinement are regarded

<sup>27</sup> Zhuo Job Chen et al., "Muslim Verbal and Active Prayer (MVAP): Measurement and Psychological Functioning of Supplications in Islam," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 31, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 249–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1858254>.

<sup>28</sup> Sulieman Ibraheem Shelash Al-Hawary et al., "The Education of Children in an Islamic Family Based on

the Holy Qur'an," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (March 31, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8273>.

<sup>29</sup> Shafieka Moos and Sa'diyya Shaikh, "Maternal Identity and Muslim Ethics: South African Women's Experiences," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (July 30, 2024): 927, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080927>.





as expressions of spiritual beauty. In many Sufi cultural interpretations, feminine qualities such as tenderness, patience, and nurturing care are associated with the manifestation of divine compassion in human life. The representation of female figures in these performances reflects this sensibility by portraying women as moral anchors within the narrative, embodying ethical clarity, spiritual calmness, and relational harmony. Through a cultural *da'wah*, the *dalang* integrates these values into the performance without overt doctrinal instruction, allowing the audience to encounter Islamic teachings through symbolic imagery and storytelling. In this sense, female characters are not positioned merely as supporting figures but function as carriers of ethical meaning within the aesthetic structure of the performance. The representation of women in *Wayang Wali* and *Wayang Sambung* thus reflects a broader process of Islamic-Javanese cultural synthesis, in which artistic creativity, spiritual symbolism, and moral pedagogy are woven together within the living tradition of contemporary *wayang* performance.

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