# Educational Meaning in the Symbolic Visual Structure of *Kayon* Ganesha Created by *Dalang* Enthus Susmono

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore the educational values embodied in the visual symbolic structure of Kayon Ganesha, an artistic work by Enthus Susmono. The academic values represented in Kayon Ganesha are mportant to examine and can be used as a source of moral and character development for future generations. The research employs a descriptive, qualitative approach with a single-case study design. Data were collected from informants, settings, and documents through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and content analysis. Data validity was tested using two techniques: data source triangulation and informant review. Data analysis followed a flow model consisting of data reduction, data display, and verification. The findings reveal that Kayon Ganesha consists of three structural parts, namely lower (palemahan), middle (lengkeh), and upper (pucuk), each containing symbols that represent the human journey toward ultimate truth through education. The figure of Lord Ganesha in Kayon Ganesha also comprises three parts, namely head, body, and legs, symbolizing the ideal qualities of a knowledgeable person. The implication of this study emphasizes that the educational values within Kayon Ganesha can serve as a source for character education based on local wisdom in the field of art and cultural creativity.*

*Keywords*: *Educational Meaning, Structure, Visual Symbolic, & Kayon Ganesha.*

## INTRODUCTION

The term "*kayon*" is another designation for "*gunungan*" in *wayang kulit purwa* (classical Javanese shadow puppetry). The shape of the *gunungan* represents the tree of life (*kayon*), which literally signifies "life" (Subiyantoro & Zainnuri, 2017, p. 276). The *kayon* serves as an essential property in *wayang kulit purwa* performances, functioning as an opener, a closer, a scene transition marker, and a spatial-temporal indicator during the performance (Loita, 2018, p. 61). Without the *gunungan* or *kayon*, a *wayang kulit purwa* performance could not take place. *Wayang* itself embodies values of life, morality, spirituality, and aesthetics (Subiyantoro, Fahrudin, & Amirulloh, 2023, p. 85). The scenes and narratives in *wayang* would be difficult to understand and interpret, as space and time constitute crucial elements within a performance's storyline.

The *Kayon* Ganesha is one of the modern creations by the late puppeteer (*dalang*) Ki Enthus Susmono from Tegal. Ki Enthus was a renowned *dalang* from Tegal, Central Java, who produced an extensive body of *wayang* works (Fuad & Nurhidayat, 2017, p. 32). He was recognised as a creative and innovative puppeteer with a high level of exploratory

intensity, making his *wayang* creations and performance styles widely appreciated by the public. Ki Enthus demonstrated exceptional ability in interpreting, adapting, and responding to contemporary issues, which made his pakeliran (performance style) highly interactive and dynamic. The *Kayon* Ganesha is among Ki Enthus's many *wayang* works whose creation and conception were influenced by contemporary themes. This *kayon* has been widely adopted by other puppeteers, leading to the emergence of various forms and styles of *gunungan* that differ visually but remain consistent in structural and conceptual essence. Many *wayang kulit* artisans across different regions have also created puppets based on Ki Enthus Susmono's concepts, which are then implemented in performances by other puppeteers.

The *Gunungan* or *Kayon* Ganesha is an artwork that not only presents visual beauty but also embodies profound philosophical meanings. Society needs to be educated through various means, one of which is art. Learning through art refers to the use of artistic media to study various subjects, a concept popularised by H. Read (1970) as "education through art" (Suharto, 2012, p. 89). The *Kayon* Ganesha can serve as a medium for understanding and instilling values through artistic expression. These values are primarily related to the philosophical meanings embedded within the symbolic visual structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha. Such values can function as a source of character education for the younger generation, preparing them to face the dynamics and challenges of the future.

The current condition of education is concerning, as reflected in the increasing reports of juvenile delinquency in mass and social media. Practices such as cheating, intergroup brawls, bullying, promiscuity, pornography, and drug abuse have become major educational issues (Soraya, 2020, p. 74). This situation poses danger if preventive measures and a comprehensive transformation within the education system are not implemented. The nation's younger generation may lose its identity and moral compass, potentially leading to the collapse of the nation's integrity in the future. Culturally based artworks provide an alternative and highly potential source of character education values that can be implemented within the educational context. In this regard, the *Kayon* Ganesha, as a culturally rich and artistic creation imbued with profound values, holds strong potential for being utilised in fostering character development within education.

Based on the background described above, the research problem is formulated as follows: How is the educational meaning represented within the symbolic visual structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha created by Enthus Susmono? The purpose of this study is to describe the educational meanings contained in the symbolic visual structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha created by Enthus Susmono. The results of this research are expected to contribute new and distinctive insights to complement previous studies, particularly in the field of *wayang* (Javanese puppetry). The body of knowledge in *wayang* studies will thus become broader, clearer, and deeper, providing valuable benefits for society. The public will gain new perspectives

and understandings that have not been previously explored, especially regarding the study of *Kayon* Ganesha by puppeteer Ki Enthus Susmono.

Studies on *wayang*, particularly those focusing on the *gunungan* or *kayon*, are generally not new, as several previous researchers have conducted related investigations. Various aspects of the *gunungan/kayon* have been explored by earlier scholars using different methods, approaches, and theoretical frameworks. Loita examined the symbols contained in the *gunungan* of Javanese *wayang kulit* (Loita, 2018, p. 60). Perasutiyo, Muchyidin, and Nursuprianah studied the golden ratio and the meaning of the *wayang kulit gunungan* philosophy (Perasutiyo, Muchyidin, & Nursuprianah, 2022, p. 41), which combined the disciplines of mathematics (the golden ratio) and *wayang* art and culture. Fahrudin et al. investigated the conservation value of *gunungan wayang kulit purwa* as a science learning material (Fahrudin, Saputro, Sarwanto, Sauli, & QiaoLu, 2023, p. 470). This study employed a scientific perspective, particularly in the field of natural conservation, through the traditional art of *gunungan wayang kulit*. Dewi examined the aesthetic paradoxes found in the Javanese *wayang gunungan (A. K. Dewi, 2023, p. 1)*. Sunyoto and Angge investigated the form of the *gunungan wayang kulit purwa* as a source of ideas for creating pendants and necklaces, utilising the *gunungan* as inspiration for handicraft design (Sunyoto & Angge, 2016, p. 217). Andani explored the philosophy of the *gunungan* in *wayang kulit* performances from an Islamic perspective, approaching the study

of the gunungan through the lens of Islamic thought (Andani, 2023, p. 863). Yulianto, Syakir, and Sugiarto analysed the *gunungan wayang kulit purwa, focusing* on its aesthetic form, philosophical meaning, and practical values as implemented in educational contexts (Yulianto, Syakir, & Sugiarto, 2022, p. 206). Meanwhile, Pugersari studied the form of the *gunungan wayang* as a representation of Indonesian culture in the visual design of Indonesia's halal logo, applying design studies as the analytical framework in examining the *gunungan wayang kulit* within the context of national visual identity (Pugersari, 2024, p. 69).

Based on previous studies, research on the *gunungan* or *kayon*, particularly the *Kayon* Ganesha, has not yet been thoroughly explored regarding its symbolic visual structure and the educational values it contains. Earlier studies have mostly focused on the classical *gunungan wayang* purwa, whereas the *Kayon* Ganesha represents a creative reinterpretation of the *gunungan* by Ki Enthus Susmono. Previous research has generally focused on fields such as mathematics, science, craft arts, religion (specifically Islam), and design. To date, there has been no specific study focusing on the *Kayon* Ganesha from the perspective of its symbolic visual structure. This indicates that the present research is novel in both its research object and analytical focus. The originality of the object and the focus of analysis align with the new and fresh data, analysis, and discussion presented in this study. Such novelty contributes positively to the enrichment of knowledge in the fields of art, culture, and other related disciplines.

## METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a single-case study strategy. Qualitative research, also known as naturalistic inquiry, positions the researcher as the primary instrument of the study (Sutopo, 2006, p. 40). The case study strategy was chosen because the research focuses on a single object, the *Kayon* Ganesha, without any comparison to other *gunungan* or *kayon* forms. The object of this study is the *Kayon* Ganesha, created by Ki Enthus Susmono. The research subjects are selected *dalang* (puppeteers) identified through the snowball sampling technique, as the original artist of the *kayon* has passed away.

The data used in this study were obtained from two sources: primary data and secondary data. The primary data were derived from informants as well as from places and events, while the secondary data were obtained from documents and archives. The informant data were collected from selected *dalang* (puppeteers) identified through the snowball sampling technique and gathered using in-depth interview methods. The data on places and events were obtained from *wayang* performance venues and the performances themselves through participatory observation techniques. Meanwhile, the document and archival data consisted of physical data (the *Kayon* Ganesha object), archival records, and both online and offline recordings relevant to the study, collected through content analysis techniques.

The collected data were then tested for validity using two techniques: data source triangulation and informant review. Data source triangulation was carried out by cross-checking information obtained from three data sources: informants, places and events, and archival materials. The informant review was conducted by returning the organised data to the informants to obtain clarification and confirmation of its accuracy. The data were analysed using a flow analysis technique, which involved the procedures of data reduction, data display, and verification. This analytical technique was chosen because the study employed a single case study design. Given the large volume of data collected from various sources, data reduction was necessary. The reduced data were then displayed in tables or descriptive narratives. Conclusion drawing or verification was performed once the data reached a saturation point, meaning no new or relevant information emerged.

The visual structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha was analysed within the context of Javanese culture to explore the educational values embedded within it. The symbolic structuralism theory of Lévi-Strauss was employed as the analytical framework to examine the visual symbols found in the structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha. Humans are symbolic beings with the capacity to structure, organise, and impose structures upon the phenomena they encounter (Misnawati & Anwarsani, 2019, p. 27). The *Kayon* Ganesha consists of an outer structure, which comprises the visible visual symbols, and an inner structure, which represents the meanings or values underlying what is seen. The meanings embedded in the visual symbols of the *Kayon Ganesha* were interpreted through Javanese cultural context and educational perspectives.
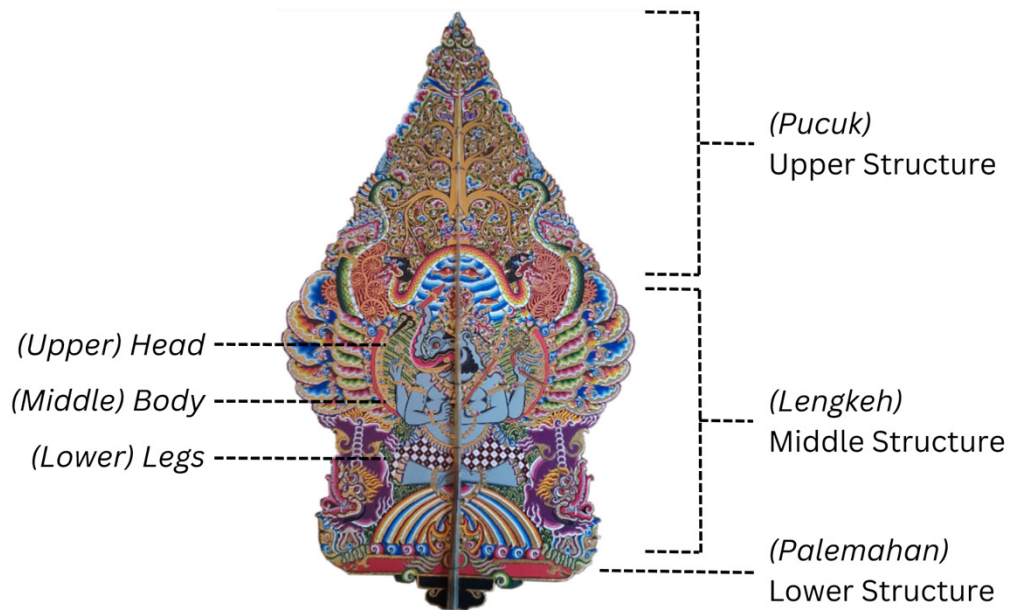
**Figure 1. Structure of Kayon/Gunungan Ganesha**
(Source: Wijaya Documentation, 2024)

**Table 1. The Structure and Symbolic Meaning of the Kayon Ganesha Visual**
(Source: Document and Archive Analysis, 2024)

| *Kayon* Structure | Visual Symbol | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| Lower (*Palemahan*) | Red Line | The human world; without symbols, images, or meanings. |
| Middle (*Lengkeh*) | Five Rainbows | The five paths of life. |
| | Two Giant Heads | Guardians; determining who is worthy or unworthy to enter. |
| | Ganesha Figure | A symbol of knowledge and wisdom. |
| Upper (*Pucuk*) | Wings | The act of soaring toward the summit (the spiritual peak). |
| | Pond/*Blumbangan* | Symbol of the ocean (segara), the water of life. |
| | Two Dragons | Symbol of obstacles or challenges. |
| | *Banaspati* | Guardian of sacredness and purity. |
| | *Hayat* Tree | Symbol of life, connecting the lower and upper worlds. |
| | Snake Tail (from top to bottom) | The ladder of human ascent and descent into the spiritual realm. |
| | Five Flowers | The five Javanese philosophies; also, the five Islamic principles. |
| | Single Bud | The ultimate purpose of life the unity between human and the Divine (manunggaling kawula gusti). |

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The *kayon*, also known as *gunungan* in *wayang kulit purwa* (classical shadow puppet theatre), represents both a tree (kayu) and a mountain (gunung) (Arps, 2017, p. 441). In *wayang kulit* performances, the *kayon* functions as an opening and closing element, a marker of scene transitions, and as a symbol of the forest or fire. The *wayang kulit* itself portrays the diverse characters of human life within the universe (Ismurdyahwati & Srinarwati, 2024, p. 552). Without the *kayon* or *gunungan*, a *wayang kulit* performance would not exist, as it serves as a guide that symbolises the journey of human life from the temporal world toward the eternal one. The *Kayon* Ganesha is one of many creative variations of the *kayon* or *gunungan* in *wayang kulit*, serving the same fundamental functions. The *kayon* holds a crucial position in *wayang kulit* performances because it embodies symbols and meanings that can serve as moral and philosophical guidance for life. The form and meanings of the *Kayon* Ganesha will be further elaborated in the following subsections.

**The Meaning of the Visual Symbolic Structure of *Kayon/Gunungan* Ganesha**

The structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha consists of visual forms (symbols) arranged into three main sections: the *palemahan* (lower part), the *lengkeh* (middle part), and the *pucuk* (upper part). Each form or symbol within these sections contains specific philosophical meanings and values. The detailed forms and meanings of the *Kayon* Ganesha are presented in the figure and Table 1 below.

In general, the *kayon* or classical *gunungan*

is divided into three main structural parts: *palemahan* (the lower part), *lengkeh* (the middle part), and *pucuk* (the upper part), which are arranged vertically from bottom to top (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 204). These three structures symbolise the three realms of existence: the lower world, the middle world, and the upper world. The lower world represents the mortal or human realm, characterised by its immanent nature—without inherent meaning or value (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 206). In the *Kayon* Ganesha, the symbol of the lower world is depicted through a thick, elongated red line at the base of the *wayang*, devoid of any patterns or motifs. This visual form signifies that, in essence, the human world holds no ultimate significance; all worldly matters are transient. Wealth, status, position, and any worldly pursuit possess no enduring value; they are merely illusions, fleeting as a mirage.

The next structure is the *lengkeh*, located in the middle section, which symbolises the middle world. This realm serves as a bridge between the human world (*palemahan*) below and the divine or eternal world (*pucuk*) above. The most prominent feature in the middle part of the *Kayon* Ganesha is the figure of Ganesha himself. Ganesha, the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, is known as the deity of all knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 43). He is also often referred to as the protector god, the remover of obstacles, and the ruler over all challenges (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 43). Ganesha serves as a symbol of education, as education embodies knowledge that enlightens and fosters wisdom in humanity. In the context of education, we often encounter the concept

of examinations, which determine whether one is ready to advance or must repeat, much like Ganesha, who both grants and removes obstacles along the path of human learning and growth.

At the lower part of the *Kayon* Ganesha, there are five rainbows on the left side and five on the right side, symbolising the beginning of the human journey from the lower world to the upper world (*pucuk*). Knowledge or wisdom serves as the primary path and essential provision for humans as they ascend toward the higher realm, the world beyond death. Therefore, it is a moral obligation for humans to seek and cultivate knowledge continually. The concept of lifelong education is inspired by the saying "uthlubul 'ilma minal mahdi ilal lahdi", which means "seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave" (Hairani, 2018, p. 355). Yusuf further emphasises that there is no such thing as being too late, too old, or too early to learn (Yusuf, 2012, p. 111). The rainbow's beautiful colours symbolise that the lifelong pursuit of knowledge is like walking through a garden full of flowers, a journey filled with diverse forms of wisdom and learning.

The process of becoming an educated person is not easy; there will always be a natural selection that determines who is worthy and prepared to pursue knowledge and who is not. Humans are obliged to seek knowledge, for those who do not endure the hardship of learning must be ready to face the bitterness of ignorance (Rais, 2019, p. 26). The pursuit of knowledge is often painful, yet its results are sweet, a path not everyone is capable of walking. This concept is symbolized in the *Kayon* Ganesha through the depiction

of two giant heads, representing guardians or gatekeepers. Not everyone is permitted or able to approach Ganesha, the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom, for only those who are truly deserving may pass. Ultimately, it is the individual who determines their own worthiness; without awareness, enthusiasm, determination, and sincerity in learning, one will remain trapped in the illusions of the material world.

The upper section (*pucuk*) of the *Kayon* Ganesha consists of several visual symbols, including wings, a pond (*blumbangan*), two dragons, *banaspati*, the tree of life, a serpent's tail, five flowers, and a single flower bud. When a person has attained a high level of knowledge, they are considered worthy to ascend to the next, higher stage, the *pucuk*. This aligns with Sumardjo's statement that once the mystical teachings (the middle realm) have been mastered and the student has been well-trained in magical practice, they may proceed to the next stage — entering the third structure, the *pucuk* (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 207). The wings on both sides of the Kayon Ganesha symbolise the human journey from the middle world (education) to the upper world. These wings represent the readiness of an enlightened person to ascend toward the ultimate realm of existence. The student undertakes a metaphoric flight toward the pohon *hayat* (tree of life), which rises to *the pucuk*, symbolising the spiritual ascent toward ultimate truth (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 208).

The next section is the *blumbangan* or segara (the sea), which is depicted with a symbol of blue and white gradient water waves flanked by two dragon tails. Water represents

the source of life, providing sustenance for the pohon *hayat* (tree of life) and all living beings above it. This aligns with Dewi's view that water is the essence of life, and God created it as a medium through which humans can learn the values of life itself (A. P. Dewi, 2018, pp. 102–103). The sea (segara) also symbolises the vastness of knowledge that humans are obliged to explore and navigate. The ocean is a perilous realm—its storms and waves can destroy and drown anyone who dares to cross it, yet within it lie hidden treasures: coral, pearls, and diamonds. Before reaching the summit, humans must first pass through this world of the tangible, symbolising the trials and obstacles encountered on the journey toward the ultimate realm of enlightenment (Loita, 2018, p. 63). The two dragons encircling the *blumbangan*/segara serve as symbols of these challenges and dangers that must be overcome in the human quest toward The One (the *pucuk*). Navigating the ocean of knowledge inevitably brings trials and tests, and only those who endure and persevere through them will emerge as resilient individuals, elevated in wisdom and stature.

The upper world represents a sacred realm; therefore, *banaspati* serves as the symbol of purity and protection, guarding the sanctity of this realm after one has overcome temptations and trials. According to other interpretations, *banaspati* symbolises the reality that human life is filled with challenges, dangers, and threats that can arise at any moment (Loita, 2018, p. 65). At the summit of the mountain, the pohon *hayat* (tree of life) also stands as a symbol of existence and sanctity, a sacred place revered by ancient ancestors.

They believed that the spirits and souls of their forebears resided in tall, ancient trees atop high mountains. An educated person is regarded as one of high status, both in the eyes of society and before God, because of the knowledge they possess. God considers the learned to be noble beings whose rank is elevated to the highest place (Aas, 2021, p. 8). Once a person attains such a noble rank, their next duty is to preserve and elevate it further through the continual pursuit of knowledge without end. The pohon *hayat* thus becomes a symbol of connection between the lower and middle worlds, between humanity and the Divine through the noble path of knowledge.

The serpent's tail depicted on the *Kayon* Ganesha symbolises the descending path toward the middle and lower worlds. This implies that when a person has attained a high level of virtue and enlightenment, they should remain humble and willing to guide others (those in the lower realm) toward the same path of righteousness. The five flowers on the \**Kayon* Ganesha remind us of the Javanese philosophical concept of kiblat papat lima pancer. This concept symbolises the four cardinal directions with one central point, representing the relationship between humans and the universe (Aminah & Alam, 2024, p. 7). The kiblat papat lima pancer philosophy also reflects the four fundamental human desires inherent within every individual: lauwamah (greed), supiyah (lust), amarah (anger), and mutmainah (serenity) (Aminah & Alam, 2024, p. 7). Humans must strive to balance and control these desires so that God may elevate their spiritual rank. The number five also holds significant meaning in Islam, as it

**Table 2. Forms and Meanings of Ganesha's Visual Symbols**
(Source: Document and Archive Analysis, 2024)

| Body Structure | Visual Syimbol | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| Head (Upper) | Large Head | Broad thinking |
| | *Leyepan* Ayes | Concentration |
| | Large Ears | Listening more attentively |
| | Single Tusk | Removing evil, preserving goodness |
| | Small Mouth | Speaking only important matters |
| | Trunk | Efficiency and adaptability |
| Body (Middle) | Four Arms | The universe (east, west, north, south) |
| | *Trisula* | Past, present, and future |
| | *Cakra* | Ultimate weapon, eradicator of injustice |
| | Pen | Knowledge and intellectuality |
| | *Tasbih* | Remembrance of God (dhikr) |
| | Large Stomach | Peace with both good and bad |
| | Blue Color | Trust, loyalty, and responsibility |
| Legs (Lower) | Small Feet | Taking steps with careful consideration |
| | Cross-legged Sitting | Respect, politeness, and humility |
| | Black and White *Sarung* | Symbol of evil (black) and goodness (white) |

is reflected in various religious practices such as the five daily prayers (salat lima waktu), the Five Pillars of Islam, and the reminder to "remember five things before five things."

The single flower bud (kuncup bunga) at the top of the *Kayon* Ganesha symbolises the ultimate purpose of human life, the oneness of God. At this stage, a person has returned to the Divine, and through the provision of knowledge and wisdom, they can attain the ultimate truth. The flower bud represents the Javanese philosophical concept of manunggaling kawulo gusti, which refers to the unity between the human self and the Creator (Hidayat, Suyatmo, & Nawawi, 2023, p. 61). This union and return of the human soul to God signify the beginning of a new life after death. When a person has been released from their physical body, they may enter the true spiritual realm, which is often described as a state of emptiness (Sumardjo, 2006, p. 180). The flower bud is the highest point of the *Kayon* Ganesha; however, beyond it lies one final element: the white screen, symbolising emptiness or transcendence.

Overall, the *Kayon* Ganesha represents

the human spiritual journey from the mortal world toward the highest enlightenment through education and knowledge, as depicted in its visual symbols. Humans can derive valuable life lessons from *wayang* narratives and their rich symbolic meanings (Pangestu, Suhita, & Suryanto, 2023, p. 555). The *Kayon* Ganesha illustrates the transience of human life filled with worldly illusions, the process of education, and the struggle for knowledge as a path toward wisdom and nobility. Education, in its truest sense, is not merely the transfer of knowledge but a means of building character (Peterson, 2020, p. 151). The Ganesha symbol within the *kayon* embodies expertise and wisdom that must be pursued with determination and perseverance in the face of trials and obstacles. The *Kayon* Ganesha also portrays the journey toward the highest spiritual attainment, where knowledge elevates humanity to honour and unity with the Divine. Its culmination is manunggaling kawulo gusti, the mystical union between human and God, affirming that true knowledge ultimately leads humankind back to its divine essence in complete spiritual awareness.

**The Symbolic Visual Structure of Lord Ganesha in the *Kayon* Ganesha**

The most significant part of the *kayon* or *gunungan*, which distinguishes it as *Kayon* Ganesha, is the presence of the Ganesha figure at the centre of the composition. Ganesha is depicted as a plump figure seated cross-legged, with an elephant's head and four hands, each holding a specific object. The figure of Ganesha is composed of three main parts: the head (upper section), the body (middle section), and the legs (lower section), each containing distinct visual forms and symbols with specific meanings. A more detailed description of Ganesha's forms and their symbolic meanings is presented in Table 2 below.

Ganesha is a deity symbolising knowledge, wisdom, and the remover of all obstacles. The symbolic structure of Lord Ganesha consists of three parts: the upper structure (head), the middle structure (body), and the lower structure (legs). Each structure contains visual symbols that embody specific meanings. The symbols and their meanings in the figure of Lord Ganesha are analogous to two sides of a sheet of paper that cannot be separated from one another. According to Saussure, the signified (meaning) and the signifier (symbol) form an inseparable unity, metaphorically described as two sides of the same paper (Vera, 2014, p. 46). The interpretation of these symbols is based on cultural ideas and concepts; therefore, understanding them requires familiarity with the artistic conventions from which they originate. The meanings derived from these symbolic interpretations hold valuable lessons for human life, enabling individuals to comprehend the essence of humanity as beings who are complete, intelligent, and educated.

A large head with narrow eyes, large ears, a single tusk, a small mouth, and a trunk characterise the uppermost structure of Lord Ganesha's figure. Ganesha is depicted with the head of an elephant and a plump belly (Indrayasa, 2018, p. 90). Overall, the head of Lord Ganesha resembles that of an elephant, complete with a trunk, large ears,

and a broken tusk on one side. Although an elephant is an animal, it is considered one of the most intelligent among them, often capable of performing impressive acts in circuses, symbolising intellect and awareness. The large head of Lord Ganesha signifies broad-mindedness and deep knowledge, commonly interpreted as intelligence. Ganesha's large head symbolises sharp intellect, vast insight, and wisdom (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 47). In human perception, a large head is often associated with greater brain capacity and intelligence. The narrow or half-closed eyes of Ganesha further represent careful observation and sharp focus. Such eyes indicate a concentrated and penetrating gaze (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 47).

In addition to having a large head, Ganesha also possesses wide ears, symbolising that as a wise deity, he listens more than he speaks. His large ears visually represent this meaning in contrast to his small mouth. Ganesha's small mouth serves as a moral reminder that humans must be mindful of their speech, as spoken words strongly influence others. The combination of large ears and a small mouth signifies that one should listen more and speak less (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 47). One should listen to all that is good and pure and speak only words grounded in truth. Lord Ganesha has a pair of tusks, with one broken and the other intact. This symbolises the importance of discarding and sacrificing all that is negative while preserving what is good and virtuous. Ganesha's form, which is half-human and half-elephant, features a trunk that functions like a hand. The trunk can remove great obstacles

yet is gentle enough to handle small and delicate matters (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 47). Symbolically, Ganesha's trunk represents efficiency and adaptability, reflecting the ability to adjust to circumstances and respond appropriately to one's environment.

The middle structure of Lord Ganesha's figure in the *kayon* or *gunungan* represents the body, which includes several symbolic elements such as four hands, a *trisula* (trident), a *cakra* (discus), a pen, prayer beads (tasbih), a large belly, and a blue-coloured torso. Ganesha is consistently depicted with four hands, each holding a specific object. In the Javanese cultural context, the number four symbolises kiblat papat, or the four cardinal directions (east, west, north, and south), representing the universe. This concept, often referred to as mancapat, embodies the idea of the four directions surrounding a central point, symbolising balance and harmony within the cosmos (Savitri & Sumardiyanto, 2021, p. 59).

In the *Kayon* Ganesha, Lord Ganesha holds a *trisula* (trident) with his trunk. The *trisula*, a three-pronged weapon resembling a fork, symbolises the three dimensions of time — the past, the present, and the future. These three temporal stages inherently shape human life: the past that has passed, the present that accompanies us, and the future that awaits. These three phases are inseparable, as the present determines the future, and the past influences the present. The triadic pattern represents a philosophical conception arising from human interpretation to achieve harmony (Ardana & Consentta, 2022, p. 21). Ganesha also holds a *cakra* (discus) in his left hand. In *wayang* (shadow puppet) narratives, the *cakra*

is the weapon of Prabu Kresna, depicted as a serrated circular blade (Ariyanti & Anto, 2018, p. 27). The *cakra* weapon held by Ganesha symbolises the ultimate instrument for eradicating injustice. Justice is the aspiration of all beings in the universe, particularly humankind, and injustice must be eliminated even if it requires the force of power.

Other objects held by Ganesha in the *Kayon* or *Gunungan* Ganesha include a pen and a rosary (*tasbih*). The pen symbolises knowledge and intellectuality in human civilisation. It represents the medium of communication technology used for disseminating knowledge (Susanti, 2023, p. 70). Human society continues to advance through learning, and knowledge endures and evolves because it is recorded (with the pen) and documented in writing. Without the written records of the past, humanity would not have been able to develop the sciences and technologies that define modern civilisation. The next object held by Ganesha is a *tasbih*, consisting of small beads connected in a circular string. In Islamic tradition, the *tasbih* is commonly used as a tool for reciting dhikr (remembrance of God). The *tasbih* held by Ganesha can thus be interpreted as a symbol of remembrance, a reminder for humans to remember and praise the Almighty God continually. Dhikr is a form of worship in Islam that signifies the act of remembering God (Kamila, 2022, p. 40). To attain well-being in both the worldly and spiritual realms, humans must always remember God, accompanied by obedience and devotion in avoiding prohibitions and carrying out His commands.

The figure of Ganesha in the *Kayon* or *Gunungan* Ganesha is depicted with a large belly and a blue-colored body. These features carry symbolic meanings that provide moral lessons for humankind. Ganesha's large belly represents a state of inner peace and acceptance of both the good and bad aspects of worldly life (the mortal realm). The world, in essence, is structured in pairs: goodness exists because of evil, and vice versa. Every aspect of life in the universe embodies dualism and paradox, yet both elements must coexist in balance (Subiyantoro et al., 2021, p. 86). Humans should strive to embody goodness, even though perfect goodness is unattainable, just as individuals who commit evil are not entirely evil. In the *Kayon* Ganesha, Ganesha's body is portrayed in blue. Blue symbolises trust, loyalty, and responsibility (Setyaningrum, 2015, p. 184). Many corporate and nonprofit organisations use blue tones in their logos or branding because the colour conveys a vision rooted in faith, loyalty, and accountability.

The lower structure of the Ganesha symbol represents the deity's legs, which consist of three visual elements: small feet, a cross-legged sitting posture, and a black-and-white patterned cloth. Ganesha's small feet symbolise careful and deliberate movement. This conveys the message that humans should not act hastily; rather, every step-in life should be taken slowly and thoughtfully (Wantari & Gunawan, 2020, p. 47). The cross-legged posture of Ganesha in the Kayon Ganesha, where both legs rest crossed on a flat surface, signifies respect, politeness, and humility. Lord Ganesha is also depicted wearing a cloth patterned in black and white. These two colours symbolise the duality of good and evil. The

presence of a small white dot within the black field and a small black dot within the white field represents the idea that within goodness lies a trace of evil, and within evil, there is always a spark of goodness. This concept parallels the *Yin* and *Yang* symbol in Chinese philosophy, where the interplay between black and white is not absolute but rather mutually complementary (Asmaret, 2018, p. 266). The world, therefore, is never entirely black or white; both forces coexist, balance each other, and together create harmony.

In general, Lord Ganesha symbolises knowledge, wisdom, and the remover of obstacles, which are visually represented through three structural components: the upper structure (head), the middle structure (body), and the lower structure (legs). Each of these structures contains visual symbols imbued with profound philosophical meanings. These meanings serve as lessons for humanity on how to live life in this transient world. Through his visual symbolism, Ganesha teaches humans to listen more than they speak, to maintain balance among intellect, justice, and spirituality, and to cultivate acceptance of life's dualities, including trust and responsibility. The symbols of Ganesha also convey the importance of acting with careful consideration, demonstrating humility, and recognising that life is always in a state of balance between good and evil. Through these symbols, Ganesha imparts valuable lessons for humanity to become intelligent, wise, and grounded in the values of goodness and harmony in life.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that the *Kayon* Ganesha is composed of a symbolic visual structure that embodies both meaning and educational values. The *Kayon* Ganesha consists of three main structural levels: the lower structure (*palemahan*), the middle structure (*lengkeh*), and the upper structure (*pucuk*), each containing distinct symbols and associated meanings. The symbolic structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha represents the human journey from the mortal realm to the realm of ultimate truth through the pursuit of knowledge and education. The figure of Lord Ganesha depicted in the *Kayon* Ganesha is also divided into three structural parts: the upper structure (head), the middle structure (body), and the lower structure (legs). The symbolism within Ganesha's visual structure embodies the essential qualities that define the ideal human being: knowledge, education, and civilisation. The implication of this study emphasises that the educational values embedded within the symbolic structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha can serve as a source of character education based on local wisdom, particularly in the fields of art and cultural creation.

This study has explored the meanings and educational values embedded within the symbolic visual structure of the *Kayon* Ganesha, yet there remains ample room for further exploration in future research. It is recommended that subsequent studies conduct an in-depth examination of the relationship between the symbols found in the *Kayon* Ganesha and both traditional educational systems and contemporary

educational values. This topic presents a compelling area for deeper investigation. A comparative study between the *Kayon* Ganesha and other *gunungan* forms, viewed from aesthetic and educational-philosophical perspectives, could also be undertaken to provide broader insights into the construction of values within traditional art. Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach is encouraged in future research to enrich the understanding of how symbols in traditional art can contribute to character formation and the cultivation of wisdom in human life.

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