

SINTREN'S SACRED CADENCE: Journeying into the Mystical Dimensions of Spiritual Rhythms

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Abstract

This article investigates the mystical dimension embedded within the traditional Javanese performance art of Sintren, revealing its function as a medium for spiritual experience and transcendence. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study draws on Annemarie Schimmel's theoretical framework on Islamic mysticism and incorporates in-depth analysis of Sintren performances, alongside field research involving practitioners, artists, and audience members. The research seeks to understand how Sintren facilitates spiritual engagement and mystical encounters within a cultural and performative context. Findings demonstrate that Sintren operates not merely as a ritual or cultural performance, but as a tangible expression of mysticism deeply rooted in Javanese spiritual consciousness. Through the interplay of music, dance, trance states, and symbolic language, Sintren creates a sacred space in which participants and observers alike experience a connection with the Divine. This mystical interaction transcends performative boundaries, offering both performers and audiences moments of transcendence and inner transformation. The study underscores how traditional art forms serve as vital vehicles for spiritual expression, embedding metaphysical themes within cultural practices. By highlighting the convergence of art and spirituality, this research contributes to broader discourses in religious studies, anthropology, and performance theory. It also underscores the urgent need to preserve and critically study cultural expressions like Sintren, which encapsulate rich, localized interpretations of the sacred. Ultimately, this research affirms that traditional art forms are not only aesthetic

phenomena but also powerful conveyors of mystical experience and spiritual identity within indigenous cultural frameworks.

Keywords: *javanese culture; mystical dimension; sintren art; spiritual experiences*

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Introduction

Indonesia, as a rich country in cultural diversity, possesses a variety of arts that hold deep spiritual significance. Traditional Indonesian arts are not merely forms of entertainment or creative expressions; they also reflect beliefs, religious values, and spiritual practices of the society. In many traditional arts such as *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppetry), traditional dances, and music, there is a strong presence of mystical and spiritual dimensions. For example, in Javanese *Wayang Kulit*, each character carries symbolic meaning (Loita 2018, 60-65; Masroer 2017, 38-61; Nurcahyo 2018, 1069-1076; Purbasari 2012, 1-8) and represents the conflict between good and evil (Hadiprayitno 2009; Setiawan 2020), teaching moral values to the audience (Alfaqi et al. 2019; Kushendrawati 2016; Purwanto 2018). Similarly, traditional dances like the Balinese *Pendet* dance are considered sacred and offered as a tribute to the deities (Dasih 2018, 6). These arts mirror the profound spiritual life of Indonesian communities and their belief in the existence of a supernatural world interconnected with daily life. This demonstrates that art in Indonesia serves not only as a vessel for artistic expression but also plays a powerful role in preserving and passing down spiritual values to future generations.

Previous research in the study of art and spirituality has been extensively conducted. During the author's investigation, three categories of previous studies were identified. First, studies on symbolism and spiritual meaning in art (Ardiyanto & Hidayati 2015, 347-352; Ilyas & Abidin 2017, 807-811; Laksmi 2010, 73-84; Rusianingsih & Timur 2020, 90-101). The second category focuses on the analysis of religious iconography in art (Casande 2010, 112-133; Putra et al. 2018, 41; Sari & Pramono 2008, 73-84). The third category encompasses the spiritual expression through traditional art and music (Mawardi 2013, 131-147; Murtana 2011, 61-69).

This research offers a fresh contribution to the field of art and spirituality by specifically focusing on traditional Indonesian art, particularly the art of Sintren. Sintren is a traditional performing art consisting of a dance performance carried out by women in a trance state (Wahidin 2013, 29). While categorizing prior research, this study enhances the understanding of how art can function as a medium to deepen spiritual experiences among individuals and communities.

Several previous studies on the traditional performing art of Sintren can be categorized into three main themes that explore different aspects. First, in the category of cultural and traditional aspects of Sintren, Pamuji (2022) delves into the phenomenon of Sintren performance from coastal areas and its contribution to community empowerment through anthropological perspectives. Meanwhile, Nurlelasari, Herlina, and Sofianto (2017) shed light on the historical and cultural dimensions of Sintren performance in Indramayu, while Devi (2012) addresses preservation strategies in Brebes, underscoring the significance of safeguarding this cultural heritage. The second category, education and propagation values in Sintren performances, illustrates how Sintren serves as a medium for transmitting educational values and religious messages. Research by Soleh, Sulaiman, and Casta (2020) reveals the transformation of Islamic educational values through Sintren performances in Cirebon. Irmawati (2020) emphasizes religious propagation in this art form, demonstrating how symbols and meanings in Sintren performances convey religious messages. Conversely, study of Asmara and Kusumaningrum (2019) presents a model of childhood sex education through the symbolic interpretation of Sintren dances, highlighting the connection between educational values and performing arts. Lastly, the third focus centers on the Representation of Women in Traditional Sintren Performances. Agustina's research (2021) underscores how women in Sintren performances often fall victim to harmful stereotypes, emphasizing the importance of advocating for more inclusive and accurate portrayals of women within this traditional art form. By categorizing these studies into distinct themes, we observe that Sintren performing art encompasses a rich cultural dimension, educational and religious potential, and consideration for the role of women in the development and preservation of this traditional artistic heritage.

Despite previous research that delved into symbolism, religious iconography, and the influence of art on spiritual experiences, this study fills a knowledge gap by exploring the dimension of mysticism in Sintren art. In the context of Indonesia, Sintren art holds profound and strong spiritual value, yet it has not been extensively researched. Therefore, this study provides a unique position that complements the existing categories of previous research.

By exploring aspects such as spiritual rhythms, the use of mystical symbols, and personal experiences within the practice of Sintren art, this research aims to enrich our understanding of the relationship between art, spirituality, and Indonesian culture. Thus, this study contributes to the global understanding of art and spirituality while providing more specific insights into traditional Indonesian art.

Through this approach, this research creates a space for further investigation that can involve the development of new theories, innovative research methods, and a deeper understanding of how art can serve as a spiritual medium and enrich human experiences. Thus, this research positions itself as a valuable new contribution to the study of art and spirituality, with a specific focus on Sintren art in Indonesia.

Based on Annemarie Schimmel's Islamic mysticism theory, the hypothesis of this research is that Sintren art contains dimensions of mysticism reflected in Divine love, emphasis on personal experience, and symbolic and metaphorical understanding (Schimmel 2011). In Sintren art, artists and art enthusiasts experience a profound expression of love for the Divine through their artistic practices, such as through songs and movements that depict a spiritual connection with the Divine. Moreover, Sintren art provides individuals with an opportunity to experience a deep personal relationship with the Divine through the internalization and practice of spiritual teachings embedded in the art. Additionally, Sintren art employs symbolic and metaphorical language that enriches the understanding of mystical dimensions in Islam, for instance, through the use of dance movements, musical melodies, and costumes that carry spiritual meanings and messages. Therefore, this hypothesis asserts that Sintren art contains dimensions of Divine love, emphasis on personal experience, and symbolic and metaphorical understanding as integral parts of mystical practices in Islam.

Research Method

The object of this research is Sintren, a traditional art originating from Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. Sintren art has deep cultural roots in the Cirebon society and is often associated with spiritual values in the context of daily life. Sintren art involves a combination of dance, singing, and music, blending traditional and religious elements (Darmoko 2014, 115-125). In this research, the main focus will be on the dimensions of mysticism contained within Sintren art, particularly in terms of Divine love, emphasis on personal experience, and symbolic and metaphorical understanding (Schimmel 2011).

This research employs a qualitative methodology which involves three main stages: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. Through this scientific approach, the study strives to provide a detailed and comprehensive portrayal of the dimensions of mysticism within Sintren art. By utilizing participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, this research aims to uncover further insights into the spiritual richness in this traditional art form. The chosen methodology elucidates new perspectives on the significance of Divine love, personal experiences, and symbolic understanding as fundamental elements within Sintren art.

Through participatory observation, the researcher actively engages in the performances of Sintren art in Cirebon. The researcher carefully observes every element of the performance, from graceful dance movements and heart-stirring singing to the captivating use of mystical symbols. The goal of this observation is to gain a profound understanding of the aesthetic and spiritual experiences inherent in Sintren art.

Additionally, in-depth interviews are conducted by the researcher with Sintren artists, performers, audience members, and community figures related to Sintren art in Cirebon. These interviews aim to obtain individual perspectives and experiences related to the dimensions of mysticism in Sintren art, including their personal experiences and symbolic understanding. By listening to their narratives, the researcher can gain richer insights into the meanings and spiritual values embedded in Sintren art.

After gathering data from observation and interviews, content analysis is performed. The data is systematically and deeply analyzed, seeking thematic patterns and meanings related to the dimensions of mysticism in Sintren art. This analytical process aims to explore a deeper understanding of the spiritual aspects contained in Sintren art, as well as to identify the role of Divine love, emphasis on personal experience, and symbolic and metaphorical understanding in shaping the mystical dimension of this art.

Results and Discussion

The History of Sintren's Development

Cirebon is a region in West Java where the spread of Islam was carried out by Sunan Gunung Jati. He propagated Islam through a cultural process, where he touched upon the cultural aspects of the community, such as arts, by incorporating Islamic nuances. This was possible because the Cirebon community was tolerant of accepting elements from outside influences. Moreover, the people were open to embracing other cultures (Rusydi 2014, 328). Thus, Islam smoothly integrated into the culture of the Cirebon community.

However, the people could not completely eliminate the traditions inherited by their ancestors before the arrival of Islam. This led to the blending of local culture and Islam, resulting in the formation of a unique new culture. The people of Cirebon could not entirely let go of the belief in nymphs or spirits in nature. Nevertheless, above all, they believe in the one God, as prescribed in Islam.

Sintren is an art form imbued with magic and Islamic values. It also grew and developed during the time of the Islamic saints (*wali*). At that time, the saints were actively engaged in preaching. During the spread of Islam in Indonesia, the rituals of Sintren were modified to adhere to more Islamic principles.

During the period of the Islamic spread in Indonesia, Sintren, which was originally used as a ritual of worship to ancestral spirits and a means of communication with spirits, transformed into a form of worship to God. This transformation began with changes in its verses, which became more Islamic in nature. The *wali*, who had the mission of spreading Islam, gradually modified the traditions of Sintren, starting with its verses. The verses used became a medium for preaching. The cultural

approach taken by the *wali* was necessary due to the strong adherence of the Cirebon community to Hindu-Buddhist customs.

Similarly, Javanese songs, which previously contained teachings of earlier religions, were transformed into Islamic praises that extolled the greatness of Allah. The following verse demonstrates how Islam entered the art of Sintren.

<i>Waris lais terapnang sandang ira</i>	The lais charmer fitted your clothes
<i>Dunung alah dunung</i>	Master, oh master
<i>Si Dununge bahu kiwa</i>	Master of the left shoulder
<i>Pangeran kang lara tangis</i>	Loving and Merciful God

The *lais* charmer (*waris lais*), is a *lais* player (Sintren player) who symbolizes creatures (human beings). *Terap nang sandang ira* (fitted your clothes) represents all the desires and behaviors of humans. *Dunung alah dunung* (Master, oh master), symbolizing Allah, the Almighty who deserves to be worshipped. The phrase “*dunung alah dunung*” means that we should only worship Allah. *Si Dununge bahu kiwa* (Master of the left shoulder) signifies that God is not far from us. God is All-Knowing of all our actions. *Pangeran kang lara tangis* refers to the Most Compassionate and Merciful God, whom we serve and seek help from. Allah loves all His people and shows affection to those who are pious (BI 2019).

Changes also occur in the interpretation of symbols displayed in the Sintren ritual. As explained by LW from Purwawinangun village, Kapetakan district, the main actors in Sintren, namely the Sintren or *Lais* and the puppeteer or *Pawang* Sintren, totaling two people, symbolize the two declarations of faith (*Shahada*). Meanwhile, the musical instruments (*waditra*) totaling four symbolize faith, monotheism (*tauhid*), mystical knowledge (*ma'rifat*), and Islam. The *waditra* totaling five symbolize the five pillars of Islam. Furthermore, there are also 20 people symbolizing the attributes of God, namely the *nayaga* (musicians), song carriers, and other players. The cage and the Sintren/*Lais* itself symbolize the physical and spiritual body that will be separated, similar to the cage left behind by the Sintren or *Lais* (LW 2019).

Five musical instruments used in the Sintren performance, consisting of two bamboo (tubes), one *gendi* (flute), one *buyung* (cylindrical drum), and *kecrek* (percussion), are interpreted as representing the five pillars of Islam. The *gendi* in Sintren music serves as a gong, and it is blown

regularly to produce the sound “*huu...huu...*” which signifies the recitation of the name of God (Allah). In the Syatariyah Sufi order that developed in Cirebon, the “*huu*” uttered with a regular and continuous rhythm signifies Allah.

EH stated that Sintren indeed is influenced more from Hindu-Buddhist teachings. However, the Islamic saints (*wali*) who integrated Islamic teachings have given new meanings to the symbols within Sintren according to Islamic teachings. One example is teaching “*sadaqah*,” which is when the audience throws money to the Sintren. This teaches the community about the act of giving alms (*sadaqah*) (EH 2019).

Furthermore, Sintren performers must also be young girls who are still virgins. This is intended as an adaptation to Islamic teachings, where virginity is associated with purity. As women are considered extensions of the divine manifestation, sacred and mystical, they are seen as being divine beings. Women possess both physical and spiritual aspects; the physical aspect being their consciousness, ability to think, and capacity for emotions and empathy. The spiritual aspect lies in their embodiment of the sacred and divine, while the physical aspect encompasses their bodies and reproductive organs. Despite the fact that, in Islam, a woman's body is considered '*aurat*' (a private part that must be covered), women in the culture cannot be replaced by men. This also indicates that the Islamic religion within the culture cannot completely alter beliefs that have been passed down through generations of Javanese society (BI 2019).

Sintren as a Ritual Art

Sacred performances occur when Sintren is played during ritual ceremonies. Ritual is a structured and patterned activity that holds symbolic meanings and cultural values, used to convey and guide behavior within a social group (Lisman et al. 2023; Pop 2014). Ritual performers are often influenced by various perspectives stemming from specific religions, cultures, or ideologies. There are crucial elements to consider in a ritual, namely space, time, and participants (Wuryaningrum et al. 2017). It cannot be done haphazardly but must be determined accurately and in accordance with customs and requirements. The main component is the participants; without them, the ritual cannot take place. The tools and sacred objects used in the ritual, such as offerings and other sacred items, are also essential components (Meliono 2004).

Initially, Sintren was a magical dance of coastal communities. It was performed while mothers and children were waiting for fishermen to return from the sea, with the aim of ensuring their safety. Additionally, it was used as a means to ward off evil spirits when fishermen did not get a good catch. Sintren as a ritual dance is also used during the ceremonies of “*sedekah bumi*” and “*nadranan*” at the Tomb Complex of Sunan Gunung Jati, annually. Furthermore, Sintren as a ritual dance is often used in the propagation of Islam.

In the form of Sintren that serves as a ritual dance, certain requirements must typically be fulfilled to ensure smooth communication with the unseen world and to avoid any obstacles during the performance. This is essential because any disturbances during the ritual not only endanger the dancer but also the audience. Requirements include having a female virgin dancer who has undergone a 40-day fasting called “*tirakat*” on Mondays and Thursdays. Additionally, she must wash her hair and bathe on Friday night with water from seven wells mixed with seven types of flowers, repeating the process 40 times. These measures are taken to ensure the smooth execution of the Sintren ritual, as it concerns the well-being of many people (Meliono 2004). Furthermore, essential conditions in the Sintren ritual include offering “*sesaji*” and using other ritual objects like incense. All of these are mandatory because these objects hold symbolic significance that connects the spiritual and earthly realms (Soedarsono 1999).

In ritual dances, Sintren dancers typically perform simple movements with no specific intentions other than serving the ritual purpose. Usually, Sintren dancers in ritual dances lift both hands and sway them unconsciously. Their movements are static, as if embodying the arrival of a heavenly nymph into the Sintren's body. However, it will be different for Sintren in performing arts, which will be discussed in the following section.

Supporting the Sintren ritual are the accompanying dancers, musicians, and singers, who must be able to facilitate the invocation of the heavenly nymph that will possess the Sintren's body. The accompanying music for Sintren is played using very basic musical instruments, but the accompanying songs must be predetermined. These songs function like incantations recited by the supporters of Sintren in the ritual. Songs like “*Turun Sintren*” (the descent of Sintren) play a significant role in summoning the heavenly nymph that will enter the Sintren's body.

In ritualistic Sintren performances, there is a boundary between the audience and the Sintren performers. This signifies that the Sintren dancers and their supporters exist in a different realm from ordinary humans. As a result, regular spectators are not allowed to approach the mystical world that the Sintren is entering. This demarcates the sacred and the profane realms, where the Sintren dancers are immersed in the sacred world, while the audience remains in the profane world.

The concept of sacredness recedes as mundane objects encroach upon the sacred domain (Eliade 1959), as illustrated in the Sintren ritual where observers toss money towards the Sintren. Money is symbolic of the profane, leading to the descent of the Sintren and the subsequent loss of control by the celestial nymph over the Sintren's form. This ritual highlights how the introduction of worldly elements can diminish the sanctity associated with the ritualistic space. The act of offering money by the audience serves as a representation of the secular world infiltrating the sacred ritual, causing a disruption in the spiritual connection between the celestial and earthly realms. The fall of the Sintren symbolizes the disruption of the divine influence that once guided the ritual, emphasizing the fragility of maintaining sacred boundaries. Consequently, the traditional reverence and purity linked with the Sintren are disrupted as the profane aspect embodied by money is accentuated. In essence, the Sintren ritual exemplifies the delicate balance between the sacred and the profane, highlighting how external influences can erode the sanctity of spiritual practices.

The Dimension of Mysticism in Sintren Art

Sintren art is a form of traditional art rich in spiritual and mystical dimensions. Based on Annemarie Schimmel's discussion of Islamic mysticism (Schimmel 2011), Sintren art becomes a concrete example of mystical expression in Javanese culture. Mysticism in Sintren art is not limited to ritual actions or worship but also involves profound spiritual experiences and a quest for the presence of the Transcendent.

In Schimmel's view, Sintren art serves as a window that opens the door to the spiritual dimension within Islam. Through singing, dance movements, and symbols embedded in it, Sintren art invites its audience to enter the mystical realm connected with the Divine. Personal experience in Sintren art holds significance in the pursuit of unity with God and aligning oneself with His will. Sintren art creates a space for

profound mystical experiences, where artists and spectators can sense the presence of the Transcendent and immerse themselves in the spiritual beauty radiating through every performance element.

Divine Love in Sintren Art

In Sintren art, there exists a profound dimension of love towards God, expressed through artistic practices. This dimension, referred to as Divine love or love for the Absolute in Schimmel's terminology, embodies a deep and profound affection towards the Divine.

Mysticism can be defined as love of the Absolute—for the power that separates true mysticism from mere asceticism is love. Divine love makes the seeker capable of bearing, even of enjoying, all the pains and afflictions that God showers upon him in order to test him and to purify his soul. This love can carry the mystic's heart to the Divine Presence “like the falcon which carries away the prey,” separating him, thus, from all that is created in time (Schimmel 2011, 4).

The concept of love for the Absolute becomes a central element in the appreciation and expression of Sintren Art. The artists and enthusiasts of Sintren art utilize singing, dance movements, and the heartfelt rendition of lyrics to express their love, admiration, and reverence for the Divine. Through these artistic practices, they endeavor to achieve a profound spiritual presence and align themselves with His will.

One example of this dimension is reflected in the following lyrics:

Waris lais terapnang sandang ira	The Lais charmer fitted your clothes
Dunung alah dunung	Master, oh master
Si Dununge bahu kiwa	Master of the left shoulder
Pangeran kang lara tangis	Loving and Merciful God

In the example of the verse mentioned above, we can see how the concept of Divine love is reflected in the art of Sintren. The lyrics express respect and admiration for Allah, as the Majestic Being worthy of worship. The phrase “*dunung alah dunung*” emphasizes that only to Allah must we submit. This reflects sincere and loyal love towards the Almighty.

Furthermore, the lyrics also depict the closeness and intimacy with God. The phrase “*si Dununge bahu kiwa*” indicates that God is not far from us. He is All-Knowing of all our actions, reflecting an understanding of His near presence and constant supervision. “*Pangeran kang lara tangis*” in

the verse refers to the Compassionate and Loving God, who serves as a place for us to devote ourselves and seek help. This portrays a close relationship between humans and God in the concept of divine love.

By using symbolic and metaphorical language, Sintren art is capable of deeply expressing divine love. Verses like these not only convey spiritual messages but also invite individuals to experience the presence of God and immerse themselves in His love more profoundly. This showcases how Sintren art becomes a means to experience and express divine love in the context of spiritual life.

In Sintren art, the dimension of divine love is also reflected through the interpretation of symbols used in the performance. The main characters, the sintren or *lais*, and the *dalang* or *pawang* sintren symbolize the two Islamic declarations of faith, the *shahada*. This demonstrates devotion and loyalty to Allah as a manifestation of divine love.

Furthermore, the musical instruments (*waditra*) used in Sintren performances also carry symbolic meanings related to the beliefs and teachings of Islam. The four *waditra* represent faith, monotheism (*tauhid*), gnosis (*ma'rifat*), and Islam, while the five *waditra* symbolize the five pillars of Islam. In the concept of divine love, the use of these symbols invites art enthusiasts to deepen their understanding of religious teachings and align themselves with the will of God.

Additionally, there are symbols that represent the attributes of God, such as the twenty *nayaga* (musicians), song carriers, and actors. This number depicts the abundance of God's attributes as understood in Islam. Through these symbols, enthusiasts of Sintren art are reminded of the magnificence of God and experience a sense of closeness to Him during the artistic practice.

The entire meaning of these symbols reflects the dimension of divine love in Sintren art. The use of these symbols serves as a means to express and immerse oneself in deep love for God and to connect with the spiritual aspects of everyday life. The dimension of divine love in Sintren art is manifested through the use of five musical instruments. In Sintren performances, two bamboo *bumbung*, one *gendi*, one *buyung*, and *kecrek* are used to represent the five pillars of Islam. Through the use of these musical instruments, enthusiasts of Sintren art are reminded of the importance of practicing religious teachings and strengthening their spiritual connection with God.

One of the integral musical instruments in Sintren performances is the “gendi.” The gendi serves as a gongs and is blown regularly, producing the sound “*huu... huu...*” which symbolizes the invocation of the name of God. In the context of the Shatariyah tariqah that flourishes in Cirebon, the rhythmic and continuous recitation of “*huu*” represents Allah. Thus, through the use of this musical instrument, enthusiasts of Sintren art are invited to experience and immerse themselves in the dimension of divine love towards the absolute God.

With this symbolic meaning, Sintren art becomes a medium for artists and enthusiasts to delve deeper into their love for God. Through the appropriate choice of musical instruments and sounds, enthusiasts of Sintren art can experience expressions and spiritual contemplation that draw them closer to the presence of God. The dimension of divine love reflected in the use of musical instruments and symbolic interpretation in Sintren encourages individuals to explore and strengthen their spiritual connection with the divine.

Emphasis on Personal Experience

The emphasis on personal experience is one of the dimensions of mysticism that is reflected in Sintren art. This concept is related to the Sufi tradition, which places great importance on direct and personal experiences with God. In the context of Sintren, artists and art enthusiasts have the freedom to experience and convey their spiritual experiences personally through their artistic practices. The Sufi practitioners, who always remain within the embrace of Islam, acknowledge the significance of personal experience in understanding tauhid, the belief in the oneness of God. In Schimmel's research (Schimmel 2011, 17), it is stated that Sufis are not bound by adherence to specific legal or theological schools, but they can achieve their spiritual goals through various approaches, without being confined by irrelevant dogmatic or theological differences.

In the context of Sintren art, the emphasis on personal experience provides individuals with the freedom to express and internalize their personal relationship with God. Sintren artists can explore and convey their spiritual experiences through dance movements, singing, and deep lyrical expressions. These experiences become bridges that connect individuals with the divine, transcending formal boundaries within legal or theological schools. In this context, Sintren Art becomes a medium for individuals to delve into the dimension of mysticism through their

personal experiences, deepening their spiritual connection with God, and attaining a deeper understanding of His unity.

One form of local culture is the traditional art of Sintren, which exists in Cirebon. The understanding of art is explained by several experts, including Sumardjo in his book titled "Filsafat Seni" (Philosophy of art), where he quotes the definition of art from various scholars, including Leo Tolstoy, who stated that art is a kind of 'union' between one human being and another. It is about giving and not receiving. What is given? The artist gives the feelings of their life experiences to others through the artwork. Art is an expression of feelings conveyed to others so that they can feel what the artist feels (Sumardjo 2000).

Art is intended as a religious ritual because religion itself is always connected to "something" beyond human-cultural experiences, or something transcendent. This transcendent element is believed to be a reality that can only be depicted through symbols. It is something that cannot be formulated by humans, but it is felt to be present, and one of the ways it can be expressed is through art.

Art emerges within human beings through sensory experiences. This sensory art awakens intellectual awareness and stirs emotions. In art, humans undergo a state of experiencing. They become one with the object of the experience, losing the dimensions of space and time. It evokes the experience of the "now," with no past or future. According to Jakob Sumardjo, this "now-ness" is "eternity." He expresses that art is an experience of the "other" and the "different," as it involves a structure of virtual events that provide a complete experience within an unexpected and unbounded system of relationships. Thus, in art, the virtual elements offer a refreshing experience and unexpected thoughts about the truth of values and meanings (Sumardjo 2000).

Art is a meeting point of truth and reality. An artist, scientist, philosopher, or religious person can embody symbols. The embodiment of these symbols requires intelligence to bring them into being. Art itself deals with spirituality, both in terms of reality and experience. Pre-modern art is not merely a concept and an experience but also a manifestation of spiritual presence. According to Sumardjo, the spiritual is the transcendent reality of the "empty" realm, which exists and is felt only in symbols. The symbols themselves are the transcendent reality. The presence of the transcendent is only in the realm of "now-ness" or

“eternity”; beyond that, the powers of the transcendent do not operate. Outside of rituals, art objects are considered profane.

Symbolic and Metaphorical Understanding

The understanding of symbolism and metaphor is a dimension of mysticism reflected in the art of Sintren. Schimmel explains that in the tradition of Sufism, symbols and metaphors are often used to depict spiritual realities. In the context of Sintren art, the use of symbolic and metaphorical language becomes an effective way to convey and comprehend mystical dimensions within Islam (Schimmel 2011, 4).

Sufism often employs symbols that refer to spiritual realities (Musa 2011, 189; Zafar & Jabeen 2022, 301), such as light symbolizing spiritual knowledge, spiritual journey representing the journey towards God (Jedoui 2019). Through the use of these symbols, Sintren art enriches our understanding of the mystical dimensions in Islam.

In Schimmel's explanations (Schimmel 2011, 383), it is often found in mystical poetry an intriguing combination between human love and divine love. Nostalgia for the beloved and yearning for union are expressed through symbols borrowed from human love. This creates a unique beauty and allure in the verses of mysticism.

An interview with LW from Purwawinangun village, Kapetakan district, provides additional insight into the symbolism in Sintren art. According to his explanation, the main performers in Sintren, namely sintren or *lais* and *dalang* or *pawang* sintren, symbolize the two declarations of faith (*shahada*) in Islam. Meanwhile, the number of musical instruments (*waditra*) totaling four represents faith, monotheism, gnosis (*ma'rifat*), and Islam. The use of five *waditra* represents the five pillars of Islam. There are also twenty individuals symbolizing the attributes of God, including the *nayaga* (lead singer), song carriers, and other players (LW 2019).

Furthermore, Sintren initially started as a folk performance, but as it evolved, its uniqueness became part of celebratory events such as circumcisions and weddings. However, it is more commonly presented during wedding ceremonies due to the resemblance of the sintren dancer's appearance to the bride. The origin of the name “sintren” or “wari *lais*” holds strong symbolism. “Wari” means water, and “*lais*” means sacred. This name symbolizes a young man who is seen as a pure hope for the nation.

Understanding the symbolism in Sintren art adds depth and spiritual significance to the performances. Through the selection of performers, the number of musical instruments, and the symbolism in the name, Sintren art not only serves as entertainment but also reflects religious values, togetherness, and profound aspirations. This enriches the experience and understanding of art enthusiasts regarding the mystical dimensions embedded in Sintren art.

EH's opinion indicates that although Sintren has its roots in Hindu-Buddhist teachings, the Islamic saints who adopted Islamic teachings have given symbolic meaning to the practice of Sintren in accordance with Islam. One example is the teaching about *sadaqah* (charity), where the audience throws money to the sintren performer. This action teaches the community to perform charity (EH 2019).

The teaching of “*sadaqah*” in the practice of Sintren is an effort to instill the values of goodness and social concern in Islam. By throwing money to the sintren performer, the audience is encouraged to cultivate a generous and compassionate attitude. This aligns with Islamic teachings that encourage believers to give charity as a form of caring for others and assisting those in need.

Through the teaching of “*sadaqah*” in Sintren, the Islamic saints (*Wali*) strive to integrate Islamic religious values with existing traditions and artistic practices. Thus, Sintren not only serves as a means of entertainment but also becomes a vehicle for conveying moral and spiritual messages to the community.

The clothing worn by the sintren in the performances holds specific meanings and symbolism. The “*baju golek*” upper garment worn by the sintren symbolizes appropriate dress code according to societal norms, especially in modestly covering the body. The use of “*jarit*” (a cloth) that must be below the knees carries the meaning of displaying the identity of a woman with proper and modest behavior (Asmara & Kusumaningrum 2015, 112-113).

The wide cloth belt used to tie the “*sampur*” holds the symbol of a woman's strength and resilience in fulfilling her roles in society. The “*celana cinde*” (traditional trousers), worn before putting on the “*jarit*,” symbolizes protection and readiness of women in taking care of themselves and preparing for all matters thoughtfully (Asmara & Kusumaningrum 2015, 113).

The “*sampur*,” cloth made of silk that is 3 (three) meters long, holds the meaning that women have the freedom and rights to make choices and choose their own partners. The “*jamang*,” a head adornment consisting of a crown and flower crown, symbolizes the beauty and dignity that women must uphold. The use of sunglasses by the sintren holds a symbolic representation of being selective and exercising self-control when looking.

Additionally, other accessories like the “*keris*” a type of traditional weapon also symbolize self-protection. All these accouterments form the identity and symbolism in Sintren practices, reflecting the values and roles of women in society. In the context of mysticism, these clothing and accessories can also be interpreted as means to achieve unity with the Divine, safeguard the purity of the heart, and cultivate a strong spiritual character.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that in the art of Sintren, there is a theological dimension reflected through aspects such as Divine love, personal experience, and symbolic and metaphorical understanding. According to Annemarie Schimmel's theory, art is considered a form of communication with the Divine, and this can be observed in the music, equipment, and lyrics of Sintren, which serve as pleas to God to manifest spiritual power. This study contributes to expanding our understanding of the relationship between art and spirituality in the context of traditional culture, highlighting the importance of studying and appreciating rich and complex cultural heritage like Sintren.

However, this research also has some limitations to be noted. Firstly, the focus of the study is limited to one aspect of Sintren, namely the songs and their lyrics. Other aspects such as dance movements, costumes, and social context may not be deeply examined. Additionally, this research relies on secondary sources and theoretical analysis, without involving field research or interviews with Sintren practitioners. This may restrict a more holistic and profound understanding of the spiritual experiences and artistic practices within the context of Sintren. Therefore, further research involving primary data collection and field studies can provide a more comprehensive insight into the mystical dimension of Sintren as well as the experiences and perspectives of practitioners.

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