

THE RELEVANCE OF BATIK FASHION WORN BY CHARACTERS IN THE YOGYAKARTA-STYLE RAMAYANA BALLET PERFORMANCE ON PRAMBANAN OPEN STAGE

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of industry and technology might already help batik as a genuine fashion of Indonesia to obtain international recognition. Batik today in general is already changed either in its aspects of design, production technique, or aesthetic, and its market share is starting to expand not covering only Indonesia but also Malaysia and Thailand. The fame of batik becomes more significant when it is used by the casts of Ramayana Ballet on Prambanan Open Stage, Klaten, Central Java. The objective of research is to provide reasons behind the conservation effort to use batik in Ramayana Ballet performance. Method of research is qualitative descriptive using structural functional theory. This theory requires this research to look for meaning behind the function of batik clothes worn by Ramayana Ballet casts. Data collection method includes interview, which is done with key informant of Sumardi (56 years old), and direct observation on Ramayana Ballet performance. Research has some results: (1) *Parang Klitik* is batik pattern used by casts who play the part of Rama and Sinta; (2) *Poleng* is batik pattern worn by cast who acts out Hanoman; and (3) *Parang Barong* is a pattern of batik put on by cast who features Rahwana. These three patterns have two symbolical relevances, namely, vertical relationship between macrocosmos and microcosmos, and horizontal relationship of both as eternal balance. Conventional review on this symbol indicates that industrial revolution might already impact production aspects of performance art but values inside it still need to be conserved.

Keywords: Batik, Ramayana, Personify, Ramayana Ballet, Symbolic, Structural Functional.

BACKGROUND

Traditional culture might have been significantly influenced by Industrial Revolution era. Everything was taken over by technology and targeted for mass production by industry (Kasian, 2019). Batik has changed from a cultural commodity to an economic commodity. Previous studies that reviewed batik had supported this position, yet including results of studies on the development of batik in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand (Ramlan, 2019). Moreover, the development of batik has influenced various aspects of culture, including the presentation of Ramayana Ballet on Prambanan Open Stage. Art experts argue that Ramayana Ballet is a Yogyakarta-style dance-based tourism attraction. It is said so because this is one of Javanese classical dances created by Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwana I (1756-1792) as one of his heirlooms, or can also be interpreted as a cultural identity for people in the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate (Soedarsono, 1997: 130: 130). Like other Javanese dances, one of the costumes used is 'batik.' Today, the existence of batik is increasingly known to the public and

is found in various daily life activities, and even its use in certain event has been supported by a variety of sophisticated technological devices. For the sake of symbolical relevance, the existence of traditional dance still needs to be maintained, especially regarding on the conservation of genuine art values.

Batik is a sketch made on a piece of cloth, which is then covered with wax and colored by dipping it into certain dyes (Mandegani, et al. 2018). In general, every batik cloth sheet contains a symbolical aspect and tends to support the characteristics and social strata of the wearer (Parmono, 2013: 135). Batik is a cultural product that is functional and always following the development of culture (Marpaung, 2016). However, in every era, local values, including batik, still need to be conserved. In this context, batik conservation effort was carried out through Ramayana Ballet performance on the Prambanan Open Stage. Researcher attempts to explore the existence of cultural values and cultural relations in Ramayana Ballet performance by using structural functional theory, and the reason is possibly because researcher has ever used this theoretical approach in his study on mask puppets in Malang (Hidajat, 2008).

Batik worn by performance art casts was not a new phenomenon because many kinds of batik patterns had been manifested through engravings (*sunggingan*) on leather puppets (*wayang kulit*). This research is not discussing the origin of batik or the use of batik as decorative patches on leather puppets. This research is attempting to review the function of batik as one element of fashion worn by Ramayana performance casts, either male or female (Hidajat, 2018). It must be noted that some costumes are indeed designated to use batik. Therefore, batik can be considered applicative and functional where performance artists can apply traditional batik on costumes of character that they act out. Batik is used either to produce artistical impression or to show the position of character in certain social strata. However, it is assumed that Ramayana story is coming from India and batik is not the original costume to this story. This assumption would be elaborated further in the review of Ramayana Ballet held on Prambanan Open Stage.

Fashion may give certain meaning to the identity, position and role of certain character in performance art (Soedarsono, 1997:290). A character in performance art can be recognized among others through fashion, and of various fashions existed, one of them is batik (Darmaputri, 2014). Batik or other fashion has a purpose of their own. Under this research context, Ramayana Ballet is presented in Yogyakarta-style dance played by Wisnu Murti dance society chaired by Sumardi. Therefore, batik is a mandatory fashion worn by dancers who play the part of key characters possibly because batik has been considered as a representation of Yogyakarta.

Therefore, this research also tries to understand the meaning of batik costumes worn by casts who feature main character of Ramayana Ballet. The use of batik is examined here to get understandings and conceptual reasons why batik has such noble function.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

Research method was qualitative descriptive with structural functional theory as its theoretical base (Hamilton, 1990). This theory required this research to look for the meaning of the function of batik cloth worn by casts in Ramayana Ballet performance on Prambanan Open Stage. Structural functional theory was proposed by Claude Levy-Strauss. The word “structural” in this theory is referring to a constant system in a real world (Bucher, et.al., 2004:35). Data collection method was interview with key informant (Sumardi, 56 years old) and direct observation on Ramayana Ballet performance on Prambanan Open Stage. Focus of observation was given on main characters, namely Rama, Lesmana, Sinta, Hanuman,

Kumbakarna and Rahwana. All these characters can be recognized from batik fashion they wore. Main instrument to collect and analyze data was researcher, and therefore, researcher was also called human instrument (Suwartono, 2014:122). It is said so because researcher has been aware of operational method and technique of this research. The collected data were analyzed with interpretation theory that involves referential and historical interpretations.

DATA DESCRIPTION

The full story presentation of Ramayana story through Ramayana Ballet on Prambanan Open Stage consists of seven (7) scenes, which respectively are: (1) *Sayembara Mantili*, (2) The abduction of Sinta by Rahwana, (3) Argasoka Park, (4) *Rama Tambak*, (5) Kumbakarna's Death, (6) Rahwana's Death, and (7) Sinta's Sacred Fire (*Sinta Obong*). In all these scenes, all central characters wear batik cloth.

1. Rama, Lesmana, and Sinta

Rama, Lesmana, and Sinta were the most frequently played characters on every scene. Batik pattern used on their scene is *Liris* with brown background. Theme of this batik pattern is called *Parang Klitik*. Brown background was used on Rama and Lesmana characters with fashion technique of *cancutan* (Nuraini, 2011:92). This fashion theme is usually worn by protagonist (noble) characters. Sinta wore batik pattern of *Liris Parang Klitik* with fashion technique of *jaritan*. In case of on-stage human puppets (*wayang orang*), fashion technique used to wear batik is called *samparan*. However, if the stage is too wide, then *samparan* technique may hamper the dancers' moves. Rama, Lesmana, and Sinta characters are prepared in artistically harmonious fashions. *Liris Parang Klitik* is worn by these characters from the beginning to the end of performance.

2. Hanuman

One part of Ramayana story is about the journey of Rama and Lesmana to wander through Dandaka Forest before entering to Pancawati State. When they arrived to this State, there was a great dispute between Sugriwa dan Subali. In the middle of this sibling's quarrel, there is a prominent liaison character named Hanuman. White color dominates Hanuman character because Hanuman is indeed known as a male white monkey. One element in Hanuman costume is batik *Poleng*. Key informant, Sumardi, said that batik *Poleng* is a traditional batik and has a philosophical background that describes Hanuman characteristic. This kind of batik has been known in Bali and the Balinese has used it for religious rites. There are many variants of batik *Poleng* in Bali, such as *Poleng Ruwabineda*, *Poleng Sudamala* (for *ruwatan*), and *Poleng Tridatu*. If reference is taken from leather puppets, three characters are presented with always wearing *poleng*, and they are the members of *kadang bayu* (Family of Bayu), namely Dewa Bayu, Bima and Hanuman. Theme of batik *Poleng* they put on is *Poleng Bangbintulu*.

The use of batik *Poleng* in Hanuman is ornamented by red dyed cloth (Yogyakarta-style fashion) and various *buntal* accessories. *Buntal* is a bundle of foliage, usually pandanus leaves and flowers arranged in a way that forms an extended cord. These ornaments gives a sense of strong, robust, and steady in every dance move of Hanuman character.

3. Rahwana

In Ramayana story, Rahwana showed up when Rama, Lesmana and Sinta entered Dandaka Forest. Rahwana made an alliance with Kalamarica who was then sent to lure Sinta by taking a form of golden deer (*kijang kencana*). Rahwana character is displayed with a huge body and steady moves, and fashioned with batik *Parang Barong*. This batik is adopted from leather puppets (*wayang kulit*) and it is usually used to express artistical quality of Rahwana character.

Besides, *Parang Barong* is also an ornament in the fashion worn by Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwana, the King of Mataram Kingdom.

The full story of Ramayana epic performed by Ramayana Ballet on Prambanan Open Stage has been observed. In general, batik is a vital element that gives identity and artistical quality of character in the story. The existence of characters in Ramayana story and batik clothes they wear contain deep meaning and provide important lessons to other researchers who attempt to understand Javanese tradition.

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Performance art is an art work that involves visual display. Creating such art work must always take into consideration cultural transformation pattern, aesthetical idealization, and symbolical concept (Hidajat, 2018:69). All these considerations are aimed to deliver messages of the art work, either connotative and denotative, to the audiences. These messages enable audiences not only to make interpretations but also to understand complex imagination (Gustami, 2007:13). This description is used as the base to analyze pattern of batik worn by casts in Ramayana Ballet performance on Prambanan Open Stage.

1. *Parang Klitik* for Rama and Sinta

Batik theme used by Rama and Lesmana characters is batik *Parang Klitik*, which is one of the oldest batik themes in Indonesia. The word *Parang* is defined by Javanese Dictionary as *Pereng* (Indonesian: *lereng*), or valley. This batik theme is interpreted as a life that is always accompanied with tests (Musman & Arini, 2011:43). This theme is dominated by diagonal lines. Every batik *parang*, including that worn by Rama and Lesmana characters, contains drawings like few letter “S” arranged in a row. As said by key informant, Sumardi, batik *parang* has a deep meaning because it represents a warrior who faces his life problem with a mentality as strong as waves in the sea. Batik *parang* is a classic batik theme that has been widely used during Mataram Kingdom era.



Figure 1
Rama/Lesmana/Sinta wearing batik *Parang Klitik*
(id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sendratari_Ramayana_Prambanan)

Only nobility can use this batik theme and this condition is well understood by Javanese. The use of this batik theme on Rama, Lesmana and Sinta characters is not only for artistical function but also to signify that these characters are nobility. Pattern “S” is referred as an integration between microcosmos and macrocosmos (Sumardjo, 2002:128). The relationship between this integration and Prambanan Open Stage is that a performance art can be used to educate audiences about life harmony. Performance art is used not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a medium of contemplation and introspection to aware of how insignificant is the human before God. This perception is materialized with placement of three temples (*candi*) as background, which stand tall with being irradiated by spotlights.

2. *Poleng* for Hanuman

Another key character that has symbolical power in Ramayana story is Hanuman. This character is wearing white costume as base fashion and also batik *Poleng* in front part. *Poleng* is defined by Indonesian Great Dictionary as a pattern of black and white boxes like a chess box. People nowadays are still less familiar with this batik pattern. In the realm of leather puppets (*wayang kulit*), batik *Poleng* is worn by *Kadang Bayu* (Batara Bayu, Bima, and Hanuman). *Poleng* with a deep philosophical meaning is *Poleng Bangbintulu*.



Figure 2: Hanuman character wearing batik *Poleng*
(menggapaiankasa.com/2017/01/pesona-sendratari-ramayana-yang-memukau.html)

The boxes in *Poleng* are colored with a combination of colors from four colors available, precisely black, white, red and yellow. Hanuman in Ramayana Ballet performance wears cloth in two dominant colors, respectively, black and white, meaning powerful, sturdiness, and fight for rightness (Sumardi, interview on August 8, 2019). *Poleng* is considered sacred by Hindu-Balinese community, and they use three kinds of *poleng*, namely *Poleng Ruwabineda*, *Poleng Sudamala*, and *Poleng Tridatu*. In essence, Hanuman in Ramayana story is a character known with fine personal attributes such as nobleness, brave, fight for rightness, and honesty.

3. *Parang Barong* for Rahwana

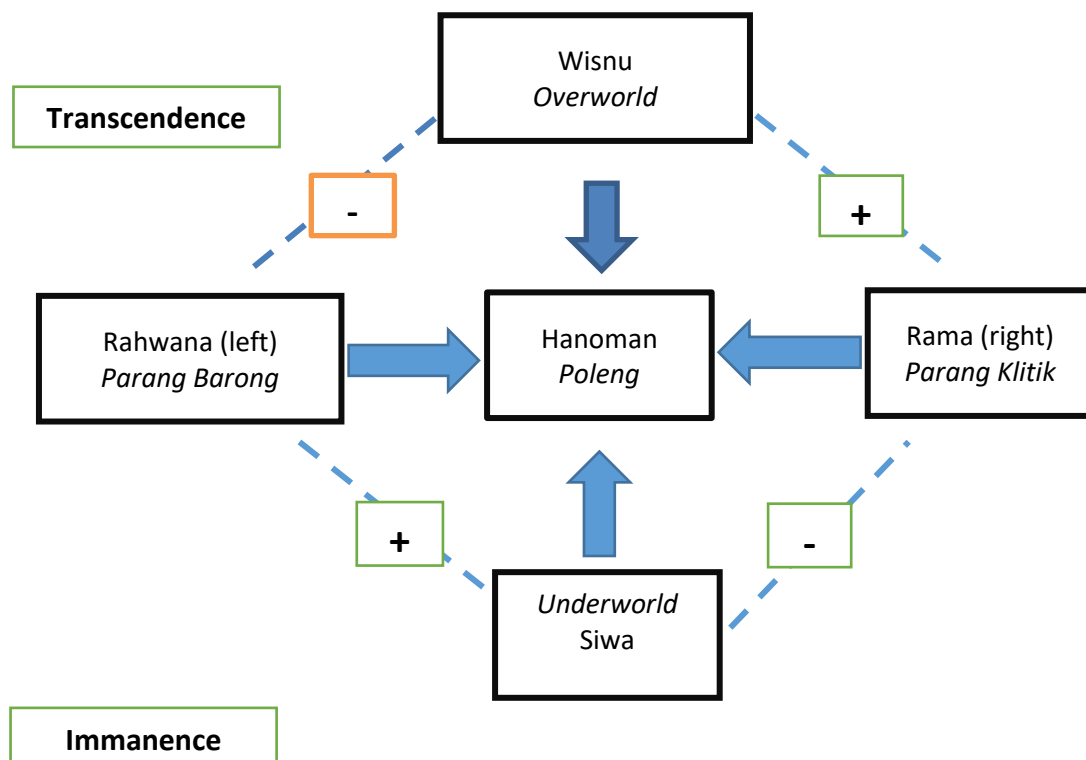
Antagonist character in Ramayana Ballet is Prabu Rahwana. This character is the source of disaster for Rama and Sinta’s romance life. He is known as a king, a dauntless warrior, and not

easy to yield. Batik cloth for this character is *Parang Barong*, and the word *barong* is referring to the word “big”.



Figure 3: Rahwana character wearing *dodot Parang Barong* (id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sendratari_Ramayana_Prambanan)

Parang Barong theme is dominated by a big capital letter “S”. This theme has been used long ago by kings or sultans of Mataram Kingdom. This theme is describing the possession of a big power that helps the possessor to endure from whatsoever strikes that challenge it. The nature of *Dewa Siwa* is also symbolized by *Parang Barong*. The paths of structural functional analysis are described as follows:



Scheme 1: Scheme of structural functional analysis: eternal balance

Eternal balance at the scheme comprises some units of relationship. In transcendence area, the relationship between Wisnu and Rahwana is proven to be negative and this contrasts with the positive relationship between Wisnu and Rama (possibly because Rama is the avatar of Wisnu). Positive sign is defined as a mythical position which states that goodness is always on the right and has something to do with the upper world.

In immanent area, the underworld is ruled by Siwa and has positive relationship with Rahwana. The myth says that evil power is held by Siwa, the God of Destroyer. In leather puppets story, Rahwana inherits his power from Siwa. Despite this positive sign, relationship between Rahwana and Siwa is located on the left of the immanent world. In the other hand, Rama and Siwa have a negative relationship, which therefore can be said that goodness is always in opposite to the underworld, which therefore negative sign comes up. The opposition between Rama and Siwa is identical with the opposition between Wisnu and Siwa.

Hanuman (*Poleng*) is a symbol of a reality where transcendence area meets immanent area to be united into an energy of struggle, survival and dynamic. This symbolization produces a strong local value and therefore, it needs to be conserved, like what Hindu-Balinese did. They use batik *Poleng* as the part of community life particularly for the sake of a spiritual life expression.

Javanese divides the world into two. Left side is occupied by badness whereas right side is represented by goodness. Such opposition is proven to be everlasting. Rahwana is described as having evil power, standing at the left, and relating with the underworld. In contrary, Rama stands at the right and has relation with upperworld. The meeting between *tengen* (right) and *kiwa* (left) is crossing the opposition line between upperworld and underworld. All these crisscrosses are put into batik used by characters of Ramayana Ballet on Prambanan Open Stage to symbolize eternal balance.

CONCLUSION

Although industrial era has triggered the wave of cultural change, traditional batik as an Indonesia national culture needs to be conserved. One of conservation efforts is through Ramayana Ballet. The wearing of batik by characters in Ramayana Ballet has a symbolical meaning. Batik *Parang Klitik* is a product of an aesthetical combination between Rama and Sinta as a romantic couple. Batik *Poleng* is the symbol of middle world where humans possess attributes of strength, persistence, and honesty in dealing with various challenges in the life. Batik *Parang Barong* used by Rahwana symbolizes the balance between transcendence (upperworld that emphasizes on perfection) and immanence (underworld that is known with fragility). All three batik themes above have their own meaning and all meanings represent symbolical relevance shown by horizontal relationship between the right that symbolizes goodness and the left that symbolizes badness. This horizontal relationship can also be interpreted as an eternal balance.

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