



## Research Article

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# Revitalizing Javanese Islamic Literature: A Philological and Oral Tradition Study in Coastal Culture

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## Abstract

*This study explores a spiritual occurrence that flourishes and develops within the framework of Pesantren, a significant aspect of Javanese Islamic tradition. One notable spiritual activity that flourishes in Pesantren is known as Pesantren literature. The term 'Pesantren literature' refers to literary works that originate and develop within the Pesantren environment, encompassing both the physical and spiritual realms. Noteworthy characteristics of Pesantren literature include the following. Pesantren literature is predominantly composed in Arabic and is typically written in Arabic script. At times, Pesantren literature may be composed in the new Javanese language with Arabic-pegon script. It emerged and gained momentum during the 18th century, experiencing rapid development in the 19th century. Pesantren literature encompasses both oral and written traditions. It is often recited during specific ceremonies and occasionally performed as a form of performing art. Pesantren literature exhibits varying degrees of influence from Arabic and Persian literature. In conclusion, Pesantren literature has been a vital spiritual and literary tradition in the Indonesian archipelago, particularly in Java. It has evolved as a unique form of literary expression within the Pesantren environment, encompassing both oral and written traditions.*

**Keywords:** Javanese literature, Singir, Verses literature, cultural significance

## 1. Introduction

Despite the extensive body of research on Javanese literature, one significant genre remains notably understudied – Javanese verses literature, or "Singir" in the Javanese language. Previous This scholarly neglect is evident in the absence of comprehensive investigations into this unique literary form (Young et al., 2019). While numerous studies have been conducted on Javanese literature, there has been limited research on a specific genre known as Javanese Verses literature, or 'Singir' in Javanese. To date, this genre has garnered relatively little attention from researchers. This observation is

evident when considering various Javanese literary studies carried out by notable experts such as Zoetmulder (1995). among others, who have predominantly omitted discussions related to Verses literature. Surprisingly, even comprehensive catalogs of Javanese manuscripts. Given this scarcity of research attention, it is imperative to explore Javanese Verses literature comprehensively. Such exploration can illuminate unique facets of Javanese culture, language, and history, rectifying a longstanding scholarly gap in the field

Above-mentioned renowned Javanese literary scholars like Zoetmulder (1995) who have made substantial contributions to the field, have curiously overlooked Verses literature in their works. Furthermore, the omission of Javanese Verses literature from esteemed catalogs of Javanese manuscripts, underscores the widespread oversight of this literary treasure. These catalogs serve as essential references for researchers, yet they contain no mention of Verses literature. Academic research on Javanese verses literature remains a rare phenomenon, with only a few studies. The scant attention afforded to this genre contrasts sharply with its potential cultural and historical significance (Stahl, 1993; Russell & Yañez, 2003). In light of this dearth of research, it is imperative to explore Javanese Verses literature comprehensively. Doing so can shed light on unique aspects of Javanese culture, language, and history, enriching our understanding of this vibrant literary tradition and rectifying the scholarly oversight that has persisted for so long (Houston, 2004).

Given these considerations, this research aims to explore and unearth historical values by rejuvenating the latent potential within literary works through digitization and contemporary adaptation of ancient scripts (Starre, 2015). Consequently, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which Pesantren literature, as a representation of historical literary heritage within coastal culture, can enhance community empowerment. In essence, this study investigates how coastal literature and folklore hold promise as an alternative avenue for the establishment of a creative industry capable of generating new employment opportunities, serving as a community guide, and facilitating a fresh approach to understanding diverse local wisdom within the context of modernity (Fang, 2012). Moreover, by amalgamating coastal literary creations with the creative industry sector, they can offer a distinctive appeal that can significantly contribute to the development of seaside tourism.

## 2. Theoretical Review

As documented in historical records, the success of Islamic da'wah (Islamization) in Java can be attributed to the pivotal role played by Islamic scholars, whose significant contributions transformed Islamic values (Ismail, 2011; Ibad, 2023). Through the institution of Pesantren, Islamic thought and intellectual traditions have been meticulously transmitted across generations, fostering the growth and development of a network of Indonesian Islamic intellectuals (Aydin, 2017; Salama, 2011). This phenomenon can be traced back to the era of eminent scholars such as Sheikh Sheikh Abdur Rauf As-Singkili, Abdus Samad Al-Palembani, Hamzah Fansuri, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Makassari, Nuruddin Ar-Raniri, Syamsuddin As-Samatrani, Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari, among others (Wibowo & Nurnaningsih, 2019). This tradition persisted and culminated in the generation of scholars represented by figures like Kyai Ihsan Jampes, Imam Nawawi Al-Bantani, and Kyai Saleh Darat (Salih bin Umar Al-Samarani, d. 1321/1903), flourishing during the 17th to 19th centuries. Subsequently, in the 19th century, the legacy continued with the emergence of Pesantren scholars who authored books and literature. Notable among them were KH Mahfudz from Tremas, who resided and taught in Mecca during the early 1900s, and KH Ihsan bin Muhammad Dahlan from Jampes Kediri, renowned for his work 'Siraj Al-Thalibin.' Additionally, a scholar from Java, KH Bisri Mustofa, made significant contributions, producing over twenty Pesantren works (Naldi, 2022). Other prominent Javanese scholars include KH Muslikh from Mranggen (Muslikh bin Abd Al-Rahman Al-Maraqi, d. 1981), the individual who wrote numerous works concerning the Qadiriyyah and Naqsabandiyah Sufi orders, and Ahmad 'Abdul Hamid Al-Qandali from Kendal (Azra, 1995).

This showed that historical records vividly demonstrate the profound impact of Islamic da'wah in Java, with its success owing greatly to the pivotal role played by Islamic scholars. These dedicated

scholars made significant contributions that not only transformed Islamic values but also paved the way for the enduring legacy of Indonesian Islamic intellectualism (Bayat, 2013; Ebaugh, 2009). The institution of Pesantren emerged as a crucial vehicle for the preservation and transmission of Islamic thought and intellectual traditions across generations. This meticulous transmission, dating back to the era of esteemed scholars such as Sheikh Abdur Rauf As-Singkili, Sheikh Abdus Samad Al-Palembani, Hamzah Fansuri, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Makassari, Nuruddin Ar-Raniri, Syamsuddin As-Samatrani, and Muhammad Arsyad Al-Banjari, laid the foundation for the growth and development of a network of Indonesian Islamic intellectuals (Huda, 2021). It shows that the enduring contributions of these scholars and the institutional framework of Pesantren have left an indelible mark on the intellectual, cultural, and religious heritage of Java, shaping the trajectory of Islamic thought and scholarship in the region. Their legacy continues to inspire and guide subsequent generations of scholars and learners, serving as a testament to the enduring power of knowledge and intellectual pursuits in the context of Islamic history and culture in Java (Aydin, 2017).

This Islamic intellectual tradition is evident through its written legacy encompassing Islamic education, thought, and culture (Nurfaizal, 2018). Consequently, traces of Islamic intellectuals are discernible within classical religious texts containing various Islamic teachings, such as tauhid, tafsir, ahlak, fiqh, and the teachings of tasawuf, collectively referred to as Pesantren literature (Munip, 2016). However, in Indonesia, this literary tradition has waned since the ascendancy of the thought of Imam Nawawi Al-Bantani from Banten, whose works found extensive use in India and Middle Eastern countries. Several factors have contributed to the decline of the writing tradition among Indonesian scholars from that time until recently. One notable factor is the increasing impact of oral culture, which has become institutionalized within the traditions of Islamic society, leading kyai (Islamic scholars) to prefer imparting their knowledge through recitations and lectures (Abdullah, 2023). The second is a weakened literacy ethos within the Pesantren tradition in Indonesia, primarily due to the prevalent practice of oral teaching, whether in the form of religious lectures or the oral transmission of religious texts (manqul and sorogan) in Pesantren. The third is a shift in people's priorities from the pursuit of knowledge in the sciences to other domains, such as politics and economics (Dhoffer, 1982; Abdullah, 1995). These factors have collectively contributed to the diminishing prominence of written traditions among Indonesian scholars, marking a transition towards oral traditions and a shift in academic focus.

As it progresses, coastal literature can be classified into two primary traditions: written and spoken. The written aspect of Pesantren literature involves a range of texts such as Pesantren verses, Al-Barzanji poetry, Burdah poetry, nadhoman, and more (Oktafrian & Nurizzati, 2018). Pesantren Verses are usually crafted using diverse references like the Holy Quran, Hadith, Burdah, Syaraful Anam, and others, interwoven with the author's imaginative flair. For instance, the work 'Verses Abu Nawas' features Abu Nawas's supplications to Allah in pursuit of His divine favor. Other notable examples include 'Verses Tomba Ati' and 'Verses Erang-erang Sekar Panjang' by Kyai Siradj Payaman Magelang (Rahman, 2021). These works delve into themes ranging from the torments of hell to the pleasures of heaven.

### 3. Research Methods

Typically, this research employs philological techniques alongside methods for studying oral tradition. The philological method was utilized for text description and editing. Meanwhile, the method of researching oral tradition was used to gather field data concerning text reading, transmission, and the recording of oral text reading activities within the Pesantren tradition. The research design for this study aims to explore the capacity of coastal literature and folklore as a foundation to create a creative sector that could offer job opportunities, serve as a community guide, and offer insights into local wisdom within the context of modernity (Schofield & Szymanski, 2011). The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining philological methods and oral tradition research methods to investigate the subject matter comprehensively. This approach involves the

systematic study of written texts. Researchers employ philological methods to describe, analyze, and edit textual material related to coastal literature and folklore. This includes scrutinizing written works for linguistic, historical, and cultural insights. The philological analysis helps in understanding the textual content and its implications for the study's objectives.

This study has undertaken both catalog research and fieldwork, encompassing an examination of the National Library Catalog and the private collections of Kyai Sholeh's family, along with manuscripts and books related to Faithur Rahman (Abdullah, 2023). Additionally, it draws upon the Syarah Al Hikam manuscript of KH Sholeh Darat, which is preserved at the Sholeh Darat Mosque under the guidance of Dadapsari, Semarang (Mawahib et al., 2017). The rationale behind this research lies in the manuscript's status as a valuable cultural heritage of the archipelago from past centuries, still accessible today. Consequently, there is a need to conduct a philological and thematic study of this manuscript, with a particular focus on understanding the principles of KH Sholeh Darat's preaching which promotes religious harmony. This approach involves observing and recording oral text reading activities, documenting narratives, and conducting interviews with practitioners. Oral tradition research methods allow for the collection of firsthand accounts and experiences related to coastal literature and folklore, offering a rich source of qualitative data. To analyze the findings, researchers compare the findings from philological and oral tradition analyses to gain a comprehensive understanding of coastal literature and folklore. This comparative analysis helps identify commonalities, differences, and the role of these traditions in contemporary society. The research analysis integrates findings from philology and oral traditions with insights from fields such as cultural studies, sociology, and creative industries (Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2012). This interdisciplinary perspective enhances the study's depth and breadth. By employing these research methods and approaches, the study aims to provide a holistic exploration of coastal literature and folklore, shedding light on their potential for creating a vibrant creative industry, promoting community development, and preserving local wisdom in the modern era.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This research delves into a spiritual phenomenon that thrives and evolves within the context of Pesantren. One notable spiritual activity that flourishes in Pesantren is known as Pesantren literature (Mujab, 2017). The term 'Pesantren literature' refers to literary works that originate and develop within the Pesantren environment, encompassing both the physical and spiritual realms. Noteworthy characteristics of Pesantren literature include the following. Pesantren literature is predominantly composed in Arabic and is typically written in Arabic script (Munip, 2016). At times, Pesantren literature may be composed in the new Javanese language with Arabic-pegon script. It emerged and gained momentum during the 18th century, experiencing rapid development in the 19th century. Pesantren literature encompasses both oral and written traditions. It is often recited during specific ceremonies and occasionally performed as a form of performing art. Pesantren literature exhibits varying degrees of influence from Arabic and Persian literature (Ricci, 2011).

Among the literary creations of Pesantren in both written and spoken forms are the *Manakib Syekh Abdul Qadir Al-Jailani*, *Naskah* (script) *Al-Barzanji*, *Nadlaman*, *Nashar*, *Qasidah Burdah*, *Syi'ir* (Verses), *wirid*, *hizb*, *wifik*, and *rajab* (Auliani & Alfadhli, 2023). These literary texts are recited during religious ceremonies like births, circumcisions, and various festivities. During these ceremonial occasions, the literary texts are frequently recited in performances accompanied by tambourine music, serving as a form of expressive art. Reading *wirid* and prayers serves as a form of communication between individuals and their God, functioning both as an act of worship and a means of seeking protection within society (Abdullah et al., 2021). Hence, it persists, sustains, and safeguards its presence amidst the diverse challenges of the era.

Humans employ various forms of social behavior to sustain their livelihoods (Homer & Kahle, 1988). One way humans address their health concerns is by seeking out shamans. Dukuns, often regarded as "smart individuals," are believed to possess the ability to aid patients in seeking healing

or resolving life's burdensome challenges. In practice, shamanism in society is rich with diverse local elements, imbued with magic, and encompasses multiple ethnic and cultural influences. Therefore, the prevalence of the shamanistic model is greatly influenced by belief systems, religious frameworks, worldviews, and the cultural context from which it originates (Abdullah, 2022).

One of the cultural legacies of coastal communities is the literary output of Pesantren. *Pesantren* literature comprises a body of literary works, including religious texts, oral traditions, and poetry that originated and evolved within the *Pesantren* environment, pertaining to both doctrinal and ritualistic teachings, as well as logical and spiritual instruction (Salaeh, 2023). Among the characteristics of *Pesantren* literature are (1) *Pesantren* literature is typically composed in Arabic and written using the Arabic script, (2) at times, *Pesantren* literature is written in the modern Javanese language using Arabic-Pegon script, (3) emerging and flourishing around the 18th century, *Pesantren* literature experienced rapid growth during the 19th century, (4) *Pesantren* literature comprises both oral and written traditions, (5) *pesantren* literature is typically recited during specific ceremonies and occasionally presented as a form of performing arts, and (6) *Arabic or Persian literary traditions somewhat influence Pesantren literature* (Srinio et al., 2024).

Within the realm of *Pesantren* literature, there exists a category of translated literary texts. An illustrative example includes the translation of Arabic-language works into Javanese. *Pesantren* scholars, such as KH Bisri Mustofa, KH Sholeh Darat, KH Abul Khoir, KH Abdul Chamid, and others often undertook these translations. The process of translating these texts into Javanese introduced a fresh perspective, contributing to the emergence of a unique interpretation of Islam in the Nusantara region. One noteworthy translated work is 'Faithur Rahman' authored by KH Sholeh Darat As Samarani (Afwadzi & Miski, 2021). Significantly, 'Faithur Rahman' is recognized as the world's initial Arabic commentary. Alongside the book 'Sarah Al Hikam,' 'Al Fathur Rahman' served as a bridge for the Javanese people to comprehend Islamic teachings. This process of Islamization through the translation of Arabic-language books gave rise to a distinctive form of Islam in Indonesia, one that harmonizes with the language, culture, and local wisdom of the archipelago. This transformation marked the genesis of what we now recognize as 'Islam Nusantara' (Schmidt, 2021).

Islam Nusantara represents the form of Islam that originated and developed in Indonesia, characterized by its deep integration with local wisdom (Maarif et al., 2022). The incorporation of local wisdom has rendered the face of Islam Nusantara more inclusive and embraced by the local communities. KH. Sholeh Darat stands as an eminent figure among Nusantara scholars, playing a pivotal role in fortifying the essence of Islam Nusantara through the translation of Arabic texts into Javanese, including the 'Faithurrahman Book.' Kyai Sholeh's works fall within the genre of *Pesantren* literature, which emanated from coastal communities (Wajiran, 2020). These coastal communities have contributed significantly to the corpus of *Pesantren* literature, serving as a reflection of the manifestation of Islam in the archipelago. On the contrary, a distinguished scholar from Central Java, KH Ahmad Rifai, introduced the concept of "Islam Satu" or "One Islam." Islam Satu condenses the five pillars of Islam into a single pillar, emphasizing the recitation of the shahada as the primary focus, as outlined in the *Syarihul Iman*. Despite the ensuing controversy, KH Ahmad Rifai remained steadfast in upholding his principles. These two scholars' contributions shed light on the evolution of Islamic thought, particularly in the context of Islam Nusantara and the concept of Islam Satu, within the history of Islamic philosophy in the Indonesian archipelago (Bakry & Gunawan, 2018). KH Sholeh Darat, as part of his Javanese da'wah and Islamization model, skillfully harmonizes Shari'a teachings with tarekat in his teachings.

To preserve and revitalize *Pesantren* literature in the face of globalization and modernization, it's important to adapt it to today's world while keeping its core values intact. This adaptation could involve using modern digital platforms, like social media and e-books, to share these works widely. This would make them more accessible to younger audiences who are increasingly engaged with global discussions. Educational programs that highlight the importance of *Pesantren* literature in current Islamic thought can also help people appreciate its relevance today. Workshops and seminars that focus on analyzing these texts can promote active participation and connect traditional

teachings to contemporary issues.

Additionally, collaboration between Pesantren scholars and cultural institutions is vital for documenting and promoting this literature. By creating archives, organizing literary festivals, and starting translation projects, the unique stories and wisdom found in Pesantren literature can reach a wider audience, both locally and globally. Involving local communities in these initiatives ensures that the literature addresses modern issues, reinforcing its importance in Indonesia's cultural landscape. Through these various approaches, Pesantren literature can not only survive but also thrive, enriching both local and global understandings of Islam while meeting the challenges of the modern world.

## 5. Conclusion

Pesantren literature emerged and evolved with a primary focus on worship, encompassing both vertical and horizontal forms of prayer, particularly emphasizing the concept of self-approach to Allah (*taqarrub ilallah*). Many of the Pesantren works take the form of translations from Arabic into Javanese and are dispersed across various regions, aiding in the comprehension of Islamic teachings in the Javanese context. These translated works have significantly contributed to enhancing the understanding of Islam among the general populace in Javanese society. Furthermore, they have modernized the interpretation of religious concepts in Java, simplifying the process of learning about Javanese Islam. Within the translated literary pieces in Pesantren literature, Islamic mystical texts are also included, including *wirid*, *wifk*, *hizib*, and *raja*. These oral texts serve multiple functions, such as facilitating worship, warding off jinn, countering magic and witchcraft, acting as self-defense mechanisms, promoting trade, fostering love (*mahabbah*), and more. In the Pesantren tradition, students, having completed their studies in foundational subjects like Arabic grammar, Sharia sciences (*fiqh* and worship), Quranic interpretation, and tasawuf (esoteric knowledge), further refine their knowledge by delving into "*ilmu tuwo*" (traditional knowledge) disciplines, such as *wirid*, *hizib*, *wifk*, and the practice of *raja* inscription.

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