A Study on the Theory of Creation in the *Pūrwaka Bhūmi*

Sugeng Tanto

This paper deals with the cosmology in Javanese tradition based on the text called *Pūrwaka Bhūmi* (*Pūr. B.*)¹⁾. The term cosmology has two uses: one belonging to philosophy and the other to science, although these two are not necessarily without intermingling. In this paper I shall be concerned primarily but not exclusively with the philosophical use of the term.

This paper mainly aims at clarifying some important Javanese thoughts, such as the concept of the Supreme God (*Sang Hyang Widhi*), the origin of prominent gods such as Brahmā, Visnu and Śiva and also the origin of human beings. The *Pūr. B.* shows that Javanese native beliefs and gods had been placed higher than those of Indian gods. In this paper, I will compare the Javanese theory on the origin of the universe with that of the Indian theory.

1. General View of Indian Cosmology

Religious cosmology usually explains the history and evolution of the universe based, at least in part, on the principles mentioned in scriptures or accepted texts. Cosmological theories most frequently begin by giving an important position of a Supreme God who creates and maintains this universe. In India, Hinduism has several concepts pertaining to the cosmology. One of such theories is the theory of the golden womb (*Hiranyagarbha* of *Rg-Veda* 10.121). It explains the sources of the creation of the universe. According to this theory *hiranyagarbha* floated around in emptiness and the darkness of the non-existence and then broke into two halves which formed the heaven (*svārṅga*) and the earth (*prithvi*).

2. The *Pūrwaka Bhūmi*

The *Pūr. B.* basically explains the origin of the earth, gods, man, and other animate and inanimate objects in this universe. Having examined the language style and its contents, it can be argued that the *Pūr. B.* was written in the 16th century A.D.²⁾ Out of several Old Javanese texts³⁾ the *Pūr. B.* belongs to the period of middle Javanese literature.⁴⁾ Although

an English translation of the text was done by C. Hooykaas (1974), so far no detailed analysis of this text has been done yet. When translating the text into English, Hooykaas referred to several manuscripts from various sources, such as the *Griya Tegeh*, *Griya Krotok* and *Sang Hyang Aji Tiga-Jñāna* of Badung.

2.1. *Sang Hyang Widdhi*

The *Pūr. B.* mentions that *Sang Hyang Widdhi* is the source of all knowledge and the origin of all gods and goddesses (*kamulan bhaṭṭāra lawan bhaṭṭāri*). The *Pūr. B.* mentions several other names of *Sang Hyang Widdhi*, namely *Sang Hyang Sūkṣma*, *Sang Hyang Sunya Viśeṣa* and *Sang Hyang Widdhi Viśeṣa*. According to the *Pūr. B.*, the Supreme God is said to have no abode (*tanpa rovang*), no form (*tanpa rūpa*), no color (*tanpa warna*) and no one is equal to him (*tan ana inung-inung ira paḍanira*). Although at present *Sang Hyang Widdhi* is visualized in Bali, at the beginning he could not be visualized. Boediardjo is of the opinion that the idea of *Sang Hyang Widdhi/Sang Hyang Tunggal* has been influenced by Islam.⁵⁾ The *Pūr. B.* mentions that the *Sang Hyang Widdhi* created the three Indian powerful gods, namely Brahmā, Visnu and Śiva. The rest of the gods (*devas*) and goddesses (*devi*) are off-springs of these three gods.

2.2. Prominent Gods

The *Pūr. B.* mentions that the first step taken by *Sang Hyang Widdhi* was to create a female principle named *Chanting Kuning*. She was created out of his bone (*asthi Widdhi*) and later was known to be goddess Umā (*Bhaṭṭāri Umā*). The second creation was god *Iśwara* (*Kursika* and *Samsadya*). He was created out of the skin (*cremi*) of the *Sang Hyang Widdhi* and his color was white (*petak*). The third creation was god *Brahmā* (*Garga*). He was created out of his flesh (*misya*) and possessed the red (*abang*) color. The fourth creation, the god *Mahādewa* (*Meitri*) was created out of the male offspring of *Sang Hyang Widdhi*. He possessed yellow color (*kuning*). The fifth creation was god *Visnu* (*Kurusya*), possessing black (*ireng*) color. The sixth creation was god Śiva (*Sang Pretañjala*). Five colors (*pañca warna*) were attributed to him.

After being created by *Sang Hyang Widdhi*, these gods and goddess worshiped *Sang Hyang Widdhi* (*kanem anakira Sang Hyang Widdhi bhakti ri Sira*). This thought may be intended by the author to show the superiority of the local god, *Sang Hyang Widdhi* over those of Indian gods.

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2.3. The Universe and Its Constellation

The *Pūr. B.* mentions that *Sang Hyang Widdhi* gave the order to goddess *Umā* (*Bhaṭṭāri Umā*) and god *Śiva* (*Bhaṭṭāra Śiva*) to create the universe and its constellation. The text mentions that after listening to the teachings of *Sang Hyang Widdhi* on various kinds of *mantrās*, philosophy and metaphysics, *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* were assigned to create Gangga River. It is said that when *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* entered the Gangga River, it turned into an ocean. In the task of creating Gangga River, both took the different forms, *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* took the form of *Bhaṭṭāri Gangga* and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* took the form of *Sang Hyang Baruṇa*. After creating Gangga River, the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, planets, and winds were created by the joint works of *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* (*pūrwaka gaṅga, tumuli pṛthiwi, Ākāśa, Sūrya, Vulcan, Lintang, megha, Traṅgana, Bāyu*). It is mentioned that because of being obedient to the *Sang Hyang Widdhi*, both *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* (*Nini Patuk*) and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* (*Kaki Patuk*) were given special powers equal to that of *Sang Hyang Widdhi*. The *Pūr. B.* gives a clear picture on the special positions of both the *Bhaṭṭāri Umā* and *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* among other gods.

2.4. The Position of *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva*

The *Pūr. B.* mentions that after creating the six prominent gods, *Sang Hyang Widdhi* assigned the four gods (*Bhaṭṭāra Iśwara, Bhaṭṭāra Brahmā, Bhaṭṭāra Mahādewa* and *Bhaṭṭāra Visnu*) a special duty of creating the world. But these gods rejected the request of *Sang Hyang Widdhi* for the reason that they felt unable to create. After having rejected the request, *Sang Hyang Widdhi* cursed and turned them into animals. *Bhaṭṭāra Iśwara* was cursed and turned into an ogre/*yaksa*, occupying the east. *Bhaṭṭāra Brahmā* was cursed to be a tiger occupying the south; *Bhaṭṭāra Mahādewa* was cursed to be a serpent occupying the west direction, and *Bhaṭṭāra Visnu* was cursed to be a crocodile occupying the north direction. The text relates that the four gods approached god *Śiva* to restore them to their original forms. Then, he approached *Sang Hyang Widdhi* to get his approval to undertake the ritual.

Bhaṭṭāra Śiva was appointed by *Sang Hyang Widdhi* to summon his other brothers namely god *Iśwara* (*Kursika* and *Samsadya*), god *Brahmā* (*Garga*), god *Mahādewa* (*Meitri*), and God *Visnu* (*Kurusya*). *Bhaṭṭāra Śiva* undertook the process of exorcizing of the above mentioned four gods. The text mentions that with the help of god *Śiva*, god *Kursika* returned to the east and became *Bhaṭṭāra Iśwara* (*Sang Kursika mulih mangetan, matemahan Bhaṭṭāra Iswara grehanir*). He was residing in the Indra world. *Garga* returned to the south

and became *Bhaṭṭāra* Brahmā and was residing in the world of Brahmā (*Sang Garga mulih mangidul, matemahan Bhaṭṭāra Brahmā, ring brahmā-bhuwana grehanira*). *Metri* returned to the west and became *Bhaṭṭāra* Mahādewa. He was residing in the heaven (*Sang Metri mulih mangulon, matemahan Bhaṭṭāra Mahādewa ring Swarga-bhuwana grehanira*). *Kurusya* returned to the north and became *Bhaṭṭāra* Visnu. He was residing in the Visnu world (*Sang Kurusya mulih mangalor, matemahan Bhaṭṭāra Wisnu ring Wisnu bhuwana grehanira*). In the text it also mentions that the other name of *Bhaṭṭāra* Śiva is *Bhaṭṭāra Guru*. From this text, *Bhaṭṭāra Guru*, who was believed to be the highest god in old Javanese religion in the 16th century, occupied the position below the *Sang Hyang Widdhi*.

2.5. The Origin of Human Beings

According to Indian tradition the four caste members, namely *brahmana*, *ksatriya*, *vaiśya* and *sudra* were respectively created from the mouth, shoulder, waist and feet of the Supreme Being. The Javanese tradition mentions a different view on the creation of human beings. The *Pūr. B.* mentioned that human beings were not directly created by the Supreme Being (*Sang Hyang Widdhi*). Human beings were the creations of the joint works of five prominent gods. It mentions that *Bhaṭṭāra* Iswara was assigned to create the human skin (*Bhaṭṭāra Iswara gumawe kulit*), *Bhaṭṭāra* Brahmā to create the blood (*Bhaṭṭāra Brahmā akarya rah*), *Bhaṭṭāra* Visnu to create the bones (*Bhaṭṭāra Wisnu akarya balung*), *Bhaṭṭāra* Mahādewa to create the muscles (*Bhaṭṭāra Mahādewa akarya otot*), and *Bhaṭṭāra* Śiva was assigned to create the flesh and the head (*Bhaṭṭāra Siwa agawe daging mvan kapala*). Unlike the Indian tradition, the Javanese tradition does not mention the division of human beings into castes. *Sang Hyang Widdhi* cursed his four children and they were not allowed to meet. However in order to return to their original form, *Bhaṭṭāra* Śiva was appointed to be a teacher of their ritual to be in original forms. Because of being a teacher of all gods, *Bhaṭṭāra* Śiva is known as *Bhaṭṭāra Guru*.

2.6. The Origin of Animate and Inanimate Objects

After returning to their original forms, every god was assigned by *Sang Hyang Widdhi* to create both animate and inanimate objects for the purpose of filling and beautifying this universe. For instance, Mahādewa is said to be the creator of animals having many feet and animals without legs. *Bhaṭṭāra* Brahmā created the forests and wild animals living therein.

In Javanese tradition, an ogre (*yaksa*) and terrifying animals, such as the tiger, the serpent, and the crocodile are respected. One of the reasons is that they are believed to have

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connection directly with prominent gods and even some believe that they are gods in disguise. Besides gods and goddesses, they deserve to receive offerings.

3. Conclusion

From the words such as *ngulon*, *ngidul*, *wetan*, *gawe* and *mulih*, it can be assumed that the *Pūr. B.* belongs to the middle Javanese literature. Looking at it from the standpoint of its contents, it stresses and places the position of *Sang Hyang Widdhi* above the *Bhaṭṭāra Guru*. Several developments have taken place about the concept of the highest gods or God in Java. From about the 4th to the 13th century the three gods (Brahmā, Visnu and Śiva) were considered to be the highest. This idea changed in the 13th century. From the 13th to about 16th century, the Javanese god *Bhaṭṭāra Guru* was considered to be the highest god. And from the 16th century above, the *Sang Hyang Widdhi* was placed highest above all gods.

From the above explanation it is clear that the Javanese concept on the origin of the universe has been much influenced by Indian thought. Though it is basically the works related to Hindu teachings, a few Buddhist terms are also mentioned. For instance, the term *Aksobya* and *wiku* are being used. This text mentioned three kinds of *wiku*, namely those who dedicate themselves to study (*anut sastra*), those who follow the practice of asceticism (*manut ring brata tapa*) and those who perform rituals (*manut yajñā*). Many terms, especially the names of gods, mountains, rivers etc. were borrowed from the Indian story. However, some Javanese elements have been inserted and the story has become different from the Indian one. Names such as *Canting Kuning*, *Kaki*, *Nini* etc. were of Javanese origin and bear no connections with Sanskrit.

The Javanese creation theory accepts the existence of many gods and goddesses but strongly emphasize the pre-eminence of the Supreme Deity. In this text it is said that the Superior Being, *Sang Hyang Widdhi* begins by creating a female principle, to which the name *Chanting Kuning* was given. *Sang Hyang Widdhi* is an invented concept that refers to the highest god. What at present are called prominent gods, i.e. Brahmā, Visnu, Śiwa were created by *Sang Hyang Widdhi*. The Position of *Sang Hyang Widdhi* is supreme, too subtle and too far to be approached by human beings.

Though the text closely resembles Hinduism, the concepts of the creation of human beings are different from those of India. For example in the *Puruksa Sukta* of the *Rg. Veda* 10th *mandala*, it is stated that the four castes, i.e. *brahmins*, *ksyatriya*, *vaisya* and *sudra* were created from the respectively mouth, shoulder, waist and feet of the great being (*pu-*

rusa). But in the *Pūrwaka Bhūmi*, human beings were the joint works of the prominent gods.

From the whole story, it can be seen that the Supreme Being, *Sang Hyang Widdhi* was placed to be the highest god. It was followed by *Bhaṭṭāra Śiwa/Bhāṭṭāra Guru*. Gods Brahmā, Iśwara, Visnu, and Mahādewa were placed under *Bhaṭṭāra Guru*. And from these prominent gods arises some lesser gods, i.e. Baruna, Dewi Sri, Rudra etc. According to this text, all gods, whether they are prominent gods or lesser gods, are the manifestation of *Sang Hyang Widdhi*, but human beings, though their position is supreme among all creation, were created by prominent gods. They are not the manifestation of the *Sang Hyang Widdhi*. From the whole story, we can draw a conclusion that the text followed what is called Monism rather than monotheism. Unlike the Christian or Islamic concepts of theology that explain the universe and everything contained in it are created by the Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient God, in this text the Universe and everything including in it were the joint works of prominent gods and *Sang Hyang Widdhi*.

Notes

- 1) The word '*pūrwaka*' means 'beginning' and '*bhūmi*' means 'the earth'.
- 2) Comparing with the work written in the early 16th century, i.e. *Tantu Panggelaran*, the idea and thought mentioned in the *Pūrwaka Bhūmi* is quite different. The *Tantu Panggelaran* stresses *Bhaṭṭāra Guru* as the highest god, but the *Pūrwaka Bhūmi* mentions the *Sang Hyang Widdhi* to be the highest god. I argue that the *Pūrwaka Bhūmi* must have been written later than the *Tantu Panggelaran*.
- 3) Javanese literary works are generally classified into three periods: Old Javanese/*Bahasa Jawa Kuno* (9th -15th century), Middle Javanese/*Bahasa Jawa Tengahan* (15th - 20th century) and Modern Javanese/ *Bahasa Jawa Modern* (20th century - present day). For the details, see Zoetmulder [1974:3-100]. Concerning the date of Old Javanese texts, see Hazra [1986: 72-87].
- 4) Many works belonging to the Middle Javanese Literature are influenced by Islam.
- 5) Boediardjo [1978: 112].

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