

Ritual Interaction in the Soneyan Mask Puppet

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Abstract

The preservation of traditional arts depends on the artists and their supporters. The Soneyan Mask Puppet artistic life is still showing its existence as a medium of expression for fulfilling the needs of the arts. Until now The Soneyan Mask Puppet has undergone five generations. In the beginning, the show performed by the puppeteers of gedhog puppet and purwo puppet. The shows were accompanied by the slendro type of Javanese traditional music, in the form of Pamijen music. Before the show begins, rituals were held. The rituals were part of the Mask Puppet show. Therefore, the activity of the Soneyan Mask Puppet can not be separated from the rituals. Based on the description, the primary purpose of this study is to assess the ritual interaction in The Soneyan Mask Puppet. This is a qualitative research with an approach to social, cultural and performing arts. The data were drawn from the techniques of observation, interviews, and documentary study. The data analysis procedures followed Miles and Huberman (1984) data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. Among the results of this research is that the process of ritual interaction in the Soneyan Mask Puppet is in the form of symbolic interaction contained in ritual offerings before the show begins. The symbolic interaction is found in a ritual that is highly expressed in the offerings consisting of ambeng, incense, straw, combs of banana, chicken eggs, chili, shrimp paste, upa, coconut shoot, brown sugar, dried fish, mboreh flower, jugs, cigarettes, teeter, money (two combs bananas, eggs, chili, rice, coconut, brown sugar, dried fish, mboreh flowers, jugs, cigarettes, combs, money).

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INTRODUCTION

There are groups of people who want the traditional arts, in general, remain as it is, and there are groups that want change. Groups that maintain the "authenticity" assume that development efforts may abandon the existing integrity and be considered unable to maintain the values contained in the arts inherited by the ancestors.

In essence, the existing art is very much dependent upon the cultural system embraced by the supporting community that can actually be indicated through an ideological system of the artists and their supporters. It means that the ideology of the artists and the supporting community are very much influential to the form and existence of a traditional art including ritual tradition. According to Hadi (2012: 99) rituals include a ritual system, a form of ritual associated with religious beliefs, marked by special properties, which give rise to respect the sublime in the sense of sacred experience.

The generally shown ritual function is usually still grounded to the rules of prevailing tradition. One of these rituals is carried out before a show starts. It is equipped with some offerings that must be met. The role of the rituals is to unite two parallel systems with different levels of hierarchy by placing the relations between the formative and reflective relations to one another in such a way as each is related to the symbolic origin and the origin of its expression.

According to Soedarsono (1972: 57) the function of the ritual is not only dealing with the events of life that are considered important but also for the sake of the audience's ritual that is the ruler of the world above and below, while the human is more concerned with the purpose of the ceremony rather than enjoying its manifestation.

According to Koentjaraningrat (1987: 77) a ceremony is not far from the events in human's everyday life. Ceremonies are considered as significant events. Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat (1994: 377-378) explains that

there are four important things that must be done when someone holds a ceremony, namely: (1) where ceremonies are performed, (2) moments of the ceremony, (3) materials and tools for the ceremony and (4) person (called *modin*) who performs and leads the ceremony. All of the four aspects are integrated within the series of events. Another opinion related to the ceremony is the opinion stating that the ritual has three aspects, the first is related to the sign of nobility. the second is equipment (according to tradition) for series of actions or deeds that are bound to certain rules according to custom or religion. The third is an act or celebration performed or held in connection with important events. The ceremony is generally performed as the realization of the solidarity within the community. Therefore, it is usually implemented by many concerned citizens together.

Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat, (1994: 37) explains that a ceremony is a series of sharing forms and elements of communication with nature spirits, spirits of ancestors. The ceremony can be classified into twelve elements of ceremonies (rites), that is, service, sacrifice, eating together food that has been sanctified by prayer, dancing sacred dances, singing sacred songs, processing, playing arts of holy drama, fasting, intoxicating or clouding the mind with anesthetic medication to the state of trance or drunk, and meditation. In short, according to Lubis (2007: 30) ritual is interpreted as an ordinance in religious ceremonies that has the most prominent position. The salience of the ceremony is able to unite people in a way that the ceremony is positioned on an individual or a group. It is also described in more details by Lubis that a ceremony is a public space where the myths, symbols, and values are easily created and distorted. The ceremony is often equated with ritual. Ritual is connoted as a sacred ceremony; it is associated with the sacredness that is

considered as an object of worship or a means of spiritual ceremonies.

Earth alms ceremony is a ritual that is done by people intending to give alms to the welfare of the earth. The earth is essentially a place of life and survival for all the souls therein. Therefore, a human being is obliged to maintain and pray for the safety and well-being of the earth in order to stay alive. Among the rituals is the one performed by the Sonean community.

This tradition of the earth alms is one of the traditional rituals of the community in Java that has lasted for generations of ancestors of the previous Java. Sudarsono (2000: 93) suggests that in view of the Java community the spirit of the dead is eternal. The spirit of a person who has died still has magic a power, that can bring relief to the survivors so that children and grandchildren who are still alive constantly strive to keep in touch with and worshiped them (Koentjaraningrat, 1994).

The earth alms ritual is a part of the Javanese culture. According to Sulasman and Gumilar (2013: 20) culture is passed down from generation to generation. Culture is made up of many complex elements including religious and political system, customs, languages, tools, clothing, buildings, and works of arts. Likewise is the artistic ritual of Soneyan Mask Puppet that has been used as one of the people's needs so that the sequence of earth alms ritual is still performed today.

The presence or existence of the cultural expression in the Soneyan Mask Puppet arts in Kedungpanjang Margoyoso Pati includes certain typical and unique characteristics according to the standard of the local tradition. As a consequence of the phenomenon, The District of Pati has some traditional arts, one of which is the Mask Puppet which grows and develops in the village of Kedungpanjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati. The Mask Puppet has become the pride of the community of Kedungpanjang from generation to generation.

In the context of traditional arts, such phenomena imply that the supporting community has demonstrated their cultural

inheritance process including the arts. According to Parsons (1953: 5-6), "in the sense of culture there are always three important aspects, namely: (1) the culture is transferred from one generation to another, this culture is seen as an inheritance or social tradition; (2) culture is learned, in this case, the culture is not a manifestation, to some extent, and the physical state of man is genetic; (3) culture is internalized and shared by the supporting community". This implies that the process of the arts inheritance takes the models of knowledge and technologies of values and beliefs which are always experienced through the process of education.

The Mask Puppet in the Village of Kedung Panjang, Margoyoso, Pati is a form of Mask Puppet found in all areas of the island of Java. The Mask Puppet is classified as an outdated traditional performance and art and is not only spread out in Java but also in the neighboring islands such as Bali, Madura, and South Kalimantan.

Sudarsono (1972: 62) mentions that "Since the period of East Java, Mask Puppet is a form of royal dance ". Since the collapse of Majapahit and triggered by the Giyanti agreement in 1755 the Mask Puppet had shifted its position, from royal dance to folk dance. Subsequently, Mask Puppet was no longer popular in rural areas with presence of the aristocratic characteristics as the one inherited in the palace in past. In the end, the Mask Puppet is closer to the stylistic character of folk performance.

One type of the Mask Puppet surviving up this time is the Mask Puppet in the Village of Kedungpanjang Soneyan, Margoyoso, Pati. As well as the mask puppet show in general, the Mask Puppet of Kedungpanjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati is presented by dancers wearing masks as the actors or characters in the story. The performers wear specific masks used as a mask depicting certain figures in the story. According Cahyono (2006: 241),

Performers are presenters in a show, either directly or indirectly presenting the forms of performance. Some performances

only involve male performers, female performers, or the combination of male and female performers. Views from ages, performers can vary, such as children, adolescents, and adults.

According to Suharso (56 years old) in a July 5, 2016, interview, Mask Puppet in Kedungpanjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati was firstly performed by the puppeteers of gedhog puppet and those of purwo puppet. The performers took the roles portraying certain figures in scenarios presented on stage. The performers were required to be able to conduct dramatic and dance dialogues. To complete a performance, every performer wore a certain costume in accordance with the characters they play.

In line with the above description, dance clothes often reflect the identity or characteristics of a region where the dance originated from and is with the use of costume colors. All are regardless of cultural background or philosophical view of each region (Jazuli, 1994: 18). Costume closes the body and also functions to protect the body, the costume should not interfere with movement but must support the motion design and motion attitude. All elements of clothing, such as line, color, texture, quality of materials must be utilized well (Darlene Neel and Jennifer Craig in Jazuli 2001: 105-106).

The ritual Mask Puppet performance does not use any makeup because the each of the players wears a mask to cover their faces during the whole play. There are some interesting things from the Mask Puppet in the village of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati that can be studied. First, the Mask Puppet, in the village has the impression as folk art. The fact found on the Mask Puppet in the village of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati is very different from the other forms of royal art that tend to be complex, refined (sophisticated), as well as sourced from the valuable concept.

According Simatupang (2013: 31) a show is a disclosure activity that asks for involvement, enjoyment of improved

experience inviting a response. Performance can be summed up as a compact form of human artistic articulation that is presented in the format of "staging". This categorization is necessary because a specific culture in the form of dance, singing, theater and the like is often an integral part of a stage show. Performance is a work of art that involves the actions of individuals or groups in a particular place and at a certain time. Performance art usually involves four elements: time, space, the body of the artists and the artists' relationship with the audience.

On some perspectives of the show, the Mask Puppet in Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati, is still influenced by elements of the palace as reflected on the shape of the masks and costumes worn during the show. However, when viewing the layout the performance, the Mask Puppet in the village of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati gives more impression of a folk art form filled with simple improvisation, spontaneity, simple performance what without any complexity and subtlety. It is disclosed by Sudarsono (1999: 1) that "the people focus their attention on joint participation more than artistic arrangement that directed to the audience. Moreover, the movements still seem simple, spontaneous, and do not show any complexity or subtlety".

Essentially, a dance performance is not separated from musical accompaniment, both internally and externally. Internal musical accompaniment is accompaniment coming from the dancers themselves. External musical accompaniment is accompaniment conducted by people beyond the dancers, either in words, songs or complete orchestra (Jazuli, 1994: 13). In line with these opinions, the Mask Puppet in Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati includes only the accompaniment of gamelan with slendro style with the form of gending Pamijen; with no motion of the feet lifting, trisik, sabetan, pacak jangga, and the motion of dominant lumaksana with ogek lambung. At the time of antawacana (dialogue) the players lift their mask with the intent to pull a hook made of leather that is originally bitten.

The authenticity of the Mask Puppet in Kedung Panjang is different from those in the palace and its surrounding, the sustainability of the arts is perceived as belonging to the community of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati. This clearly leads to two aspects. Firstly, in the community of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati, interactions actually occur in the art of the Mask Puppet. Secondly, the Mask Puppet is still functional for the community of Kedung Panjang as a part of their life. Based on the above two aspects, the researchers are interested in deeply investigating aspects related to the art form and interactions in the Mask Puppet in Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso for the people of Kedung Panjang particularly in the earth alms ceremony.

Along with the earth alms ceremony conducted by the Pati community, the ceremony is able to generate togetherness, that is, a kind of positive energy that can ignite a strong motivation for all elements of this nation to rise. Taufik Abdullah believes that the myth will never be accepted if it is not grounded in sensory reality that is sturdy enough. In the dictionary, this word has three meanings: regalia; equipment (according to the customs), a series of actions or deeds that are bound to certain rules in line with custom or religion; act or celebration carried or held in connection with important events.

Ritual is an ordinance in religious ceremonies. This term is in fact often used as a synonym for the word ceremony. Based on this notion, rituals and ceremonies are often used to refer to a similar purpose. The term ritual remains an important element to explain the term ceremony (Lubis, 2007: 28-30). Based on the notion, the ritual activity is an ordinance in religious ceremonies to communicate with invisible things that are believed to exist because in essence in this life there are visible and invisible entities. A concrete example of the self is that there are tangible and also intangible elements of life.

METHODS

The method used in this study is a qualitative research method. According to Creswell (2016: 4), qualitative research method is a method to explore and understand meaning ascribed by individuals or groups as social or humanitarian problems. The approach used in this study was an interdisciplinary approach (Rohendi, 2011: 63). In this study, the discipline that is used was the artistic one (visual arts), communication, and socio-cultural science.

The focus of the research and the data collected in this study referred to the research problems. The source of data in this study was the community of Kedungpanjang Soneyan Margoyoso Pati and the related documents. The data were collected through the data collection techniques such as observation, interviews and documentary studies. This study used data validity checking formulated by Creswell, namely triangulation, member checking, and rich and thick description.

Furthermore, the procedures of data analysis in this study included the stage of data reduction, data display, and conclusion through the process of interactive cycles, referring to Miles (1992). Such stages are not always sequential, but the processes may move in a shuttle. Besides drawing conclusion, the meaning of data was also understood through the dialogical interpretation approach referring to the opinion of Abdullah (1993), namely, the researchers conducted a dialogue on the interaction of a phenomenon with the informant because there is a possibility that the interaction the researchers understand can be different from what the informant believed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Yunita et al (2016: 1), the symbolic interaction in the show is in the form of a conversation, provision of a symbol in the form of sound, and movement that occurs between some elements in the show. The process of symbolic interaction occurs in the earth alms ritual offerings at Dukuh

Kedungpanjang. The symbolic interaction is found in offerings and ambeng made to bring the spirits of ancestors to communicate with the actors in the ritual. The incense and straw are media that are used to interact with the ancestral spirits. The incense and straw should be burned in advance to spread the scent to the spirits of the ancestors.

The traditional ceremony has several aspects. Koentjaraningrat (1987: 378) describes

that the ceremonial system of religion or religious ceremony can be categorized at least into four aspects, namely (1) where the ceremonies are performed, (2) when the ceremony is conducted, (3) the objects and instruments for the ceremony, and (4) those who perform and lead the ceremony. The four aspects reflect space, time, and actors, as well as the equipment used.



Figure 1. The form of *Sesaji* ritual
(Foto: Any, 2016)

In line with the above opinion, the researcher outlines and describes the materials and tools used when the process of the ceremonial ritual of the Mask Puppet takes place. Among them are burned incense and straw for offerings. The other offerings include

two combs of bananas, chicken eggs, capsicum, trasi, upa rice, coconut shoot, brown sugar, gereh, mboreh flower, jugs, cigarettes, combs, money.



Figure 2. The process of burning incense
(Photo: Any, 2016)

Putting meanings of symbols in the offering is very important because it is the meaning behind the symbols that is embodied as a communication process through the meaningful symbols. Combs of bananas symbolize harmony or unity of the people in the village to unite in prayer to God as a form of gratitude for the abundance of the harvest which they have acquired. Chicken eggs symbolize an entity that is single, round, and seed as the beginning of the growth of a good generation. The spicy chili symbolizes the courage of people at Kedungpanjang to organize the future life.

Upa (rice) symbolizes the community's food at Kedungpanjang to meet the daily food staple that is always fulfilled. Cikalán (coconut shoot) symbolizes the growth of the next generation as virtuous village children. The coconut tree is selected because all parts of the tree are useful to the needs of human life. Therefore, it is expected that the Sonean citizens always give benefit not only to themselves but also to others. Brown sugar symbolizes the sweetness of life in Kedungpanjang from generation to generation in the future.

Gereh (salty fish) symbolizes a side dish which is served with rice. In addition to being cheap, it is also nutritious so it is hoped that the citizens of Soneyan become an intelligent and superior generation. Mboreh flower (which is made from flour that is colored red) symbolizes the fragrant flowers that can invite the spirits of the ancestors or danyang to attend the earth alms ritual. Kendi, a jug of drinking

water that is made of clay, symbolizes life that can give life in the village of Kedung Panjang. A comb symbolizes a tool for hair doing. Money symbolizes a tool to transact in any sale and purchase.

Ambeng (a form offerings) which consists of *sego bucu* (rice formed a small mound), *bumbon* (various assorted spices), *ingkung* (chicken cooked but not cut into pieces), snacks such as *dumbeg* (cake), *gemblong* (made from sticky rice), *tape* (yeasty cassava), *bugis*. To be more detail, *gemblong* is a food made from sticky rice that has been mixed with grated coconut and then crushed and wrapped in banana leaves. *Dumbeg* is ingredient food made from rice flour, cane sugar, brown sugar, a container that is a coconut leaf shaped like a small sized horn. *Tape* is a food made of sticky rice mixed with yeast and wrapped in banana leaves and left for a few days. *Bugis* is a food made from sticky rice that has been refined and mixed with coconut milk, salt, and stuffed with nuts or grated coconut, brown sugar, cane sugar, and shaped resembling a small ball and wrapped in banana leaf.

Offerings and *ambeng* already prepared are placed on *dundang* (basket). After a gong is sounded in the village chief's house, the *ambeng* and offerings are brought by citizens towards Punden Wit Ringin and Punden Mbah Ro. It symbolizes the sincere intention of the village residents to submit the produce to the Punden. After arriving at the Punden, the *ambeng* and offerings are placed in the middle and surrounded by the community of the Kedung Panjang village for prayers.



Figure 3. Snack named *gemplong, tape, dumbeg*, (Foto. Any, 2016)

Ambeng and offerings are used as a symbol to interact with ancestral spirits or *Danyang* during the *kenduren* ritual. This is the means to achieve a desire. In tribute to the *Danyang* that cannot be seen by the naked eyes, this ritual is very important to be implemented so that the public can obtain a blessing. *Gemplong* is food made of sticky rice which symbolizes an adhesive or unifying citizens. *Tape* is food made from cassava. Cassava is considered as a source of agricultural income, which is expected to provide an advantage in the form of abundant natural resources. *Dumbeg* is food made from rice flour. It symbolises a hope that people will have an abundant harvest of rice.

The other form of ritual activities is walking around the banyan tree escorted by the village head who is followed by the entire apparatus. This activity of walking around the banyan tree is with a jug containing water taken from a source in *Kedungpanjang*. This activity symbolizes the emergence of magical power from the activity of revolving the banyan tree. Revolving creates energy, whereas water symbolizes a source of life, fertility, and prosperity. This ritual activity of revolving resembles the activity done by *Lakshmana* when he wanted to leave *Shinta* hoping to avoid disaster. In the Islamic religion, this ritual resembles the event of *Tawaf* that is revolving the *Ka'aba*.



Figure 4. Walking around the *beringin* (banyan) tree
(Photo: Any, 2016)

Symbolic Interaction also exists in the kenduren procession. Kenduren a procession which is held during the earth alms ritual. Being very simple, a kenduren ritual is a part of the interaction with the ancestors or Danyang of the village. Kenduren is a series of prayers to God so as to bestow them with abundant harvests, to avoid omen, and to beg for the welfare and safety of Kedung Panjang especially and the surrounding community in general.

The symbolic interaction is seen in the Village Head of Kedung Panjang Soneyan of the Margoyoso district when he burns straw, which is the dried rice stalks. Then, muezzin leads the kenduren with prayers recited in Islam, witnessed by the village head, *kamituo* (village secretary), village apparatus, and the residents of Kedung Panjang. They pray while lifting both of their hands fervently.



Figure 5. *Besek* containing food for *Kenduren*
(Photo: Any, 2016)

Kenduren was attended by all residents of Kedung Panjang, Soneyan, and the nearby residents. As said by Mbah Idris (60 years), a trader as well local residents: "Let us attend the ritual so as to get the mercy from the Danyang ..." That is among the giggles from the Kedung Panjang residents.

Once the prayer is finished, the residents scramble the *ambeng* presented at the event of *kenduren* ritual. The residents of the village believed that it is a blessing to get to safety, well-being, and prosperity. With the offerings and *ambeng* media as an intermediary to invite the spirit of the ancestors, the interaction between the residents and the Danyang appears with the actors' reading ritual prayer to the Danyang or ancestors. So the ancestors are pleased to be present to pray for the villagers of Kedung Panjang Soneyan Margoyoso to be endowed.

The *kenduren* procession of symbolic interaction contained in ritual activities aimed to pray together to God Almighty. The tradition of earth alms ritual which contains a prayer to God Almighty does not deviate from the teachings of Islam. Therefore, the earth alms rituals continue to be preserved until now in order to become a preserved art tradition.

CONCLUSION

Soneyan Mask Puppet is a traditional art performed as a unity in charity of the earth. The procession rituals are carried out prior to the Mask Puppet performance. The ritual conducted before Mask Puppet performance is a form of symbolic interaction between humans and the ancestors as well as the creator of the universe, with the hope that blessings are always bestowed for the community of Soneyan especially in terms of the abundance of crops. In other words, it is a symbolic interaction in order to obtain prosperity, serenity, and tranquility due to the availability of food, clothing, and settlement. The symbolic interaction contains in the procession the offerings and amenities. Supplies of the offerings include *ambeng* created as a means of

the communications medium and are also simultaneously dedicated to the spirits of the ancestors. Through the offerings, there is a relationship and communication between the ancestors and the community as the actors of the ritual. The other media to use to communicate with the spirit of existing authorities are incense and rice straw by burning them beforehand in order to create the scent which is believed to be highly favored by ancestral spirits. The other media of offerings include a pair of banana combs, chicken eggs, chili, trasi, upa rice, coconut shoot, brown sugar, dried fish, mboreh flower, jugs, cigarettes, comb, and money.

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