

# Symbolic Meaning of Pedati Gede Pekalangan Cirebon

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## Abstract

*Pedati Gede Pekalangan Cirebon will be the main object of this research. Although there are sources say that Pedati Gede logically cannot run, and many also believe that Pedati Gede is a magical vehicle that can walk by not touching the ground (flying), but this research is not to prove the truth of the story. Finding the symbolic meaning of Pedati Gede is the main focus. This research is a qualitative research with an ethnographic approach through oral history, and a semiotic approach through visual narrative. Data collection obtained through interviews, observation, and literature study. The results of this study indicate that Pedati Gede Pekalangan is a symbol of the closeness of the Cirebon muslim community to the God. Pedati Gede is a symbol of a vehicle (facility) to achieve a goal, namely Allah SWT.*

**Keywords:** *pedati gede, magical, symbolic, islam, pekalangan Cirebon*

## INTRODUCTION

Cirebon is one of the regions in Indonesia which is famous for its cultural acculturation. This area stores and preserves so many ancestral heritages. Starting from the existence of the Palace to historical sites. One of the interesting things to research is the Pedati Gede Site. Pedati Gede is a type of wheeled carriage, which is a train without an engine pulled by horses and other animals, ranging from ebro, wagon, horse cart, kretek, kahar balloons, bendi, buggy, and others. (Habnit, 1977)

This site is located in a small, densely populated building in RW 05 Pekalangan Selatan, Cirebon. As the name implies, this cart has a very large size, and is the largest cart in Indonesia and maybe even in the world. However, the original size of this cart should be much larger than it currently looks. In 1907, Pedati Gede caught fire, and from what was supposed to have 12 wheels, now only 8 wheels are left that can be saved and put back together. Another burning wheel could not be saved, but debris can still be found in Pekalangan. The current cart is the result of reconstruction carried out by Herman De Vost in 1993. Herman De Vost was the Director of the Palace Train Museum in Leiden, the Netherlands at that time.

It is said that this cart was once used by saints to spread Islam along the island of Java from the coast of Jakarta to Surabaya. And it is also used to transport materials for the Great Mosque of Sang Ciptarasa which is located in the Kasepuhan Palace in Cirebon. According to Chaerul Salam, Pedati Gede was familiar with the knock down system at that time. This means that the amount of series of Pedati Gede wheels can be adjusted according to your needs. (Chaerul Salam, 2000: 9)

There are several versions of the story about Pedati Gede. Starting from mystical things to some who consider it only a monumental work of its time. Apart from the various stories that have been built, there are things that are interesting to learn, namely the symbolic meaning of Pedati Gede. Symbolic comes from the word symbol. Etymologically, the symbol or symbol comes from the Greek word "sym-ballein" which means throwing together something (object, action) which is associated with an idea. (Hartoko dan Rahmanto dalam Alex Sobur, 2004:155)

Humans will never escape a symbol. Everything that is created by humans usually has a symbolic meaning, whether it is intentional or not. Likewise, with the creation of Pedati Gede in his time. What meaning do you want to convey with the creation of the cart? This research will try to understand the aims and objectives of the ancestors to create Pedati Gede through visual analysis



Figure 1. Pedati Gede Pekalangan Cirebon  
(Source: Hendhy Nansha, 2020)

In life, the process of manifesting symbols is indispensable. The goal is to make it easier for humans to understand their relationship with the Creator of the universe, humans, and also the supernatural. (Herawati, 2010).

## METHOD

This research focuses on Pedati Gede Pekalangan Cirebon which will examine in more depth about the symbolic meaning contained in it. This research is a qualitative research with an ethnographic approach through oral history and a semiotic approach through visual narrative. Sources of data obtained through interviews, observation, and literature study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Planner of Pedati Gede Pekalangan

It is very difficult to find literature about the history of the existence of Pedati Gede Pekalangan. Likewise with the allegations of the maker of Pedati Gede, which until now is not certain. People call him Ki Gede Pekalangan. If Ki Gede Pekalangan was a designer / architect, it is somewhat doubtful, because he could not find any other design works made by him. While there is a strong suspicion that Ki Gede Pekalangan was a royal person in charge of taking care of carts for royal transportation. (Chaerul Salam, 2000: 9). Etymologically, "pekalangan" comes from the word "kalangan". The word circle has two meanings:

- a. kalangan: is a special space made for a particular interest.

b. kalangan: protocol officers (in contemporary terms).

From the above understanding, Ki Gede Pekalangan can be concluded as a royal structural official at that time who was in charge of taking care of the facilities and infrastructure, including the means of transportation in it. And one of the important means of transportation at that time was Pedati Gede. As with royal tradition, Ki Gede Pekalangan is also a hereditary position. So it is very possible that Ki Gede Pekalangan is not just one person.

According to folklore that developed in Cirebon society, Pangeran Cakrabuana, also known as Mbah Kuwu Cirebon, was a figure believed to be Ki Gede Pekalangan as well as the designer of Pedati Gede in 1485. With Pedati Gede he spread Islam to remote parts of the Java island. This Pedati Gede is also used to transport building materials when the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa Kasepuhan Palace was built. Taryi as a kuncen stated that Pedati Gede was pulled by a kerbau bulai and walked without touching the ground (flying). But in fact no one has ever seen Pedati Gede walk.

According to the legend of R. Achmad Opan Safari Hasyim, a Cirebon philologist, Pedati Gede and this kerbau bulai are magical vehicles, which are not seen when driven by Pangeran Cakrabuana. Except for a poor child who has no name, has no parents, and never eats or drinks because of his poverty. Prince Cakrabuana then made this magical child adopted and given the name Pecilon which comes from the word "pecil" which means "child", and "lon" which means "class/adoption". The place where this child came from was eventually known as the Pecilon area. During Islamic holidays such as Maulid Nadi and one night of Suro, Pedati Gede is bathed in a ritual ceremony. Many people are scrambling to take water from the ritual, because they are believed to be able to get blessings from the Almighty.

## B. Narrative Concept

The main ideas of this concept are taken from Gerard Genette's theory, namely:

a. Story / Narrative Statement

Oral or written discourse whose job is to tell the events or series of events that become a sign.

b. Sequence of Events (Succession of Events)

Real or fictitious storytelling, which is the subject of a discourse, and in some relationships, opposition, repetition, and so on.

c. Event

But not what is retold, but an incident where someone tells something.

### *Pedati Gede Pekalangan Visual Narrative*

Pedati Gede has very unique visuals, especially at its enormous size. Has a length: 8.6 meters, width: 2.6 meters, and height: 3.5 meters. There are 8 wheels, each with a diameter of 2 meters (6 pieces) and a diameter of 1.5 meters (2 pieces). Each wheel has 12 spokes.



Figure 2. Pedati Gede Wheels  
(Source: Hendhy Nansha, 2020)

At the top there is a wagon house known as Mande Mangu. Mande means “in front”, and mangu means “standing”. This mande mangu was the place used by Prince Cakrabuana to preach to the villagers he visited. Mande mangu later became the inspiration for the creation of a pulpit in ancient mosques in Cirebon. The shape is rectangular and made of teak wood. On the right and left, there are logs arranged to form a fence. The floor is also made of teak wood.



Figure 3. Mande Mangu  
(Source: Hendhy Nansha, 2020)

In the past, the original roof of Mande Mangu was made of coconut leaves arranged on a string of bamboo. At the top it is covered using shingles (thinly cut wood). Because it is damaged and may be difficult to maintain, it is currently being replaced using a white cloth.

On the right and left of the mande mangu, there are Qilin ornaments, which are mythological creatures mixed with Chinese and Persians depicted with a dragon's head, the body of a deer, and a tail that resembles a tiger. On this cart, there is also a combination of the shape of a peacock on the legs.



Figure 4. Qilin ornament

(Source: Hendhy Nansha, 2020)

In addition, on the back of the Pedati Gede, there is also an ornament resembling a starling bird wearing a crown on its head. Then also appear ornaments of Hindu influence which in Indonesian ornaments are known as the Garuda motif. Garuda is the vehicle of Lord Vishnu in Hindu mythology.



Figure 5. Starlings Ornament  
(Source: Hendhy Nansha, 2020)

### C. Symbolic Meaning of Pedati Gede Pekalangan

According to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), symbols are some kind of signs, paintings, words, etc. that state something, or contain a specific purpose. Symbol is a form that marks something other than the embodiment of the symbolic form itself. (Alex Sobur, 2004).

Symbolic meaning can be understood by tracing the historical background, the process of creation, the socio-cultural conditions of the creator, and the conditions of the social environment. Symbolic meaning is also influenced by the level of creativity, skills, and supporting facilities.

#### a. Pedati's House

Also called mande mangu. The roof resembles a house and is shaped like a pulpit in old mosques on the island of Java. Mande mangu functioned as a seat for the coachman and also the place where Prince Cakrabuana stood when preaching. This is a description of leadership or role models.

#### b. Starling

As a description of one of Pangeran Cakrabuana's followers, Tapak Jalak who came from Banten.

c. Qilin

Having a leadership education value that is flexible (not rigid) can be accepted by the upper class and lower-class people. Other meanings also represent luck, big heart, long life, and wisdom.

d. Wheels

Describes life that continues to rotate. Hardships and joys will come alternately. We must stick to goodness. If in life in this world always refrain from committing sins, the Almighty will make it easier for us in the next life. The spokes on the wheel have the meaning of life support. Meanwhile, the boss (the center point of the wheel) represents unity and strength so as not to be easily tempted by sin. The enormous size of the wheels is a sign of admiration.

e. Kerbau Bulai

Reminiscent of the belief of the Cirebon people at that time who considered the buffalo to be everything, as a life support. Moreover, the downy buffalo is certainly considered to have more strength, because it is physically different from buffaloes in general.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural acculturation greatly influences the creation of Pedati Gede's symbolic meaning. Hindu culture through ornament is still very much felt in these artifacts, even though the application is aimed at spreading Islam. Pedati Gede Pekalangan as a whole has a meaning as a symbol of life, both religious life (vertical) and daily social life (horizontal). These artifacts also seem to show the high level of intelligence of the Cirebon people.

As a means of transportation, Pedati Gede has a meaning as an intermediary medium to reach the Creator. On a small scale, for example in family life, the head of the family is responsible for bringing all members of his family to a better condition and is blessed by the Almighty. Likewise, on a larger scale, for example in the life of the nation and state. A leader is responsible for bringing his society to a better direction.

For the people of Cirebon, Pedati Gede is identical with Prince Cakrabuana who is virtuous and has had a major influence on the entry of Islam to Cirebon.

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