



Symbolic Form of Puppets in Character Wayang Golek Purwa Sunda

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Abstract

Wayang golek purwa Sunda is a sublime art with philosophical aspects. The performance involves many equipment and elements. The elements of wayang golek purwa are all equipment dalang when he's performing, which in this research is limited to wayang. This study aims to discuss symbolism's meaning in these elements. To explain it, the semiotic theory from Charles Sanders Peirce was used in this study. The analytical description was used, that is, by analyzing all the data found in the study, then describing it using the scientific theory used and combining it with other literature studies. The study's results expose the meanings of the puppet element of the performance. It contains correlations with the concepts of Sundanese human living, from birth to death. Accordingly, the performance is just not a spectacle. Based on the resulting study, wayang golek contains educational values closely related to the teachings of humanity in the identity of the Sundanese people.

Keywords: *Wayang Golek Purwa; Dalang; Meanings; Symbol*

Introduction

The Saussurean perspective explains a symbol is a type of sign. This sign refers to the relationship between the signifier and the signified that seems arbitrary. Arbitrary or manasuka here means that there is no necessity that a certain sign must contain a certain meaning as well. Furthermore, Saussure explains that one of the characteristics of symbols is that they are never truly arbitrary (Berger, 2010: 48-57). The reason for this is the imperfection of the natural bond between the signifier and the signified. For example, the symbol of Christianity is the cross, it cannot be replaced with any other symbol. The symbol from the perspective of Indonesian life is explained by Sri Teddy Rusdy, as follows. A symbol is something that has cultural significance and resonance. Symbols can influence and have deep meaning. In addition, symbols help humans to be responsive to something. Symbols also help sharpen cultural behavior and performance (2015: 61).

Signs or symbols are also one of the products of local wisdom found in Indonesia which is always inserted in all aspects of life, such as religious aspects, art, agriculture, etc. The aspect of art is one thing that many signs find in it, for example in puppet art.

Wayang golek purwa Sunda is a folk theater performance art that lives in West Java. His presence is quite popular and has many fans, especially in certain troupes such as the Sunarya dynasty or the Sutarya dynasty. This overnight performance art is usually performed at weddings, circumcisions, rituals, or activities related to politics and government. In the performance, wayang golek purwa is accompanied by a set of gamelan salendro; But nowadays it has experienced development with the discovery of multi-laras gamelan which makes this wayang golek purwa performance accompanied by a gamelan multi-laras.

In the book *Padalangan 1* by M.A. Salmun published by the Indonesian and Regional Book and Literature Publishing Project in 1986, part one explained that the source of the story performed in wayang golek purwa comes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics with a slight change in some contexts that are adapted to the ethics and philosophy of life of the Sundanese people. The changes here are adapted to the eastern atmosphere of Sundanese culture, one example is making the goddess Drupadi only have one husband, namely Yudistira, even though in the Mahabharata book alone, Drupadi is the wife of the five children of Pandu or the Pandavas.

The wayang golek purwa show is worked on in such a way that it has several sub-performances. In the book *Tetekon Padalangan Sunda* by Atik Soepandi published by Balai Pustaka in 1988, in one of its chapters it is explained that wayang golek purwa performances have a regular and continuous performance pattern, starting with tatalu, paseban jawi, jaranan, bebegalan, nagara sejen, perang kembang, patapan, nagara sejen, nagara jawastina, widarba, and perang ruket.

The book *Philosophy of Wayang*, Sri Teddy Rusdi published by the Kertagama Foundation in 2015 page 63 explains that there are two signs in puppet performances, namely physical signs and non-physical signs. Physical signs here are interpreted as signs that can be seen directly by the sense of sight, for example, such as puppets, puppet boxes, virgin palms, cranes, etc. At the same time, non-physical signs are the opposite of these physical signs, which cannot be seen directly, such as patet, kakawen, suluk, gending accompaniment, etc.

This study focuses on the physical signs directly used by dalang in wayang golek purwa performances. Thus the physical signs discussed in this study are limited to puppets. Further from the explanation of the physical signs mentioned above, extracting the meaning of the sign becomes a very interesting thing. The meaning conveyed in the pattern of puppet performances is very complex and orderly. Solichin argues as follows: Wayang performances can be listened to in three aspects, namely aesthetics, ethics, and philosophy. Aesthetics is an aspect of the beauty of his art that encompasses all the elements of his work; ethics relates to the content of moral messages conveyed in puppet stories or plays; While philosophy is the essence of the meaning of wayang performances (2011: 10).

Research on physical signs in wayang golek purwa performances is very rarely found, this causes references to academics in the field of wayang golek are currently very limited. This kind of phenomenon has long been a subject of criticism for art universities, especially in West Java. The interpretation of meaning related to these elements has a connection with Eastern philosophy inherent in the culture in West Java. This is a special attraction for researchers, to be able to unveil the correlation between symbols in the physical elements of wayang golek performances with the Eastern culture of the Priangan people.

Theory and Methodology

The theory used in this study is the theory of semiotics, or in Barthes' terms, semiology, which wants to study how *humanity interprets* things. Semiotics is said to be the science of the meaning of signs derived from two thoughts, Peirce and Saussure (Sri Teddy Rusdy, 2015: 12). Semiotics is the study of *signs*, sign functions, and meaning production. A sign is something that to a person means something else.

Wayang art as an “adiluhung” art contains various kinds of signs from every aspect, therefore the discipline of semiotics is used by researchers to add validity to the results of this meaning study. To dissect the meaning of these signs, this study relies on Charles Sanders Peirce's version of semiotics. The essence of Peirce's thought is that the *universe* consists of *signs*, so Peirce's view is pan-semiotic. Humans interpret natural, social, and cultural symptoms through a process that occurs in their cognition called *semiosis* (Teddy Rusdy, 2015: 13). Peirce's categorization of signs involves three interrelated things: icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons are signs of similarity, indexes are signs that point to causality, and symbols are conventional signs (Zoest, 1991: 57).

Dissecting the symbolic meaning of the six physical signs in the Sundanese wayang golek purwa performance applies three important elements according to Peirce, namely, (1) *Representation* (X), (2) *Object* (Y), and (3) *Interpretant* (X = Y). *The representative* in this case Peirce explains that a sign can represent something else, thus a sign represents something that represents it. Objects are something that is represented, for example, the universe (two banana trees) as a puppet game area. What is called *interpretation* is a procedure for meaning in one's thinking about an object referred to by a sign. Examples related to the context of this study such as the universe which is interpreted as the earth or universe, which is the place where human life and all God's creatures take place.

The research method used is the analytical descriptive method, which analyzes and describes the meaning of physical signs in wayang golek purwa performances. To obtain proportional data according to the author's needs, appropriate and directed methods are needed, both in the process of searching or collecting data, as well as in the process of analyzing the data obtained.

Results and Discussion

A fairly long and wide explanation in the previous section has known that language in broad definitions is not just a matter of speech and oral forms which are then referred to as *parol* and *langue* (Hawkes, 1978: 30), but language can also be used as a means for humans to escape from mental fatigue due to life problems. The role of language from its function as a means of human expression is realized in various ways such as, through stage artwork, music, painting, karawitan, puppets, and others.

Including one of them in the wayang golek, can be a means of expressing various things from life that are inserted into objects used by a *dalang/puppeteer*. So, in this case, the object is given the term physical sign. Various elements of wayang golek purwa performance that can be seen in plain view, if detailed one by one have a deep meaning for the entire wayang golek purwa performance. And here is an explanation of the meaning contained in the wayang used by *dalang/puppeteers* in performing wayang golek purwa.

1. Wayang/Puppets

In the wayang golek purwa performance, the medium of performance is a wooden puppet called wayang golek, this puppet is carved and colored in such a way by certain aesthetic rules and regulations. Wayang was created by the concepts of high art owned by puppet masters and poets several centuries ago, at least since the time of King Airlangga (Zoetmulder, 1981: 21). Wayang golek is a form of reform of shadow puppets, with consideration of several aspects to create wooden puppets that live and develop in West Java.

Each puppet character has its own character, puppets have subtle, rough, good, evil, beautiful, handsome, scary ugly, and others. Therefore, puppet characters and puppet play stories are a form of various characteristics and characters in human life. This view then gave birth to an assumption that the story of the puppet performance was a *wewayanganing urip* (a shadow of life) (Slamet Sutrisno, et al. 2009: 56-62). The interpretation of the meaning of wayang golek here is limited to the form of each

character in question, the following are some of the characters contained in the wayang golek purwa performance quoted from the book *Wayang Golek Sunda (Aesthetic Study of Golek Characters)* compiled by Drs. Jajang Suryana, M.Sn.

A. Golek Satria

The form of wayang golek is divided into three main characters, namely *lungguh* like Arjuna's character, Abhimanyu; *ladak tungkul* like the Narayana character; and *dangah ladak* like Nakula and Sadewa. These three characters are further manifested in the use of face color, the *lungguh* face will be given white, the dashing character or *ladak tungkul* will be given pink and ivory, while the agile character or *ladak dangah* will be colored ivory bone. The attitude of the head of the wayang golek is a symbol of the character and character of the puppet, this puppet symbolizes humans with polite temperament. Manners here are manifested in the form of a bowing head posture (*tungkul*). Although there are indeed knights, such as Krishna who is agile, the shape of his head posture is only upright with straight eyes looking forward.

In addition to the shape of the head posture, the color of the face also symbolizes a human character in puppets, for example, smooth characters are given white, agile characters, *ladak* are given pink, while *ladak dangah* characters are ivory (Suryana, 2002: 142).



Figure 1, is an example of golek lungguh (Source: Private Collection)



Figure 2 shows a ladak golek (Source: Private Collection)

B. Golek Ponggawa

This type of wayang golek is divided into four types, this type of distinction refers to the shape and size of the body of the puppet in question, such as *pongawa alit* (small) like Setyaki characters, *sembada* (medium) like Jayawikata characters, *ageung* (large) like Gatotkaca characters, and *badag* (very large) like the character of Indrajit. Golek *pongawa* is an implementation of humans who have a bold temperament. This puppet group is also a symbol of humans who have a sturdy and authoritative stature, so it can be seen from the lines of their faces that tend to be firm and given facial hairs such as mustaches, and thick beards.



Figure 3, is an example of golek ponggawa (Source: Private Collection)

C. Golek Buta

This type of puppet is a picture of deviant human nature, such as fierce, scary, ferocious, arrogant, angry, greedy, and cunning, so that the shape of his face is extraordinary and scary. So that the stature must also show the nature and character in question, such as a large tall body, upright head, thick eyebrows with forehead wrinkles, bulging eyes, and so on.



Figure 4, an example of a blind golek (Source: Private Collection)

D. Golek Panakawan

Those who belong to the panakawan in the golek purwa are four puppets named Semar, Cepot, Dawala, and Gareng. Semar is embodied with a white face, the image of an honest, clean-hearted, wise, and far-sighted character. His short, fat, and black body symbolizes honesty and humility. Kabul (2022) explained that Semar's children, namely Cepot, Dawala, and Gareng, are often juxtaposed with elements of human lust, namely anger, lawwamah, and muthmainnah. The lust for anger is a lust that always drives people to ugliness or infidelity. The so-called lust lawwamah is lust that has carried out the commands of Allah SWT. and shuns His prohibitions, but still slips a lot in immoral deeds, thus making him always regret himself. Then what is called muthmainnah lust, which is lust that has been clean from the nature of riya, ujub, arrogant, etc. then changes to praiseworthy qualities in the form of affection, gentleness, etc. It is the beginning of a person getting closer to Allah SWT.



Figure 5, an example of golek panakawan (Source: Private Collection)

In the Wayang Golek performance, there is a puppet that is played at the beginning of the show, this puppet is commonly called maktal and named Citrasena. This puppet is manifested in the form of a male human, wearing traditional *beskap* clothes complete with *bendo*, *sinjang*, *keris*, and *sampur*. In the context of the performance, wayang maktal is played as the opening of the performance with a dance presentation in the songs 'Kawitan', 'Gawil', 'Sungsang', etc. This can directly show the greatness of a dalang/puppeteer in mastering *sabet* or in this context in the form of puppet dance movements that adopt a lot of *keurseus* dance genres. The *keurseus* dance genre is a type of dance developed from *tayuban*, which is an entertainment dance for priyayi or *menak* men in the palace environment (Narawati, 2003). In its presentation, many patterns of this dance movement are adopted into wayang maktal dances, such as *keupat*, *mincid*, *galeor*, *gedut*, and so on.

A consensus also developed among the dalang/puppeteers in West Java, that wayang maktal is a puppet that symbolizes dancers in a palace. This is based on the perspective of the life history of *menak* or Priangan nobles, such as regents, *wedana*, etc. who like this genre of dance. However, Apep (2022) argues, that if maktal is only interpreted as a palace dancer, of course, this is too narrow, because philosophically the meaning of maktal refers to the symbol of wayang golek performances as a whole. Cahya (2022) explained that the wayang golek performance is a symbol of human life, when the *kayon* is removed by a dalang/puppeteer and the puppets that will be played by his role appear, this is a symbol of the birth of a human being, as we believe that Adam and Eve were the first humans to be sent down to earth. Referring to this, the maktal is a symbol of the first man, namely the Prophet Adam A.S. Lili (2022) explained, before the maktal consensus officially spread in West Java, the puppet that played a role in the initial presentation of the wayang golek performance was wayang *emban geulis*. It is a beautiful female puppet, wearing a bun, *kebaya*, and *sinjang*. This puppet is a symbol of a child shaman who helps pregnant women give birth, therefore, the beginning of the wayang golek performance is a symbol of the process of human birth.

The change from wayang *emban geulis* to maktal was started by a Sundanese puppeteer maestro, Ki Dalang Dede Amung Sutarya Alm. Cahya (2022) explained, that around the 1960s Dede Amung tried to make creativity by making maktal puppets inspired by royal dancers. In his initial presentation, Dede Amung used the song 'Gawil' as an accompaniment to this wayang maktal dance.

In interpreting the meaning of this wayang golek form, referring to the theory used by researchers, what is called a sign or representation here is the form of the puppet itself. While what is called the object in this sign element is the presence of various forms of temperament from puppet puppets,



Picture 6, wayang emban geulis and Citrasena (Source: Private Collection)

Such as golek satria, ponggawa, buta, etc. which will then point to the last triadic concept of interpretant, which as described above, will be found as an interpretation of the meaning of each form of puppet temperament, which implies a meaning for an interpreter. The interpreter figure here is the researcher, who processes data from the speakers as reference material for interpreting signs contained in each element of the Sundanese wayang golek purwa performance.

But in this study, researchers found a finding that was different from the views of the figures above. In interpreting the meaning of a puppet, it is not necessarily only seen based on the shape or posture of the puppet in question, but it is necessary to do a deeper review of other aspects such as aspects of the story, grammar, etc. We take a sample of the puppet character Kumbakarna, in the posture he is indeed a scary giant, but if we examine from the side of the play/story, then Kumbakarna is a symbol of the figure of the nation's hero who is willing to sacrifice his body soul to defend his beloved country.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the symbols of each puppet character may not necessarily be seen only from the shape of the body, it needs consideration of other crucial aspects so that the meaning of 'truth' can be expressed straightforwardly. The shape or posture of the wayang golek if we examine it, is a guide for a puppeteer when playing the puppet in question. Because we know that each puppet character 'dances' according to its character, such as the keupat dua movement for wayang golek *lungguh* characters, and keupat tilu for wayang golek *ladak* characters, therefore, a correlation will be found between the body shape of the puppet and *tetekon padalangan*, which is at the point of the *bet* that requires a puppeteer to be able to dance the puppet according to his character, nature, and character.

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