

# WOMEN OF PERIPHERAL JAVANESE TRADITION

## A Nearly-Forgotten Inspiration

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify the women's contribution to the development of a peripheral Javanese community, Bagalen. This research is vital due to relatively scarce information about women's contribution in this area. So far, knowledge of community development is predominantly occupied by men or noblewomen. Library research develops this study. Hence, the authors collect data via research books and theoretical construction that are derived from relevant historical documents. The results reveal that peripheral Javanese women instead of central Javanese significantly contribute to preserving tradition and religion. In the past, the area was once led by a woman, namely Nyai Bagalen. However, the existence of women's leadership in the past didn't inspire the progress of women today. Then, the contribution of Bagalen women in preserving *dolalak* dance, upholding religious verses through Islamic verses and songs, is almost acknowledged by the public as a woman's effort in standing up for tradition and upholding their religion due to the prevailing hegemony. Hence, the knowledge should provide space to prove that the women's contribution is significant to the resources of the community so that community development is persistently inspired by its localities.

**Keywords**

Bagelen, women's contribution, knowledge, peripheral Javanese, tradition, Javanese women

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## INTRODUCTION: ARCHIVAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

This paper aims to identify women's contribution to a peripheral Javanese community, namely Bagelen. Geographically, Bagelen culture covers the southwestern part of Java. It is considered a Javanese subculture, not part of the central culture. The locus of power and culture called *negarigung* region—which could aptly be translated as center of power—encompasses Surakarta or the Principality of Solo and Yogyakarta (Koentjaraningrat 25-27). The Bagelen region, however, has only become a peripheral area since February 13, 1755, when the Giyanti Agreement, which was rife with Dutch colonial interference, took effect. This agreement has forced the Mataram Kingdom under Sunan Pakubuwana to be divided into Surakarta Sunanate and Yogyakarta Sultanate. It has likewise confirmed the power of Sultan Hamengkubuwana in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta who reigned over half of Central Java (Ricklefs 149). The Bagelen region, formerly belonging to *negarigung*, has become part of *mancanegara*, which means “beyond,” as the power change occurred. As now part of *mancanegara*, Bagelen always refers to how power is implemented from *negarigung*.

This research regards the contribution of women in a peripheral Javanese community. Previous research on the contribution of women to community development is dominated by research on Javanese women at the center of power. These include Nastiti's work entitled *Perempuan Jawa: Kedudukan dan Peranannya dalam Masyarakat Abad VIII-XV*. She studies the position and role of ancient Javanese women from the eighth to the fifteenth century. In addition, Carey and Houben wrote a book entitled *Perempuan-Perempuan Perkasa di Jawa Abad XVIII-XIX*. Both of the researchers described the powerful women in Java in the XVIII-XIX century. Adji and Achmad's book *Perempuan-Perempuan Tangguh Penguasa Tanah Jawa* also examines women who ruled Java. Different from the previous books, Permanadeli studies the social representation of Javanese women in the modern era in *Dadi Wong Wadon: Representasi Sosial Perempuan di Era Modern*. Moreover, Pangastoeti's article “Perempuan yang Terpinggirkan Dalam Penulisan Sejarah,” addresses the marginal position ascribed to women in the area of development due to the subjectivity in male-dominated historical writing.

The history of community development is indeed subject to the ruling authority. A king will assign his letterman to write according to the king's wishes. Generally, the news about Javanese rulers talks about the king's greatness, the prosperity of the people as evidence of the king's success, the conquest of a region, and so on. The development of society and power has an orientation to the center of power while the power is held by the king who subscribes to male dominance. Consequently, men profoundly produce a lot of knowledge. In contrast, the existence of women becomes invisible in community growth.

The study of the women present in the development of society is largely about women at the top positions—women as queens, royal women, or upper-class women—according to Irwan Abdullah, an anthropologist from Universitas Gadjah Mada (qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 1* 68). This confirms the male dominance that is present through kings or princes, to whom the journey of human history and public knowledge is attached and continues to be produced from time to time.

Hence, this investigation of women's activities in the Bagelen community—a peripheral Javanese culture—adds to the growing literature of the role of gender in Indonesian society and shows how women, either upper class or marginalized, can provide extensive contributions to social development. This study is divided into six sections: the first part shows the significance of research on the contribution of women in the traditions of peripheral societies; the second part presents the research method used, namely library research supported by theoretical constructions based on Bagelen historical sources; the third part describes the whereabouts of women leaders in Bagelen in the past; the fourth part explains the Bagelen women as preservers of art and culture; the fifth part reveals Bagelen women as upholders of religion; and the last section presents the conclusions of this study.

This study is grounded on library research (Bakker and Zubair 63). Hence, the materials were sourced from books such as *Sejarah Hari Jadi Kabupaten Daerah Tingkat II Purworejo*; *Konstruksi Posisi Perempuan dalam Masyarakat Bagelen: Sudut Pandang Budaya, Agama dan Politik* by Marwah, et al.; *Perempuan-Perempuan Perkasa di Jawa Abad XVIII-XIX* by Carey and Hoube; *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Masyarakat Kebumen* by Priyadi; and *Bagelen dan Mataram Kuno* by Penadi. Moreover, other books, supporting documents, articles and other similar sources were used in the study. This study also uses theoretical constructs based on related literature, such as chronicles, legends, and other historical and cultural documents. According to Suseno (4), theoretical constructs in modern science are built based on intuitive certainty to achieve logical clarity. The data are then analyzed by explaining, checking, comparing, conceiving, and categorizing. Through these processes, many assumptions used to explain phenomena are questioned and explored to obtain the findings.

## WOMEN LEADER IN BAGELEN COMMUNITY IN THE PAST

In central Javanese culture, society has two social strata, namely the lower stratum which is filled by *wong cilik/kawulo* (“ordinary people”), and the upper stratum is *gusti/penggede* (“the higher social”) (Moertono 19-20). In the Javanese view, each person has different powers based on their position in the hierarchy. People who

are in the higher social hierarchy must be respected. With Bagelen culture being peripheral Javanese, it has a more open and loose social structure, unlike central Javanese culture (Priyadi 191). Despite the presence of the upper class in the Bagelen region, feudalistic values do not strongly reflect the formed social order.

A discussion of the origin of Bagelen can reveal the position and contribution of women in the early development of the Bagelen community. Several versions explain the origin of Bagelen people. However, this paper uses official sources of the Purworejo Regency Government. According to *Sejarah Hari Jadi Kabupaten Daerah Tingkat II Purworejo*, the origin of the Bagelen people cannot be separated from *prasasti* ("inscriptions") later known as Prasasti Kayu Ara Hiwang or Prasasti Boro Tengah (823 AD). The events as inscribed in the "prasasti" are in the period of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in the era of Sri Maharaja Rake Watukura Dyah Balitung during the Hindu Mataram rule in Java.

In the inscription, there is no information about women. The figure in the inscription is Dyah Sala Putra Sang Raja Bajra, a senior officer of the Hindu Mataram Kingdom. This inscription describes the people of the Bogowonto River Valley living in prosperity, order, good religious life, with an orderly and authoritative government, and community cooperation. No information explains whether women have an important contribution to maintaining community prosperity and order at that time. The absence of information about women shows that those who produce knowledge are dominant male rulers who do not recognize women's contributions. Despite the absence of information on women, it should not be assumed that they have no contributions. In the case of Bagelen, prosperity and order cannot actually be separated from the dimensions of feminine traits attached to the women's capability to contribute significantly to fulfilling family needs and creating order and peace in the community.

In the history of Bagelen, the female figure attached to the Bagelen community is Nyai Ageng Bagelen. In Indonesia, the term "Nyai" has various meanings. Indeed, the term "Nyai" is often attached to a concubine of Dutch soldiers who came from indigenous women during the colonial period. Ananta Toer, for example, describes it in his novel *Bumi Manusia*. In the story, Nyai Ontosoroh becomes a strong and clever woman, even though her fate ends in bad luck. Another study by Hellwig entitled *Citra Kaum Perempuan di Hindia Belanda* also describes the bad luck of Nyai, an indigenous woman who became a concubine of Dutch soldiers. However, the term "Nyai" is also synonymous with the honorific call for the wife of the "Kyai" or the Islamic religious leader in Indonesia. Even for the people of West Java, the term "Nyai" is a general term for adult women. However, for Nyai Bagelen, "Nyai" means honor because of her position as a leader in the suburbs during the ancient Javanese era. The term peripheral, as mentioned at the beginning of this article,

refers to a peripheral Javanese community, namely Bagelen. This is a Javanese subculture—not belonging to the central Javanese culture, which is known to be located in Solo and Yogyakarta.

Unfortunately, the source of historiography about Nyai Bagelen is not provided in an inscription or chronicle but through the form of folklore passed down over the generation. Nyai Bagelen, who is described as a resilient farmer, is the ancestor of the Bagelen community. In terms of names, the address “Nyai Bagelen” with its name also shows cultural recognition of the important position of women. In this case, the woman recognizes her identity with her name, without relying on the husband’s name. It is likely influenced by the peripheral Javanese culture which is more egalitarian and freer than the central Javanese culture (Yogyakarta-Solo). That is, the identity of the female character itself is recognized and respected in the past. This identity is constructed in the context of both men and women through one’s name. Identity as men is signified as a male group, and becomes a marker of difference from the “confronted” group namely women (Woodward 2). The identity of Nyai Bagelen as herself is recognized by the community and her descendants, not hidden.

As time goes by, the gender bias issue has reduced the figure of Nyai Bagelen. When the community becomes a source of knowledge (Abdullah, qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 1* 68), the knowledge that is perpetually reproduced will also confront ideologies that prioritize men over women which causes the greatness of female characters to fade away due to gender bias. In this case, Mulder’s work, *Inside Indonesia Society Cultural Change in Java*, can help clarify the situation of gender bias. Mulder points out that Javanese people have a well-maintained share of symbolic roles. Men in the family take on roles in public affairs while women play roles in domestic affairs, as shown in Javanese expressions: *wong lanang nang ngarep, wong wedok nang mburi* (“men are in the front, women are behind, lit”). The basic principle of this division is complementarity. In the context of equality discourse, however, it does not refer to the same position as men. Despite its complementary purpose, as society develops, the women’s contribution is increasingly invisible and unknown to the public for persistently being “placed behind,” to complement the “front party.” As a result, the involvement of women has increasingly worn out and come to be unknown to the wider audience.

The Nyai Bagelen figure experienced a history gap in terms of knowledge by the public. As Abdullah (qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 1* 73) states, it is a case of female leadership becoming invisible to the public. Specifically, for Nyai Bagelen, the public’s lack of knowledge about her prevents her from taking the spotlight as a local female figure. Mythical matters much more symbolize the existence of the Nyai Bagelen figure although it obscures its real virtues. The capability of Nyai



Bagelen as a local leader who manages agricultural fields, raises livestock, and weaves textile is not widely exposed. Likewise, the traits of Nyai Bagelen as a determined, firm, and assertive woman are somehow forgotten by people.

Until now, the name Nyai Bagelen is still well-recognized in the Bagelen community, especially in Purworejo Regency. However, the public memory of Nyai Bagelen is only limited to the past figure that is closely related to magic and mysticism. Her presence as a leader in the periphery of Java denies her recognition in the historical development of a society dominated by men and popular figures. Male figures also dominate even the field of history writing. Ahimsa Putra (qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 2* 73), an anthropologist from Universitas Gadjah Mada, emphasizes that everything in the development of society depends on who writes what. In this case, perhaps Nyai Bagelen as a past leader is also not recognized as a formidable woman. The figure of Nyai Bagelen should also be presented as a figure capable of taking care of agriculture, animal husbandry, and weaving, which can inspire the Bagelen community. The competence of Nyai Bagelen as a political, agricultural, and industrial leader remains unexplored.

This finding is actually more profound than Carey's which argues that the key role of women in Javanese history is being the validator or preserver of the dynasty. If women's contribution is only understood so superficially, it is difficult to develop public knowledge (borrowing Abdullah's terms) that women have an important history in the human journey. In this context, scientists need to develop a scientific attitude towards the order of customs and other cultural heritage. When the figure of Nyai Bagelen experienced historical discontinuation, the scientific study of the women character in the past is expected to encourage gender and cultural studies especially regarding the character of local women. Moreover, Carey's study shows that since the conclusion of the Diponegoro War or the Java War (1825-1830 AD), Javanese culture, as tamed by the colonials, has been like a museum culture so that those who live today do not know the greatness and character of local women in the past.

Thus, the study of the women's contribution to the journey of a community group strives to establish women as a center for comprehending cultures as a whole. Such conditions occur because the fields of science are androcentric, a construction dominated by male interest and power either through political or economic order which causes directly or indirectly the subordination of women (Budianti 207). This makes the presence of women in the history of a community often out of sight. The effort to examine the women's position in a peripheral culture is part of demonstrating the importance and necessity of knowledge based on women's ways of knowing or ways of producing knowledge based on the principle of femininity, referring to Shiva's book, *Bebas dari Pembangunan*. Shiva is putting women, who

are at first considered as the main object of change, at the center of the process of change and knowledge creation. Science will be well-implemented if it is accepted and integrated within the given cultural systems. If science, in contrast, does not produce something important and meaningful for a community group, then it has not been successfully cultured, referring to Kleden's book, *Sikap Ilmiah dan Kritik Kebudayaan* and Setiadi's article (65).

### BAGELEN WOMEN AS PRESERVERS OF TRADITION

Bagelen lies between two cultures, Javanese culture in the east and Banyumas in the west. Therefore, Bagelen shows a transitional culture. This can be seen from its vernacular language. Bagelen dialect is a mixture of Javanese and Banyumas languages, referring to Hanifan's work entitled *Bahasa Jawa di Kabupaten Purworejo: Kajian Geografi Dialek*. The influence of the Javanese language can be seen in some people who apply Javanese speech level (*ngoko*/"low," *madya*/"middle," *krama inggil*/"high") while the Banyumas language dominates the daily speech which has no speech level regardless of the social strata. Of course, not all places in the Bagelen area use this dialect since some people also use Javanese.

The origin of the Bagelen community is an agricultural society largely relying on livelihoods from the Bogowonto River Valley. As a farming society, cooperation dominates community structure, and it prioritizes common interests. In its development, farming is still one of the main livelihoods of the community, especially in the lowlands such as the Bogowonto River valley. Meanwhile, in the Bagelen regions in the coastal area, either Purworejo or Kebumen Regencies, the local people make a living as fishermen. There are also some hilly areas in Bagelen that the residents use for plantations of wide variety of fruits. In both Purworejo and Kebumen Districts, the community has local handicrafts, namely batik. The local batik production names Adipurwo in Purworejo Regency and Gemeksakti batik in Kebumen Regency. The two districts produce a variety of batik patterns that can be widely used by people. The Bagelen society is free to create bright colors and varying batik designs that reflect more egalitarian values they hold. In contrast, in the central Javanese tradition, the batik designs characterize the class from which the wearer belongs. Thus, the traditional Adipurwo batik in Purworejo Regency and Gemeksakti batik in Kebumen Regency characterize egalitarian values because they can be worn by all groups of people.

The local language used in the Bagelen community shows that Bagelen culture has a more open and loose social structure, unlike the central Javanese culture. Besides, the variety of colors and patterns of their traditional batik is indicative



of the Bagelen people's more egalitarian values. However, does society have egalitarian values for women and loose social structure? Let's look at the involvement of Bagelen women in traditional dance, namely *dolalak*.

The figure of women in Bagelen can be seen in *dolalak*, a dance that developed and endured in this region until now, particularly in Purworejo Regency. Its history is related to the Dutch colonial period when the Dutch built military forces in the Purworejo area for the center of defense. *Dolalak* traces its development from the singing and dancing of indigenous soldiers who were required by the Dutch to join the military. Yet the existence of *dolalak* is then closely related to the habits of the local community, especially about folklore or local legend (Santoso 239-240).

In reality, there are insufficient sources discussing the origin of *dolalak* along with its cultural system. The dance is believed to have formed around 1915 when Dutch colonialism was still firmly entrenched in this country. In this context, Carey (xii) explains that the Dutch archives generally reflect the reality of male-dominated colonialism. Carey emphasizes that at that time Javanese elite women were entangled in a narrow space. Needless to say, the arts are born among ordinary people and the initiation into the arts is still dominated by men. Since the historical reality during colonialism (in this case the Dutch colonial occupation) shows male dominance, the contribution of women is not apparent, even more so for women in the peripheral regions.

*Dolalak* dance was originally carried out by male dancers, but it evolved to become dominated by women. The shift from male *dolalak* dancers to female dancers made the existence of these traditional arts increasingly developed in the community. The study conducted by Santosa (237) shows that women play a central role in promoting traditional arts. Women are behind the success of a performing art either traditional or modern. One example is the development of *dolalak* in Kaliharjo Village, which is called one of the centers of *dolalak* dance development in Purworejo Regency. According to one of the arts managers in the village, the development of *dolalak* by women has made the dance more interesting. The *dolalak* dance group in Kaliharjo Village has many members, including almost all women in the village and not just dancers who are members of an art group (*Laporan Penelitian Bagian 2* 34).

The description affirms that in terms of arts and tradition, women's contributions cannot be underestimated. The study conducted by Santosa above is part of an effort to show that women also fill the public knowledge space (Abdullah, qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 1* 68). In this case, it is necessary to re-explore history, related to the contribution of women in discovering and developing *dolalak* dance, to uncover hidden narratives that did not become public knowledge.

Men also dominate the writing of history, so the narration about the contribution of women as preservers of art and culture becomes invisible. A different point of view may emerge if the one writing history about *dolalak* is a woman. As stated by Ahimsa Putra, the interpretation then may be “more impartial”: that the development of *dolalak* is mixed and in the hands of female figures who work hard to always dance and preserve the traditional art form (qtd. in *Laporan Penelitian Bagian 2* 31).

It can be seen, when the Bagelen community has a social stratum that is not strong, a colloquial language shows the values of freedom and egalitarianism. However, such values do not apply to see the position and position of women. Through the art of *dolalak*, it can be seen that women are not recognized as equally contributing and as important as men, even when the development of dance is precisely performed by women.

Efforts to preserve culture as described above look like tourism development. This is a necessity. The designation of Kaliharjo Village as a tourism village based on the development of the *dolalak* dance confirms this. On the one hand, it is an effort to preserve customs and culture, on the other hand, it is information on tourism development. In line with this is the development of culture as well as tourism in Bali and Yogyakarta. In Bali, for example, Balinese cultural tourism is developed based on the diversity of local and religious cultures, promoting harmony between tourism development and sustainable Balinese cultural preservation (Rai Utama 6). In such manner do they try to realize the latter. The same applies to cultural preservation in Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta tourism in the Kembangarum area also includes cultural products and activities in package attractions for tourist visitors (Ristiawan 20). Therefore, a tourism village performing traditional local culture as attractions is part of cultural preservation efforts.

## **BAGELEN WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS UPHOLDERS**

This section explores the contribution of peripheral women in religious affairs. Permanadeli's study (250) shows that women in Javanese mythology are symbols of living things that protect lives. Javanese women are represented as those who always move to fight for the living. Javanese women hold their power to balance real-world life. In this regard, the story that contains the cosmological order infertility myths is known throughout Java. The fertility symbol in Javanese belief is in the figure of Dewi Sri as the goddess of rice. The story related to Dewi Sri contains teachings about rice cultivation and fertile life. Pemberton (280) shows that the story of Dewi Sri exists throughout Java, along with the various versions of the

figure and relatively different forms of worship. Pasundan Land also recognizes the story of Dewi Sri as a symbol of fertility among its farming communities.

The Bagelen community is basically a religious agricultural society. This can be observed from its agrarian environment situation that later developed into an animistic society. The religious characteristics can be discovered from animistic beliefs, then people adhered to Hinduism and Buddhism, and later to Islam. During the Hindu-Buddhist period, they glorified Lord Shiva (Hinduism) and mixed it with Javanese culture. Some local people also embraced Buddhism. The Bagelen community is also best known as a religious society that lives side by side between people of different religions. In this case, religious leaders have a special position in the lives of local people.

Regarding the development of Islam in the Bagelen region, there are three main sites that display the early development of Islam in the past, namely Petilasan Sunan Geseng, Sunan Geseng Mosque, and Santren Mosque (“Sejarah Kabupaten Purworejo”). Petilasan Sunan Geseng is on a hill located in Bagelen Village, Bagelen District. The name Sunan Geseng is also used for the Sunan Geseng Mosque. Sunan Geseng Mosque was built in the 19th century during the reign of Tumenggung Cokronegoro. The mosque has overlapping roofs, one and above there are *mustaka* (“the head”) made of clay. It consists of the main room and *limasan* (“pyramid”) roofed porch.

Another site that signifies the Islamic development in this region is the Santren Bagelen Mosque. The historical background of the mosque is related to the King of Mataram, namely Sultan Agung who ruled the Mataram Kingdom at its peak, specifically 1613-1645 AD. The mosque is also the oldest in the Bagelen region. The establishment of Bagelen Mosque is based on the instruction of the wife of Sultan Agung. The order intends to reward the services of Kyai Baidlowi. According to Penadi’s work, *Bagelen dan Mataram Kuno*, Kyai Baidlowi is a local Islamic figure who developed Islam in the Bagelen region. He also contributed to helping the Mataram Kingdom defeat the Dutch colonials in the Bagelen region. The connection of Bagelen Mosque with Sultan Agung is reinforced by the inscription of the number 1618 in one of the tombs which indicates the reign of Sultan Agung.

The explanation above shows that the presence of women in the early development of Islam in the Bagelen region was not apparent. Even the women’s contribution to the spreading of Islam in the Bagelen region remains unclear to the public knowledge. The sites of the greatness of Islam in Purworejo Regency, for example, always refer to the men who contributed to the development of Islam in the region. We never hear about women’s presence in the early days of the development of Islam in the region. The leaders of the spread of Islam in another part

of Bagelen areas, including the Kebumen Regency, also refer to the figure of men such as Sheikh Asnawi, Anom Sidakarsa, and Abdul Awal, who spread Islam in the southern coastal region of Java. Are women thus absent in coloring the development of Islam at that time? It seems impossible that the spread of Islam did not involve women. One proof is the order of Sultan Agung's wife to build the Santren Bagelen Mosque as a reward for the support of Kyai Baidlowi towards Mataram. Information about the involvement of women in the early days of the development of Islam in Bagelen is indeed scarce, yet it does not mean that the contribution did not exist. Further investigation is needed to show the public about the contribution.

Like other regions in Java, the introduction and development of Islam in Bagelen region have also been confronted by the strong local traditions close to pre-Islamic beliefs. The tolerance that is built towards these conditions is not in the form of art as entertainment, nor as a form of worship. Walisongo's role, for instance, in spreading Islam in Java through wayang *kulit* ("leather puppet") or wayang *golek* ("wooden puppet") was an attempt to make Islam easily accepted at that time. Graaf's study (in Raap xx) shows that this is a secularization of art because the local art developed into show material rather than a strong local religious ritual. The development of Islam in the Bagelen region is more prominent in the southern coastal region of Java. Islamic tolerance for traditional practices before Islam entered Bagelen region manifests through the embodiment of religious symbols in the puppet theater wayang *kulit*, in *dolalak* art in Purworejo accompanied by traditional songs and *sholawatan* ("pray for the Prophet Muhammad"), and in *jamjaneng* and *rebana* art in Kebumen that combine traditional and Islamic art. In this context, the women involvement in religious services in the traditional arts of the Bagelen community is hardly exposed publicly. Narratives telling how women are as important as men in reciting *sholawat*, singing Islamic verses through *jamjaneng* and *rebana* art, are hardly known and these forms of women involvement are rarely perceived by the public as ways of broadcasting Islam.

Apart from Islam, another quite rapidly developed religion in Bagelen region is Christianity, especially in Purworejo Regency. The development of Christianity in Purworejo has started before the three decades of the 20th century, which made Purworejo the center of zending Dutch Protestant churches. A former *santri* ("local term for Muslim"), later known as Kyai Sadrach, is the pioneer of the early history of Christian development in the region. The term *santri* can be harmonized with the mapping of Javanese people in the phenomenal study of Geertz, *Agama Jawa*, conducted in 1955 by making the scheme of Javanese cultural maps into three classes: *santri*, *abangan* ("peasants"), and *priyayi* ("nobleman"). Kyai Sadrach is a *santri* who later converted to Christianity, even taking a position as a missionary.

Unfortunately, the historical writing about the role of Kyai Sadrach in spreading Christianity does not include the contribution of Bagelen women in developing Christianity in the area. Again, the contribution of women's maintenance and upholding of their religion is not well known by the next generation. Community knowledge about the spread of Christianity in the Bagelen region always refers to the male figure, namely Kyai Sadrach. The public does not place women who also contributed to carrying out their religious duties. Are women thus absent in coloring the development of Christianity at that time? It seems impossible that the spread of Christianity did not involve women. Information about the involvement of women in the early days of the development of Christianity in Bagelen is indeed scarce, yet it does not mean that the contribution did not exist. Indeed, further investigation is needed to show the public about the contribution.

### **CONCLUSION: WOMEN'S CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN PERIPHERAL COMMUNITIES**

In the course of the history of particular community groups, women are frequently in a marginal position, as if they are not present in the development of society. Seemingly most people agree. Identifying women's position in peripheral societies is part of a scientific effort to show that in the course of a society's history, women also contribute to and inspire people's journey in the past and should also inspire the next generation. The results of this study indicate that Bagelen women have been leaders in the past. Examples include Nyai Bagelen, the Bagelen women who are also able to preserve art and culture, and the Bagelen women who are also an inseparable part of religious development in the region.

Nyai Bagelen is the leader of the Javanese tradition and religion, maintaining dynasties, managing agriculture, and doing production. As a leadership figure, she should be able to inspire society today, that women have an important position and contribution to the development of society, thus encouraging the advancement of women today. Local women are also able to maintain traditions and culture, among others illustrated in the development of *dolalak* dance. Local women also cannot be separated from religious activities. Indeed, there is not much literature that writes about it, and there is not much public opinion that acknowledges it.

The implication of the research, the writing of a multidimensional society journey particularly focusing the knowledge on female leaders is, of course, expected to produce a deeper narrative about society. Writing the society journey would be incomplete if it only tells the story of a great person or leader rather than from the side of the people including female figures in the peripheral areas.

Culture must have its mechanism to face the modernity current. That is, deepening thought based on culture is needed to avoid using only external parameters to measure change. Modernity must consider the cultural dimension as the social identity of every society. Hence, the study of women's contribution to the journey of peripheral communities is part of the issue so that the locality is always a source of enforcing inspiration.



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