

# JAVANESE CULTURAL PARADOXISM : A VISUAL SEMIOTICS STUDY ON WAYANG PURWA CHARACTHERS OF SATRIA AND RASEKSA FIGURES

*by* Slamet Subiyantoro, Dkk.

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# JAVANESE CULTURAL PARADOXISM : A VISUAL SEMIOTICS STUDY ON WAYANG PURWA CHARACTERS OF SATRIA AND RASEKSA FIGURES

✉ Slamet Subiyantoro\*

Kristiani\*\*

Yasin Suryo Wijaya\*\*\*

\*Departement of Fine Art Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta

✉ s.biyantoro@yahoo.co.id

\*\*Department of Economic Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta

kristieko95@yahoo.co.id

\*\*\*Department of Fine Art Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret Surakarta

Yasinwijaya1996@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Wayang Purwa is a noble Javanese cultural heritage which reflects the high philosophical values embodied in the values of the spectacle and the guidance; however the wayang is now rumored to be experiencing a setback and degradation of values. Both the outer and inner structure of the wayang purwa profiles of satria and raseksa are the representations of the good and bad traits in which both are impossible to unite but nevertheless will always be there and side by side. This study aims to explore the character values on visual semiotics of Raseksa and Satria characters. Satria and Raseksa figures were selected using purposive sampling technique, through wayang Pandawas and Kurawas. The study was designed with qualitative research approach; the data were collected using the techniques of interviews, observation, and document analysis. The data were analyzed following the steps of data reduction, data display, and verification. The results of the research revealed that in wayang, the Raseksa and Satria figures represent a paradoxical representation of both the external structure and the inner structure. The outer structure is in the form of wayang purwa visual elements, which turns out to be the opposite shape from both Pandawas and Kurawas figures. The inner structure is more about the inseparable meaning and value from the outer structure. In semiotics, the visual element (outer structure) of Pandawas and Kurawas figures can be represented or interpreted based on their values and meanings (inner structure) in addition to show conflict of meaning. The paradoxical cultural value in Javanese culture is essentially a learning experienced based humanity values manifested through puppet characters. As exemplified from the Islamic role model of the Prophet Muhammad along with his obligatory and impossible natures. The wayang Satria may represent the obligatory nature (good character) and wayang Raseksa represent the impossible (bad character) of humans.

**Keywords:** Cultural Paradoxes, Visual Semiotics, Wayang Satria, Wayang Raseksa.

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## INTRODUCTION

Literally, the word wayang was derived from ancient Javanese which means shadow (Supendi, 2007, p.55). *Wayang kulit consists of two words, Wayang and Kulit, wayang is Javanese word meaning shadow or ghost, kulit means leather, and added together it translate as shadow from leather. So the wayang kulit is a two dimension puppet, made of buffalo or goat leather, like paper dolls but with arms that swivel* (Widjajanto, Lund & Schelhowe, 2009, p.20).

Wayang is made of carved skin, thus, when exposed to light, shadow puppets will appear on the screen. Puppet is a typical combination of various arts in the form of fine arts, performing arts, and music. Fine art in wayang can be observed based on the essence of wayang in the form of carvings on the skin and painted with *sunnging* techniques. Performing arts through wayang performances are nothing but role plays and stories played by a dhalang. While the art of music that is applied is an accompaniment played during the

wayang performance.

Many people across countries especially those of South East Asian countries know very well wayang. Internationally, wayang purwa has been recognized by UNESCO as the Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, a grand masterpiece of local human heritage which greatly contributes to shape high value of human civilization (Nurgiantoro, 2011, p.18). Wayang Purwa, in addition to being a spectacle, the wayang play reflects life guidance derived from stories, characters, and visual structures. Wayang Purwa is made by skilful handcraft with well-prepared and philosophically designed cultural art. A wayang is a representation of mainly human characters and the physical words and every part of the puppets/ wayang design reflects symbolic significance (Widjajanto, Lund & Schelhowe, 2009, p. 20). During, before and after the performance a special ritual ceremony is always held.

The stories narrated in wayang purwa are inspired from Hinduism Ramayana and Mahabarata epic stories (Guridno cited in Saptodewo, 2014, p. 107). Even though the wayang kulit uses shadow puppets, the story was not derived from both Mahabarata and Ramayana. There are varied types of wayang and puppets in Indonesia, i.e., wayang golek, wayang beber, wayang suket and so forth. Those varied types of wayang share different stories, characters, and even visual forms.

There are tens or even hundreds of figures in wayang purwa, but in general only consists of two poles, namely the Satria/noble and Raseksa figures. Both poles are the wayang both good and antagonistic or evil characters. This is where the value of Javanese cultural character lies in the soul of the Wayang Purwa traditional art. The figure is a representation of the Javanese society lives where humans innate nature consist of black and white or good and evil. In Javanese society, wayang has been used as a medium for inculcating values to the people, it reminds humans to live consistently according to their nature, rules and norms agreed upon in the society.

Being a cultural art heritage, wayang kulit purwa experiences a backwardness from its supporting society environment. Puppet culture has rarely been staged in public as a performance art, one of the leading reasons is due to numerous proliferated alternative entertainment and varied

information which literally have replaced people's interest, moreover the youth who have been greatly influenced (Pumama, 2010, p. 41). Thus, it is unsurprisingly the cultural events such wayang performance is more preferably by those the older generation. Ironically, the older generation too would reluctantly teach their descendants on the importance of traditional art, more specifically wayang purwa.

The character values cultivation may traditionally passed from generation to generation through cultural art, one of which is sourced from wayang kulit purwa. This is in line with Pramono, Suyanto & Wahida (2017, pp. 400) puppet is not only one source of the search for values that are indispensable for the survival of the nation, but the puppet is also one of the rides or educational tools of good character. The extracted values may be sourced from stories, character traits, to the visual semiotic structure of each character. empire where the wisdom and arrogance of kings in various kingdoms become a discussion of good and bad values (Sutarso & Murtiyoso, 2008, p. 4). Satria and Raseksa figures in wayang purwa are a representation of the nature of good and bad. Both of these qualities will always exist and contradict each other in human life. The task of humans is to choose and select those good qualities to obtain a well-balanced, peaceful and harmonious lives.

This paper deliberately choose a theme "Javanese Cultural Paradoxism: Visual Semiotic Studies in Wayang Purwa of Satria and Raseksa Figures", which aimed at exploring the value of wisdom and badness in wayang purwa through semiotic visual structures. Paradoxism is in visual structure forms between the noble and Raseksa figures. The typical parts of wayang Satria's shape are different from those of Raseksa's parts of shape. The paradox shape is, therefore, followed by the paradoxical character value. Thus the character values found can be a valuable learning for human beings throughout generations, and people who would exalt the traditional noble values inherited from their great ancestors through wayang purwa.

Among the studies related to wayang purwa were a study conducted by Arifin (2002) on wayang kulit, wayang kulit is seen as an effective medium of character education inculcation since it reflects noble values. Additionally, Hadipriyono (2014) discusses puppet aesthetics, puppet aesthetics who concerned on shadow puppets instead of its



aesthetics, face color, facial expressions, body style etc. Another study conducted by Suyami (2006) who highlights on puppet values reflected in the puppet which is worthy of being a spectacle, guidance and role model. Further study was conducted by Nurgiyantoro (2011) on puppets and the development of national character. The results of the study emphasized that puppets essentially have good values they are reflected in the figure characters, stories, and various other supporting elements. Subiyantoro and Zainnuri (2017) examined the religious values in Wayang Sadat and their relevance in learning fine arts in schools. Each symbol structure in the wayang sadat reflects Islamic values. This value is quite relevant to the 2013 curriculum in addition to be used as a source of learning in fine arts learning.

Based on the results of a number of previous aforementioned studies, it shows that in general, shadow puppets have been examined from several aspects of puppet aesthetics, the value of guidance and spectacle, puppets as the development of character, and the significance of puppets on the world of education. Thus, examining wayang purwa from the perspective of the satria and kurawa profiles has not yet been explored in depth. Wayang Purwa consists of many figures divided into two divisions, namely the profile of Satria and Raseksa. Satria and Raseksa are the representation of Javanese culture about the value of good and bad when excavated from its structure both the external structure (visual) and the inner structure (meaning). Understanding art and culture is not only in the visible (visual), but there is something behind that which appears in the form of meaning and philosophy.

In the concept of balance, good and bad will always exist, it is impossible to unite them; however, the two are side by side. Depending on how humans take sides whether towards good (satria) or bad (raseksa). Satria figures become human symbols which manifest kindness, responsibility, *andhap asor modesty*, simple, modest, wise, and are a manifestation of the perfect human nature. Whereas the Raseksa figure is a symbol of fear, badness, evil, lust, and a description of behavior that humans should not have. Characters reflected from wayang purwa are a description of the human's characters and deeds, each of which has consequences. All cultures generally share figures both fictitious and real figures as role

models and where in Javanese culture particularly reflected in the puppet characters. In Islam there is also a figure of the Prophet Muhammad who has a mandatory nature as things to be imitated and impossible traits that the prophet might not have.

The significant difference in this study lays on the object of the wayang purwa, which are the Satria and Raseksa figures who represent the paradoxical values of good and bad. The puppet is, therefore, explored from their value of cultural characters reflected through the visual structure of the puppet using semiotics perspective. Thus this study has its own specific differences from the others'.

## METHOD

This study was designed with qualitative research method with single case embedded strategy. This case was chosen since the object is the Javanese Purwa puppet characters, namely the Satria and Raseksa. The data were collected by applying the methods of interview, observation and document analysis techniques. The interviews were conducted with Dhalang or experts in the field of puppetry. Observation was conducted to wayang kulit performances, and document analysis concerns photo analysis, wayang literature, or direct shadow puppets. The studied wayang figures are the Raseksa and Satria which were selected by purposive sampling technique. The figures of Satria were among others; Pandavas Lima figures, while the Raseksa figures were drawn from several Kurawas figures. The data followed the flow models of analysis procedures of data reduction, display, and verification or conclusion. The used flow model of analysis in this study is adapted to the strategy used, which is a single case strategy.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Puppet has been recognized by UNESCO, the world's institution as one of the world heritages. According to Wijanto, Lund & Schelhowe, (2009, pp.19) wayang is a popular form of entertainment. Sometimes it is an ancient heritage, a reminder of an age long past, some time a medium for contemporary artists experiments with shape, color, and movement. For countries it has been used to relate myth and legend and enact simple traditional farces. Wayang is a cultural representation of the Javanese society which is

expressed through fine arts, music, literature, and performances. For Potgier and Brits (2014, pp. 1799) puppets have been implemented for different purposes and areas, such as theater, education, therapy, and politics. In addition to being a spectacle, wayang reflects noble values and traditional guidance, which is why wayang purwa produces paradox figures between Satria and Raseksa groups. In between the two figures it lays a good inclination, the figure is represented with Satria puppet and the other is the opposite called Raseksa. Both good and bad already exist and become the God's destiny on earth. The human task is simply to sort out and choose the virtues and omit badness as a life lessons.

One of the paradoxes of Javanese culture illustrated in both Satria and Raseksa characters. Satria and Raseksa figures have been well-recognized to people in common especially when other figures like Pandhawa and Kuravas were mentioned. These figures are conflicting or paradoxical figures in nature. Understanding both art and culture certainly may be insufficiently to only focus on what appears, one should deeply observe on invisible things behind, in addition to

the outer and inner structures. Sukarma and Lestari (2015, pp. 66) emphasized the relationship between external and internal structures in case they are combined they will give birth to inseparated forms and meanings like the elements of birth and mind in humans. Thus in part of understanding the paradoxical forms in Pandavas and Kuravas puppets, they need to be seen from the physical or visual aspects in addition to the non-physical aspects or meanings.

#### **Paradoxes In Terms Of Visual (Outer Structure)**

Purwa puppet shadow is a typical visual art. The fine art material subjects are closely related to visual aspects such as color, line, shape, texture, and the value in which they are closely related to means or symbols (Subiyantoro & Zainnuri, 2017, pp. 278). Visual structure is a physical structure, therefore, the shape can be physically felt by human's five senses and each structure is symbolic and reflects a meaning. The visual structure of the Pandavas and the Kuravas is quite significantly different from each other in terms of the shapes of the eyes, nose, mouth, head, face, face color, direction facing, hand position, and clothing.



**Figures 1.** Visual Representation of Pandhawa Wayang Figures

In the Javanese Purwa puppet show, the Pandhawa Lima figures who hold protagonist role which consists of 5 characters, they are Arjuna, Werkudara, Puntadewa, Nakula, and Sadewa. While the antagonist is Kuravas who represents a

very large number, reaching 99 figures. However, in this study only 5 figures are going to presented, namely Buto Cakil, Buto Terong, Dursasana, Kumbakarna, and Sengkuni.



**Figures 2.** Visual Descriptions of Kuravas Wayang Figures

Based on visual analysis on the two different puppet characters above, then the structure of Pandavas puppet shapes' figures are in contrast against the Kuravas puppet's. The visual analysis are illustratively described by the puppet shapes in table below.

**Table 1.** The Visual Structure of Pandawa Lima Wayang

Shapes	Puntadewa	Werkudara	Arjuna	Nakula	Sadewa
Ayes	<i>Gabahan</i>	<i>Telengan</i>	<i>Gabahan</i>	<i>Gabahan</i>	<i>Gabahan</i>
Noses	<i>wali miring</i>	<i>tumpul dampak</i>	<i>wali miring</i>	<i>wali miring</i>	<i>wali miring</i>
Mouths	<i>Mingkem</i>	<i>Mingkem</i>	<i>Mingkem</i>	<i>mingkem</i>	<i>Mingkem</i>
Heads	<i>Luruh</i>	<i>Luruh</i>	<i>Luruh</i>	<i>Longok</i>	<i>Longok</i>
Faces	Calm	Calm	Calm	Calm	Calm
Facial colors	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black
Direction	Right	Right	Right	Right	Right
Hands' positions	Straight	<i>Malang tight</i>	Straight	<i>Straightly tight</i>	<i>Straightly tight</i>
Outfits	Simple	Simple	Simple	Simple	Simple

(Source: The Results of Literature Study Analysis)

**Table 2.** The Visual Structure of Kuravas Wayang

Shapes	Buto Cakil	Buto Terong	Dursasana	Kumbakarna	Sengkuni
Eyes	<i>Kedhelen</i>	<i>Plotot</i>	<i>Plotot</i>	<i>Plotot</i>	<i>Sipit lengkung</i>
Noses	<i>Pesek</i>	<i>Bulat Terong</i>	<i>Pangotan</i>	<i>Pangotan</i>	<i>Pangotan</i>
Mouths	<i>Prengesan</i>	<i>Prengesan</i>	<i>Prengesan</i>	<i>Prengesan</i>	<i>Mingkem</i>
Heads	<i>Ndangak</i>	<i>Luruh</i>	<i>Ndangak</i>	<i>Longok</i>	<i>Ndangak</i>
Faces	Fierce	Fierce	Fierce	Fierce	Tranquiling
Facial colors	Red	White	Red	Red	Red



Direction	Left	Left	Left	Left	Left
Hands' positions	<i>Malang Kerik</i>	<i>Malang Kerik</i>	<i>Malang Kerik</i>	<i>Malang Kerik</i>	<i>Malang Kerik</i>
Outfits	Luxurious	Luxurious	Luxurious	Luxurious	Luxurious

(Source: The Results of Literature Study Analysis)

Based on the above analysis results, generally there are a lot of paradoxical visual structures between Pandavas and Kuravas figures. The general shape of Pandavas's eyes is *gabahan* like a grain of rice, in contrast to Kuravas character which generally shows *telengan* or bulging eye shape. The Pandavas puppet's nose is mostly a wiry nose where the shape is pointed like a wulent knife in an oblique position while the Kuravas has a large *pangotan*-nosed and eggplant-rounded nose. All the Kuravas puppets' mouth are different from those of Kuravas with a typical *prengesan*. *Prengesan* mouths a typical open-mouth shaped where the teeth and even fangs of the puppets are visible. The heads of Pandavas figures *luruh* or look down and some are in a sloping position or facing forward. The Kuravas puppet's position is to look up or face forward and slightly upward. All Pandavas' faces are calm in black while the Kuravas are fierce or creepy in red and white. All puppet *purwa* Pandavas figures face to the right while Kuravas puppets face to the left. Pandavas hand positions vary from straight, *malang kerik*, and tightly closed. However, all Kuravas puppet hand positions are *malang kerik* or transversal, flaky or opened and bent like challenging positions. The last paradoxical form is in outfit shapes. In general, the clothes worn by the Satria puppet are simple clothes, not even wearing clothes. In contrast to the Kuravas puppets

who wear clothes that are all luxurious and complete.

### Paradoxical Structure In The Perspective Of Meaning (Inner Structure)

In line with Sukarma and Lestari's opinion (2015, pp. 66), the outer and inner structure of a wayang are inseparable and interconnected. Thus, in attempt to explore the underlying meanings of Pandavas and Kuravas puppets shapes, a researcher, therefore, needs to be focused on the external or visual structures of those characters. In representing the meaning in visual structure, one should study the science of sign, the so called semiotics. The word "semiotics" was derived from the Greek's word *semeion* which means "sign" or *seme* equally means "the interpreter of signs (Mudjiono, 2011, pp. 129). Representation or interpretation is part of seeking for meaning through the existing sign system. Signs are the media we use in our efforts to find a way in the world, in the midst of humans, and along with the humans (Mudjiono, 2011, pp. 129). Barbieri (The visual structure of the Pandavas and Kuravas puppets becomes a sign and in certain representations which generate certain related meanings).

**Table 3.** Signs and Meanings on Pandavas and Kuravas Wayang Figures

Shapes	Pandhawa	Kurawa		
	Shapes/Signs	Meanings	Shapes/Signs	Meanings
Eyes	Inclined <i>Gabahan</i> & <i>Telengan</i>	Be patient & see goodness	inclined to be glared, kedelen & sipit lengkung	Angry, suspicious & cunning

<b>Noses</b>	<i>Walimiring</i>	Modest	Pug, <i>pangotan</i> & Eggplant round	Arrogant & haughty
<b>Mouths</b>	<i>Mingkem</i>	Quiet	<i>Prengesan</i>	Big mouth, laughing & greedy
<b>Heads</b>	inclined to <i>Luruh</i>	Modest, <i>andhap asor</i> & knowledgeable	Inclined looked up & <i>longok</i>	Arrogant, & Fool
<b>Faces</b>	Calm	Patient	Fierce	Scary & Angry
<b>Facial colors</b>	Black	Grief, patient	red	Fierce
<b>Direction</b>	Right	Goodness	Left	Evil
<b>Hands' positions</b>	inclined to straight & tight	Wise	<i>Malang kerik</i>	arrogant, haughty
<b>Outfits</b>	Simple	Simple and homely	Luxurious	Rich-like & arrogant

(Source: The Results of Literature Study Analysis)

Javanese people used to recognize signs, which was why in every aspect of their cultural lives they always intersect with signs and meanings, one of which is manifested in the art of wayang purwa. All puppets came to life as characters and they can portray different personalities, share various traits, and they cross all culture (Potgier and Brits, 2014, p. 1799). Every sign and meaning in the puppet always represents a character value. Pandavas puppets tend to be *gabahan* and *telengan* which represent a common sense that the Javanese people are the people of patience and rich with wisdom in leading the paths towards goodness. Unlike the Kauravas which illustrated with veyes as if being angry, suspicious, even cunning. Pandavas Walimiring's puppet nose reflects a humble meaning, which show common human nature of being modest, shows no arrogance compare to the Kuravas character. The Pandavas puppet's mouth is all closed which symbolically represents a quiet personality. Being quiet culturally means to be wise and only good and useful words should ideally produce by one's mouth. Unlike the figure of Kuravas with a typical *prengesan* mouth which represents a big mouth character, laughing a lot, and greedy. Humility in Pandavas puppets are

visible from the puppet head's position which tends to fall or bow. People who live up a life with good hearts and knowledge are usually inclined to bow as rice is filled. Unlike the case with the Kuravas wayang whose head position tends to look like rice that does not contain or is foam. The head looks up to mean people who are arrogant and not knowledgeable. The nature of wise, humble, arrogant is reflected in both the Pandavas and Kuravas puppets' shapes of face. The Pandavas puppets show a calm face and manifest in itself patient character. These philosophically means any bad circumstance should be faced calmly, patiently, and think for the way out. While the Kuravas with a ferocious face or as if to show an angry or emotional face. The paradoxical nature of patience and anger is also shown from the facial color, which is black and red. Pandavas puppet manifest a good character which is symbolized from the direction facing towards the right. While the puppet Kuravas is a symbol of *angkara* or evil, it is identifiable from position of the puppet which is facing towards the left. The hands and clothes position of the two wayang purwa reflect a conflicting meanign. Pandavas puppet hand positions tend to be straight which worn simple outfits. Wise and unpretentious



personality whose look and life principle show no extravagant and luxurious but in simple, innocent and modest. Unlike the arrogant people who tend to show off their luxurious things to other people know and are impressed with what that person has.

Wayang or puppet is a figure made by the Javanese community as a guideline in running life a noble human being. As in Islam there is a prophetic figure like the Prophet Muhammad who plays a role model for mankind who qualifies with both the obligatory (good) and impossible (bad)

nature. The obligatory nature of the Prophet Muhammad associated with 4 noble traits, *sidiq* (truthful and honest), trustful (trustworthy), *tabliq* (convey), and *fatanah* (intelligent and wise), additionally, there are also 4 the impossible nature of him, they are *kadzib* (lie), *khiyanat* (betrayal), *khitman* (hiding), and *baladah* (stupid) (Mansyur, 2013, p.18). Both the obligatory and impossible nature of the Prophet is a representation of the wayang Satria and Raseksa figures.

**Table 4.** The Obligatory and the Impossible Nature of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH

The Prophet's Obligatory Nature		The Prophet's Impossible Nature	
The Satria Wayang Figures		The Raseksa Wayang Figures	
<i>Sidiq</i>	Truthful and Honest	<i>Kadzib</i>	Liar
<i>Amanah</i>	Trustworthy	<i>Khianat</i>	Hypocritical
<i>Tabliq</i>	Delivering knowledge	<i>Khitman</i>	Hiding
<i>Fatanah</i>	Clever & Wise	<i>Baladah</i>	Stupid

(Source: The Results of Literature Study Analysis)

Puppet is a figure that is made by the Javanese community as a guideline in running life a noble human being. As in Islam there is a prophetic figure like the Prophet Muhammad who plays a role model for mankind who qualifies with both the obligatory (good) and impossible (bad) nature. The obligatory nature of the Prophet Muhammad associated with 4 noble traits, *sidiq* (truthful and honest), trustful (trustworthy), *tabliq* (convey), and *fatanah* (intelligent and wise), additionally, there are also 4 the impossible nature of him, they are *kadzib* (lie), *khiyanat* (betrayal), *khitman* (hiding), and *baladah* (stupid) (Mansyur, 2013, p. 18). Both the obligatory and impossible nature of the Prophet is a representation of the wayang Satria and Raseksa figures.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion above, a conclusion can be derived that the characters in Raseksa and Satria wayang figures reflect the Javanese noble cultural values which in their typical shapes are paradoxical in terms of external and internal structures. The external structure concerns visual elements representation which apparently show the opposite physical shapes between the Pandavas and the Kauravas characters. The shapes of the eyes, nose, mouth,

head, face, facial color, direction facing, hand position, and clothing tend to show the opposite character between one character to the other. The inner structure is more about the meaning and value where they both inseparable from the outer structure like in a human and his soul. In semiotics, the visual elements (external structure) of the Pandavas and the Kauravas are represented or interpreted in terms of their values and meanings (inner structure) and show a conflict. The paradoxical cultural value in Javanese culture is a learning process for human beings which is manifested in the puppet characters. Similarly to Islamic religion, which places the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h along with his obligatory and impossible nature. Puppet Satria can represent the compulsory nature (good traits) and puppet Raseksa represent the other around, the impossible traits (bad traits) of human beings.

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