

## Artistic Transformation of Malang Mask Puppet: From a Stage to another

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**Abstract:** Research examines the artistic transformation on the variant of presentation functions of Kedungmangga Village's Mask Puppet. This variant has an implication to 'the stage' where presentation takes a place, and by this reason, presentation area has always a symbolical meaning. Research type is qualitative involving structural functional perspective and A-G-I-L Theory. This research utilizes data of explanations, words and behaviors of the presenting artists. Interpretative analysis is used to understand social change experienced by Mask Puppet conserver societies in Kedungmangga Village, Pakisaji District, Malang Regency, and East Java. Result of research indicates that different event needs different arrangement of stage, such as: (a) *Altar* stage for *gebyak suguh pundhen*, (b) *Genjot* stage for *gebyak tolak balak*, (c) *Latar* stage for *gebyak ngamen* and *tanggapan*, and (d) No stage for *gebyak festival* and mass presentation. The implication of artistic transformation on each variant of Mask Puppet presentation is the change of symbols in social status previously possessed by *kamituwo*, *dalang*, and the chairs of Mask Puppet societies.

**Keywords:** Mask Puppet, performance art, stage.

### INTRODUCTION

The development of performance art is influenced by conditions and situations of environment that evoke transformation process.

The origin and real inventor of Mask Puppet in Malang, East Java, remain unclear. Some speculations say that the birth of Mask Puppet comes from *raket* performance which has been once popular during the age of Majapahit Kingdom on XV century [1]. However, this performance cannot be linearly linked to Mask Puppet history. The oldest data from the book of *Javaanse Volksvertoningen* (Javanese Folk Shows) written by Th. Pegeaud in 1938 have shown that in eastern part of Malang, rural dancers have performed a dance with "puppet attributes" [2]. Onghokham, in 1972, has written an article indicating that Mask Puppet has been performed in Malang since the old-day administration of Malang Regent, Raden Adipati Ario Soerio Adiningrat 1898-1934. At the time, there is a popularly known artist of Mask Puppet, named Candra or Reni who is the citizen of Palawijen Village [3]. Mask Puppet dancers are usually coordinated by village chief, and at the time, the chief is Saritrano [4]. Other data that supports the author's belief include archeology artifacts and ancient Java literatures. However, this research does not intend to use these data to track down artistic transformation of Malang Mask Puppet.

As indicated by Th. Pigeaud and Onghokham, since XX century, Malang Mask Puppet has been widely recognized in Great Malang (now represented by Malang Regency, Malang City and also Batu). This

finding is supported by the data reported by AM. Munardi (1979/80), Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono Final Paper, 1985, Hendrikus Supriyanto and Moch. Soleh Adi Pramono [3], and Robby Hidajat (the author of this article). Some conserver individuals of Malang Mask Puppet have been lived since the age of Reni. Of many societies conserving Malang Mask Puppet, one survivor is Mask Puppet Society in Kedungmangga Village, Pakisaji District. Mask Puppet presentation always includes 4 central characters, precisely Panji Asmarabangun, Dewi Sekartaji, Gunungsari and Klana Sewandana [5].

Previous observation indicates that Mask Puppet in Kedungmangga Village has been functioned as a part of the ritual of *Bersih Desa* which is held at *pundhen belik kurung*. Mask Puppet can also be performed as entertainment during *hajatan* (wedding ceremony) and *khitanan* (circumcision) [6]. The author (Robby Hidajat) assumes that Mask Puppet as a ritual medium is potentially powerful to evoke artistic transformation of morality values contained within performance, whereas Mask Puppet as an entertainment is a method to fulfill the living necessities of performers. Morality values conditioned in custom rituals will support the balance of various different social systems [7]. It is also assumed that artistic potential of Malang Mask Puppet as a financial-

generating instrument is developed from the functioning of this potential on some rituals. However, the author realizes that Mask Puppet does not linearly come from the rituals. Artistic transformation has reinforced Mask Puppet by making it into a community habit. Deep investigation is, thus, needed to obtain deep understanding on this topic. It can be said that Mask Puppet's presence in the rituals is an old habit, but it successfully maintains its existence in the modern age. Unfortunately, life necessity and social change have created a strong pressure to replace ritualism with profane function. Taking this background into account, research problems are formulated, respectively: (1) How is the development of the presentation function of Malang Mask Puppet?; and (2) What is the meaning of artistic transformation in relation with presentation stage of Malang Mask Puppet?

### **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

Research uses qualitative approach with structural functional perspective. The emphasis is given upon the searching for change agents [8] whom their presence is observed with a schematic pattern of Personal Theory, called A-G-I-L [9]. This theory asserts that culture transformation is possible to occur at a certain ethnic community, which in this research, it is represented by Kedungmangga Village communities who still kept intact their *intermittent latent* as agrarian communities. This identity is preserved with several aims which among other are to intertwine social integration and to keep balance of various different work systems adopted in the agrarian communities. To maintain such arrangement, adaptive behaviors must be shown by Mask Puppet conservers either inside or outside Kedungmangga Village [10]. Data are compiled from key informants such as Suroso (44 years old) and Tri Handoyo (37 years old) who are the still-active beneficiaries of Mask Puppet in Kedungmangga Village; Moch. Dahlan (56 years old) who works as Kamituwa of Kedungmangga Village; Sumantri (62 years old) who composes some Malang-style gendings; and Moch. Soleh Adi Pramana (65 years old) known as *dalang* of Malang Mask Puppet [10]. Data collection technique involves deep interview and participative observation [11]. Snowball Model is done by collecting data from key informants and keeping this process continued with other informants until it reaches data saturation [12]. Data analysis utilizes an interpretation involving semiotic theory to read symbols emerging as meaningful artistic symptoms [13].

### **DATA EXPOSITION**

The presentation of *Jegdong* Leather Puppet is considered as related transformatively with Mask Puppet in Malang, East Java because some features of both puppet arts are similar, including characters, *gendings*, and puppeting pattern. Previous studies support this fact by stating that Malang Mask Puppet has a development line closely correlated with *Jegdong* Leather Puppet. The difference is that the story told in

*Jegdong* Leather Puppet is presenting repertoires of Mahabarata tales [14]. Such repertoires are still used until now because in old days, puppet master of Malang Leather Puppet are the strong inspirer of Hindu spiritualism [26].

In the other hand, Malang Mask Puppet presents the Story of Panji. The characters performed in Mask Puppet, or in the Story of Panji, resemble to the characters in Mahabarata tales. The scene of *jejer* at Jenggala Kingdom is very identical to its counterparts at Amarta Kingdom in Mahabarata tales. Prabu Lembu Amiluhur resembles to Yudhistira. His sons are also comparable to Mahabarata characters, such as Panji Asmabarangun comparable to Arjuna, Panji Banyak Sasi and Panji Banyak Wulan both comparable to Nakula and Sadewa, and Panji Kartolo inspired by Bima. This comparability is the evidence that characters in Malang Mask Puppet are the product of transformation from those in Leather Puppet.

Mask Puppet is a dance drama performance played by dancers who wear masks (Indonesian called it *topeng*). Dialog across characters is represented by *dalang* who also plays a role as *story teller*. Dancers' costumes are same with characters' appearance in Leather Puppet or *Wayang Purwa*. The characters wear *jamang*, *sumping*, *kelat bahu*, bracelet, *sampur*, *badong* (*praba*), *cinde* pant, and *rapek* and also *pedangan*. There is a transformation of cloth arrangement from Leather Puppet to Mask Puppet.

The presentation of Mask Puppet starts by *gending giro* (the opening music) involving few songs such as *Krangean*, *Gondel*, *Loro-Loro* and *Sapujagad* (Sumantri, interviewed on 14 April 2017), and followed by *Beskalan Patih Dance*. The characters of the story are presented in a sequence, beginning with *Jejeran*. Scene in *Jejeran* often involves a meeting session between King (possibly Javanese King or *Sabrang* King) and his warriors. Scene in *Kaputren* or *Pertapa* presents King's daughter who suffers from trouble, usually being forced in marriage, or who experiences something restless which leads to her certain reaction. What she muse about is then discussed with her maid-servant, named *Dawala* or *Ono-ini*. Moreover, *selingan* scene is displaying characters of *Bapang Jayasentika* and *Demang Mones* who present comical, imitative and attractive moves. This scene is usually the opening show before *Jejeran* in *Sabrang* Kingdom whose the king is Klana Sewandana. Antagonist characters are often described as threatener and attacker to the existence of Java kings. But, in the end of story, the enemies are always fallen down. The character of mediator is Raden Gunungsari, a son of King Daha. Raden Gunungsari is depicted as the *reincarnation* of Raden Samba [15].

Kedungmangga Village communities hold Mask Puppet during the ritual of *bersih desa* in the yard

of *pundhen*. Presentation starts in early morning. Ritual participants are only male who go to *pundhen* bringing the offerings containing with rice and side dishes. Some carry the box containing costumes and masks to be used in Mask Puppet presentation. The preparation of *suguh* is initiated by *kamituwa* or *dalang*. *Suguh* is a ritual involving procedures such as burning incense, eating black sticky rice, spreading flowers, and putting offerings beneath old buckeye tree. After *suguh pundhen* is over, it is continued with *kenduri*, having a meal together. This procession is cheered with Mask Puppet presentation. Ritual participants then bring the remaining meal along with them as *berkat* (gift from God) when they manage to go home.

Besides *suguh pundhen*, other ritual activity involving Mask Puppet is ritual of *tolak balak*. In this ritual, Mask Puppet is performed on emergency stage called *genjot*. The ritual of *tolak balak* is aimed to release someone from birth or behavior consequences considered as “inviting bad luck”. To avoid unluckiness, ritual of *tolak balak* is upheld. Other name of this ritual is *ruwatan* but there is also *tolak balak nadhar* which is held when anyone promise to themselves to hold Mask Puppet if they can achieve what they want [16].

During leadership age of Karimun around 1950s, Mask Puppet is a going-around performance, and this activity is called *ngeteng* (*ngamen*). Mask Puppet is presented on *latar* (yard) by the house of the host or the village officer. Over times, Mask Puppet Society then develops into a commercial organization that can be hired as entertainment organizer for wedding events (*hajatan*) (Suroso, interviewed on 3 May 2016). Mask Puppet is performed on *genjot* (emergency stage) and the story presented is always about marriage, such as *Rabine Panji* (the marriage of Panji) or *Rabine Gunungsari* (the marriage of Gunungsari). In circumcision event (*khitanan*), the presented story can be *Panji Laras* or *Walangwati-Walangsumirang* (Tri Handaya, interviewed on 21 May 2016).

At the most recent development, Mask Puppet starts to abandon traditional custom ritual in the village. People still utilize Mask Puppet as a spiritual expression presented in the form of *arak-arakan*. In 2009, ritual of *arak-arakan* is arranged to accompany burial ceremony of Karimun [17]. In 2015, Mask Puppet is organized in the ritual of *suguh pundhen* on the grave of Reni. Mask-costumed characters are arranged in a march along the way from the house of Jaid (grandson of Reni) to the public cemetery of Palawijen Village [18].

Mask Puppet presentation for festivals and various contests is firstly initiated by A.M. Munardi and Sal Murgiyanto. Mask Puppet from Kedungmangga Village was performed in 1978 at *International Traditional Art Festival for Commemorating the 33th*

*Independence Proclamation of Indonesia Republic* and also at *the 45th Founding Day of Jakarta City* [19]. Colossal presentation of Mask Puppet is used by governmental institutions to produce public impression that they care with the development of the local art. On 1 April 2016, Mass Dance entitled *Grebeg Sabrang Wetan* involving 1000 dancers was performed to celebrate 100<sup>nd</sup> Founding Day of Malang City. The stage for dance presentation was set on football field at Stadion Gajayana Malang [20]. Other massive dance was also presented on the road, namely Tugu Road, in the front of Malang City Hall. In this event, Bapang Dance was performed by 100 elementary school students of Malang City on 2 May 2016 on the behalf of celebrating National Education Day.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mask Puppet in Kedungmangga Village, Malang Regency, East Java, is a traditional custom ritual widely recognized in the cultural environment of agrarian communities. It has influenced spaces, actions, and ritual achievement of individuals or groups of people in Kedungmangga Village. According to Schechner [21], Mask Puppet presentation on *pundhen belik kurung* requires several processions such as joint meal (*kenduri*), offerings (*sesaji*), and Mask Puppet dance. These help the communities to represent themselves as farmer who can live in balance with nature, maintain social stability, and establish what they call *tata tentrem kartaraharja*. Stability can produce “safety” (*slamet*), and the pray for safety is known as *dongo slamet*. Safety can be achieved through spiritual behavior, such as *suguh pundhen belik kurung*. Indeed, *pundhen* is considered as a living place of *bedah kerawang* (the spirit of the pioneer of the village). *Pundhen* can also be the burial plot of village pioneer. Dhavamony explains that spiritual procession expects ancestral spirits or gods to come and give protection [22]. Mask Puppet presentation is one element of *suguh* processions but it is conditioned in such way that ancestral spirits will extend their blessing and social kindness Moch Dahlan, interviewed on 15 July 2016.

The function of Mask Puppet during *suguh* procession is to accommodate noble values that inspire life pattern of communities. One of these values is to disseminate “affection”. This “affection” is expressed through a romance (love), and it is usually characterized by Panji Asmarabangun, a main character in Mask Puppet story. The word “Panji” means a flag or *umbul-umbul* that symbolizes the standing of affection (Pramana, interviewed on 5 May 2017). The wave of the flag signifies the upright of affection among the life beings. Transformation of this characteristic is represented by *kamituwa* or the elder of the village. In Mask Puppet, the elder is called with *demang* who will represent human existence, and this rank is played through some characters such as Demang Mones, Mundu, Semar, Bagong dan Patrajaya.

The Story of Panji performed in Malang Mask Puppet has been rooted in Ancient Literature of *Semaradahana*, the tale of King Kameswara and Princess Srikirana [23]. This tale describes the disappearance of Dewi Sekartaji, the fiancée of Panji Asmabarangun. They pass loyalty test and become the spouse because they are destined to be *sak-jodo* (mate) or *garwa* (*sigarane nyawa*; or soul mate). Their love is eternal but their confluence is assisted by Raden Gunungsari. The word *gunung* symbolizes man and is considered as the place where gods reside and where the kindness is revealed, while the word *sari* signifies the position of woman (Pramana, interviewed on 5 May 2017).

Mask Puppet presentation is unique in terms of place, time and story. Variances of Mask Puppet presentation and function on every stage are elaborated in the discussion of artistic transformation of the stage in such following.

#### **Pundhen Altar**

Mask Puppet presentation for ritual of *suguh pundhen* is aimed to extend *sajen sih langgeng* (eternal love). It is an expression of Kedungmangga Village communities to show their devotion to their ancestral spirit, also known as *bedah kerawang* or *kaki dhanyang desa*, named after Kyai Rasek (Suroso, interviewed on 3 May 2017). Ritual participants are entertained with Mask Puppet. The essence of the Story of Panji performed in many *gebyak* (presentations) is the accumulation of values that bind humans into their family (household) life. The development of certain community is initiated from family/household, and therefore, such initiator family is called *batih* (core family) [24]. Core family must exist to respect ancestral spirit, and this tradition has been practiced by Serun, the grandfather of Karimun. Once a year, in the day of *Senen Legi* in month of *Selo* (after the Great Day of Idul Fitri), Kedungmangga Village communities arrange ritual of *bersih desa* which also involves ritual of *suguh pundhen*. The procession of *suguh pundhen* represents the highest hierarchy in the spirituality of values that bind the morality of Kedungmangga Village communities. The confluence between ancestral spirit and community is made on *pundhen* altar. People gather on the open spot, usually beneath buckeye tree. It is located at quiet and peaceful banks of Metro River. This river is presumed as a transformation of a mythical river in tale of gods. River water is given label *tirta amarta*, or the water of life. In the Story of Dewa Ruci, Bima is a character who finds the water of life (Pramana, interviewed on 5 May 2017). The blessing given to the river (water) of live will allow communities to be gifted with eternal life. The ultimate expectation is *tata tentram* and *kartaraharja*, which in short, village communities will always expect to be blessed with a fertile soil. Fertile means the source of happiness and naturalness.

#### **Genjot Stage**

*Tolak balak* is a sacred ritual to expel disturbances of evil spirits. *Ruwatan* is held to save people from their bad luck, especially those who remain in *sukerta* category. Specific ritual is conducted to neutralize their fear against misfortune. During this procession, the affected people may declare *nadhar*, a ritual to set a promise as a debt which must be settled after they get what they want. They often hold Mask Puppet presentation on *genjot* stage made of woods constructed by families and neighbors. This stage must be strong enough to support 5 to 8 individuals, and this stage is trampled on by feet (*diencot-encot*) to ensure whether it is strong or not. Therefore, *genjot* as stage is signified as the higher position than ground. It is given a more respectful label, namely *Panggung Sangga Buwana*. This stage is used as a place to build a spiritual communication with ancestral spirits to convince them to give their blessing, or at least to expel threats from evil spirits (Pramana, interviewed on 5 May 2015). Protector spirit is always personified by “Dewa Wisnu” [25]. The characteristic of Dewa Wisnu as the keeper and guardian of universe is transformed into the character of *dalang* during the process of *pangruwatan*. Thus, a close relationship is found between *dalang* and Gunungsari character because both are presented to resolve problems. After resolving problems, Gunungsari goes back to hermitage life at *Gunung Ukir*. Indeed, *gunung* means the residence of gods, whereas *ukir* is a method to shape Mask Puppet. It can be said that gods in the mountain are those determining the fate of humans, or those stipulating *destiny*. In ritual of *tolak balak*, the power of determination remains only in the hand of Ki Dalang *Kondobuwana*. The name *Kondobuwana* is originated from *Kondo* meaning the story and *buwana* referring to the universe. Ki Dalang, thus, is appointed to tell story about universe.

#### **From Latar to Proscenium**

Presentation stage (*genjot*) of Mask Puppet has experienced a transformation. In old days, ritual stage for *suguh pundhen* was arranged on altar, a spread-out area in front of *pundhen belik kurung*. It is a place where ancestral spirits and village communities meet. Altar is considered as sacred due to its simplicity and functionality as a place where people extend their pray or gratitude to gods. *Gebyak ngamen* is Mask Puppet presentation held in front of certain house, or precisely on a spot called *latar*. This spot must be lower than the shelter of house owner. *Latar* represents a simple place for the humble individuals expecting empathy from the rich to enliven their daily subsistence. By presenting themselves on *latar*, it means that they expect gifts and pities from the rich. In recent days, proscenium stage is constructed to be the place of Mask Puppet presentation and it is positioned in such way which covering (hiding) the owner of *hajatan*. Mask Puppet presentation is metaphorically replacing the position of the house (the family). Presentation is aimed to set up the appearance

of characters. Mask Puppet characters are arranged in an order similar to that in Leather Puppet.

Mask Puppet presentation represents the host in welcoming the guests. Good presentation keeps guests happy and comfort. The story told in *hajatan* event is usually about *rabi* (marriage) and also representing the confirmation of marriage and the pray of expectancy. Bride and groom are prayed to be gifted with smooth life and affection until death separates them. Such expectancy reflects *kapesten* (life certainty). Characters who represent this expectancy are *punakawan* and *emban*. They are characters destined to meet other humans, and their language of communication symbolizes the feeling of rejoice. Therefore, they always have skills of comedian and entertainer.

Mask Puppet presentation for *hajatan* put characters on proscenium stage. Performance for personal event, including *hajatan*, seems eliminate the powerful rank of *kamituwa*, *dalang*, and chair of Mask Puppet Society. The power now remains in the hand of *hajatan* owner because the owner has a right to hire their favorite Mask Puppet group. A presentation theme of *rabi* (marriage) is only a habitual, and this habit is enforced due to the lack of understanding among event owners about another themes. The selection of story and Mask Puppet group is based on popularity. For instance, Mask Puppet group led by Kangsen from Jabung Village is one popular group which is often called to celebrate community events, including *hajatan*, in Malang regions.

### **Abolishing the stage**

Mask Puppet is usually presented with players standing on the stage prepared with esthetic quality. The magnificent stage allows audiences to give a clear appreciation to the event, especially when Mask Puppet is presented for ritual of *tolak balak*. Audiences are expected to be the witness because they can see the course of the story. In the next development, stage is then abolished because communities attempt to comprehend the performance world at the closer range. Those who have an experience as dancer or who perform as dancer can express themselves in obvious way, like dancing in the crowd. They want to be closer with audiences and give audiences a more satisfying moment. Complete costume worn by Mask Puppet dancers during the escort of the deceased Karimum into his burial plot is not only a real event, but also imaginary. Dancers are not only a spectacle, but also a self-expression to show the characteristic of real figures. Dance is performed on the street and can be seen obviously by many eyes. Therefore, the procession to accompany Karimum burial ceremony is a phenomenon that abolishes or excludes the existence of stage. This phenomenon is a presentation where performance art and audiences are met in natural way. The distance between spectacle and audiences

diminishes. Colossal presentation of Mask Puppet is usually held on open field or wide land with great number of dancers. The usual stage is considered as not enough to accommodate certain individuals who have interest on power. During the age of kingdoms, some leaders assert what so called “*titah*” or absolute order. The presence of Mask Puppet dancers in great number (mass) on wide open field (or football field in current days) is aimed to express the glorification and dominancy of the respectful master of the city. The abolishment of stage as presentation site symbolizes several exclusions. The position of *Kamituwa* is excluded because the presentation is not associated with traditional custom. The chair of Mask Puppet group is excluded because the presentation does not correlate with rights and duties of membership. *Dalang* is excluded because the presentation does not arrange characters in chronological order. Story or *lakon* is excluded because the presentation only shows the image of characters in choreographic way.

### **CONCLUSION**

The stage for Mask Puppet presentation in Kedungmangga Village is a case of artistic-symbolic transformation. It represents a meaningful artistic motive that audiences (communities) try to understand. Ground (*tanah*) is viewed as a sacred place because it is considered as the center (*pancer*). Mask Puppet formation is always centered on king or main character in the heart of story. If Mask Puppet is played for profane event, it is then only presented for attraction and exhibition of strength, power, and also personal identity to be shown off to others. Artistic transformation in Mask Puppet presentation stage has developed and also influenced social institution of the community. Certain people are ruling the stage, such as *Kamituwa* in *gebyak suguh pundhen*, *Dalang* in *ruwatan* and *tolak balak*, Chair of Mask Puppet group in *gebyak ngamen* and *tanggapan*, and choreographer or director in *gebyak festival* and Mask Puppet mass presentation.

Presentation stage (*genjot*) is viewed as a sacred place because it facilitates performer to connect with gods (sacred spirits) in favor of blessing. Sacred presentation is usually led by *dalang*, who is considered as liberator or rescuer of humans from danger. Stage is said as profane if it is used with intentions of economic profit, power-seeking, self-exhibition, and searching for the admirable position. Less surprisingly, the existence of *kamituwa*, *dalang*, and chair of Mask Puppet group is gradually excluded in Mask Puppet presentation. Indeed, this presentation itself is the mask (*topeng*) worn to hide the evil face of the masters and to disguise them with more obvious ethnical face.

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