

Female Puppeteers And Feminine Wayang Characters In The Javanese Wayang Kulit Arts

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Submission date: 26-Oct-2023 06:19AM (UTC+0300)

Submission ID: 2207578384

File name: 5666-13763-1-PB_1.pdf (741.25K)

Word count: 2406

Character count: 13187

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Abstract – The evolution of Javanese wayang kulit purwa performance art is intrinsically related to the efforts of its supporting artists. They have an innovative mind that motivates them to continually be inventive and distinctive, which has colored the forms of the story, storyline, characters, puppets, accompaniment, and nearly all of the elements in the performance. However, relatively few puppetry stories deal with the lives of female characters. This study was designed with a descriptive qualitative methods with a critical ethnography approach, which is perceived to be capable of providing clear information about the trend of minimum development of female characters in wayang art. The results revealed that; first, from the artist viewpoint, according to their experience, female artists who promote the life of wayang art are more inclined to engage in male-oriented activities. This situation also affects their capacity to express themselves and be creative, particularly when composing stories in wayang. The audience provides both roles. Wayang performances have become an outstanding appeal for people to come along and appreciate.

Keywords – Female Characters; Javanese; Male Artisans; Wayang Performance,

I. INTRODUCTION

Wayang kulit performances are still fairly common among the supporting community. On the other hand, puppetry has seen major developments in terms of puppet form, performance stage, accompaniment, and numerous other aspects[1]. Wayang performances develop in response to the demands and advances of the times. Recent developments have given rise to initiatives encouraging creative artists to always be innovative in making the nuances of performances more appealing.

In the realm of wayang performing arts, artists fall into numerous categories, including those who create those who perform, those who perceive, and those who critique as those who link the piece of art with the supporting community. The intersection of interests of all of the artists described above has brought wayang art to life and continues to flourish to this day [2].

The supporting elements in a wayang performance that can be used in order to channel an artist's creativity include story, sabet, catur, and accompaniment [3]. Wayang stories arose in India, corresponding to two main epics, the Mahabarata and the Ramayan [4]. At this point, these two sources of Wayang stories have developed into guidelines or *pakem*, which in turn have become a source of inspiration for the creation of new *sanggits*, culminating in the emergence of the *carangan* type narrative form. *Carangan* type plays or stories are new stories created by an artist creator as an extension of the *pakem* play. [5], [6].

Javanese Wayang Kulit, considered by many as the world's oldest fairy tale tradition, symbolizes the Javanese people's values and life philosophy. Several characters in wayang kulit have been identified with various ideal positions in Java, and prominent figures typically mirror the social life of Javanese society. Krishna, for example, is one of the shadow puppet characters who shows noble attributes and is seen as an example of a noble personality. While his opponent, a character with a rough personality, is owned by a giant and is the lowest level of character that must be controlled [7, p. 6]. Despite the fact that different sorts of characters (women in Wayang) are presented as role models, women in wayang always play a secondary role after their husbands and are always in a subservient position. This is barely unanticipated, given that Javanese Wayang Kulit applies classic narratives

from Hindu mythology such as the Mahabarata and Ramayana, in which women are considered possessions [8]. In addition, stories in wayang have been classified into several groups, including the types of plays such as *lairan*, *raben*, *awah*, *aluman*, *jumenengan* and others [9]. The current wayang stories reveal many things about the masculine character. If this sexism is not addressed, there will be a limited repertory of stories in wayang that revolve on worries about the character of female characters.

There have been numerous examples of puppet stories that relate stories about female characters, but when compared to stories about male characters [10], [11], they are not especially balanced, which means that many recount stories about the creation of male wayang figures [12]. The trend may also be attributed to the artists who produced it, those who perform it, the observers/viewers, and the number of *wayang* puppets with many male portions. Gender studies on the growth of various professional female puppeteers in Indonesia in pursuing their professions have also been discussed regularly [13]. The flexibility of Javanese culture helps female puppeteers reach their objective of becoming professional female puppeteers [14], [15].

II. METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative research method carried out using a critical ethnographic design, since this design is deemed appropriate for study objectives related to empowerment which eventually help to describe the struggles for emancipation of certain groups in society. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observable at the location of the wayang purwa performance with female characters, interviews with puppeteers were carried out as data triangulation to determine the female characters in the performance. Secondary data is gathered from books and academic papers in order to ensure data completeness. In addition to primary data, the researchers collected secondary data through interviews with supporting sources, especially professional male puppeteers and actors/observers of shadow puppet performing arts in Solo Raya. Although there are female puppet figures and artists in Balinese Wayang Kulit performances, this study is limited to female puppet characters in Wayang Kulit performances on the island of Java. This limitation was implemented because Javanese shadow puppet shows are more focused on entertainment than those in Bali, where the performance concept is deeply rooted in Hindu worship and faith.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Creative Artist

A creative artist is a character who generates creativity while working on aspects in wayang. The artwork is founded on the sentiments of the artist himself, who frequently feels dissatisfied with what currently existing. This means that when you see and experience existing events, a sense of boredom develops, giving rise to a creative spirit to create. An artist's work is frequently inspired by himself or by his surroundings. Feelings or stories from his life can be used as motivation for work, but stories from other people can also be a source of inspiration for creativity. Males now account for the vast majority of creative artists. The fact that the majority of artists who produce are males naturally impacts the standard of their work. With a huge number of creative artists dominated by males, this has resulted in the presence of a wide repertory of *wayang* stories that largely relate about male main characters [16].

3.2. Performing Artist

Individuals who perform as artists bring works of art to life and develop them. The truth is that this artist marketed the artist's works and made them available to the public. There are currently a great number of artists who work as actors, and the phenomenon is dominated by men. When an artist shows his work in *wayang* to the public, he is also referring to a rich treasure of previous stories. In reality, an artist who performs in introducing works in *wayang* produces his own innovations as spices to spice up the presentation.

Javanese Wayang Kulit performances may also be classified as male-performed performances since virtually all of the performers, with the exception of the singers (including the *dhalang* and the gamelan musicians known as *Niyaga*), are male. Even though there are currently female *Niyaga* and *dhalang*, they are still seen as men's companions in some situations, such as when women learn to play the gamelan, which has traditionally only been performed by males. Walton [17] outlines a few instances of *pesindhen* gender inequalities. Many of the people we interviewed believed that nonegalitarian interactions (inequality) were a natural result of gender inequalities. For example, husbands who forbade their *pesindhen* wives from performing, a father who forced his 14-year-old *pesindhen* daughter to marry the second wife of a wealthy puppeteer in order to

secure the family's financial well-being, and a male *guru gamelan* who advised his female students not to learn *gamelan* instruments.

Male dominance is evident in the domain of gamelan music, where only a few women work as *guru(s)*, music composers, gamelan leaders, and gamelan competition judges. Furthermore, as people outside of masculine culture, people have unfavorable stereotypes about women's sexuality and talents. People frequently believe that *pesindhen* are incredibly beautiful and cannot be mastered (conquered). They were chosen in this work because of their sensuality to draw more people to *wayang* performances [17]. Similarly, some believe that female puppeteers cannot perform as well as men *dhalang* (puppeteers).

3.3. Experienced Artists

Appreciative artists are one of the groups whose objective it is to appreciate works of art. Appreciation may take many forms. It entails offering constructive feedback. The feedback may involve criticism or recommendations. This indicates that the piece of art could have been far better. Another type of appreciation is having a group of artists performing a work of art as a medium for appreciation. Putting up an art performance is undoubtedly costly. A great deal of the artistic artists who make substantial contributions to the long-term sustainability of a piece of art are males [18].

Another fascinating aspect of Javanese morals is the position of art enthusiasts as women, especially when women decide to play roles different than their responsibilities as Javanese. This gives minimal social sanction. Power is shown in physical attributes in Java, where actions are considered more noteworthy than motives. For example, women who do not fulfill their household roles but have the highest social status in their family will be completely accepted as an exception to the rule, whereas this will not apply to those who decide/break the rules and their roles fail, such as women who remain single and cannot offer any benefits [19].

3.4. Critics

Artist critics are one type of artist whose roles are crucial in the life and death of a work of art. An artist critic's responsibility is to serve as an intermediary between the piece of art and the artist who perceives it. Since works of art may adapt to market demands, they will live and grow. This indicates that performing artists and creators will consider market demands and consumer preferences while developing works. The creativity originates from ideas that include feedback and thoughts from an artist critic. Men outnumber women in the number of persons who work as an artist critic. This can have an indirect impact on the input offered to creative artists for their works,

IV. CONCLUSION

The absence of attempts on female characters is due to factors from both Wayang Kulit artists and the supporting audiences. The artists who promote the life of wayang art work are typically males who, based on their experience, are more inclined to masculine activities. It has an impact on their capacity to express themselves and be creative, particularly while writing stories in wayang. Both parts come from the audience. The performance of puppetry art (*pedhalangan*) has become an exceptional magnet for people to come and enjoy the show.

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