



# Manifestations of beliefs in mystical (“*tuah*”) plants within the repertoires and practice of Javanese karawitan



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## ABSTRACT

Javanese culture maintains a profound relationship with mysticism, including beliefs in plants considered to possess *tuah* (spiritual potency). Javanese karawitan, as a cultural expression, also contains symbolic layers shaped by these mystical worldviews. This study examines how such beliefs manifest in the titles, symbolic atmospheres, and performative behaviors associated with selected gendhings that reference or imply spiritually potent plants. Using a qualitative descriptive method and a phenomenological approach grounded in Javanese cultural mysticism, the research integrates musical-text analysis, cosmological symbol interpretation, and interviews with practitioners to clarify how each method contributes to the findings. Textual analysis identifies plant-related symbolic markers; phenomenological interpretation reveals how performers internalize these symbols; interviews explain the cultural logic linking plant potency with specific performative behaviors. The findings show that beliefs in spiritually potent plants function not merely as a cosmological background but as active determinants of performative intention, aesthetic atmosphere, and interpretive meaning within the examined repertoire. This study offers a new contribution by demonstrating that the concept of *tuah* operates as a metaphysical structure influencing both musical creation and performance. Unlike previous studies, it identifies a direct relationship between sacred-plant symbolism and its concrete manifestation in Javanese karawitan.



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## 1. Introduction

This study is guided by three central research questions: (1) which types of spiritually potent plants (*tumbuhan bertuah*) are used as titles in the repertoire of Javanese karawitan gendhings?; (2) what symbolic meanings do these spiritually potent plants carry in relation to Javanese cosmology and belief systems?; and (3) how do mystical beliefs in such plants influence the symbolic interpretation and performative practices of Javanese karawitan gendhings? These questions arise from the understanding that Javanese karawitan is not merely a musical tradition but a cultural system embedded within a broader mystical worldview. Within this worldview, spiritually potent plants function as symbolic extensions of the Javanese cosmological relationship between the *jagad ageng* (macrocosmos) and the *jagad alit* (microcosmos). When such plants appear as *gendhing* titles or are invoked in performance contexts, they carry layers of cultural meaning that influence how musicians interpret the pieces and how specific performative behaviors are enacted. By investigating the presence, symbolism, and performative implications of these plants, the study seeks to reveal how non-musical cosmological elements actively shape the aesthetics and spirituality of Javanese karawitan. The Javanese people are deeply intertwined with mystical and spiritual dimensions of life. These

aspects are embedded within the framework of Javanese cosmology. Javanese cosmology is a conceptualization of mystical life that integrates belief in supernatural forces beyond the self, including both natural forces and the divine. In Javanese thought, the universe is referred to as the *jagad ageng* (macrocosm), while the individual human being is seen as a reflection of the *jagad alit* (microcosm). There exists an inseparable relationship between the two. This interrelation between the *jagad ageng* (macrocosm) and the *jagad alit* (microcosm) represents a central theme in the discourse of Javanese cosmology [1, p. 181].

Nearly all aspects of the Javanese worldview, including beliefs, myths, moral values, ethics, and even everyday concerns such as agriculture and trade, those are influenced by supernatural forces believed to arise from the harmony between the *jagad alit* and the *jagad ageng* [2, p. 117]. Prosperity or adversity, fortune or misfortune, are perceived as outcomes of efforts to achieve unity or oneness between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This unity can be interpreted as the establishment of a connection between the Javanese individual (or community) and a higher, transcendent power beyond themselves. Such harmony is sought as a means of enhancing personal spiritual strength in pursuit of well-being both in this world and the hereafter. For this reason, the Javanese continuously strive to maintain balance and harmony between the microcosm and the macrocosm. In Javanese cosmology, everything that exists in the universe is understood as part of a harmonious order between the *jagad ageng* (macrocosm) and the *jagad alit* (microcosm). The macrocosm encompasses all elements of the universe, such as earth, sky, wind, water, and all supernatural powers beyond the human realm, meanwhile the microcosm refers to humans as the miniature representation of the cosmos. Within this conceptual framework, elements of nature, including plants, are imbued with deeper spiritual significance. As part of the effort to unify the self (*jagad alit*) with nature (*jagad ageng*), the Javanese people have, for generations, lived in close connection with the natural world. Through their ongoing struggle for survival, they have gradually observed and learned from every movement, change, event, and natural force, both visible and invisible, that can be sensed or felt. These natural forces include everything found on the surface of the earth, including flora and fauna [3, p. 1-2]. Over time, such forces came to be known by the term *tuah*.

The term of the *tuah* refers to sacredness, spiritual potency, or a kind of blessing, an influence believed to bring about tangible or intangible benefits, such as happiness, prosperity, luck, or safety. Something considered to possess the *tuah* is believed to exert a magical or psychological effect on those who believe in it. Objects or entities that are thought to carry certain powers beyond the human self are thus believed to hold the *tuah*. For this reason, even today, many Javanese people continue to recognize and believe in the existence of certain objects, stones, trees, and plants that are considered to be endowed with the *tuah*. Several types of plants considered to possess the *tuah* serve as tangible examples of how the Javanese people interpret nature in symbolic and spiritual terms. This belief holds that certain plants contain mystical powers or the *tuah*, a form of spiritual energy, mystical efficacy, or metaphysical force that, while invisible, is believed to bring either positive or negative influence. The *tuah* may serve as protection, attract prosperity, ward off misfortune, or draw in good luck, depending on the type of plant, the timing of its use, and the ritual procedures involved. Plants believed to possess the *tuah* are often used in traditional rituals, royal symbols, and as elements in prayers or expressions of specific hopes and wishes. Certain types of plants believed to possess mystical spiritual powers, in addition to serving as symbols of prayer and aspiration, have also influenced the creation of traditional art, both aspirational and inspirational. Artworks involving sacred plants often reflect specific hopes or intentions for future benefits. Inspirationally, these plants are seen as sources of ideas, motivation, or positive energy, encouraging individuals to create, act, or engage with the artwork in a more meaningful way. For example, the *Wahyu Tumurun* plant (*Ochna serrulata*), symbolically interpreted as “descending revelation,” is believed to embody prayers and hopes for divine guidance, mercy, and abundant blessings from the Almighty. This symbolism has inspired the creation of batik art motifs named after *Wahyu Tumurun* [4, p. 373-378]. Similarly, the names of flowers and leaves from other sacred plants, such as the jasmine (*Jasminum*), which became known as “*Melati Rinonce*”, and the leaf of the *Andong* plant (*Cordyline fruticosa*), called “*Godhong Andong*”, have served both as aspirations and inspirations for naming motifs in traditional Javanese kris craftsmanship [5, p. 13]. These

examples represent traditional Javanese artworks inspired by the belief in sacred plants. Javanese gamelan music or its *gendhings* of the *karawitan* repertoires are also among the traditional cultural art products of Java. The majority of both the performers and audiences are Javanese people. Like the Javanese community in general, they consistently exhibit mystical behaviors rooted in beliefs derived from Javanese cosmology.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with an approach rooted in Javanese cultural mysticism. The primary focus is to explore the Javanese people's belief in the mystical meaning of spiritually spiritual plants (*tumbuhan bertuah*) used in the naming of *gendhing karawitan*, and to interpret these meanings through a mystical lens, performance style, and inner or spiritual significance. The research design follows an interpretative qualitative approach combined with a phenomenological-cultural perspective [6, p. 48]. The aim is to explore and interpret the symbolic meanings of sacred plants within *gendhing* titles, as well as how such meanings are internalized and actualized in the musical practices of *karawitan*. Data collections are divided into three datats in the following: (1) Primary data that contains of In-depth interviews with *karawitan* practitioners and cultural experts, focusing on perceptions, experiences, and practices related to sacred plant symbolism; (2) Secondary data that certain of literature review of classical manuscripts, Javanese cultural texts, and plant cosmology references relevant to mystical beliefs in plants; And (3) observational data that certains the field observations of *karawitan* performances, noting performative gestures, rituals, and behaviors linked to the symbolic meaning of plants. Meanwhile The data analysis is conducted in an integrated, multi-step process, as illustrated below:

- Data Organization and Coding: All collected data (interviews, texts, observations) are transcribed and coded according to thematic categories, including plant symbolism, cosmological associations, performance practices, and mystical beliefs.
- Hermeneutic Analysis: Texts and interview transcripts are analyzed hermeneutically to uncover latent meanings, cultural references, and cosmological concepts embedded in *gendhing* titles and performance practices.
- Symbolic Interpretation: Coded data are interpreted to identify symbolic relationships between plants, titles, and performance behaviors, focusing on how these symbols convey spiritual and cultural meanings.
- Mystical-Cultural Analysis: Ritual practices and spiritual values observed during performances are examined to understand how mystical beliefs in plants inform performance style and gestures.
- Integration and Triangulation: Findings from interviews, literature, and observation are triangulated to ensure validity and coherence, producing a holistic understanding of how the mystical plants (*tumbuhan bertuah*) influence both symbolic interpretation and musical practice.
- Interpretation and Conclusion: Integrated insights are synthesized through cultural reflection to reveal the metaphysical and aesthetic role of mystical plants (*tumbuhan bertuah*) in Javanese *karawitan*.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. "Tuah" Meaning and Plants Having "Tuah"

In Indonesia in general, the term "*tuah*" is commonly used by the Malay ethnic group and is interpreted as luck, fortune, or good destiny. For the Malay community, something is considered to possess "*tuah*" because it carries a hopeful quality believed to bring luck and favorable outcomes [6, p.229]. This term, along with its associated meaning, has also been adopted by the Javanese community. In Javanese traditional beliefs, "*tuah*" is often associated with or refers to mystical supernatural powers that are believed to positively influence human life, particularly in aspects such as prosperity, health, and protection from perceived dangers. The term "*tuah*" is

also interpreted as sacred power or spiritual potency. The notion of “*tuah*” as a form of spiritual potency is addressed in the Hindu teaching of *Cadu Sakti*, which refers to the power or omnipotence of God. This divine power, known as *wibhusakti*, is believed to permeate all of existence; it resides both within and beyond all of God's creations [7, p. 11-15]. Furthermore, in relation to the interpretation of “*tuah*” as sacredness, Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh defines *karāmah* (sainthood or sacred miracle) as an extraordinary ability that enables a person to “shorten the distance of the worldly realm,” thus allowing them to perceive the afterlife before its actual time. *Karāmah* is also described as the shortening of the spiritual distance between the individual and God. Additionally, it is understood as a transcending of temporal limitations, whereby a person can perform mystical or supernatural acts beyond normal human capability (such as fasting throughout the year, engaging in constant prayer, *etc.*) without experiencing hardship [8, p. 1-2]. Based on these definitions of the *karāmah*, “*tuah*” can thus be understood as an extraordinary ability, beyond normal human behavior, that enables an individual to consciously draw nearer to, or even achieve union with, the Divine.

In Javanese mysticism, a spiritual teaching that must be deeply understood is known as *sangkan paraning dumadi*. This doctrine emphasizes a profound and holistic comprehension of life, beginning with the recognition of divinity through a reflective journey of existence—namely, by seeking, recognizing, internalizing, and fully realizing the origin of life, the path of human existence, and ultimately, the most essential purpose of life: to return and become “united” with God, the Creator. The ultimate goal or highest form of ideal human fulfillment in Javanese belief is the conscious awareness and knowledge of one’s true self, *sangkan paraning dumadi*, namely, understanding where one comes from, for what purpose, and to what ultimate end, which is the union with the Divine [9, p.4]. According to the teachings of the *Kejawen* (Javanese philosophy), human beings and all entities in the universe originate from God and will ultimately return to God [10, p. 215-216]. In the context of the meaning of “*tuah*” as it relates to *karāmah* (divine grace) or sacredness, “*tuah*” in the *kejawen* worldview refers to divinity itself, namely, the omnipotent power of God manifesting within the framework of *sangkan paraning dumadi* throughout all of His creations in the universe. Thus, closeness to God is considered the highest and most perfect form of “*tuah*.” In the Javanese belief system, “*tuah*” that understood as the manifestation of the power and omnipotence of God (*Kang Gawe Urip*, “The Giver of Life”) within the framework of *sangkan paraning dumadi* in all of His creations, is also believed to manifest in specific objects. Consequently, the Javanese belief in certain objects, specific places, particular individuals, and traditional rituals that are believed to possess *tuah* is commonly found in Javanese cultural life. Certain objects are considered to possess *tuah* because they are believed to hold supernatural powers, which are manifestations of divine power through the process of *sangkan paraning dumadi* as expressed in all elements of the universe. Additionally, such objects are considered sacred because they serve as symbolic representations of traditional wisdom (*petuah*) imbued with spiritual values. These objects may include gemstones or agates, bamboo, various inscriptions (*raja*) written on the skins of specific animals and later used as personal amulets (*jimat*), as well as certain sacred trees and plants [11, p. 1-101]. From the explanations above, at least two categories of *tuah* can be identified: individuals who possess *tuah* and objects or items that are considered to be endowed with *tuah*. These two are believed to share a reciprocal relationship, influencing one another. This relational connection is illustrated in the following Fig. 1.

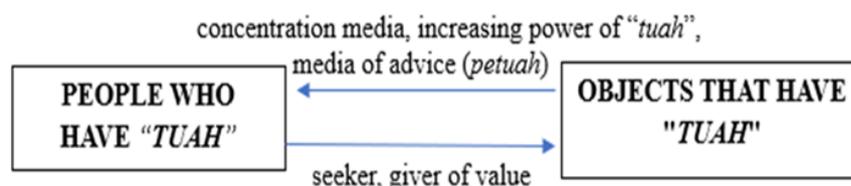


Fig. 1. The Relationship Between Humans Possessing *Tuah* and Objects Endowed with *Tuah*

Based on Fig. 1, it can be explained that Javanese individuals who are believed to possess *tuah* act as both seekers and givers of *tuah* value that relates to objects considered to hold *tuah*. These individuals rely on such objects as mediums of spiritual focus or concentration (*yantra*)

to facilitate the unification of the self with divine power, to enhance their own *tuah*, and to serve as instruments through which they impart wisdom (*petuah*) to others in their surroundings. The power and/or the spiritual potency known as the “*tuah*” is also believed to reside in certain types of plants. Specific parts of these plants, such as leaves, seeds, fruits, flowers, wood, and roots, are believed to embody this *tuah*. Based on this belief, these components are considered to hold beneficial qualities and are often utilized for various positive purposes in the daily lives of the Javanese people, including in traditional medicine, health practices, as ritual offerings (*sesaji*), or as materials used to imbue specific objects with spiritual power. Ethnobotanical studies provide evidence for the Javanese belief in *tuah*, or spiritual power, in plants. For example, research shows that the leaves of the *Katuk* plant (*Sauropus androgynus*) are used in ritual offerings as symbols of protection and safety, and *sinom* or tamarind leaves (*Tamarindus indica*) are widely used in traditional herbal medicine (*jamu*) [12, p.24-25]. Similarly, the pomegranate fruit is believed to have medicinal and ritual significance [13, p.39-40], certain flowers are spiritually potent and used in wedding ceremonies [14, p.157-166], and the roots of *Akar Bahar* (*Antipathes spp.*) are believed to heal ailments and are made into protective jewelry [15, p.84; 16, p.94-95]. These examples illustrate how plants are seen as carriers of spiritual and symbolic power in daily and ritual life. This ethnobotanical knowledge is relevant to Javanese gamelan because plants that are considered “*tuah*” also appear in *gendhing* titles or are invoked symbolically during performances. From an ethnomusicological perspective, *gendhing* becomes more than music; it functions as a medium through which these spiritual forces are recognized and enacted. Thus, the symbolic and ritual significance of plants parallels their musical role, shaping repertoire, interpretation, and performative behaviors, linking tangible cultural practices with intangible musical and spiritual expression.

In addition, certain types of wood derived from specific trees or plants are also believed to possess “*tuah*” or spiritual potency. These woods are traditionally used as raw materials for crafting the *warangka* (sheath) of the Javanese *keris* (a traditional dagger). For example, *warangka* made from sandalwood (*Santalum album*) is believed to attract benevolent spirits and ward off malevolent ones. The *warangka* carved from *Timaha* wood (*Kleinhovia hospita*) is thought to hold supernatural properties that serve as a means of personal protection. Wood from the *Trembalo* tree (*Dysoxylum acutangulum*) is believed to promote both physical and spiritual tranquility, while *Awar-awar* wood (*Ficus septica*) is traditionally used for its purported ability to neutralize venom or toxins from animals and insects. Additionally, *warangka* made from *Adhem Ati* wood (*Litsea chinensis*) is associated with the cultivation of patience, inner peace, and protection against malevolent magical influences. Other types of wood believed to possess specific forms of *tuah* are also commonly used in the making of *keris warangka* [17, p. 25-29]. The belief in the spiritual potency of these various woods significantly contributes not only to the perceived metaphysical function of the *keris* but also to its aesthetic value, as the choice of wood enhances both the symbolic and artistic dimensions of the *Keris*.

### 3.2. Plants Having “*Tuah*” in to *Gendhings* Titles

Before discussing the types of plants that believed have “*tuah*” as reflected in the titles of *gendhing* repertoires in Javanese *karawitan*, it is important to first review the types of *gendhing* repertoires in textual terms, particularly in relation to the level of complexity (length or brevity) found in traditional Javanese *karawitan* compositions. Traditionally, these *gendhing* compositions are broadly categorized into two groups: (1) *gendhings* with irregular forms and/or patterns, such as *Sampak*, *Srepegan*, *Jineman*, and *Ayak-ayakan*; and (2) *gendhings* with regular forms and/or patterns, such as *Lancaran*, *Ketawang*, *Ladrang*, *Ketawang Gendhing*, *Gendhing Tengahan*, and the larger-scale *Gendhing Ageng* [18, p. iv]. Among *gendhings* with regular forms, structures, and patterns, the *Lancaran* form represents the simplest type of *gendhing* composition in Javanese *karawitan*. Its structure and musical composition are relatively simple when compared to the *Ketawang* form. Similarly, the *Ketawang* form is relatively simpler in both composition and pattern compared to the *Ladrang* form. *Ladrang* is simpler than *Ketawang Gendhing*, and so on, progressing in complexity up to the most intricate patterns found in the large-scale *Gendhing Ageng* forms [20]. In the context of the Javanese *karawitan* (traditional gamelan music), certain *gendhing* titles incorporate the names of plants believed to carry spiritual or auspicious significance (*tuah*). One such example is the piece titled

“Ketawang *Tarupala*”, which belongs to the *Ketawang* form, a relatively simple and symmetrical musical structure, see Fig. 2. This piece is typically performed in the *Slendro* tuning system and follows the *Pathet Manyura*, a modal framework used in Javanese gamelan music. In *karawitan*, *pathet* refers to a system that organizes melodic structure and emotional character within a particular tuning system (*laras*). It governs which pitches are emphasized and how they function within a composition. The *Slendro* scale, which divides the octave roughly into five equal intervals, features three main *pathet*: *Pathet Nem*, *Pathet Sanga*, and *Pathet Manyura*, each associated with different moods, times of performance, and dramatic contexts.

Ketawang <b>Tarupala</b> , laras sléndro pathet manyura [RP]																
<i>Buka</i>																
•	1	1	•	3	2	1	2	3̄	2	1	3	2	1	⑥		
<i>Ompak</i>																
[	•	1	1	•	3	2	1	2̂	3̄	2	1	3	2	1	⑥	]
<i>Ngelik</i>																
•	•	•	•	2̂	3̂	2̂	1̂	3̂	2̂	6̂	5̂	2	3	5	③	
•	•	6̂	1	2	3	2	1̂	2	1	6̂	1̂	2	3	2	①	
3	3	•	•	3	3	6̂	1̂	2	2	5̂	3̂	6	5	3	②	
6	1̂	6	•	6	1̂	5̂	3̂	6	5	2	1̂	3	2	1	⑥	]

Fig. 2. The Main Notation of the "Ketawang *Tarupala*"

In Javanese cultural understanding, particularly among the Yogyakarta court (*keraton*) community, the term *Tarupala* refers either to a type of climbing plant or, in some interpretations, to the nutmeg plant (*Myristica fragrans* Houtt). *Tarupala* has often served as both an inspiration and an aspiration in traditional batik motifs. The plant is regarded as possessing spiritual or symbolic power (*tuah*), representing prayers and hopes for fertility and prosperity. At the level of the *Ladrang* form, which is more complex and structured than the *Ketawang*, several compositions are titled after plants believed to hold auspicious meanings. These include *Ladrang Sri Rejeki*, *Ladrang Lung Gadhung*, *Ladrang Sekar Gadhung*, and *Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*. Among them, *Ladrang Sri Rejeki* is typically performed in the *Pelog* tuning system, see Fig. 3. Similar to the *Slendro* tuning system, *Pelog* also operates within a modal framework known as *Pathet*, which governs tonal emphasis, melodic contour, and emotional nuance. Within the *Pelog* system, there are three principal *pathet*: *Pathet Lima*, *Pathet Nem*, and *Pathet Barang*. “*Ladrang Sri Rejeki*” is most commonly performed within the rules of *Pathet Nem*. The plant names in these *gendhing*, such as *Gadhung* (*yam*), *Mlathi* (*jasmine*), and *Sri Rejeki* (*symbolizing prosperity*), carry symbolic meanings that resonate with the spiritual and emotional character of the music. By invoking these plants, the *gendhing* not only conveys auspiciousness and well-being but also reflects the Javanese belief in the mystical connection between nature and the expressive, ritualized dimensions of *karawitan*.

Referring to plants believed to possess auspicious or spiritual power (*tuah*), the *Sri Rejeki* plant (*Aglaonema* sp.) is widely regarded as a symbol of luck, fortune, prosperity, and positive energy. Etymologically, the term “*Sri*” in Javanese can refer to royalty or a fertility goddess, while “*Rejeki*” denotes sustenance, fortune, or prosperity [20, p.1]. Symbolically, planting *Sri Rejeki* around the home represents a hope or aspiration for continuous blessings, good fortune, and well-being for the household members. The following explanation pertains to titles that incorporate the name of the *Gadhung* plant (*Dioscorea hispida* Dennst.). The *Gadhung* plant (*Dioscorea hispida* Dennst.) is a type of tuber that grows wild in forests, yards, and plantations. It serves as an alternative food source, medicinal ingredient, or insecticide, but it also contains cyanide toxins that can be intoxicating or even lethal [21, p. 108].

Ladrang **Sri Rejeki**, laras pélog pathet nem (Magelang) [MW]

*Buka*

	2	2	3	2	1	3	5	3	2	•	1	6	⑤			
[	1	6	1	2	1	6	3	5̇	1	6	1	2̇	1	6	3	5̇
	2	1	2	•	2	1	2	•	2	3	2	1̇	6	5	6	①
	•	1̇	•	1̇	2̇	3̇	2̇	1̇	3̇	2̇	1̇	2̇	•	1̇	6	5̇
	•	•	5̇	6̇	1̇	6	5	3̇	6	1̇	6	5̇	2	1	6	⑤
	•	5̇	5̇	•	5̇	6̇	2̇	1̇	•	6̇	2̇	1̇	•	6̇	2̇	1̇
	3	5	3	2̇	•	1	6	5̇	2	6̇	2̇	1̇	2	6	4	⑤
	2	6̇	2	1	2	6	4	5̇	2	6̇	2̇	1̇	2	6	4	5̇
	2	6̇	2	1̇	2	6	4	5̇	2	3	2	1̇	3	2	6	⑤]

Fig. 3. The Main Notation of the “Ladrang Sri Rejeki”

The name *Gadhung* appears in the titles “Ladrang Lung Gadhung”, “Ladrang Sekar Gadhung”, and “Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi”. Typically, “Ladrang Lung Gadhung” is performed in the *Pelog* scale using the *Pathet Nem* system (particularly in the Yogyakarta style), “Ladrang Sekar Gadhung” is performed in the *Slendro* scale following the *Pathet Manyura* system, and “Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi” is performed in the *Slendro* scale using the *Pathet Sanga* system, see Fig. 4.

Ladrang **Sekar Gadhung**, laras sléndro pathet manyura [RP]

*Buka*

	2	2	1	6	5	5	6	1	2	2	1	2	⑥				
<i>Ompak</i>	•	1	•	6̇	•	3	•	2̇	•	1	•	6̇	•	3	•	2̇	
	•	3	•	2̇	•	3	•	5̇	•	2̇	•	1̇	•	2̇	•	⑥	
<i>Irama Wilet</i>	[	3	5	3	6	3	5	3	2̇	3	1	3	6̇	3	5	3	2̇
		3	1	3	2̇	3	6	3	5̇	3	1	3	6̇	3	1	3	⑥]

Fig. 4. The Main Notation of the “Ladrang Sekar Gadhung”

In relation to the Javanese belief in the mystical power or *tuah* possessed by plants, there has yet to be a clear understanding of what this *tuah* entails specifically in the context of the *Gadhung* plant. Interestingly, the term *Gadhung* frequently appears in the titles of *gendhing* (musical compositions) in Javanese *karawitan* (classical gamelan music). Within the Surakarta and Yogyakarta styles of *karawitan* alone, at least three *ladrang*-form *gendhing* compositions are found that incorporate the term *Gadhung* in their titles. In the Banyuwangi style of *karawitan* in East Java, the term *Gadhung* is also used, as seen in the title of the piece *Opak Gadhung* and in the lyrics of the musical accompaniment for the *Seblang* dance, specifically in the line *Kembang Gadhung*. The *gendhing* used in the *Seblang* dance is considered sacred by the Banyuwangi

community. The meaning of *Gadhung* in *Kembang Gadhung*, however, does not refer directly to the mystical power (*tuah*) of the *Gadhung* plant. Instead, *Gadhung* is interpreted as a food product made from *Gadhung* tubers that is delicious to eat, yet intoxicating and poisonous [22, p.100 & 113]. This interpretation differs from that found in the *karawitan* tradition from Kebumen, Central Java. In this context, the term “*Lung*”, which refers to the vine and leaves of the *Gadhung* plant in the “*Gendhing Lung Gadhung*”, is symbolically understood as a prayer and hope for fertility and enduring familial unity across generations [23, p. 2-5]. From these varying interpretations, the term *Gadhung* may be understood as representing something that is pleasurable or enjoyable, yet potentially intoxicating or even poisonous, while also serving as a symbolic expression of prayer and aspiration for fertility. In Javanese *karawitan* (particularly within the Surakarta style), there exists another *gendhing* in the *ladrang* form that incorporates the term *gadhung*, namely “*Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*”, Fig. 5. This piece is widely regarded as sacred or even *wingit* (imbued with spiritual power or taboo) by many practitioners of Javanese *karawitan*, especially in the Surakarta and Yogyakarta regions. Referring to plants believed to possess mystical qualities (*tuah*), the *Mlathi* or jasmine plant (*Jasminum*) is also featured in the title “*Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*”. Jasmine and its flowers are traditionally believed to bring calmness to the heart and mind, and symbolize purity or sanctity. For this reason, they are often used as essential elements in ritual offerings in Javanese cultural practices. The term *Gadhung Mlathi* also appears as a batik motif, that is *Dodot Alas-alasan-Gadhung Mlathi*, which is worn by traditional Javanese brides and grooms. In this context, it symbolizes purity, fertility, and clarity of thought [24, p. 214-249].

Ladrang **Gadhung Mlathi** dados ladrang **Ubal-Ubal** dados lancaran **Bubaran Nyutra**, laras sléndro pathet sanga [MW]

<b>Buka Gender</b>	. 2 . 1 . 2 . 1 2 2 1 1 . 6 . 5	<b>Ladrang Ubal-Ubal</b>	[ . 1 . 6 . 2 . 1
<b>Ompak</b>	[ . 2 . 1 . 6 . 5		. 5 . 6 . 2 . 1
	. 2 . 1 . 6 . 5		. 5 . 6 . 2 . 1
	1 1 . . 1 1 . . 1 1 3 2 1 6 5 3		. 3 . 2 . 6 . 5
	. 2 . 1 . 6 . 5		. 2 . 1 3 2 6 5 1 6 5 3
<b>Ngelik</b>	. 2 . 1 . 6 . 5		. 6 5 6 3 . 6 5 6 1 3 2 6 5 3 6 5 3
	. 2 . 1 . 5 . 6		. 6 5 6 3 . 6 5 6 1 3 2 6 5 3 6 5 3
	. 2 1 2 6 . 2 1 2 6 5 6 1 2 . 2 1 . 6 . 5		2 2 3 2 6 5 3 5
	. 5 6 1 . 1 2 5 . 5 6 1 . 1 2 5 6 1 2 3 1 6 5 3 5		. 1 . 6 2 1 5 3 6 5 3 2
			. 5 3 5 2 . 5 3 5 2 3 5 6 2 1 5 3 6 5 3 2
			. 5 3 5 2 . 5 3 5 2 3 5 6 2 1 5 3 6 5 3 2
			1 1 2 1 6 5 3 5
		<b>Lancaran Bubaran Nyutra</b>	[ . 2 . 1 . 2 . 1 . 6 . 5
			. 6 . 3 . 5 . 3 . 5 . 2 . 3 . 5
			. 3 . 2 . 3 . 2 . 3 . 2 . 6 . 5

Fig. 5. The Main Notation of the *Gendhing* “*Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*” that continued with *Ladrang Ubal-ubal* and *Lancaran Nyutra*

Within the *Sekaten* gamelan musical repertoires of the Yogyakarta royal court, there exists a *gendhing* titled “*Gendhing Andong-andong*”, Fig. 6. The term *Andong* in this composition refers to the *Andong* plant (*Cordyline fruticose*). This plant is traditionally believed by both Javanese and Sundanese communities to possess protective properties, serving as a ward against misfortune or malevolent forces. Among the Balinese, *Andong* leaves are also frequently used as ritual implements in various ceremonial contexts [26].

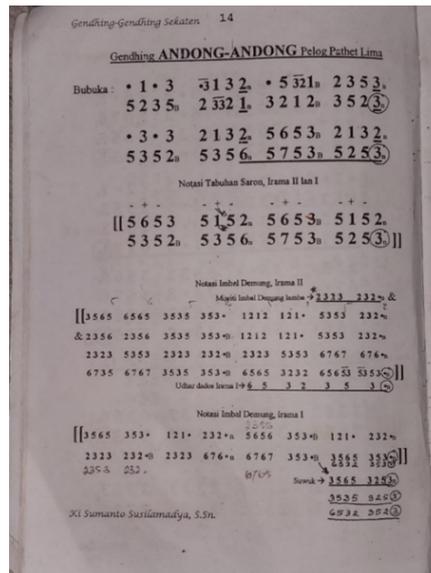


Fig. 6. The Main Notation of the *Gendhing Andong-andong* [26, p. 14]

At the level of *gendhing* *Tengahan* and *gendhing* *Ageng*, several *gendhing* titles refer to the names of plants believed to possess *tuah* (mystical power). The *gendhing* titled “*Kembang Gayam*” refers to the *Gayam* tree (*Inocarpus fagiferus*), while “*Gendhing Gambir Sawit*” refers to the *Gambir* tree (*Uncaria gambir*) and the *Areca* palm (*Areca catechu* L.). Additionally, there is a *gendhing* composition that references the *Styrax* tree, known locally as *Kemenyan*, such as “*Gendhing Menyan Kobar*”. In terms of textual presentation, “*Gendhing Kembang Gayam*” is typically performed using the *Pelog* scale, while “*Gendhing Gambir Sawit*” and “*Gendhing Menyan Kobar*” are presented using the *Slendro* scale, specifically following the rules of *Pathet Sanga*. The types of trees referenced in the titles of these *gendhing* compositions are believed to possess auspicious and extraordinary *tuah* (spiritual power or virtue) in Javanese society. The *Gayam* tree, which is especially planted in the Yogyakarta palace (*Keraton Yogyakarta*), is mentioned in the literary work *Serat Salokapatra* as a symbol of prayer and hope for peace, safety, and serenity. The term *Gayam* or *Gayem* is often interpreted through *jarwa dhosok* (folk etymology) by Javanese people as an abbreviation of *hanggayuh ayem*, meaning “to attain peace and tranquility” [27, p. 37]. The *Gambir* and *Areca* (*Pinang*) trees, whose fruits are used as ingredients in traditional *sirih-pinang* offerings, are believed to symbolize harmonious relationships, both among humans and between humans and their ancestors. Therefore, *sirih* (betel leaf), *gambir*, and *pinang* are commonly included as components in ritual offerings within Javanese culture. The *Kemenyan* (benzoin) tree, whose resin is crystallized and burned to produce fragrant smoke, is used as both incense and an offering element in rituals. The fragrant smoke resulting from the burning of the *Kemenyan* resin symbolizes purity, spiritual fragrance, and is believed to serve as a medium connecting humans with ancestral spirits in spiritual practices [28, p. 5-6].

### 3.3. The Meaning and Behavior of Performing *Gendhings* Titled the *Tuah* Plants

Based on interviews with several informants regarding the mystical interpretation of *gendhings* in Javanese *karawitan* and the behavior associated with their performance or presentation, it can generally be concluded that such interpretations and behaviors depend largely on two main aspects: the function of the *gendhing* (i.e., the purpose or context in which the piece is performed) and the *rasa* of the *gendhing* (i.e., the aesthetic and emotional expression that emerges from the musical arrangement during its performance). Similarly, the interpretation and behavior surrounding the *gendhing* discussed in the previous subsection are also rooted in their function and *rasa*. For example, the meaning attributed to *Ketawang Tarupala* when performed during a traditional wedding ceremony (*Pahargyan Penganten*) will differ from its meaning when performed in other contexts. Furthermore, *Ketawang Tarupala* will convey a different *rasa* when presented in a *soran* or *bonangan* (hard voice and instrumental) style compared to when it is played in a more subdued or refined (*lirihan* or

*alusan*) manner. Consequently, the interpretation and performance behavior will also differ accordingly. The same applies to other *gendhing* repertoires in *Ladrang* form, such as *Ladrang Sri Rejeki*, *Ladrang Lung Gadhung*, *Ladrang Sekar Gadhung*, and *Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*, as well as to *Gendhing Tengahan* and *Ageng* repertoires like *Gendhing Kembang Gayam*, *Gendhing Gambir Sawit*, and *Gendhing Menyan Kobar*. Furthermore, the interpretation and performative behavior associated with these *gendhing* are explained by KRT Teguh Widodo (a lecturer in the Karawitan Department at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta and a senior *karawitan* performer in the Surakarta palace) as follows:

*"Essentially, gendhings Alit such as those in Ketawang and Ladrang forms primarily serve as srambahan (complementary repertoires that can be performed in various events and situations). However, there are exceptions, such as Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi, which carries a wingit (mysterious, sacred, or spiritually charged) atmosphere and should not be performed carelessly. Similarly, mid-length compositions (gendhing Tengahan) such as Gendhing Kembang Gayam and Gendhing Gambir Sawit are generally also used as srambahan. Nevertheless, Gendhing Gambir Sawit, which is believed to have been composed by a spiritually powerful figure, he is Kanjeng Sunan Kalijaga, and interpreted as a symbolic prayer for 'nggambira sak uwit' (to attain holistic happiness across generations), has a particular spiritual significance for karawitan performers, especially senior ones. For them, performing Gendhing Gambir Sawit is akin to offering a prayer for both physical and spiritual well-being. This interpretation is also aligned with what is written in the Serat Wedhapradangga [30]. Meanwhile, Gendhing Menyan Kobar (when performed in the pelog tuning system, is retitled Gendhing Menyan Kasilir), is symbolizes a prayer offering and devotion to one's ancestors. The performance of Gendhing Menyan Kobar is typically accompanied by ritual elements, at the very least incense or kemenyan (frankincense) as offerings. Moreover, when followed by a performance of Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi, the ritual offerings are expected to be more elaborate and complex. In any case, the selection of particular gendhing in a performance, whether from the Alit, Tengahan, or Ageng categories always reflects intentionality and aspiration, encompassing both material and spiritual dimensions."*

A subsequent perspective that focuses more specifically on the meaning of "*Gadhung*" and "*Mlathi*" in the "*Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi*" is provided by M. Ng. Dedi Panggung Suprabowodipuro (a court *karawitan* servant in the Surakarta palace and an official at the Department of Culture and Tourism in Magelang Regency), who explains:

*"The direction in which the vine or stem of the Gadhung plant grows always bends to the left, which is the opposite of most other climbing plants. This unusual growth pattern contributes to the mystical symbolism associated with the Gadhung plant, which in turn has influenced the use of the term 'Gadhung' in the naming of certain gendhing repertoires, particularly Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi. When compared to other traditional Javanese cultural products such as the keris (Javanese dagger), the Gadhung plant is metaphorically represented in the form of keris with reversed or leftward curves (luk ngedhe), particularly those created by the legendary Empu Umyang, and is interpreted as a symbol of grave and mysterious warnings. In addition, the term 'Mlathi' while commonly understood to refer to the jasmine flower (melati), it can also be interpreted as deriving from the root word 'malati', meaning something that carries a conditional consequence: if approached or interpreted correctly, it brings blessing (berkah), but if misinterpreted or violated, it may result in a curse*

(kutukan). Therefore, the term *Gadhung Mlathi* can be interpreted as something that is mysterious, ominous, and malati in nature.”

Mystical practices associated with the performance of *gendhing* repertoires that reference the names of the plants that have “*tuah*” are also found in the Yogyakarta palace. A brief summary of interviews conducted with several *abdi dalem karawitan* (court *karawitan* musicians) or gamelan players at the Yogyakarta palace, they are M.B. Brongtomardika, M.B. Srikawuryan, and M.J. Gendrehkemasan is in the following:

“*Gendhing* performed in the context of the *Gamelan Sekaten*, such as *Gendhing Andong-andong*, are treated as sacred and must be accompanied by specific offerings and ritual procedures that have been formally established. The same applies to *Gendhing Lung Gadhung* performed within the *Gamelan Sekaten* tradition. In contrast, for *gendhing* that include the term ‘*Menyan*’ (incense) in their titles, such as *Gendhing Menyan Kobar* and *Gendhing Menyan Seta*, it is imperative that incense smoke continuously rises throughout the entire performance, from beginning to end, without stop or interruption.”

Based on the interview data, an interpretive understanding can be summarized in the following [Table 1](#).

**Table 1.** The performing form, function, and symbolic meaning of each of the *gendhing*

Title of <i>Gendhing</i>	Typical Tuning System and <i>Pathet</i>	Function	Metaphorical Meaning
<i>Ketawang Tarupala</i>	Usually performed in <i>Slendro</i> , with <i>Pathet Manyura</i>	as <i>srambahan</i>	Symbolizes prayers and hopes for fertility and well-being
<i>Ladrang Sri Rejeki</i>	Usually performed in <i>Pelog</i> , with <i>Pathet Nem</i>	as <i>srambahan</i>	Symbolizes prayers and hopes for fortune, prosperity, and abundance
<i>Lung Gadhung</i>	Usually performed in <i>Pelog</i> , with <i>Pathet Nem</i>	as <i>srambahan</i> (if in <i>ladrang</i> form); ritual (if performed in <i>Sekaten</i> context at the Yogyakarta palace)	Symbolizes abstract and mysterious prayers and hopes
<i>Ladrang Sekar Gadhung</i>	Usually performed in <i>Slendro</i> , with <i>Pathet Manyura</i>	as <i>srambahan</i>	Symbolizes abstract and mysterious prayers and hopes
<i>Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi</i>	Usually performed in <i>Slendro</i> , with <i>Pathet Sanga</i>	specific ritual contexts	Symbolizes abstract, mysterious, and potentially sacred or perilous intentions ( <i>malati</i> )
<i>Gendhing Kembang Gayam</i>	Usually performed in <i>Pelog</i> ( <i>pathet</i> depend on the performance)	as <i>srambahan</i>	Symbolizes prayers and hopes for peacefulness
<i>Gendhing Gambir Sawit</i>	Usually performed in <i>Slendro</i> , with <i>Pathet Sanga</i>	as <i>srambahan</i> and/or in specific rituals	Symbolizes prayers and hopes for lasting happiness and well-being across generations
<i>Gendhing Menyan Kobar</i>	Usually performed in <i>Slendro</i> , with <i>Pathet Sanga</i>	as <i>srambahan</i> and/or in specific rituals	Symbolizes prayers for the ancestors

The *gendhings* functions above are generally performed in *srambahan* or ritual contexts that symbolize prayers and hopes for well-being, fertility, happiness, and deep spiritual meanings. The use of different tuning systems and *pathet* enriches the function and spiritual nuance of each *gendhing* according to its cultural context.

### 3.4. The Relevance between Plants Having “*Tuah*” and the *Gendhings*

The relevance between plants believed to possess spiritual power (*tuah*) and the repertoire of Javanese *karawitan gendhing*, which incorporates the names of these plants in their titles, is presented in the following [Table 2](#).

**Table 2.** The relationship between the symbolic meaning of the *gendhings* and Javanese beliefs in plants that have "tuah."

Gendhing Title	Associated Spiritually Charged Plant	Symbolic Meaning in the Gendhing	Relevance to Javanese Beliefs in Spiritually Charged Plants
Ketawang Tarupala	Tarupala / Nutmeg ( <i>Myristica fragrans</i> Houtt)	A prayer and hope for fertility and well-being	Related to the belief in nature as a source of life and prosperity; the gendhing functions metaphorically as a prayer for nature's blessing
Ladrang Sri Rejeki	Sri Rejeki ( <i>Aglaonema</i> sp.)	A prayer and hope for fortune, welfare, and prosperity	Reflects the value of luck believed to come from nature and plants as symbols of well-being and fortune
Lung Gadhung	Gadhung ( <i>Dioscorea hispida</i> Dennst)	A prayer and hope that is abstract and mysterious	Gadhung is considered a wingit (sacred or eerie) plant, carrying deep spiritual meaning
Ladrang Sekar Gadhung	Gadhung ( <i>Dioscorea hispida</i> Dennst)	A prayer and hope that is abstract and mysterious	Reinforces the belief that Gadhung holds profound and sacred spiritual power
Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi	Gadhung ( <i>Dioscorea hispida</i> Dennst) and Melati ( <i>Jasminum</i> sp.)	A prayer and hope that is abstract, mysterious, and malati (conditional)	Melati symbolizes purity, and malati implies blessing or curse depending on interpretation; Gadhung adds sacred and cautionary meaning
Gendhing Kembang Gayam	Gayam ( <i>Inocarpus fagiferus</i> )	A prayer and hope for tranquility	The Gayam tree symbolizes protection and serenity, reflecting spiritual calmness in Javanese life philosophy
Gendhing Gambir Sawit	Gambir ( <i>Uncaria gambir</i> ) and Pinang ( <i>Areca catechu</i> L.)	A prayer and hope for lasting inner and outer happiness across generations	The phrase <i>nggambira sak uwit</i> symbolizes life continuity and regeneration, supporting prayers for generational well-being
Gendhing Menyan Kobar	Kemenyan ( <i>Styrax</i> )	A prayer for the ancestors	Incense acts as a medium between the human and spiritual realms, emphasizing the importance of ritual and offerings

From the table mentioned, it can be seen and understood that several *gendhing* compositions that incorporate the names of spiritual plants having "tuah" as their title not only possess artistic value, but also carry profound spiritual meanings related to traditional Javanese beliefs surrounding sacred flora.

#### 4. Conclusion

The use of plant names in certain repertoires of Javanese *gendhing karawitan* reflects a holistic and spiritualistic Javanese worldview, in which nature, art, and spiritual life are deeply interconnected. This study reveals that spiritually potent plants (*tumbuhan bertuah*) function not only as symbolic references in *gendhing* titles but also actively shape the interpretive and performative practices of *karawitan*. Such findings highlight how Javanese *karawitan* operates simultaneously as a musical, ritual, and spiritual medium, conveying symbolic meanings, prayers, and cultural values embedded within the repertoire. The incorporation of *tuah*-bearing plants into *gendhing* demonstrates a tangible link between ethnobotanical knowledge and musical expression, offering a novel perspective on the interplay between material culture, cosmology, and performance aesthetics. These findings contribute to the ethnomusicological understanding of Javanese *karawitan* by emphasizing the role of non-musical, mystical elements in shaping repertoire, interpretation, and performance behavior. Future research could further investigate how the *tumbuhan bertuah* influences pedagogical practices, audience perception, and ritualized performance contexts, as well as compare symbolic plant usage across different regional *karawitan* traditions. Additionally, interdisciplinary studies integrating ethnobotany, cultural anthropology, and performance studies could deepen insights into the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of Javanese *karawitan*, supporting cultural preservation and the documentation of intangible heritage.

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## Declarations

- Author contribution** : TBS: Conceptualized the research topic and formulated the main research questions; designed a qualitative descriptive method and a phenomenological approach grounded in Javanese cultural mysticism methodology; conducted fieldwork and collected data on gendhings that reference or imply spiritually potent plants; wrote the initial draft, including the Introduction, Methodology, and Discussion sections; revised the manuscript based on co-author feedback; submitted the manuscript to the journal, communicated with the editor during the review process, and ensured all required documents were complete and properly submitted. L: Contributed conceptual ideas and presented the theoretical framework and results to academic audiences. Managed the use and citation of references meticulously to acknowledge prior research and ensure originality. HS: Verified the accuracy of the presented data and ensured that all findings were supported by reliable evidence. Verified the accuracy of the presented data and ensured that all findings were supported by reliable evidence.
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