

## INTERWEAVING JAVANESE CULTURAL WISDOM AND ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP ETHICS: AN ANALYSIS OF ARJUNA IN ARJUNAWIWAHA

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Received: June 15, 2025

Revised: September 1, 2025

Accepted: September 23, 2025

### Abstract

*This study addresses the growing need to reinterpret classical Javanese figures through an Islamic ethical lens, offering a unique framework for understanding indigenous models of moral leadership. Previous studies have not yet examined how the concept of leadership in Arjuna Wiwaha can be interpreted through the framework of Islamic moral and ethical principles. Therefore, this study offers a novel perspective by integrating Javanese cultural wisdom and Islamic leadership ethics to reinterpret Arjuna's character as a model of moral and social leadership in the Javanese-Islamic context. The aim of this paper is to examine Arjuna's leadership as depicted in the Javanese puppet story of Arjunawiwaha, focusing on the integration of Javanese social wisdom and Islamic moral leadership. In the context of Javanese-Islamic reinterpretation, Arjuna, traditionally considered a holy man in Hindu-Buddhist legends, is reimagined as a perfect pioneer. Using a cultural hermeneutic approach and comparative analysis, this investigation examines how Islamic leadership principles, including trust (Siddiq), dependability (Amanah), insight (Fathanah), and the obligation to convey the truth (Tabligh), are integrated into Arjuna's leadership narrative. The study, furthermore, highlights key Javanese social values such as humility, resilience, and wisdom, adapted from Islamic moral lessons. Through a careful examination of Arjunawiwaha,*

*this paper illustrates a method of social adjustment and integration, which examines knowledge of how Javanese Islamic characters shape conceptualizations of governance in conventional and modern environments. The use of an interdisciplinary approach that integrates Javanese cultural wisdom and Islamic leadership ethics in analyzing the character of Arjuna in the Arjunawiwaha is a perspective still rare in leadership studies based on classical Javanese literary texts. This research thus positions the Javanese-Islamic leadership synthesis as a relevant ethical paradigm in Southeast Asia and beyond. The finding also offers a framework for culture-based leadership training integrating Javanese and Islamic values to foster ethical, culturally sensitive, and spiritually grounded leaders.*

Penelitian ini menanggapi meningkatnya kebutuhan untuk menafsirkan kembali tokoh-tokoh klasik Jawa melalui lensa etika Islam, dengan menawarkan kerangka unik untuk memahami model kepemimpinan moral yang bersifat lokal. Penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya belum mengkaji bagaimana konsep kepemimpinan dalam Arjuna Wiwaha dapat diinterpretasikan melalui kerangka prinsip moral dan etika Islam. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif baru dengan mengintegrasikan kearifan budaya Jawa dan etika kepemimpinan Islam untuk menafsirkan kembali karakter Arjuna sebagai model kepemimpinan moral dan sosial dalam konteks Jawa-Islam. Makalah ini menganalisis kepemimpinan Arjuna sebagaimana digambarkan dalam kisah pewayangan Jawa tentang Arjunawiwaha, dengan fokus pada penggabungan kearifan sosial Jawa dan moral kepemimpinan Islam. Dalam konteks penafsiran ulang Jawa-Islam, Arjuna, yang secara tradisional dianggap sebagai orang suci dalam legenda Hindu-Buddha, dibayangkan kembali sebagai seorang pelopor yang sempurna. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutika budaya dan analisis komparatif, penyelidikan ini menyelidiki bagaimana prinsip-prinsip kepemimpinan Islam seperti kepercayaan (Siddiq), ketergantungan (Amanah), wawasan (Fathanah), dan kewajiban untuk menyampaikan kebenaran (Tabligh) dimasukkan dalam kisah kepemimpinan Arjuna. Pengkajian tersebut, lebih jauh, menyoroti nilai-nilai sosial Jawa yang utama seperti kerendahan hati, ketahanan, dan kearifan, yang diadaptasi dari pelajaran moral Islam. Melalui penelaahan Arjunawiwaha yang cermat, makalah ini menggambarkan metode penyesuaian dan integrasi sosial, yang mengkaji pengetahuan tentang bagaimana karakter Jawa-Islam membentuk konseptualisasi pemerintahan dalam lingkungan konvensional dan modern. Penggunaan pendekatan interdisipliner yang mengintegrasikan kearifan budaya Jawa dan etika kepemimpinan Islam dalam menganalisis tokoh Arjuna dalam Arjunawiwaha, sebuah perspektif yang masih jarang dalam kajian kepemimpinan berbasis teks sastra klasik Jawa. Sehingga penelitian ini bisa menempatkan sintesis kepemimpinan Jawa Islam sebagai paradigma etis yang relevan di Asia Tenggara dan sekitarnya. Temuan penelitian ini juga menawarkan kerangka pelatihan kepemimpinan berbasis budaya yang mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Jawa dan Islam untuk membentuk pemimpin yang beretika, peka budaya, dan berlandaskan spiritual.

**Keywords:** *Islamic leadership ethics, Javanese culture, Arjunawiwaha, intercultural study, cultural adaptation*

## Introduction

Discourse on leadership and leaders is a topic that is continuously and actively discussed. Leadership itself is defined as an individual's ability to instill confidence in others so that they willingly agree to carry out the individual's will or ideas (Kartono, 2003). Leadership is closely tied to the character inherent in the person of the leader. The Qur'an discusses many aspects of social and political life, one of which is leadership. In the Qur'an, leadership is expressed using various terms such as *Khalifah*, *Imam*, and *Uli al-Amri* (Zuhdi, 2019). Leadership in Islam is not measured solely by power or authority, but by moral and ethical qualities that reflect the principles of religious teachings. This is embodied in the figure of the ideal leader according to Islam, namely the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), through the model of prophetic leadership (Zuhdi, 2019).

From an Islamic perspective, the concept of leadership also possesses a spiritual dimension, though with an emphasis that differs from other viewpoints. Islam teaches that leadership is a trust (*amanah*) that must be borne by individuals who possess competence, integrity, and noble character (Riam & Putri, 2024; Zuhdi, 2019). In the Qur'an, Allah says: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice." (QS. An-Nisa: 58). This indicates that leadership in Islam is not determined by lineage or supernatural signs, but by competence, justice, and the trust given by the community.

The concept of Islamic leadership is interesting when juxtaposed with Javanese leadership, which is more metaphysical in nature. In the Javanese perspective, leadership is not only based on the power of authority and influence, but also on moral exemplarity, self-control, and harmony with cosmic and social values. Leadership in Javanese culture is ideally manifested through the teaching of *Astabrata*, namely the eight leadership traits derived from the characteristics of nature and the gods, which reflect the perfection of a king's or leader's behavior (Adhit & M. Asbari, 2024; Andoko et al., 2022; Endraswara, 2013; Floriana et al., 2018; Aziz, 2013; Perdana & Sobri, 2021; Wahyudi, 2011).

Even so, there are points of convergence between the metaphysical view of Javanese thought and Islamic spirituality, particularly in the belief that a

leader must not only be intellectually and administratively capable but also possess noble inner qualities. In this context, Javanese literature containing leadership philosophy can serve as a contemplative space that unites local values with the universal teachings of Islam, thereby producing a more holistic understanding of leadership—intelligent in mind, pure in heart, and just in action.

Discussing leadership is indeed very engaging. Leadership remains imbued with nuances and cloaked in symbolic systems and myths. In the past, leaders were regarded as chosen by the gods, and thus any order issued by the king was considered a divine utterance that had to be obeyed and carried out by the people. There existed a strong societal belief in the parallelism between the macrocosm (*jagat gede*) and the microcosm (*jagat cilik*). Within this perspective, the king occupies not only the top of the social hierarchy but also the pinnacle of supernatural leadership. This belief is reflected in the conception of the God-King, or in Javanese, *Ratu-Binanthara*—a notion representing the position of the leader in Javanese society as the representative of the gods on earth (Anderson, 1990; Suseno, 1984).

One of the figures who represents leadership values in a cultural context is Arjuna, who is often depicted as a wise and considerate leader (Mulder, 2001). The character of Arjuna is known as an ideal hero—a leader who possesses extraordinary physical and mental abilities. However, the understanding of Arjuna's leadership within the context of Javanese culture is often inseparable from the development of Islamic teachings that have also influenced the social life of Javanese society. The tale *Arjunawiwaha*, one of the well-known stories in the *Mahabharata* epic, presents a depiction of Arjuna's struggle in facing leadership challenges that go beyond mere warfare.

In the historical and cultural development of Javanese society, the representation of leadership as reflected in the figure of Arjuna cannot be separated from the dynamics brought about by the arrival of Islamic teachings, which subsequently enriched the meaning and values of local leadership. Islam entered Java in the 15th century and had a significant impact on the transformation of local culture, including in the sphere of leadership. As stated by Aziz (2013), Islam in Java not only functioned as a religion shaping spiritual beliefs but also became a foundation for building a more civilized social character through the values of fair and wise leadership. Thus, in the context of Javanese-Islamic culture, Arjuna as a *wayang* character can be viewed through the lens of Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of

justice, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and responsibility in leadership.

The character of a leader emerges as an ideology and principle of leadership that is wise and firm, yet remains grounded in the nature of an ordinary human being. Meanwhile, other leadership styles often assume that a leader must always occupy a superior position in order to be consistently respected by subordinates (Perdana & Sobri, 2021). The concept of leadership—or what is also referred to as the philosophy of leadership—that will be used as a reference for analyzing leadership in this study is the concept of *Asthabrata* leadership. Broadly speaking, society recognizes many philosophies of leadership (Adhit & M. Asbari, 2024), such as the *Tribrata* philosophy, the leadership philosophy of Gajah Mada, the leadership philosophy of Sultan Agung, and the *Astabrata* philosophy. However, this study will focus on *Astabrata*, which originates from a Hindu text in Sanskrit, the *Manawa Dharma Sastra*. *Asta* means eight, and *Brata* means acts of self-control or conduct. *Astabrata* is a teaching of eight leadership elements that serve as advice or guidance given by Sri Rama to Wibisana during his coronation as king of Alengka Pura. Likewise, it is part of Sri Rama's teachings to Bharata. The leadership concept in *Asthabrata* teaches that a leader must have *wiweka*, that is, a cautious attitude in behavior and in decision-making, because the people will emulate every action of their leader. It can be said that the behavior of the leader reflects the behavior of the people (Andoko et al., 2022; Selvarajah et al., 2017; Weatherbee, 1994).

The *Astabrata* teaching is, in principle, a process of *dewataisasi*—that is, endowing a leader with divine qualities so that the people under his leadership may live in prosperity and happiness (Endraswara, 2013). The concept of *Astabrata* leadership is a Hindu leadership philosophy in which a leader is likened to possessing the power of eight gods who are manifestations of God dwelling within him. This teaching, of course, guides a leader toward achieving harmony within the society or organization he leads (Aryawan, 2021). The eight teachings of *Astabrata* contain various doctrines that are highly influential in determining whether a government can run successfully or not.

Another definition related to *Asthabrata* is conveyed differently by Tedjowirawan, who explains that the *Asthabrata* teaching initially adopted the characteristics of the gods, but later shifted to embrace the characteristics of natural elements of the universe, including *kisma* (earth/soil), *tirta* (water), *samirana* (wind), *samodra* (ocean/sea), *candra* (moon), *baskara* (sun), *dahana* (fire), and *kartika* (star), which are also referred to as the traits of the mountain. This concept aligns with the *Asthabrata* teachings conveyed by Yasadipura I

(1729–1803) of the Surakarta Palace, who explained that a leader's character must be in accordance with the *Asthabrata* principles (Endraswara, 2013).

The study of *Asthabrata* originates from ancient Hindu scriptures, particularly the *Manawa Dharma Sastra* written in Sanskrit, which outlines eight divine leadership traits. This cultural value has been historically passed down through Javanese traditions such as the art of *wayang* and the drama *Wahyu Makutha Rama* (Andoko et al., 2022). *Asthabrata* means the “way” that must be undertaken by someone who becomes a leader (Endraswara, 2013). The eight “ways” are personifications of eight natural elements that serve as models for the character of a leader. If a person—not only a leader—is able to embody these eight elements, then they will become a person of noble character and high moral conduct.

The meaning of the *Asthabrata* teaching, when interpreted deeply, does not stop merely as a doctrine for leaders but can be applied by all people. The context of leadership is not limited to the relationship between rulers and their people, because, in essence, every person is a leader—at least for themselves. This statement aligns with the opinion of Aryawan (2021), who states that the concept of *Asthabrata* can also be applied by ordinary individuals to improve the quality of their inner self and soul in the effort to perfect themselves and their lives. Every human being is essentially a leader—at the very least for themselves, and on a broader scale, as a leader of their family and environment.

According to the research of Floriana et al. (2018), *Asthabrata* is a leadership concept originating from Javanese and Hindu culture, meaning “the eight behaviors of the gods,” namely confidence, openness, communicativeness, facilitation, interactivity, politeness, and attentiveness to performance. In line with that research, Aryawan (2021) explains that the philosophy of *Asthabrata* directs a leader to embody the traits of eight deities in Hinduism: *Indra Brata*, *Surya Brata*, *Yama Brata*, *Bayu Brata*, *Candra Brata*, *Baruna Brata*, *Agni Brata*, and *Kuwera Brata*. Within *Asthabrata* leadership lies a conceptual framework that can serve as a tool or medium to reduce conflict.

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of Arjuna's leadership in *Arjunawiwaha* through a cultural hermeneutic approach and a comparative analysis of the harmonization between Javanese and Islamic leadership values. This research explores the meeting points and harmonization of local and Islamic leadership principles in shaping the characteristics of Indonesian local leadership. The urgency of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which integrates Javanese cultural wisdom and Islamic leadership

ethics in analyzing the character of Arjuna in *Arjunawiwaha*. This perspective remains rare in leadership studies based on classical Javanese literary texts.

Previous studies on Javanese classical works such as *Arjuna Wiwaha* have primarily emphasized moral integrity (Sulaksono et al., 2021), explored symbolism and ideology (Budi & Susilo, 2025), and examined the ethical structure of these works (Mukaffa, 2018). The role of a leader can be considered central and strategic, as a leader is expected to serve as a motivator, communicator, and mediator in the process of development (Wahyudi, 2011). Therefore, this current study fills a research gap by relating the Javanese classical work *Arjuna Wiwaha* to the context of Islamic leadership.

This study is significant because, in many literary works and traditional performing arts, the fusion of religious elements and local cultural values often produces leadership models that are not only historically relevant but also applicable in contemporary society. As explained by Wahyudi (2011), leadership within Islamic culture in Java cannot be separated from the processes of assimilation and adaptation between Islamic principles and local wisdom, which emphasize morality and social sustainability. Although studies on the values of *Astabrata* as a leadership philosophy in Javanese culture have been widely conducted, and the principles of Islamic leadership have also been extensively analyzed from normative-theological perspectives, there remains a lack of research that philosophically compares the values of both traditions to construct a contextual leadership model rooted in the local Islamic wisdom of the *Nusantara*. This research is important because it offers a synthesis of Javanese-Islamic leadership as an alternative ethical paradigm that is relevant for Southeast Asia elevating local wisdom into a regional leadership discourse that is more inclusive and deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual values.

## Method

This study employed a cultural-hermeneutic approach and a comparative analysis. The analysis process began by identifying words, phrases, and sentences in the text that referred to Arjuna's leadership. The hermeneutic assessment was divided into two stages: comprehension hermeneutics and explanatory hermeneutics. Comprehension hermeneutics was used to decipher the literal meanings of linguistic elements. Explanatory hermeneutics was used to explore the deeper or implied meanings contained within the text, particularly those related to leadership values (Wachid et al., 2015).

This approach was used to illustrate the interaction between Islam and

local culture, as well as its conceptual contribution to Islam Nusantara and to studies on local leadership. The primary data source for this research was the transcript of a wayang performance by the *dalang* Sunaryo Guna Prayitno from Sanggar Dwija Laras, Purworejo. The data consisted of words and sentences that represented leadership values. The data were validated through theoretical validation and source validation. The study explored information related to the object of study by describing systems of signs that could provide an in-depth understanding (Sutopo, 2002).

The data-collection technique used in this study was content analysis. Content analysis supported the interpretation of the text under examination—not merely by noting explicit content in documents or archives, but also by uncovering implicit meanings (Sutopo, 2002). Thus, understanding the leadership values in *Arjunawiwaha* was not merely an investigation of cultural heritage but also an effort to construct a leadership paradigm rooted in the identity and spiritual values of the Indonesian people.

### Finding and Discussion

Exploring leadership philosophy through literary texts is indeed a worthwhile endeavor. This is based on the understanding that literary works represent the socio-cultural conditions of a society. The philosophy of leadership is an interesting subject of analysis, particularly because the Javanese are an ethnic group with distinct characteristics and unique ways of interpreting and perceiving the world. Javanese leadership is metaphysical in character, often associated with spiritual concepts such as *wahyu* (divine revelation), *pulung* (charismatic blessing), *drajat* (rank), *keturunan* (lineage or ancestral descent), and so on. It is as if the ability to lead is not viewed as an acquired capability but rather as a miraculous gift.

When viewed through the classification proposed by Hobman et al. (2011), the Javanese leadership doctrine of *Astabrata* falls under the trait approach—that is, an understanding of the traits and attitudes proper to a leader. As emphasized by As'ad et al. (n.d.), *Astabrata* is rooted in the philosophical notion that effective leadership is shaped through understanding and emulating the characteristics symbolized by eight natural elements: earth, sea, sky, stars, sun, moon, wind, and fire. Each element carries a distinct symbolic meaning that reflects the characteristics of the ideal leader according to Javanese culture.

The analysis of literary works—particularly those that examine leadership philosophy through *wayang* narratives—was considered appropriate by the

researcher. This choice is justified by the fact that *wayang* stories are closely tied to Javanese life and are rich in philosophical meaning. The *Arjunawiwaha* episode is one of the best-known *wayang* narratives and has been widely studied by scholars.

### **Synthesis of Javanese Spiritual Leadership and Islamic Leadership**

The interpretation of leadership in Javanese culture cannot be separated from a metaphysical and spiritual framework of thought. In the *Arjunawiwaha* text, Arjuna's leadership does not merely arise from intellectual capacity or physical strength but from a spiritual practice (*laku*) undertaken with full sincerity. The ascetic practice (*tapa brata*) performed by Arjuna prior to receiving the mandate from the gods symbolizes inner readiness, submission to a higher power, and sincerity in carrying out responsibility. In this context, leadership is the result of a deep process of self-purification.

This Javanese wisdom converges strongly with leadership values in Islam, particularly in spirituality, morality (*akhlak*), and moral responsibility. Islam views leadership not as a hereditary privilege but as a trust (*amanah*) (Qur'an, Surah Al-Ahzab: 72) for which one will be held accountable before Allah SWT. In a hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Each of you is a leader, and each of you is responsible for your leadership."

The connection between the concept of *Asta Brata* leadership and the Prophet's leadership lies in symbolic traits: the sun (*rahmatan lil'alamin*), the moon (gentle, full of compassion), the stars (*qudwah hasanah*), and the wind (humble and attentive to the people). A detailed explanation is presented below.

**Table 1.** Interconnection between Javanese Leadership and the Leadership of Prophet Muhammad

Asta Brata in Arjunawiwaha	Meaning of Leadership	Islamic Values	Leadership Characteristics of Prophet Muhammad
Sun	The leader gives light and life, is just, and shines on everyone.	R a h m a t a n lil 'a l a m i n , justice without discrimination	The Prophet was a mercy to all worlds (QS Al-Anbiya:107), just to both friend and foe.

Asta Brata in Arjunawiwaha	Meaning of Leadership	Islamic Values	Leadership Characteristics of Prophet Muhammad
Moon	Calming, gentle, comforting, full of love.	Gentleness, compassion	The Prophet was gentle with his companions (QS Ali-Imran:159), even to his enemies.
Stars	Role model, direction giver, “guide to the path.”	Q u d w a h hasanah (good example)	The Prophet is the ultimate example in all aspects of life (QS Al-Ahzab:21).
Wind	Listen to the people, present without arrogance, flexible, close to the people.	H u m i l i t y , listening to the ummah	The Prophet often discussed with companions, accepted criticism, never acted superior despite being Allah's messenger.
Ocean	Big-hearted, patient, broad-minded, able to embrace differences and social dynamics.	T o l e r a n c e , p a t i e n c e , openness	The Prophet forgave those who harmed him, such as during the Conquest of Mecca (Fathu Makkah).
Fire	Firm against falsehood, uncompromising in justice.	<i>Amar ma'nuf nahi munkar</i>	The Prophet upheld justice firmly, without tyranny. His firmness was full of wisdom.
Water	Refreshing, cooling, cleansing, beneficial.	Brings benefit, s o u r c e o f goodness	The Prophet purified the people with knowledge and character (QS Al-Jumu'ah:2).
Earth	Benefits others without expecting return, full of sincerity and wholeheartedness.	Sincerity for Allah alone	The Prophet never sought reward (QS Saba:47), dedicating his entire mission solely to Allah.

### ***The Sun Trait (Rahmatan lil 'alamin, Justice without Discrimination)***

The interweaving of the Prophet Muhammad's leadership with that of Arjuna can be observed through the concept of *Asta Brata*, particularly the principle that a leader should embody the qualities of the sun. A leader, like the sun, must provide illumination, warmth, and energy evenly to all corners of the earth. Similarly, a leader should be capable of offering motivation and sharing knowledge with those they lead. This principle is reflected in the dialogue of Bathara Narada, who says:

*Bathara Narada*: *Wani menika wau adhi Guru, mboten ateges jejering ratu utawi tetungguling dewa ingkang ngasta panguaos lajeng kumingsun kumelewat kados dene tiyang ingkang ngregem jimat menika babar pisan mboten. Naming bilih titah wonten madya pada menika tertampu badhe ngraosaken kalih perkawis wonten bingah wonten sisah, wonten padhang wonten peteng, wonten begja lan wonten cilaka.* [To be brave does not mean that a king or divine ruler who holds power should become arrogant, like someone who possesses a talisman—absolutely not. It means that beings in this middle world will experience both joy and sorrow, light and darkness, gain and loss].

In this passage, *wani* conveys a profound leadership value, referring to the ability to face life's dualities with wisdom. It illustrates that a leader's bravery must be grounded in discernment and resilience across diverse circumstances. In this discourse, the sun serves as a metaphor for the ideal qualities of a leader. A good leader is likened to the sun, which radiates light, warmth, and energy evenly throughout the world. This symbolizes a leader's responsibility to enlighten, motivate, and educate those under their care (Peyton et al., 2019; Salas-Vallina et al., 2020; Selvarajah et al., 2017).

This principle is also reflected in the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). One example can be seen during a battle between the Muslims and the Quraysh, in which seventy prisoners from the Quraysh were captured. Even in that context, the Prophet demonstrated compassion, mercy, and wisdom toward his enemies. Another striking example appears in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, where the Prophet stated: "If Fatimah bint Muhammad were to steal, I would cut off her hand." This hadith underscores that the Prophet's justice did not discriminate, not even in favor of his own daughter. His commitment to justice was absolute—just as the sun shines impartially on all creation.

Arjuna, as depicted in *Arjunawiwaha*, represents a leader who is prepared not only physically and intellectually but also spiritually. When confronted with worldly temptations in the form of celestial maidens, Arjuna remains steadfast (*istiqamah*) in his ascetic practice. This mirrors the Islamic concept of *taqwa*, a deep inner awareness and commitment to remaining on the righteous path even when faced with severe trials. Such leadership, which emerges from spiritual discipline, is inherently oriented toward devotion rather than ambition, and toward service rather than domination (Zuhdi, 2019).

In this light, the synthesis between Javanese local wisdom and Islamic values provides a meaningful contribution to the development of leadership paradigms in Indonesia. Leadership need not be viewed as a dichotomy between

local cultural heritage and religious doctrine. Instead, it can be contextualized as a coherent and integrated value system—one that is spiritual, ethical, and humanistic in nature. In an era increasingly defined by pragmatism and the pursuit of power, such an approach offers a reflective, accountable, and welfare-oriented model of leadership (Olifiansyah et al., 2020; Zuhdi, 2019). These values should serve as the foundation for cultivating leadership that is principled, rooted in character and integrity, and grounded in the wisdom of noble traditions.

### ***The Moon Trait: Gentleness and Compassion***

The second trait that highlights the interconnection between the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad and Arjuna is the *moon* aspect within the *Asta Brata* doctrine, which symbolizes gentleness and deep compassion. A leader, like the moon that brings light in the night, should provide direction and resolution when the people face difficulties.

*Bathara Masna: Dawa ki yen pance mempengan ora kaya Bethara Masna. Ora kakehan gunem, ning sing baku tandhang grayange, solah bawane mrantasi. Nyatane during nganti sakkedheping Netra mungsuhe njerbabah. Butane mati. Iki lho Kang kadangipun Kakang. Adhi Bethara Penyarikan sawangen, wong yen umure tuwa ora mung umure sing okeh, ning kapinterane, kawruhe ya tuwa. Mula diarani piyayi sepuh yen disep ilmune kuwi ampuh. Mula Adhi Penyarikan aja ngremehke, kawruhipun Kakang aja ngremehke, aja ngina karo wong tuwa. Nyatane jeneng ulun maju neng palagan, ulun tamakne jemparing. Butane mati, Mamangdana mati.* [A true god is not like Bathara Masna. He does not talk much, but his actions his deeds and conduct—are complete. Proof? In less than a blink of an eye, the enemy falls. The giant dies. This is the real brother of Kakang. Look, dear Penyarikan. An old person is not merely measured by age, but by wisdom and profound knowledge. That is why one is called elder when their knowledge holds power. So don't underestimate it. Do not insult the elder. When I stepped into the battlefield and released an arrow, the giant Mamangdana was slain].

In this dialogue, Bathara Masna represents the ideal concept of leadership through the symbol of the Moon (*Laku Hambeging Candra*). The moon, with its role as a light in the darkness, serves as a metaphor for a leader who must be capable of finding a path forward when the people are confronted with difficulties. Masna asserts that a great leader does not need to speak excessively; what matters most are concrete actions and behaviors that produce thorough and meaningful outcomes. The phrase “*ora kakehan gunem, ning sing baku tandhang grayange, solah bawane mrantasi*” (“not too much talk, but what truly matters are actions—conduct that leads to resolution”) underlines the primacy of tangible deeds over rhetorical performance in leadership. This representation

is reinforced by Masna's concrete example of battlefield action—demonstrating how decisive conduct led to victory and the defeat of giants. The implication is clear: effective leadership is defined not by words, but by results—by the capacity to confront and resolve real-world challenges.

In this dialogue, Masna also reminds listeners of the importance of respecting the wisdom and experience of elders and warns against underestimating the intellectual and moral authority that comes with age. This moment reflects a dynamic of power in which the more seasoned figure provides critical advice to the younger one, signaling that honoring knowledge and accumulated insight is fundamental to becoming an effective leader. This reflection aligns closely with the *Asta Brata* philosophy, which holds that a leader must emulate specific traits and personal dispositions—not merely performative virtues, but deeply internalized qualities of character (Andoko et al., 2022).

This interconnection is also evident in Islamic leadership, as reflected in Qur'anic verse *Ali 'Imran* 3:159: "It is by the mercy of Allah that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you." This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud, when some companions made tactical errors that led to the Muslims' defeat. Despite the gravity of the mistake, the Prophet did not scold or harshly punish them. Instead, he responded with gentleness, forgiveness, and consultation. This illustrates that a leader's primary focus when facing problems must be on finding solutions—not assigning blame. A wise leader is one who maintains peace, provides resolution, and seeks a way out of every crisis with discernment and grace (Alkattani & Ramdanu, 2023; Faujiah & Muslihah, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2020).

A similar quality is reflected in Javanese cultural leadership, especially in the figure of Arjuna, who is portrayed as a leader with a gentle heart. Throughout the narrative, Arjuna is never depicted as harsh; rather, he is consistently shown as someone who exercises self-control. Like the Prophet Muhammad SAW, Arjuna demonstrates that effective leadership is not determined by brute force or power, but by the ability to lead with heart, gentleness, and wisdom.

This has significant implications for modern leadership, particularly in a complex social landscape often marked by conflicting interests, polarization, and waning public trust. The leadership values of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Islam, like those of Arjuna in Javanese culture, emphasize gentleness, self-restraint, and heart-centered leadership. These values offer an alternative

model for contemporary leaders to adopt a more humanistic and ethical approach. To foster inclusive, visionary, and sustainable leadership environments, it is increasingly crucial to embrace leadership styles centered on empathy, wise communication, and spiritual-emotional maturity. By integrating these values, modern leaders can build strong moral legitimacy and earn genuine trust from the people they serve.

### ***Qudwah Hasanah (Good Example)***

The third aspect illustrating the interconnection between the leadership of Prophet Muhammad SAW and Arjuna lies in the exemplary nature of their character, symbolized by the star. A leader is expected to become a moral compass, someone who guides and inspires their people through personal example.

*In the words of Bathara Narada: Perkara ngulungake gampang. Nanging yen nganti Ulun ulungake widadari klawan Ratu Gusti kita. Padha karo Ulun nerak pepali, nerak bebaya. Gajah midak rapah, palang mangan tandhuran. Gawe pranatan ning ora dilakoni, gawe pranatan lha kok malah diterak dhewe. Mundhak ora kajen para dewa. [Giving is easy. But if I were to give a celestial nymph to our Lord the King, it would mean breaking the taboo, violating the rules. Like an elephant trampling an ant, or a barrier consuming a crop. Making rules but not following them, even breaking them oneself, such a leader would lose the respect of the gods].*

The star symbol (*Laku Hambeging Kartika*) represents a leader as a beacon—one who provides direction and embodies the values they espouse. Narada emphasizes that true leadership is not merely about generosity or symbolic gestures but about upholding ethical standards and respecting moral boundaries. His statement implies that good leadership must be grounded in principles and adherence to rules. It also illustrates the critical importance of consistency between what a leader says and what they do.

The intertwining of Javanese philosophy and Islamic ethics is also expressed in QS Al-Ahzab 33:21: “Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) you have a good example (*uswatun hasanah*) to follow—for the one who hopes for (the mercy of) Allah and the Last Day, and who remembers Allah often.” The *Tafsir* of QS Al-Ahzab 33:21 by Imam Ibn Kathir underlines that this verse serves as a firm basis for making Prophet Muhammad SAW the role model in all aspects of life—including patience, steadfastness, and sincere perseverance in seeking Allah’s guidance.

The alignment between the figure of the Prophet and that of Arjuna can also be seen in their spiritual disposition. The Prophet was steadfast

in worship and deep contemplation, while Arjuna reflected this spiritual dimension through his meditative retreat to Mount Indrakila, choosing isolation to distance himself from worldly desires. This mirrors the Islamic concept of *taqwa*—a deep inner consciousness that guides one to remain on the straight path even amid relentless trials. Leadership rooted in spiritual practice, as demonstrated by both figures, tends to be devotional rather than ambitious, and service-oriented rather than controlling. By integrating these values, a modern leader can build strong moral legitimacy and earn genuine trust from those they lead.

The spiritual connection between the Prophet and Arjuna thus offers a vital insight for contemporary leadership: a leader's true strength arises from reflection and self-restraint, not merely strategic power. In today's world—dominated by the pursuit of material success, popularity, and political power—a spiritually based approach to leadership provides an alternative path: deeper, more ethical, and more sustainable. A leader who acts from a place of service will be better equipped to earn trust, uphold integrity, and deliver social justice (Salwa & Rohimat, 2025). In this context, spiritual practice is not separate from the public realm; rather, it becomes the ethical foundation that guides a leader's direction and decisions amidst the complexities of the times.

### ***The Wind-like Trait (Humility, Listening to the People)***

A leader must embody the principle of *Laku Hambeging Samirana*. A good leader is one who can position themselves anywhere, at any time, and in any circumstance. A leader with the trait of wind is not easily shaken by external pressures or the will of others.

*Bathara Narada: Jeneng kita sakkadang didhawuhi supaya nggiri-godha, supaya nggodha tapane Begawan Ciptaning. Yen digodha mengko kokjogar ateges wurung ora entuk gawe, ora entuk kamulyan, ora nampa kebegian. Ning yen mengko kita sakkadang nggodha Begawan Ciptaning kok tetep panggah madhep manteb nggone nglakoni tapabrata ateges lulus saka pendadaran.* [We have been ordered to tempt, to test the meditation of Begawan Ciptaning. If he wavers, if he succumbs to temptation, then he fails. He will not gain his purpose, not attain glory, not receive fortune. But if we tempt him and he remains steadfast in his meditation, then he will pass the test.]

In Javanese philosophy, the element of wind (*Laku Hambeging Samirana*) represents flexibility and adaptability. A leader with the quality of wind is expected to navigate through various situations and conditions without losing direction or core principles. The wind also symbolizes a gentle yet penetrating

force—it reaches everywhere, brings coolness, and offers calm. This subtle power of the wind serves as a metaphor for a leadership style that does not dominate but influences and stabilizes.

In the dialogue between Bathara Narada and his companions, they are instructed to tempt Begawan Ciptaning during his meditation. Should Ciptaning waver and yield to temptation, he would be deemed to have failed—rendered unfit for his designated role, unworthy of honor, and undeserving of divine favor. This concept finds resonance in the Qur'anic verse, *Surah Al-Furqan* 25:63: “And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth humbly, and when the ignorant address them harshly, they respond with peace.”

This is where the interweaving of Javanese philosophy and Islamic ethics becomes evident. The Javanese concept of *tapa*—a practice of intense meditation and self-discipline—can be paralleled with the Islamic notion of *mujahadah*, the spiritual struggle against one's own desires aimed at inner purification (Suwandi & Setyobudi, 2020). Likewise, the Javanese understanding of *wahyu* or *pulung*—seen as a form of mystical legitimacy for leadership—can be reinterpreted through an Islamic lens not as supernatural favoritism but as *taufik* and *hidayah*: divine guidance granted to those who sincerely strive and dedicate themselves to service (Daryono, 2021). It reinforces the view that localized leadership models, when critically examined, reveal profound resonance and continuity with Islamic leadership ideals.

## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is evident that there is a fundamental convergence in meaning and function between Javanese and Islamic concepts of leadership. Moreover, Javanese philosophy and Islamic ethics are not inherently contradictory; rather, they can be mutually enriching when interpreted contextually. This means that Javanese spirituality does not need to be seen in opposition to Islam; instead, it can be understood as a cultural expression that aligns with the core principles of the Islamic tradition. A model of leadership rooted in spirituality offers a deeper and more sustainable alternative. A leader who builds actions on a foundation of service and devotion is better positioned to foster public trust, uphold integrity, and promote social justice.

In this light, spiritual practice is not something detached from public life; it serves as an ethical compass that shapes decisions and direction in the face of contemporary challenges. The practical implications of this study

can be applied in culture-based leadership training programs that integrate Islamic values. By using the synthesis of Javanese and Islamic leadership values exemplified by Arjuna in *Arjunawiwaha* as a model, such training can be directed at developing leaders who possess not only strategic competence but also character, ethical commitment, and rootedness in local wisdom.

Values such as *andhap asor*, *waskita*, and *sabar*, together with the principles of *siddiq*, *amanah*, *fathanah*, and *tabligh*, can equip participants with a leadership framework that is contextual, spiritual, and relevant to the challenges of leadership in multicultural societies. This leadership model—a synthesis of Javanese and Islamic values—has the potential to be applied widely across Asia and beyond, particularly in multicultural contexts that require ethical, inclusive, and locally grounded leadership approaches.

### Acknowledgment

This article is part of the research output funded by the UNS PNBP scheme in 2022 under contract number 254/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2022. The authors would like to express their gratitude to Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) for providing the opportunity to receive this competitive research grant.

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