



Cosmology of Dewa Ruci in the Perspective of Islamic Tasawuf

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received:

24-01-2024

Revised:

13-02-2024

Accepted:

26-04-2024

Keywords

Dewa Ruci, Islamic
Mysticism, Cosmology,
Harmony, Culture.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the cosmology of Dewa Ruci from the perspective of Islamic mysticism, focusing on faith, purity, and spiritual journey. The research aims to explore how the concept of Dewa Ruci in Javanese narratives relates to Islamic mysticism. To achieve this goal, the research method used is library research, involving the study of classical texts and literature related to Islamic mysticism as well as the stories of Dewa Ruci. The findings indicate that the cosmology of Dewa Ruci reflects harmony between Islam and Javanese culture, with Dewa Ruci symbolizing values. This study enhances our understanding of how Islamic teachings are conveyed through traditional narratives, enriching our understanding of Javanese cultural heritage and beliefs.

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Introduction

The Dewa Ruci episode from the Mahabharata is a significant example of this adaptation. Dewa Ruci carries profound meaning and is cherished by many, including in folk tales and Javanese mystical teachings, although it is often considered a "heavy" story and rarely performed. This tale leads us to deep contemplation about the origins of the world and what humanity seeks to accomplish. It also takes us on a spiritual journey toward the presence of God, often referred to as "*manunggaling kawula Gusti*" (the unity of servants and the Almighty). (Khaer, 2022)

As a cultural heritage of the archipelago, the art of wayang has evolved by adapting Indian epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. (Firdaus, 2023) Besides imparting moral messages that serve as guidance from our ancestors, this adaptation process also serves as entertainment. During that time, Javanese society was deeply interested in wayang performances, prompting Sunan Kalijaga to compose carangan stories that not only contained Islamic teachings but also provided entertainment. The tale of Dewa Ruci in Wayang performances illustrates Sunan Kalijaga's spiritual endeavor to gain a deeper understanding of God. (Abbas, Suparman, Suryanto, & Wafa, 2023)

The character of Bima symbolizes Sunan Kalijaga himself, while Prophet Khidir (AS), appearing as a rare bajang, represents Dewa Ruci (Dan, Putra, & Budaya, 2003). Bima seeks the sacred water of Pawitrasari, symbolizing the knowledge he pursues. Sunan Kalijaga learns from Prophet Khidir (AS), who appears as a strange bajang and teaches many things about the nafs, including *lawwamah*, *ammarah*, *sufiyah*, and *muthmainnah*, which are related to Bima's colors. Sunan Kalijaga is also taught about the presence of God, the concept of the macrocosm (*jagad gede*), and the microcosm (*jagad cilik*). (Saputra, 2010)

This is considered the main goal for those interested in Sufism. Some Muslims seek alternative paths through Sufism because they believe conventional worship methods are not close enough to God. As a mystical aspect of Islam, Sufism aims to establish a direct relationship with God so that one can feel the presence of God in their lives. (S. M. Amin, 2022)

Amidst the high interest in wayang performances in Javanese society, the role of Sunan Kalijaga in selecting Islamic-themed stories and providing entertainment becomes intriguing (Purwadi, 2004). However, despite the appeal of Sufism to some Muslims, some still feel there is a gap in their personal relationship with God. Research on the relationship between Dewa Ruci and Sufism will provide deeper insights into the spiritual concepts in Wayang and their influence on religious understanding and daily life.

Dewa Ruci is a minor deity encountered by Bima while seeking water, the source of life in Wayang stories. Although not originating from the Mahabharata, this story contains profound Javanese moral and philosophical messages (Sunardi, Murtana, Sudarsono, & Kuwato, 2019). The importance of obedience to the guru, self-reliance, and the quest for self-identity are reflected in its narrative. As Javanese people learn about themselves, they learn about their relationship with God and seek union with Him. Although not a major part of the Mahabharata, this story is well known in Javanese society, and puppeteers often perform it. Yasadipura I, a renowned poet in the Surakarta Kingdom era, is often associated with the Dewa Ruci tale told by traditional puppeteers and modern storytellers (Nasuhi, 2009).

In the tale of Dewa Ruci, a disciple demonstrates obedience to his teacher, self-reliance, and the struggle to find true identity. Understanding one's identity will help one comprehend that they were created by God, according to Javanese wisdom. When you know God, you want to do what He desires and unite with Him, known as "*manunggaling kawula Gusti*," or the unity between servant and God. Although not an original part of the Mahabharata epic by Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, this story takes the main character from the Mahabharata, Bima, one of the strongest Pandava knights. Many Javanese puppeteers perform this inserted story.

This research is novel because it employs a cross-cultural approach that combines the cosmology of Dewa Ruci from the Javanese Wayang tradition with concepts of Islamic Sufism. Previous studies tended to examine Dewa Ruci from the perspectives of Javanese literature or Islamic Sufism separately, but this research offers fresh insights. Conducting research in this manner allows for broader discussions on how the spiritual concepts in the Dewa Ruci story can be viewed from the perspective of Islamic Sufism. This method will provide a significant understanding of the relationship between Javanese literature and Islamic beliefs.

The two main fields of Islamic Sufism and Javanese philosophy form an important theoretical foundation for understanding the cosmology of Dewa Ruci from the perspective of Islamic Sufism. In Javanese philosophy, concepts such as "*sangkan paraning dumadi*," which means the origin of life, and "*manunggaling kawula gusti*," which means unity with God, are the main focus. On the other hand, in Islamic Sufism, concepts such as "*ma'rifat*," which means knowledge of God, and "*manunggaling kawula gusti*," meaning unity with God, are emphasized. (Endraswara, 2018) Research can investigate the similarities and differences between these concepts in understanding human existence and its relationship with God by integrating these two theoretical frameworks.

Researchers develop the following issues based on the questions: First, how does the Islamic Sufism perspective on the cosmology of Dewa Ruci affect our understanding of the relationship between humans and God? Second, how do Islamic Sufism concepts, such as purification of the soul and unity with God, reflect the spiritual journey of the main characters in the Dewa Ruci story?

Method

This research employs a library research approach (Mustofa et al., 2023) aimed at gathering, reviewing, and analyzing literature related to the cosmology of Dewa Ruci and Islamic Sufism. The initial stage of this research involves a literature search from academic

sources such as books, theses, scholarly journals, and conference papers (Zed, 2008). Subsequently, predefined inclusion criteria, such as relevance to the cosmology of Dewa Ruci and Islamic Sufism, will be used to select pertinent literature. Furthermore, data from the selected literature will be analyzed to ascertain the relationship between the cosmology of Dewa Ruci and the concepts of Islamic Sufism. (Khatibah, 2011) This method provides a deeper understanding of the spiritual aspects of the Dewa Ruci story from the perspective of Islamic Sufism.

Results and Discussion

The Cosmology of the Story of Dewa Ruci

Cosmology, derived from the Greek words "kosmos," meaning "world," and "logos," meaning "science," refers to the study of the structure and history of the universe on a large scale, as well as the origin and development of a particular subject (Rahman, 2020). In 1728, Christian von Wolff wrote a work entitled *Discursus Praeliminaris de Philosophia in Genere*, which served as an introduction to this discipline (Wolff, 1732). As defined by Hasan Shadily, as cited in Whitehead (2009), "cosmology" refers to the order on Earth, not chaos without rules. Religion, astronomy, and philosophy are other fields that study cosmology. In Bima's endeavor, the main character of the story of Dewa Ruci, to understand the meaning of God, researchers examined Bima's beliefs. (Whitehead, 2009)

The story begins when Bima, also known as Werkudara or Sena, seeks guidance from Durna on how to become an ideal human being (*insan kamil*). Without hesitation, Durna instructs Bima to seek holy water that can purify his soul and make his life perfect (Hakim, 2021). In the Tikbasara forest at the foot of Mount Candramuka, there is water called *tirta prawita sari*. Despite knowing the dangers in the forest guarded by many giants, Bima respectfully accepts his guru Durna's command.

At the palace of Amarta, Bima bid farewell to his brothers before departing. They attempted to dissuade him, fearing that Durna might want to eliminate Bima in the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas. In the end, Durna sided with the Kauravas, and Bima and his four brothers became the feared force of the Pandava Five.

As a dutiful disciple of his guru, Bima rejected all efforts by his brothers to hinder him. He chose to journey alone to seek the holy water, *tirta pawitra sari*, in the Tikbrasara forest (Pujiawati, 2017). With a steadfast determination to become a warrior with a Brahmin heart, serving as an example to his people, and having deep love for his subjects, Bima insisted on finding the sacred water in the midst of the forest, despite knowing the great risks involved.

During the journey, Bima paid no heed to the dangers, staying focused on his goal. His courage left those on the forest border in awe as they watched him boldly confront the great risks with unwavering resolve. However, in the Tikbrasara forest, after wreaking havoc, Bima did not find the sacred water he sought. Instead, he encountered two giants, Rukmuka and Rukmakala, angered by the damage he had caused. A fierce battle ensued, but Bima emerged victorious. After failing to find the desired *tirta pawitra sari*, Bima returned home with a resolute heart (Navion & Cahyono, 2021).

Bima remained undeterred and sought new guidance from the sage Durna. Durna advised Bima to seek the *tirta pawitra sari* at the bottom of the sea. Despite not being skilled at swimming like his younger brother, Bima remained steadfast in carrying out the task (E. J. K. J. I.-I. U. Setiawan, 2017). This indicates the necessity of sacrifice in the quest for *ma'rifatullah*. It reaffirms that guidance from a teacher is essential, not just material wealth, to attain deep spiritual understanding.

After forsaking worldly pleasures and embarking on his journey, Bima encountered his brothers, known as "*Tunggal Baju*," each possessing different forms and powers. They were *Bayu Mangkurat* (bearing the appearance of a knight, or better known as Bima), *Bayu Kinara*

(bearing the appearance of a white monkey, or Anoman), Bayu Kanitra (bearing the appearance of an elephant, or Setubanda), *Bayu Anras* (bearing the appearance of a bird, or Jajakwreka), and *Bayu Langgeng* (bearing the appearance of a mountain priest, or Begawan Maenaka). Their meeting initiated a conflict called pancakara, a symbolic battle depicting the trials and disputes in Bima's spiritual journey (Effendi, 1977).

Those seeking *ma'rifatullah* still face various temptations despite distancing themselves from worldly affairs (Atho, 2020). During his spiritual journey, Bima encountered the "*Tunggal Baju*," each representing different human desires. Resi Anoman represented the desire for contentment, Bayu Langgeng represented the reproaching soul, Bayu Kanitra represented the desire for mysticism, and Bayu Mangkurat represented the aspiring soul. In the role of Bayu Mangkurat, Bima fought against these temptations and learned more about God. Despite facing temptations, his determination to attain *ma'rifatullah* remained steadfast. This illustrates a spiritual struggle that requires perseverance and earnestness to gain a deeper understanding of God's existence.

Bima beholds the boundless ocean and sky within the body of Dewa Ruci. In this place, he loses the ability to find his way and can no longer discern between up and down, front and back. The illuminating light in the room is not too bright. Eventually, Bima begins to see four colors of light: black, red, yellow, and white. Within the human heart, these colors guide them towards a higher essence of self, known as *pancamaya*. The inner eye serves as a marker of human essence and is the core of their identity (Wicaksana & Wicaksandita, 2023). However, light also obstructs the heart. The human heart consists of three colors: black, red, and yellow, which complete this world.

Each step is propelled by these three colors. According to (Mustakharoh & Psychotherapy, 2021), if one can distinguish these three colors from within themselves, they will be able to merge with the mystical colors. Even if one's heart is not affected by these three lights, the union between the individual and Hyang Sukma will occur, and this union will endure forever. Black light holds greater power to control one's heart. If one's heart is dominated by black light, they become angry at everything and easily enraged. It is the light that obstructs people from doing good.

The color red symbolizes strong desires, the place where all desires originate. However, if this desire is excessive, it will ignite anger and jealousy that go beyond limits, even enveloping someone's mind. Conversely, the color yellow enhances optimism and consistency. However, too much of this color can also be dangerous.

White is considered a symbol of peace as it represents a pure and calm heart, free from conflict and anxiety. Only this sincere heart can find the truth, appreciate beauty, and maintain balance among all desires. However, this white goodness can backfire if it is not used carefully.

The colors black, red, and yellow have many companions and relationships. Since white often loses, white is the only one. Furthermore, if one can understand the desires of the three colors and control them (Ghofir, Kunci, & Suci, 2013), this is where unity occurs, and this is the guide for *manunggaling kawula gusti* (union of servant and lord).

The four colors disappear: black, red, yellow, and white. One additional light will have eight colors. That is the true light. There are those resembling shining jewels, swiftly moving illusions, and glittering beads. That is what is truly called a single light. Everyone possesses these colors.

Everything is contained within the microcosm, which is actually the same as the macrocosm. That is the nature of the world. After speaking with Bima for a long time, Dewa Ruci became kind to him and said, "*Pay attention, there are many things that can thwart your efforts.*" Remember to avoid indulgence, earnestness, and vigilance in all your behaviors. If

you have obtained the expected information, do not be too eager to discuss it; instead, keep it to yourself. You should not discuss knowledge with others except in secret. You may have this knowledge because of His grace; and if you are engaged in debate about this knowledge, quickly concede (Padnobo & Wayang, 2023).

Keep secrets and cover up if you realize any problems. Utilize this knowledge wisely; however, do not let it slip momentarily. Conceal this knowledge if it appears open. Know that your activities no longer have a purpose. You have mastered all of this, courage, wisdom, strength, and bravery in battle. The most important thing is how you apply the knowledge you have gained. Furthermore, your long search for purpose no longer confuses you. Finally, Bima the Pancaretna is allowed to leave Dewa Ruci's body.

Upon returning to the world, Dewa Ruci gradually disappears. Bima is determined to become a true human when he returns to the land. He is no longer interested in the chaos of the world or the secrets of the kingdom. His inner self is resolute. Bima tells his brothers about how he arrived in Amarta. He reveals that Durna had manipulated his journey to the ocean to find holy water. Fortunately, a revelation from the gods stated that the holy water was not in the ocean, as claimed.

From this perspective, it is clear that the journey of a Sufi is generally very difficult to comprehend. The state of the soul known as ecstasy, or floating in the truth presented, arises from the highest spiritual experiences. When Bima seeks holy water, he may be attempting to draw as close to God as possible, and when he is in the "*secrets*" of Dewa Ruci, it may indicate the relationship between creation and the Creator. According to Ibn Arabi, the term "*al-haq*" is used to refer to Allah SWT and "*al-khalq*" to refer to creatures. According to Sufi cosmology, the world is considered an integral part of Allah SWT.

Approach of Sufism in Islam

In the story of Dewa Ruci, the approach of Islamic Sufism emphasizes spiritual quest and purification of the soul. In Javanese Wayang tradition, Dewa Ruci symbolizes the pursuit of inner purity and eternal happiness. Bima's spiritual journey is depicted in this tale, reflecting humanity's struggle to purify oneself and gain a better understanding of God's existence. Through Dewa Ruci, the moral teachings and life philosophy of Java are reflected, illustrating the right way of living.

In this story, the approach of Islamic Sufism underscores the importance of purifying the soul, strengthening ethics, and building a spiritual connection with God. This approach reflects the principles of Sufism that advocate simplicity, humility, and piety as the path to eternal happiness and truth (Nashihin, Sularno, Yahya, Musthan, & Aziz, 2022). Dewa Ruci serves as a representation of these principles and aids Bima in his spiritual journey towards enlightenment and inner peace.

In the story of Dewa Ruci, Bima demonstrates remarkable determination in his quest for the sacred water, *tirta prawita sari*. Alongside his belief that the water will bless and purify him, he harbors a strong desire to attain perfection as an *insan kamil*. Moreover, his unwavering loyalty to his teacher, the priest Durna, drives him to fully obey every command (Sunardi et al., 2019).

This perspective reflects the teachings of Sufism, which strongly emphasize the importance of respecting the teacher and carrying out their orders with sincerity. This aligns with the notion of piety emphasized by the Sufis, who argue that moral perfection can be achieved through a balance of action and knowledge (Pujiawati, 2017). Though Sufi knowledge may be relatively easy to learn, practicing it in everyday life requires perseverance and dedication.

If one wishes to delve deeper into religion, seeking guidance from knowledgeable individuals is a crucial step. Bima's decision to apprentice himself to Durna serves as a good

example. Thus, he acquires knowledge of "ilmu thariqah" while embarking on his spiritual journey (thariq). Bima remains faithful to his teacher and follows his commands, despite facing difficulties. This loyalty and obedience underscore the importance of following the guidance of a wise teacher to understand and implement religion (Sodiq, 2017). Through this journey, Bima demonstrates his steadfastness and commitment to pursuing deeper knowledge and understanding of spirituality, even in the face of formidable obstacles.

In the story of Dewa Ruci, the teachings of Islam and Sufism are clearly portrayed to the community. Gods are no longer considered the highest authorities; like Dewa Indra and Bayu, they can make mistakes and be subject to punishment, or even be surpassed by humans (Bima) (Abdillah, 2022). In this tale, the message emphasizes that faith is not dependent on status; but on sincerity and devotion in worship. As an ordinary human, Bima demonstrates that spiritual enlightenment can be attained with genuine intention. Therefore, Bima's journey reflects that purity can be achieved through heartfelt dedication (Wicaksono & Wayang, 2021).

After defeating two giants, Rukmuka and Rukmakala, Bima is given a gift called the "*Sabuk Bara with Cinde Kembar*" (Belt of Fire with Twin Charms). This gift holds symbolic meaning in the spiritual journey: the "*Sabuk Bara*" signifies the strong determination of a *saalik* (a person on the spiritual path), and the "*Cinde Kembar*" on the right side symbolizes the importance of righteous action. This gift serves as a reminder to Bima of the commitment and perseverance he has shown on his journey towards spiritual enlightenment (I. Setiawan, 2017).

The experience of the Prophet's Isra' Mi'raj is the culmination of a Sufi's spiritual journey. With proportion, scale, and format appropriate to their capacity, Sufis strive to emulate the Prophet's journey. Their primary goal is to draw closer to their Lord, and they may even have the opportunity to "*communicate*" with the Most High. As described in the Prophet's hadith, such encounters bring indescribable happiness that cannot be felt by the human senses.

According to William James, as quoted by Rosyad (2021), understanding why people experience spiritual "*anguish*," as understood by physicians, does not necessarily have to be part of the experience. Controlling one's desires (*mujahadah*) and purifying oneself (*tazkiyah al nafs*) are most important (Rosyad, 2021).

Bima's struggles reflect al-Ghazali's Sufi philosophy in several scenes of the story. He must have patience to overcome his own desires, be willing to leave behind a pleasurable lifestyle, and embrace a more sacred way of life. Bima also has to overcome human passions. Despite his life being in danger, he follows his teacher's orders with full awareness and responsibility. For example, when he descends to the bottom of the sea to confront the dragon Nemburnawa and faces two giant forest guardians in the Tikbrasara forest, All of this can be seen as a representation of the struggle to combat one's desires (Fahmi, 2016).

Bima encounters four colors of light: black, red, yellow, and white. These colors symbolize the desires that dominate the human heart. The concept of the miraculous heart by al-Ghazali parallels this perspective. In this story, the black light signifies the desire for anger, also known as the wolfish desire, which turns people aggressive and tends to foster hostility; the red light signifies the desire for lust, indicating the tendency to satisfy one's carnal desires, especially in matters of passion; and the yellow light signifies the desire for greed, which produces people who are greedy and want to control everything. The white light will dominate the human heart and guide it towards knowledge, wisdom, and faith. Thus, the human heart can comprehend its essence from all things, including God, through spiritual ability and knowledge (Susetya, 2016). Therefore, the human heart can understand its essence in all things, including God, through spiritual ability and knowledge.

The experience of Prophet Ibrahim seeking God is similar to what he experienced when Bima saw the emerging light. He sees stars in the sky, but he does not consider them to be God, but rather the light of Allah. This is the first obstacle faced by everyone seeking the truth in their journey towards God.

Therefore, Bima's effort to obtain holy water reflects the struggle of a Sufi to reach the stage of unveiling the existence of God. To achieve this stage, a Sufi must go through many processes, such as repentance, patience, and gratitude; courage; and fear; faith, and dependence; love; longing; willingness; and peace; and introspection and self-assessment (Badrudin, 2022).

In accordance with the lessons found in Surah an-Naziat, verses 41-40: "*But as for him who feared the position of his Lord and prevented the soul from [unlawful] inclination, then indeed, Paradise will be [his] refuge.*" Bima succeeded in overcoming the test to control his desires. This illustrates Bima's spiritual journey, reflecting the concepts of Sufism about self-conquest and purification of the soul (Harini & SI, 2019). Bima demonstrates his steadfastness and spiritual depth by understanding and overcoming his desires. His understanding of the spiritual journey and personal transformation in Javanese culture is reinforced by the parallels between his findings and ideas in religious teachings.

When the author of the Dewa Ruci story recounts Bima's sacred task of seeking holy water, there is debate. Some scholars argue that the microcosm (*jagad cilik*) and macrocosm (*jagad gede*) are entities merged into one unity of existence, known as mystical pantheism. This contradicts the views of Ibn 'Arabi or al-Hallaj, who conceal some differences between the two. According to Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, there is nothing in existence except God (*al-Haq*), who is One in His existence. There is nothing but God in essence, except as a manifestation (*tajalli*) of God in the world (S. M. J. H. J. S. I. Amin, 2005).

Wahdat al-Wujud, is not a philosophical concept separate from one's everyday life. It can only be achieved through spiritual practices integrated with the life of a Sufi, not through mere theoretical or conceptual thinking. Most people see Ibn 'Arabi's Sufism as philosophical (Harini & SI, 2019). Most scholars, especially from the Sunni group, argue that philosophical Sufism is rooted in the main teachings of Islam (the Quran and Hadith). They also believe that Sufism has been mixed with philosophies from cultures such as Christianity, Greek, Persian, Indian, and Greek. Sunni Sufism, which prioritizes the Quran and Sunnah, as developed by al-Ghazali, is often distinguished from this philosophical Sufism (Mannan, 2018).

According to Nasr (2019), the concept of "transcendent unity of existence," described as plurality and uniqueness, represented by a single light with eight colors, does not align with the teachings of al-Ghazali's Sufism in the story of Dewa Ruci. In fact, it is Ibn 'Arabi who discusses this matter. Therefore, the author wishes to emphasize that Dewa Ruci, as a Javanese mystical artwork, seeks to integrate perspectives from "*esoteric Islam*," which blends philosophical Sufi teachings that incorporate philosophical elements from cultures such as Yudhistira (Nasr, 2019).

According to al-Ghazali, the soul is its lamp, and one's life is like the light scattered on the walls of the human physical body. However, in *Serat Cebilek*, the shimmering rays referred to as *permana* provide life to the entire body and represent the Hyang Sukma within humans. *Permanence* exists within the human body but is unseen as it is an individualization of the essence of God. Moreover, there are differing opinions among scholars regarding this issue. When the microcosm enters the macrocosm body, the episode considered most significant is *manunggaling kawula gusti* (indicating the union of humans with God) (Hakim, 2021).

The story of Dewa Ruci in Javanese mystical art aims to embrace or unite various different elements. This includes the differences of opinion between Sufis following the Sunni

tradition (represented by al-Ghazali's Sufism) and those following the Sufism of Ibn Arabi. Additionally, the story incorporates elements from the Mahabharata and Ramayana, both of which are drawn from Indian culture. The character Bima appears in both of these stories.

From the perspective of Islamic Sufism, it demonstrates that humans seek spiritual meaning within themselves and their relationship with God. As a symbol of divinity within humans, *permana* signifies the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*, wherein humans strive to unite themselves with God. The effort to achieve holistic and inclusive spiritual understanding is shown by incorporating various Sufi perspectives, influenced by al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, as well as drawing elements from the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

Conclusion

In the perspective of Islamic Sufism, the cosmology of Dewa Ruci depicts humanity's endeavor to achieve spiritual unity with God through a complex spiritual journey. Symbols such as light and color are utilized in the story to illustrate spiritual events. According to al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi, the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* is reflected in human efforts to delve into the Oneness of God. Furthermore, the harmonization of various perspectives in the narrative demonstrates the importance of tolerance and inclusion in the spiritual journey. The cosmology of Dewa Ruci showcases the complexity and richness of understanding in Islamic Sufism, as well as the importance of traversing various spiritual stages to attain unity with God. To gain deeper insight into the essence of existence, the story also imparts values of patience, perseverance, and harmony.

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