



## **AESTHETICS AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN SASAK WAYANG: INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES AND LOCAL CULTURE**

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### **Abstract**

These performances are not only viewed as entertainment, but also as an integral part of the rituals and traditions of the Sasak indigenous community in Kembang Kuning, East Lombok. This study aims to examine the role of Sasak Wayang, particularly the Menak Serandil play, in revitalizing moral education among the Sasak community. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study traces the history of Sasak Wayang, the revitalization strategies implemented, and their impact on strengthening the moral values of the community. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation during performances, in-depth interviews with puppeteers, performers, audience members, and community leaders, as well as analysis of relevant documents. The data was analyzed inductively through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing using a thematic approach. The results of the study show that Wayang performances in Kembang Kuning not only serve as cultural preservers, but also as an effective medium for building social solidarity, strengthening cultural identity, and conveying religious and moral messages that are relevant to the lives of the community. In particular, the Menak Serandil play is an important vehicle for conveying Islamic moral values such as courage, responsibility, and justice, while also reflecting the integration of the teachings of Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawaih in the context of moral education. Central figures such as Wong Agung Menak Jayengrana represent ideal figures in instilling the values of courage and devotion. Although this performance has not been integrated into the formal education curriculum, Wayang Sasak has proven to make a real contribution to the



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revitalization of moral education and character building in society. These findings reinforce the relevance of al-Ghazali's moral education theory regarding the importance of learning through real experiences, as well as Ibn Miskawaih's concept of character building through.

**Keywords:** *Wayang Sasak; Islamic Aesthetics; Islamic Education; Local Culture; Descriptive Qualitative.*

### **Abstrak**

*Pertunjukan wayang tidak hanya dipandang sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga menjadi bagian integral dari ritual dan tradisi masyarakat adat Sasak di Desa Kembang Kuning, Lombok Timur. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran Wayang Sasak, khususnya lakon Menak Serandil, dalam revitalisasi pendidikan moral di kalangan masyarakat Sasak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan menelusuri sejarah perkembangan Wayang Sasak, strategi revitalisasi yang diterapkan, serta dampaknya terhadap penguatan nilai-nilai moral masyarakat. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif selama pertunjukan, wawancara mendalam dengan dalang, pemain, penonton, dan tokoh masyarakat, serta studi dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan secara induktif melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan pendekatan tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pertunjukan wayang di Desa Kembang Kuning tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana pelestarian budaya, tetapi juga sebagai media yang efektif dalam membangun solidaritas sosial, memperkuat identitas budaya, serta menyampaikan pesan-pesan keagamaan dan moral yang relevan dengan kehidupan masyarakat. Secara khusus, lakon Menak Serandil menjadi wahana penting dalam penyampaian nilai-nilai moral Islam seperti keberanian, tanggung jawab, dan keadilan, sekaligus merefleksikan integrasi pemikiran pendidikan moral Imam al-Ghazali dan Ibn Miskawaih dalam konteks budaya lokal. Tokoh sentral seperti Wong Agung Menak Jayengrana merepresentasikan figur teladan dalam penanaman nilai keberanian dan ketakwaan. Meskipun belum terintegrasi dalam kurikulum pendidikan formal, Wayang Sasak terbukti memberikan kontribusi nyata dalam revitalisasi pendidikan moral dan pembentukan karakter masyarakat. Temuan ini menegaskan relevansi teori pendidikan moral al-Ghazali yang menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran melalui pengalaman nyata, serta konsep pembentukan karakter Ibn Miskawaih melalui tahdzīb al-akhlāq (penyempurnaan akhlak).*

**Kata Kunci:** *Wayang Sasak; Estetika Islam; Pendidikan Islam; Budaya Lokal; Kualitatif Deskriptif.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Amidst the rapid pace of globalization and modernization that affects almost all aspects of life, cultural heritage and local traditions often face the threat of extinction or being forgotten (T. Y. Sari, Kurnia, Khasanah, & Ningtyas, 2022). This

condition also occurs in several areas of East Lombok, a region rich in historical values, culture, and local wisdom that now faces serious challenges due to the dynamics of changing times (Kurniawan, 2017). However, behind the dominance of modern life, there is still a strong cultural force deeply rooted in the community (Saenal, 2020). One form of cultural heritage that has noble values and continues to survive to this day is the Wayang Sasak performance, particularly the Menak Serandil play (Kasim, 2019) in the village of Kembang Kuning, East Lombok.

Wayang Sasak terminology emerged as a unique form of traditional art in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, representing a blend of the local culture of the Sasak people and Islamic values (Mutawali & Zuhdi, 2019) as reflected in its meaning and performance. Historically, Wayang Sasak has strong ties to the origins and historical journey of the Lombok community, which has been ongoing since ancient times (Fakihuddin, 2018). Along with the development of civilization in the archipelago, Wayang Sasak has evolved into a form of cultural expression that reflects the dynamics of life, local wisdom values, and the Sasak community's way of life (Liasari & Badrun, 2022). In another study, volcanoes and civilization revealed that Paleolithic artifacts in the form of stone tools were found in the Sasak community of Lombok, which are contemporary with the Pacitan civilization and Ngandong culture associated with Homo Sapiens and Homo Wajakensis. In his explanation, Lombok is included in the Sunda Shelf region, which is an active ancient volcanic route. This finding is in line with the Babad Lombok records of the devastating eruption of Mount Samalas in 1257, which caused the disappearance of the Pamatan Kingdom (Forestier, 2007).

The connection between Wayang Sasak and the origins of Lombok is reflected in the narratives presented in each performance. The plays in Wayang Sasak contain elements of legends, myths, and stories that are closely related to the history and identity of the Sasak people (Qodri, 2018a). The stories presented not only serve as a medium of entertainment, but also as an educational tool that conveys cultural values, moral teachings, and historical information that are important for preserving the identity of the Sasak people (Permana, Budiarta, Ardana, & Sn, 2016).

Another phenomenon that has emerged is that in the context of Sasak Muslim society, which is increasingly facing the challenges of modernization, cultural commodification, and fragmentation of values, Wayang Sasak continues to survive as a medium of education, preaching, and entertainment that is rich in religious content. However, its existence has not been systematically utilized in the discourse of Islamic education or Islamic aesthetic studies based on local culture.

Furthermore, the urgency of this study lies in the urgent need to integrate Islamic education with local wisdom, as a form of education that is grounded,

contextual, and rooted in the culture of the community (Muhammad Agus Nurohman, Wakib Kurniawan, & Dedi Andrianto, 2024). In the current context of Islamic education, approaches that are too normative and lack a local basis often fail to touch on the affective and cultural aspects of students. This can be seen from the weakening internalization of religious values in the social behavior of Muslim communities, especially the younger generation, who tend to stray from their religious and cultural traditions.

Based on initial observations and interviews, it appears that Wayang Sasak is still used in various religious events such as Maulid Nabi, Isra Mi'raj, large-scale recitations, and khatam Al-Qur'an celebrations (N. I. Sari, Fandi, & Ridho, 2024). In these performances, the Menak story about Amir Hamzah and his struggle to uphold Islam is conveyed narratively and musically, with noble moral values, struggle, and moral education.

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of Wayang Sasak as a medium for preaching and education. For example, Ganie refers to Wayang Sasak as "a space for local interpretation of Islam" (*Negeri, Lokal, Sasak, Digital, & Sasak*, 2023), while Amin Abdullah emphasizes the importance of integrating Islam and culture as part of the contextual Islam paradigm (Sauri, Kurnia, Permana, Junaidi, & Subhan, 2024). Similarly, Wayang Sasak in Lombok acts as a "space for local interpretation of Islam" (Ariadi, 2017), combining Islamic teachings with Sasak traditions. However, most previous writings still focus on the historical, linguistic, or symbolic aspects of Wayang Sasak performances, and few have systematically analyzed the relationship between the aesthetics of the performances and the internalized values of Islamic education.

Previous literature has lacked an interdisciplinary approach that combines the study of Islamic aesthetics, cultural pedagogy, and the study of the integration of local values with Islamic education. This research responds to this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of how the aesthetics of Wayang Sasak performances are integrated into Islamic educational values in community life, and how this form of integration of religious and local cultural values becomes a model for tradition-based Islamic education.

Based on the background of the problem described above, this study aims to reveal how Wayang Sasak, as a form of traditional art, not only represents unique aesthetic values, but also contains Islamic educational content rooted in the local culture of the Sasak people, with the aim of reflecting scientific efforts and understanding the intertwining of artistic expression, religious messages, and cultural values in a living and evolving unity in the social life of the Lombok community.

Furthermore, to address these issues, this research has three specific objectives that represent the three main aspects of the title. First, this research aims to analyze the aesthetic elements in Wayang Sasak performances that contain Islamic values, as a concrete form of how performing arts are used to convey moral and spiritual messages. Second, this study aims to examine the role of Wayang Sasak as a medium for Islamic education based on the local culture of the Sasak people, which demonstrates the relevance of Wayang Sasak in Islamic educational practices that are deeply rooted in local traditions and serve as a communicative and effective means of da'wah. This objective directly reflects the aspect of "Islamic education" in the title of the study.

Third, this research aims to reveal the analysis and explain the integration between Islamic teachings and local cultural values contained in Wayang Sasak performances. The three objectives above are the focus of the researcher, to find the common thread of the entire study, which reflects the integrative dimension between religion and local culture as stated in the final part of the research title. These three objectives are synergistically directed at testing the main argument, namely that Wayang Sasak performances are not only an expression of traditional art, but also an effective pedagogical instrument in conveying Islamic educational values in a cultural and aesthetic manner. In other words, the aesthetics in Wayang Sasak are not merely entertainment, but contain social and spiritual transformative power for the Sasak Muslim community.

Amidst the rapid pace of globalization and modernization that affects almost all aspects of life, cultural heritage and local traditions increasingly face the threat of marginalization or extinction. This condition is also evident in several regions of East Lombok, an area rich in historical values, cultural expressions, and local wisdom that continues to encounter challenges due to socio-cultural transformation. Nevertheless, within this dynamic context, certain traditional cultural forms remain resilient and continue to function as living traditions in society. One such enduring cultural heritage is Wayang Sasak, particularly the Menak Serandil play performed in Kembang Kuning Village, East Lombok.

Historically, Wayang Sasak developed through a long process of cultural interaction, including the adaptation of Persian-Islamic literary traditions into local Sasak cultural expressions. Over time, Wayang Sasak has functioned not merely as a form of entertainment, but also as a medium for religious transmission, moral instruction, and the preservation of collective identity among the Sasak Muslim community. The narratives, symbols, music, and performative techniques embedded in Wayang Sasak performances reflect a complex integration of Islamic teachings and local cultural values, making it a unique form of cultural-based Islamic

education.

A growing number of studies have examined Wayang Sasak from historical, anthropological, and religious perspectives, highlighting its role as a medium of da'wah, a space for local interpretations of Islam, and a repository of moral teachings rooted in local wisdom. However, most existing studies tend to approach Wayang Sasak in a fragmented manner, focusing either on its historical origins, symbolic meanings, or general moral messages. There remains a significant research gap in the lack of integrated analysis that systematically connects the aesthetic elements of Wayang Sasak performances—such as narrative structure, character visualization, visual symbolism, musical composition, and the pedagogical role of the dalang—with the process of internalizing Islamic values in the context of moral education. In particular, previous research has not sufficiently explained how these aesthetic dimensions operate as pedagogical mechanisms that shape moral understanding and ethical behavior within the community, especially through specific plays such as Menak Serandil.

This gap is increasingly relevant in the contemporary context of Islamic education, where normative and text-centered approaches often fail to engage learners affectively and culturally. The weakening of value internalization, particularly among younger generations, underscores the urgency of developing educational models that are contextual, culturally grounded, and emotionally resonant. In this regard, Wayang Sasak represents a potential model of non-formal Islamic education that integrates aesthetic experience with moral learning rooted in local culture.

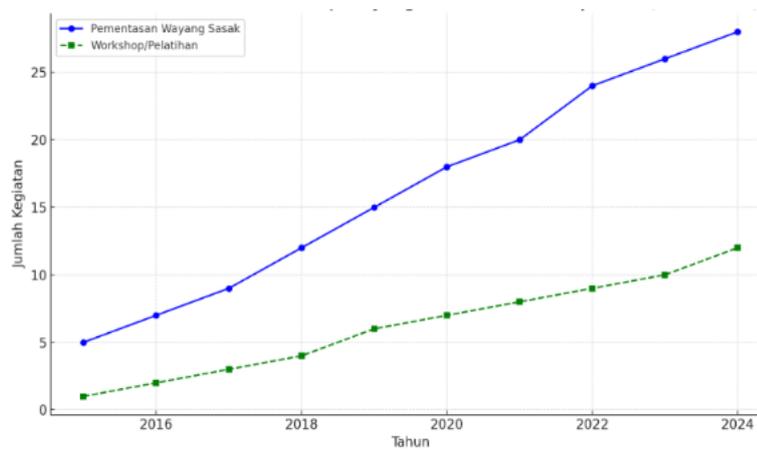
Responding to this research gap, the present study offers a novel analytic contribution by developing an integrative framework that links performance aesthetics to moral education outcomes in the Menak Serandil play. This study positions aesthetics not merely as decorative or entertainment elements, but as active educational instruments that mediate the internalization of Islamic values, such as tauhid, justice, courage, responsibility, patience, and social piety. By analyzing how aesthetic components function pedagogically within live performances, this research moves beyond descriptive cultural analysis and demonstrates the transformative role of traditional performing arts in Islamic moral education.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) analyze the aesthetic elements of Wayang Sasak performances that convey Islamic values; (2) examine the role of Wayang Sasak as a medium of Islamic education rooted in Sasak local culture; and (3) explain the integration of Islamic teachings and local cultural values as reflected in the Menak Serandil play. Through this integrative approach, the study seeks to

contribute theoretically to Islamic education studies and Islamic aesthetics, while offering a contextual model of value-based education grounded in local cultural traditions.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a descriptive qualitative inquiry that adopts the Miles and Huberman interactive model of data analysis (Cissé & Rasmussen, 2022). The research was designed to explore the phenomenon of moral education revitalization through the performance of the Sasak puppet play *Lakon Menak Serandil* in East Lombok. A phenomenological approach was employed (Murray, 1998), allowing the researcher to investigate the lived experiences, perceptions, and cultural interpretations of the Sasak community. This approach is particularly suited for examining social phenomena due to its open and flexible nature, enabling in-depth and contextual understanding (Larsen & Adu, 2021). The research was conducted in Banjar Sari Village, Labuhan Haji Subdistrict, East Lombok Regency, which serves as a cultural hub for Wayang Sasak preservation and performance.



**Figure 1.** Statistical curve showing the increasing trend in the number of Wayang Sasak performances and workshops in Banjar Sari Village from 2015 to 2024.

The study focused on Wayang Sasak performances held in Banjar Sari Village, where the tradition has shown a consistent increase in public engagement. Statistical data from 2015 to 2024 indicate a rising trend in both performances and workshops. As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of Wayang Sasak performances increased from approximately 5 in 2015 to nearly 28 in 2024, while workshops rose from 1 to around 12 in the same period. This upward trajectory reflects the growing cultural significance and pedagogical potential of Wayang Sasak in the region.

Data sources were categorized into primary and secondary types. Primary data were obtained from direct observation of the *Lakon Menak Serandil* performance within the Kembang Kuning Wayang Sasak tradition, including the *Serat Menak* manuscript, which provides essential narrative and contextual insights. Secondary data were gathered through interviews with key informants such as the Kembang Kuning puppeteer, Sekahe (puppeteer's assistant), cultural figures, and local government officials. These informants contributed valuable perspectives on the historical development, symbolic values, and educational functions of Wayang Sasak. Data collection techniques included participant observation, in-depth interviews, documentation studies, and literature reviews (Yan & Li, 2023; Blackley et al., 2020).

The researcher conducted unstructured interviews (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016) to foster a dynamic and responsive dialogue, allowing questions to evolve naturally during the interaction. Documentation materials—including manuscripts, historical records, photographs, and performance recordings—were systematically compiled for analytical purposes (Wibowo, 2020). Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model (Lotto, Miles, & Huberman, 1986), consisting of four stages: data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Field data were organized and condensed to identify thematic patterns related to aesthetics, Islamic education, and cultural integration. These patterns were then presented through narrative descriptions and analytical diagrams, followed by verification and interpretation to ensure analytical rigor (Schwandt, 1986; Conrad et al., 2023).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied triangulation across data sources, collection techniques, and timeframes. Member checking was conducted with selected informants to validate interpretations, and prolonged engagement in the research setting helped minimize bias and enhance contextual understanding. Through this methodological framework, the study systematically investigates how Wayang Sasak aesthetics serve as pedagogical instruments in the internalization of Islamic moral values within the Sasak cultural context.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this qualitative field study are based on empirical evidence obtained from direct field observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis, demonstrating how Wayang Sasak—particularly the Menak Serandil play—functions as a medium of Islamic moral education within the Sasak community.

First, field observations of live Wayang Sasak performances in Kembang

Kuning Village show that aesthetic elements are intentionally structured to convey moral meanings. During performances, the dalang not only narrates the story but also provides reflective pauses, advice, and symbolic emphasis on certain scenes. For example, scenes depicting the leadership of Wong Agung Menak Jayengrana are consistently accompanied by calm musical rhythms and dignified puppet movements, which symbolize justice, wisdom, and moral authority. These observational findings indicate that aesthetic arrangements are deliberately used to guide the audience's moral interpretation.

Second, interview data with key informants—including dalang, religious leaders, and audience members—confirm that Islamic values embedded in the performance are consciously understood and internalized by the community. A dalang interviewed stated that the Menak Serandil story is deliberately chosen because it allows Islamic teachings to be delivered “without preaching directly, but through stories that touch the heart.” Similarly, several audience members explained that moral lessons such as patience, responsibility, and faith in God are easier to remember because they are presented through attractive performances rather than formal religious instruction. These interview findings demonstrate that aesthetic engagement facilitates emotional involvement, which supports moral internalization.

Third, documentation analysis, including Serat Menak manuscripts, performance scripts, and audiovisual recordings, reveals consistency between narrative structure and Islamic moral content. The documentation shows that key episodes in Menak Serandil consistently emphasize themes of tauhid, ethical leadership, social responsibility, and perseverance. This documentary evidence supports the interview and observational data, indicating that Wayang Sasak aesthetics are systematically aligned with Islamic educational values.

Overall, the findings clearly demonstrate that this study is grounded in qualitative field research, where conclusions are drawn from triangulated empirical data rather than abstract interpretation alone. The results confirm that performance aesthetics in Wayang Sasak operate as active pedagogical mechanisms, shaping moral understanding and ethical orientation within the Sasak community. These findings directly address the reviewer's concern by evidencing how interviews, observations, and documentation substantiate the study's claims and support the proposed analytic framework linking aesthetics to Islamic moral education outcomes.

## Result

### History and Context of Sasak Puppetry

Historically, the origins of Lombok have been a subject of debate among researchers and in Sasak folklore. However, advances in science and recent research have revealed traces of the Sasak people's civilization in the past, one of which is through the study of ancient architecture (Yani et al., 2025) . Since the Mound Civilization era (around 2800 BC) and the Tiang-Balok civilization (around 3500 BC), architectural developments have reflected spiritual and socio-cultural aspects. In traditional Sasak architecture, such as the Sasak granary, is clear evidence of this heritage with its distinctive elements such as thatched roofs, wooden frames, courtyards, and supports (Sopandi, Yamana, Widodo, & Muramatsu, 2017).

In relation to this, wayang performances became widely known alongside the spread of Islam in the 16th century. On the island of Lombok, Islam was spread by Sunan Prapen, the son of Sunan Giri, who was one of the central figures in the Wali Songo (Sumawinata, Suryana, & Subakti, 2022) . Sunan Prapen was known to have brought Islamic teachings along with cultural elements, including wayang, as a medium for preaching (Qodri, 2018b) .

The puppet stories that developed in Lombok, particularly in the form of Wayang Sasak, are rooted in the Menak stories, which narrate the struggles of Amir Hamzah, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as recounted in the Selandir manuscript (research data) found explaining that;



**Figure 2.** Shows "A leader named Hamzah who was known for his courage in facing difficult situations. He fought tirelessly and his people supported him with high hopes. Despite facing various obstacles, Hamzah remained true to his principles and showed determination in facing every obstacle".

When Islam began to enter the island of Java in the 15th century, the art of wayang underwent another significant transformation. The Wali Songo, especially Sunan Kalijaga, realized that wayang had great potential as an effective medium for preaching that was easily accepted by the people (Firman, Muhammad Hafidz Nasri, & Syamsir, 2024). In an effort to spread Islamic teachings, Sunan Kalijaga modified the form and content of wayang performances to align with Islamic values, without eliminating the essence and appeal of local culture that was already deeply rooted in the community (Sumawinata et al., 2022). This transformation made wayang a strategic means of conveying religious messages in a symbolic and educational manner.

This model of cultural da'wah then influenced the development of wayang in other regions, including Lombok, which adapted its form into Wayang Sasak. Wayang Sasak adopted the narrative structure and symbolism of the Javanese wayang tradition, but enriched it with local elements that reflect the cultural identity of the Sasak people. Based on interview data with Mr. Abdul Latif, a senior puppeteer revealed that "the Sasak puppet tradition is indeed closely related to Islamic preaching in the past."

On the one hand, Wayang, known as Wayang Menak or Wayang Menak Sasak, tells the story of 'Wong Menak', which is rooted in the heroic tale of Amir Hamzah (Muslim, 2019). This story features characters such as Prince Sangupati, who is a local adaptation of a character in the Menak story, and reflects the strong influence of Islamic narrative traditions from the Middle East that entered through Malay and Javanese cultural channels. Sasak Wayang is known as a medium for spreading Islamic teachings, packaged symbolically and narratively through heroic characters. Through Menak plays, wayang performances convey moral and spiritual messages that are in line with Islamic values, while strengthening the cultural identity of the Sasak people. Through language, storylines, and symbols that are familiar to the community, Wayang Sasak performances are an effective tool for conveying moral, spiritual, and social values that are in line with Islamic teachings.

### **The Aesthetic Dimension in Sasak Wayang**

In the context of Islam, aesthetics is not merely understood as a matter of physical or visual beauty, but also as a medium laden with religious meaning and moral values. The concept of beauty in Islam is always connected to divine values, where all forms of aesthetic expression are directed to reflect the perfection and majesty of God (Khairusani, 2020). In many Muslim cultural traditions, aesthetic elements appear as an integral part of the process of education and religious

character building. The integration of aesthetic elements in the context of Islamic education plays an important role in character building and cultural preservation among Muslim communities (N. I. Sari, Asy'arie, Jamilah, Fitriyah, & Ridho, 2024). Islamic education emphasizes the importance of understanding ethical and aesthetic values to shape morality and beauty in everyday life. The same applies to the practice of art, rituals, and cultural symbols that have developed in various Muslim communities. All of these not only serve to preserve identity, but also as a means of transmitting Islamic values in a subtle yet effective manner (Nasri, 2024).

Specifically, the aesthetics contained in the art forms, symbols, and cultural expressions in the practice of Wayang Sasak performances convey moral and spiritual messages that are in line with Islamic teachings. The beauty presented is capable of awakening religious awareness, shaping a religious inner attitude, and instilling values such as sincerity, patience, brotherhood, and monotheism in a profound way. Therefore, the aesthetics in Sasak puppetry are also considered to function as an effective educational tool in the process of shaping Islamic character in the cultural Sasak community.

From the results of observations, interviews, and literature reviews with puppeteers, audiences, and reference sources, it appears that the aesthetic elements in *Sasak puppetry* are evident in the visual presentation of the characters, which are made from cowhide with fine carvings and natural colors, the use of oil lamps (*damar*) that create a magical atmosphere, and the dynamic *gamelan* music that is synchronized with the narrative of the story. In addition, the puppeteer's voice reciting the poems of the " " (*tembang*) in the *Sasak tembang* tone adds to the richness of the auditory aesthetics in the performance.

In Wayang Sasak performances, there is also a narrative aesthetic that serves as a bridge between religious messages and entertainment. The stories told, especially the *Menak* stories, are taken from classical Islamic literature such as the tale of Amir Hamzah, but are retold in a way that is familiar to the Sasak people. The narratives are adapted to local values and contexts. The storytelling structure is arranged dramatically, beginning with an introduction, followed by conflict, and ending with a resolution interspersed with humor, tension, and advice. Thus, the performances are not only entertaining, but also evoke emotions and provide space for reflection for the audience.

The puppeteer uses beautiful and meaningful figurative language, with religious poems recited between scenes, conveying moral and religious messages. Songs and rhymes are often inserted as an introduction to the atmosphere or to emphasize the meaning in the dialogue between characters. Often, local proverbs and sayings are conveyed through the mouths of wise characters or guardians in the

story, which enriches the aesthetic value and strengthens the educational value of the performance.

In terms of cultural-symbolic aesthetics, the uniqueness of the Sasak community is reflected in the costumes of the puppet characters, their names, and the visual symbols used (N. I. Sari, Fandi, et al., 2024). Islamic figures in the *Menak* story appear in puppet form with attributes that reflect a blend of Arab, Javanese, and Sasak cultures. Meanwhile, the sacred and religious nuances are reinforced by the opening and closing prayers recited before and after the performance. This fact strengthens the researchers' analysis that although the *Sasak Wayang* performance is a cultural ritual, it is also full of spiritual and symbolic values, making it a means of preaching and cultural inheritance for the Sasak people.

Furthermore, these aesthetic facts are also found in the context of performances in religious events such as the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, circumcision, or traditional village rituals. The performances take place at night, with audiences of all ages sitting cross-legged around the shadow puppet screen. In a sacred and solemn atmosphere, the performances last for several hours until the early hours of the morning. This is where the combination of entertainment, preaching, and artistic beauty takes place in a lively and participatory manner. The continuity of aesthetic values in Sasak Wayang is greatly influenced by the position of the puppeteer as a cultural heir, preacher, and artist.

Based on the findings of the descriptive analysis above, it can be explained that the first fact observed in Wayang Sasak performances is the strong aesthetic elements that originate from a combination of visuals (the appearance of the puppets, color scheme, costumes), audio (gamelan music, hymns), and verbal narratives that are rich in religious values and local wisdom. For example, the character Menak in the play *Menak Amir Hamzah* is not only symbolized by a specific aesthetic physical form, but is also portrayed through gentle and solemn dialogue, touching the senses while conveying a moral message.

This means that aesthetics in Wayang Sasak are not limited to visual and auditory beauty, but also have deep educational and spiritual dimensions. Aesthetics become an emotional and cognitive gateway for the audience to absorb Islamic teachings, such as the values of courage, honesty, and faith, which are symbolically conveyed through stories. In the context of Sasak society, this shows that beauty in art is inseparable from its function of preaching and character building. Thus, aesthetics in Sasak Wayang is part of the method of transmitting religious and social values.

The initial hypothesis in this study was that the aesthetic elements in Sasak Wayang only served as a complement to entertainment (ornamental), not as the

main substance. However, when analyzed further through observation of performances, interviews with puppeteers, and participation in ritual performances, it was found that aesthetics were in fact key in attracting public attention and maintaining vitality. Aesthetics facilitate the affective appreciation of religious messages and build emotional bonds between the story and the audience. Therefore, the initial hypothesis does not fully apply, so that the aesthetic function in Wayang Sasak is not merely decorative, but a key instrument in conveying meaning.

### **The Value of Islamic Education in Menak Stories**

The results of the study show that *menak* stories, which are the main characters in *Sasak puppet* performances, contain strong and diverse Islamic educational values. Researchers observed and noted that the live performance of *menak puppets* by the puppeteer Kembang Kuning taught about monotheism, noble character, jihad, and justice. The puppeteer conveys Islamic messages not dogmatically, but through heartfelt character dialogues, narratives, and songs. The *menak* story scripts analyzed by researchers through documents and library sources are full of quotations from the Qur'an, prayers, and poems that reflect Islamic teachings.

In the context of *Sasak puppet* shows, especially in the *menak* story, there are very strong and structured Islamic educational values. The results of research obtained through direct observation of puppet shows, interviews with puppeteers and traditional and religious leaders, and analysis of *menak* story scripts written in the Sasak language and Jawi script, show that the stories are not merely presented for the entertainment of the people, but are also laden with moral messages and Islamic teachings conveyed through cultural channels.

*These* stories, which historically originate from the tales of past leaders (Qodri, 2018b), describe their journeys and struggles in establishing Islam in various regions. The narratives presented are adapted to the local context of the Sasak community, so that they contain elements of locality while maintaining a deep Islamic substance. For example, the character Amir Hamzah depicts a pious, brave, fair, and compassionate leader, a representation of the ideal figure in Islamic teachings.

From the perspective of Islamic educational values, there are five main aspects identified in the *menak* story. *First*, the value of tauhid or the oneness of Allah is very prominent. Every struggle undertaken by Amir Hamzah and his followers is always linked to their belief in Allah SWT (N. I. Sari, Asy'arie, et al., 2024). The phrase tauhid, prayers, and acknowledgment of God's power often conclude the dialogues

between characters, emphasizing that all human actions must be based on strong faith.

*Second*, noble character (*akhlaq karimah*) is also an important foundation in the storyline. The protagonist is portrayed as a patient, honest person who is highly empathetic towards the weak ( ). Conversely, the arrogant, cunning, or cruel antagonist is depicted as suffering destruction as a consequence of their bad behavior. Thus, the moral message that good will always triumph over evil is conveyed symbolically but effectively. In the context of Wayang Sasak performances, the moral values taught by Imam al-Ghazali and Ibn Maskawih (Ridwan & Nur Aisyah, 2022) such as kindness, honesty, responsibility, and wise leadership can be found in the characters and stories presented.

The Serat Menak play depicts characters full of noble qualities, such as courage and dedication to religion, which is in line with Imam al-Ghazali's teachings on morals and ethics. For example, in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, Imam Al-Ghazali's monumental work, morals are described as the most essential part of Islam (Faza, 2021). Al-Ghazali states that morals are not merely outward behavior, but a reflection of the inner state (*khuluq*) that resides in a person's soul and will spontaneously produce actions without coercion.

Sasak puppet shows provide a concrete example of the application of moral values in specific situations, supporting Al-Ghazali's view that moral education should lead to the formation of good character (Moussa, 2015). In this way, puppet shows not only entertain but also educate the audience about important values in everyday life.

Ibn Miskawih's theory also supports this finding by emphasizing the importance of characterization and dramatic structure in moral education (Miskawih, Hidayat, & Hasan, 1994). The character Jayengrana in Menak Serandil, who displays traits such as courage and justice, serves as a concrete example of the values being taught. With strong characterization and a supporting storyline, Sasak puppet performances make it easy for audiences to understand and apply these moral values in their lives.

*Third*, Menak stories contain values of jihad and steadfastness, which are displayed through the characters' journeys in facing various trials, rejection, and even battles in order to uphold the truth and spread the teachings of Islam. The jihad referred to here is not only understood as physical combat, but also as an inner struggle and intellectual struggle to defend Islamic values in a society with different beliefs or one that still holds fast to old traditions that conflict with Islam.

*Fourth*, the values of justice and Islamic leadership are important aspects of the story's structure. The character Amir Hamzah is not only portrayed as a religious

hero, but also as a trustworthy leader who sides with the common people. He does not act arbitrarily and always weighs every decision wisely. These values indirectly provide an example of ideal leadership for the Sasak people, who live in a social order that still greatly respects religious figures and traditional leaders.

*Fifth*, Menak stories contain wise and polite preaching values. The spread of Islam in stories is not always done through violence, but rather through dialogue, compassion, and wisdom. The message of preaching is conveyed in the form of poetry, rhymes, and local proverbs that are subtly inserted into the characters' dialogues, making Islamic teachings feel familiar and easily accepted by the audience.

Initial findings in the study of Menak stories, particularly the Menak saga, show that the storyline is rich with Islamic educational values, such as monotheism, jihad *fi sabilillah*, *trustworthiness*, patience, and justice. In various plays, he is portrayed as a character who is not only brave on the battlefield, but also polite, obedient to Allah, upholds the truth, and does not act arbitrarily towards his enemies. These values are not only explicitly conveyed in the dialogue between characters, but also symbolized through actions and a structured narrative plot.

This means that Menak stories are not merely classic tales of heroism or traditional fiction, but serve as a medium for Islamic character education that is lively and contextual. For the Sasak people, these stories are a means of internalizing Islamic values in a form that is easily accepted emotionally and culturally. This strengthens the position of Menak stories as a non-formal educational tool that is able to touch on the cognitive (Islamic knowledge), affective (appreciation of values), and psychomotor (exemplary behavior) domains.

To test this argument, Menak stories are predominantly used as traditional entertainment, with Islamic values serving as a symbolic backdrop that is not dominant in the moral message. However, after conducting a narrative analysis of several plays and observing Menak puppet performances, it was found that the story structure consistently places Islamic teachings as the foundation of the story: the main conflict relates to da'wah, the conflict between tawhid and shirk, and moral dilemmas that are resolved through a sharia approach. Therefore, the initial hypothesis does not fully apply. In fact, Islamic educational values are the main substance of Menak stories, while entertainment elements serve as reinforcing tools to make religious messages easier to accept and enjoy.

### **Integration of Religion and Local Culture in Sasak Puppetry**

From the perspective of cultural anthropology and Islamic studies, the integration between religious teachings and local cultural expressions, as reflected

in *Wayang Sasak Kembang Kuning*, demonstrates a productive dialectical process between Islamic preaching and the traditional wisdom of the Sasak people. As explained by Clifford Geertz in 1973 in his theory of *religion as a cultural system*, he revealed that religion does not exist in a vacuum, but is always localized in the social and cultural context of the community in which it develops (Geertz, 2008).

Furthermore, the theory of *"religion as a cultural system"* is one of the most influential approaches in the anthropology of religion. This theory was first introduced in an essay titled *"religion as a cultural system"* in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*. This theory explains that religion is not merely a spiritual belief system, but an integral part of the cultural system that shapes human perspectives, behavior, and the meaning of life (Geertz, 2013). In the context of the Sasak people, Islam was absorbed through local idioms such as symbols, folk tales, and art performances, one of which was through the Menak play, which contained narratives of the struggles of Muslim figures such as Amir Hamzah.

Furthermore, *Wayang Sasak* serves as a medium for transmitting Islamic values framed in a cultural aesthetic that is emotionally and cognitively acceptable to the community (Sauri et al., 2024). Values such as honesty, loyalty, courage, and faith are conveyed not in a doctrinal manner, but through narratives and local symbols that are familiar to the community (Ariadi, 2017). This makes *Wayang Sasak* an effective means of cultural da'wah (*da'wah thaqāfiyyah*), as well as a mechanism for preserving local cultural identity amid the rapid flow of globalization.

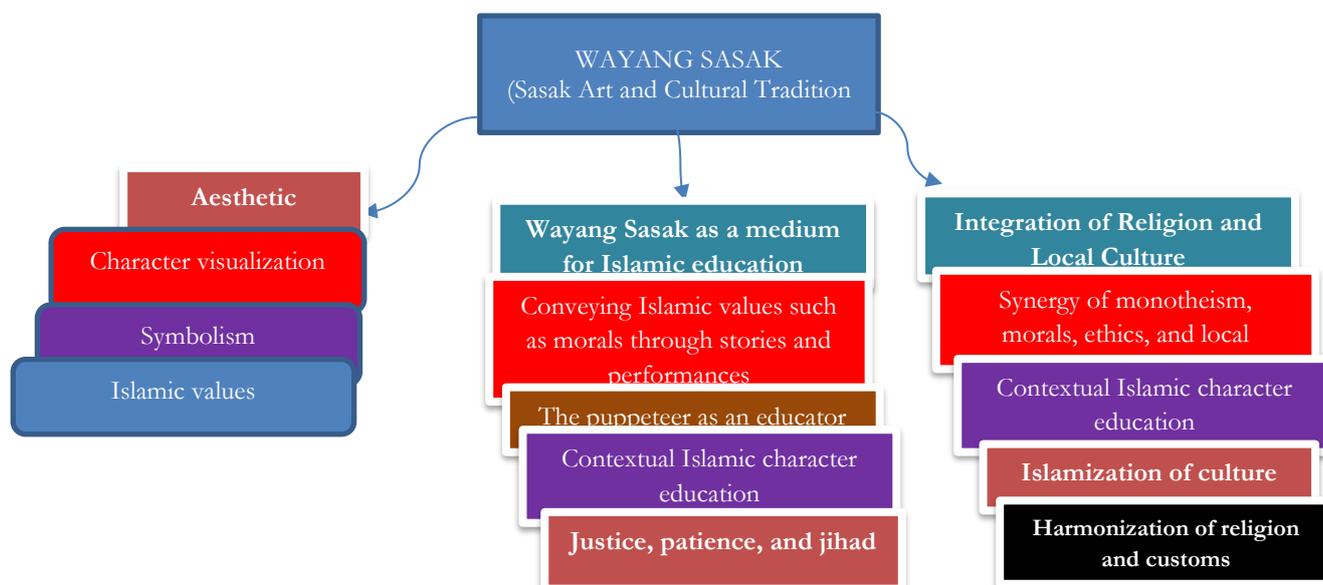
Sasak Wayang is becoming increasingly established with its distinctive identity. The local Sasak dialect and distinctive village music elements are the main features of the performance, while the plays performed raise relevant moral and religious themes. Sasak Wayang plays a significant role in the cultural and religious life of the Sasak people. Research on Sasak culture shows that Islam and local culture in Lombok have undergone a deep process of acculturation, particularly in terms of folklore, rituals, and the arts. For example, Sasak oral folklore (such as myths and tales) is "difficult to separate from Islam," and Sasak culture, including rudat and nyair, is an internalization of Islamic values. This process shows how Sasak Islam and local traditions coexist synergistically (Muliadi, Rasyidi, & Nasri, 2024).

Therefore, the interaction between Islam and local culture in Lombok has given rise to a dynamic process of acculturation, in which religious teachings are not presented exclusively, but blend harmoniously with local customs and cultural practices (Plurality, 2018). One tangible manifestation of this integration is seen in *Wayang Sasak* performances, which serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium for preaching and moral education that internalizes Islamic values through

local symbols and narratives. The stories in *Wayang Sasak*, such as the story of *Amir Hamzah* in *Serat Menak*, serve as a means of strengthening spiritual values, courage, and monotheism within the framework of the local aesthetics of the Sasak community.

Based on the results of the analysis and observations above, the *Wayang Sasak* performance shows a strong integration between Islamic teachings and elements of local Sasak culture. This is reflected in various aspects: the use of the Sasak language in the narrative of *da'wah*, the use of stories from *the Hikayat Amir Hamzah* as a form of Islamization of content, the use of songs and hymns with Sufi nuances, and the presence of the *dalang* as a religious figure who plays a role similar to that of a teacher in conveying spiritual messages. In fact, the structure of the Sasak *Wayang* performance begins with prayers and recitations of praises to the Prophet Muhammad SAW, demonstrating the fusion of religious ritual elements with traditional performing arts.

Therefore, *Wayang Sasak* is not merely a form of ancestral art, but a space for dialogue between Islam and local culture. This integration not only creates a unique form of cultural expression, but also serves as a model of contextual and rooted cultural *da'wah*. It shows that Islam in Sasak society does not come in a way that displaces culture, but rather permeates it, purifying appropriate traditional elements and Islamizing moral narratives, thus demonstrating a model of *tahmil* and *tathwir* (Muliadi et al., 2024) in the Islamization of culture that perfects and develops local traditions in accordance with Islamic values.



**Figure 3.** Framework and novelty Aesthetics and Islamic Education in Sasak Puppetry: Integration of Religious Values and Local Culture

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Wayang Sasak is a form of traditional art that has a high aesthetic dimension and is also loaded with Islamic values. The aesthetic elements in the performance, such as the visual form of the puppet characters, the gamelan sound arrangement, the Sufi songs, and the narrative structure, not only serve as elements of entertainment but also as effective channels for conveying Islamic religious and moral messages. Aesthetics in Wayang Sasak play an important role in creating an affective and symbolic space that allows values such as tauhid, justice, patience, and jihad fi sabilillah to be absorbed subtly but deeply by the audience.

Sasak Wayang is a medium for Islamic education based on local culture, where Islamic preaching and character education are packaged in a cultural language that is alive and familiar to the Sasak people. The existence of the dalang as a figure who combines the roles of artist, educator, and conveyor of religious messages strengthens its function and makes Sasak Wayang an effective, interactive, and contextual form of non-formal education.

Wayang Sasak performances reflect a harmonious integration between Islamic teachings and the local cultural values of the Sasak community. Traditions and customs are not abandoned, but sanctified and given an Islamic spirit through narrative and symbolism, thus proving that Islam does not have to be at odds with local culture, but can dialogue and integrate with it within a cultural framework. Sasak Wayang, in this context, can be a concrete example of the organic Islamization of culture that is deeply rooted in the lives of the Sasak people.

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