

Kebon Alas, the Spirit of Dalang and Nayaga on Cirebon Mask Performance

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Abstract—Kebon Alas refers to things or properties decorating a stage of Topeng Cirebon Dance (Cirebon Mask Dance) performance. To the crew of Topeng performance, Kebon Alas is the energy to boost the spirit of the performance. The absence of Kebon Alas in a performance gives emptiness feeling (*mangmung*) to dalang and nayaga. The study aims to reveal the meaning of symbols on Kebon Alas especially for the dalang and nayaga. The method applied in this study is taking esoteric approach, that is a teaching in religion or philosophy may only be understood by certain community. The result shows that the understanding toward things or properties on Kebon Alas is all related to the moral and religious teaching in Islam. This is in line with the function of Cirebon Mask Dance in the early of Islam in Java that is as the media for spreading Islam.

Keywords: *Kebon Alas, Cirebon Mask Dance, Islam teachings*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Cirebon Mask is known as a very popular type of traditional performance. It is called a mask because the main character is wearing a mask (*kedok*), and is called the Cirebon Mask because the city/regency of Cirebon is considered as a habitation as well as a centre for the spread of mask art in West Java. Regarding the spreading centre, several mask culture areas are known in Cirebon: Slangit, Gegesik, Kreyo, Palimanan, and Losari.

In terms of its function, the Cirebon Mask performance is used as a means of ancestor worship, a medium for public entertainment, and a source of dance choreography for future generations. In addition, by all its activists the Cirebon Mask is also used as a means of livelihood and also a means of expanding employment opportunities [1]. It can be added that at the beginning of Islam in the Land of Java, Cirebon Mask functioned as a means of spreading Islam [1].

In a variety of background events, The Cirebon Mask performance cannot be separated from the presence of *Kebon Alas*. *Kebon Alas* (also called *gantungan* - the hangers) refers to a collection of various objects /items hanging right above the "mask box", and also attached to a stake (near the gamelan) that is wrapped with various kinds and colours of cloth. Whether it is realized or not, the objects/ items that are hanging and attached have a decorative artistic impression.

II. PROBLEMS

Cirebon Mask until today is still commonly called to perform by the community for various needs including to celebrate the life cycle events such as circumcision and marriage. For the purpose of the performance, *Kebon Alas* is provided as an expression of gratitude for the abundant fortune and produce of the earth. To complete the needs of *Kebon Alas*, several types of objects/items are frequently obtained from stealing (usually done in the middle of the night). In connection with the act of theft, the owner will not be upset (or report it to the authorities), on the contrary they feel happy and get blessed. On the other hand, for audience of the mask, *Kebon Alas* becomes a "blessing" to be consumed and brought home. From this phenomenon, it appears that *Kebon Alas* has certain meanings for the respondent, the owner of the objects/items that is "disadvantaged", and for the audience.

Another interesting thing is that the existence of *Kebon Alas* has a special meaning for all mask crew. According to Keni [2] and Heri [3] the existence of *Kebon Alas* can affect the inner feelings of the *dalang* and *nayaga*. Obviously, the presence of *kebon alas* for the *dalang* and *nayaga* will be an energy that can influence enthusiasm and great encouragement; if *Kebon Alas* is not presented, both the *dalang* and *nayaga* will feel emptiness (*mangmung*, empty) and lack of enthusiasm in carrying out the performance.

III. PURPOSE

This study aims to describe the entity of *Kebon Alas* in a Cirebon Mask performance. The meaning of various types of objects/items contained in it rests on the meaning given by the owner of the mask culture. In other word this research uses the emic model.

IV. METHODS AND APPROACH

This research uses an esoteric approach. Esoteric in short is a teaching in religion and/or philosophy that can only be accepted and understood by a limited environment. Its application in *Kebon Alas* research, the limited environment is the performers of mask performances, namely *dalang* and *nayaga*.

The esoteric approach used as a method is considered relevant that the Cirebon Mask performance is thick with religious spirit. This can be shown among others are by the events of the religious-rite that underlies the performance, including *ngunjung*, *ngarot*, *mapag sri*, *sedekah bumi* and *mitoni* [4]. In these events, even the *dalang* of the mask is often considered a shaman (*dukun*), a local people who is considered to have advantages in the spiritual field.

The data was collected through literature studies, observations, and interviews with several resource people in Cirebon, including *dalang* and *nayaga* of mask as well as community leaders who understand the world of Cirebon Mask.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Sunan Panggung and Sufism

Most of the people of Cirebon, especially traditional art activists believe that the creator of Cirebon Mask was Syeh Malang Sumirang (real name Raden Watsiwara, 1483-1573). Every Friday he used to perform two types of art: first Friday was Wayang and next Friday was Mask, and so on. Because of this habit he was later called Sunan Panggung (*Panggung* means stage = performing arts stage) [5].

According to several sources, Syeh Malang Sumirang explored the sciences of *sharia*, *tarikah*, *hakikah*, and *ma'rifah*. As a prominent Sufi expert, he followed the footsteps of Syeh Siti Jenar, who is known for his teachings, namely *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (revelation of *wahdatul wujud*). His students were very respectful, obey all his commands and follow all the teachings. The students were taught to find the perfect life, perfection that is truly perfect.

"Humans are nothing but dead bodies that are filled with lust of *lauwamah*, anger, *sufiah* and *mutmainah*. We let go of these passions because in the middle of your lusts enthrone *sirr* or hidden secrets, spirits in the soul, perfection that is absolutely perfect." "Puppets and shadows must be united in one soul. Spirit in the soul plays creatures at His will." "The truth that rules us is not our body, but the spirit in the soul." "Like Krishna who ruled the kingdom, the essence is not Krishna. But Krishna Dwarawati. Krishna who was enthroned by the spirit of Vishnu. Krishna the incarnation of Vishnu." "Free your spirit from the bondage of the laws which hinder the freedom of the spirit that leads to and becomes one with God." "The essence of eternal life only begins after death."

The diplomatic relations and political marriage between Demak and Cirebon also bear cultural relations between the two parties. No wonder the Cirebon palace grew and developed the art of masks, and this condition lasted until the colonial government. However, after the independence, the kraton in Cirebon is no longer the centre of government where this has a major influence on the budget of the palace [6]. Therefore, mask art has been "forced" out of the palace environment, and thanks to the roles of the princes (Pangeran Bagus, Pangeran Losari, Ki Buyut Trusmi) and also other mask activists, mask art developed among ordinary people. It is probable that this momentum is the reason for the change in mask performances

from *grootspelmasker* ("big" mask performance) to *kleinespelmasker* according to the terms given by Pigeaud [7].

Among these communities, up to now the Cirebon Mask is still closely associated with religious-sacred-rite activities accompanied by the belief in spiritual and philosophical values because of the influence of Sunan Gunung Jati as the holder of the governmental authority and highest spiritual leadership in Cirebon as well as being a figure who packs the aesthetic aspects based on the concept of Cirebon community culture [8].

B. Dalang/Nayaga and Mystical Behavior

The human element in a Cirebon Mask performance consists of *dalang* and *nayaga*. *Dalang* can be divided into "*dalang turunan*" and "*dalang katurunan*". *Dalang turunan* is a *dalang* who not only becomes the main heir but also has a blood relationship with his/her predecessor *dalang*, while *Dalang katurunan* is a *dalang* who becomes the main heir but does not have blood relationship with his teacher. Specifically, for *dalang turunan*, after he/she is considered to meet the requirements as a *dalang*, he/she must do another provision namely "*buka panggung*" (open the stage). The similarity between the two types of *dalang* is that aside from being a dancer as well as the leader and owner of the group.

On the other hand, *nayaga* is also divided into two namely "*nayaga turunan*" and "*nayaga katurunan*". Some of them are family (descendants) of *dalang* who do not choose positions as the dancers, some are former *dalang* who for some reason post themselves as *nayaga*.



Fig. 1. Dalang keni and enam mask characters (Source: Art Documentation Centre ISBI Bandung).

Both to become a *dalang* and a *nayaga*, they must do mystical behaviour (*Laku mistis*). The behaviours are illustrated in: first, *tirakatan*, namely managing eating and sleeping that aims to feel themselves (*mengasa diri*). Keni and Tumus [2,9], explained the types and kinds are as follows: *sedawu* (breakfast is only allowed starting at 10 to dusk), Monday-Thursday fasting, day of birth fasting (*weton*), day and night fasting and not sleeping (*mati geni*), *mutih*, do not eat rice for a certain period of time, except consuming a fist of sticky rice or a banana, sleeping in a sacred tomb (*makam buyut*) and so on. Second, burn incense (*ngukus*) every Thursday night which is completed with offerings (*sesugu*) for the spirits of the ancestors. Third, *mulasara* (caring for) performance equipment such as *keris*, *kedok*, *tekes*, and gamelan (even if it is not a necessity but on his own awareness and on his beliefs, as well

as following his parents' habits, a potential *dalang* will do it patiently and sincerely). If the prospective *dalang topeng* "passed" or succeeded in passing the test of *meuseuh*, then in his soul there will be self-confidence especially when he is on the stage.

When the time comes to carry out the profession, *dalang topeng* is trusted by the community as a shaman (*dukun*) and has supernatural powers. Not surprisingly, various social phenomena emerge where the people flock to ask for blessings, safety, well-being, healing, and even ask for names for the new born babies (later these babies are called "*anak panggung*").

C. Kebon Alas and The Meaning of Papat Kalima Pancer

Kebon alas in the sense of denotative is an area that is overgrown by wild plants that normally grow in the forest, while in the connotative sense is a garden located in the forest (different from gardens located near settlements or in the yard of a house, horticulture). From the connotative understanding the types of plants in kebon alas are plants that can be relatively "ignored" (does not need to be treated) for a relatively long period of time. The plants are usually in the form of rice (*padi*), secondary crops (*palawija*), and fruits.

In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, kebon alas refers to objects/items hanging on the top-front of the stage. The hanging objects can be grouped into three, namely: 1) *sura gumantung*; 2) *sura kependem*; and 3) *sura sumampir*. *Sura gumantung* is various types of agricultural products derived from tree trunks/branches that are above the surface of the soil (types of vegetables and fruits), *sura kependem* are various types of agricultural products derived from tree roots and buried in the soil (*umbi -umbian*), while *sura sumampir* is various types of household needs (clothing and furniture). In further developments, the hanging objects/items are not limited to the three groups as mentioned above, but also include market snacks and various types of beverages in bottles as well as all types of goods that can be consumed as they are now.

Especially in the group of *sura gumantung* and *sura kependem*, the types of plants that are presented in kebon alas are adjusted to their habit. In this sense it can be distinguished between the types of plants in cold and in hot areas for example. Then it also adjusted to the season (harvest) period. In connection with the plants are chosen as part of the completeness of kebon alas.



Fig. 2. Cirebon mask performance and kebon alas (Source: Art Documentation Centre ISBI Bandung).

Some *dalang* and *nayaga* in Cirebon give meaning to almost every type of object/item on Kebon Alas are as follows:

1) Group of Sura Gumantung

- *Pari/paddy* is interpreted as *panggonane ing alam pangrantunan alam bagjah*. This meaning refers to rice plants as staple food which is therefore considered as a source of life and fertility; in other words, the survival of humans, especially the people of Cirebon is largely determined by the fertility of rice plants;
- *Kacang Lanjaran* (long beans) is interpreted as moral teachings, so that people "do not walk in place". This meaning refers to the nature of the bean plant which grows in a move (creep, spread). If we look closely at this teaching it contains suggestions for moving forward in various aspects of life: faith/devotion, knowledge/skills, economics, and position. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, the application is among other in terms of skills both in dancing and in beating instruments that requires the audience to feel satisfied;
- *Labu/waluh* is interpreted as *tegese lebonana atawa anjingana nganti pragat atawa bubar* which means obtain as much knowledge as possible until the end of time. This meaning refers to the word *Labu* (pumpkin) which is taken the final word (*bu*) to be associated with the word *lebo* which means "depth".
- *Encung/terong* is interpreted as a teaching that is a suggestion to study even since childhood. This meaning refers to the word *terong* (eggplant) to construct the word "terang" (light) by simply changing the vowel "o" (*rong*) to the vowel "a" (*rang*). If you look closely at the suggestion that obtaining knowledge is an obligatory. Arabic proverb says: Obtain knowledge from the cradle of a mother to the hole of the grave (*minal mahdi ilal lahdi*); Obtaining knowledge is an obligatory both for men and women (*tholabul 'ilmi farijdhotul' ala kulli muslimin walmuslimat*); and God Messenger said: Obtain knowledge even if you have to go to China (*utlubul 'ilma walau bissiyina*);
- *Chili/sabrang* is interpreted as a moral teaching that is a warning not to be tempted quickly by something that in reality can bring disaster. This meaning refers to the two properties found in chillies, namely colour (red) and taste (spicy). Red is interpreted as something tempting, while spicy is interpreted as something that will have bad effects for the body. In art, especially mask art, *dalang topeng* is a leader who manages everything. So, *dalang* is demanded to be able to manage his group well and wisely.
- *Emes/Oyong* is interpreted as teachings of intelligence/skills that are required to be. This meaning refers to the word *emes* which is taken the final word (*es*) to build the word *luwes* (flexible) which means clever or smart. In the context of the mask performance the application is among other lies in the skill of dancing and beating the gamelan.

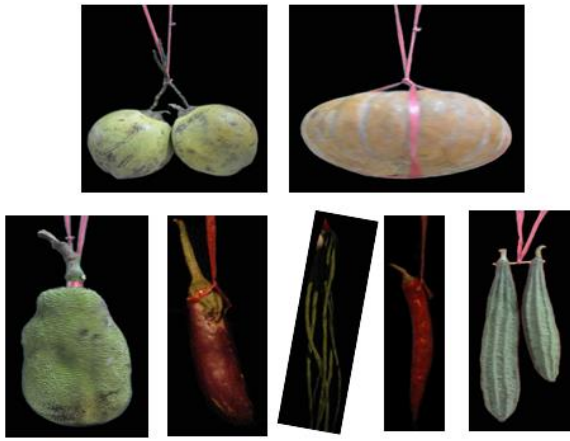


Fig. 3. Kelapa, nangka, kacang lanjaran, walu, terong/encung, cabai, and emes crops (fruits & vegetables) of hanging bush plants (Source: Author's collection).

- *Kalapa/Coconut* (two pieces) is meant as an embodiment of a married couple who complement each other. The skin (*tepes*) is made as a broom, the leaves (*blarak*) are made into the roof of house, the stems are made into pillar (*saka*), the leaves are made as *biting* brooms or sticks, the water is for drinking, the fruit is made for various foods. The philosophy of coconut is that humans must always remember the majesty of God. Everything is symbolic of human life, respecting and giving to one another. Why does it have to be a coconut? Because it takes the word *klap-klapen* or *titenana kaagungan Pangeran kang nyata*.
 - *Kluwih* (jackfruit) is interpreted as a moral teaching that is a suggestion not to overdo something. This meaning refers to the word *kluwih* which is taken by the second syllable (*wih*) to make the word *luwih* or *leuwih*, which means more. If we look closely at this teaching, it contains suggestions for humans to behave in the middle/ *siger tengah* (middle, no more or no less): including passion and desire (*tekad*), words (*ucap*), and behaviour (*lampah*).
 - *Gedang/pisang* (banana) is interpreted as moral teachings, namely *lembutana maknane kang maha kuasa supaya padang kelawan terang atine.*, This meaning refers to the word *gedang* taken by the second syllable (*dang*) to make the word *padang*, which means light. If we look closely to this suggestion is that the light is specifically related to the feelings and thoughts: the heart must be clean, the mind must be clear, not dirty, jealous, envious, etc. including sincerity and forgiveness.
- 2) *Group of Sura Kependem*
- *Kentang* (Potatoes) is interpreted as moral teachings that humans must not be arrogant. This meaning refers to the word *kentang* (potato) taken by the end of the syllable (*tang*) to construct the word *lantang* which means hard, rude, or arrogant. If we look closely at this teaching it also contains suggestions that humans must

be soft, gentle, and *tawadlu* (humble). In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, *dalang* does not have to feel superior or most prominent in presenting his skills both in dancing and in beating the gamelan;

- *Sagu* is interpreted as a moral teaching that humans must be good at saying, speaking, and in a rhythmic tone. This meaning refers to the word *sagu* by taking the second syllable (*gu*) to construct the word *ngalagu* (*pitutur* and *ngalagu*). If we look closely at this teaching, it contains suggestions so that in speaking does not simply say something which can offend the listener. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, *dalang* must be good at composing words when he gives an introduction to the show or as long as he communicates, both with the audience and with the fellow players.
- *Campu/Cassava* is interpreted as a moral teaching that how humans should conduct etiquette (ethics), especially in visiting. This interpretation refers to the word *campu* taken by the end syllable (*pu*) to construct the word *sampura* (*sampurasun*, greeting) which means to apologize. If we look closely to this teaching, it contains suggestion that humans must not behave arrogantly. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, *dalang* must say his greetings when he comes and says good-bye when he leaves the venue. The proverb says "*datang katingali tarang undur katingali punduk*". Cassava means a mixture of all kinds of *nganti tingkat* knowledge.
- *Ganyong* is interpreted as a moral teaching that humans cannot behave "spontaneous" (*ujug-ujug*). This meaning refers to the word *ganyong* by taking the second syllable (*nyong*) to construct the word *sekonyong-konyong/suddenly* (*ujug-ujug*). If we look closely to the teaching, it contains suggestion that everything must be planned or considered carefully. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, the place and time of the show need to be carefully calculated so that it can run as expected.
- *Kacang Olah* (peanut) is interpreted as a moral teaching that humans must be able to cultivate/ *kudu bisa ngolah* (must be able to make something new). This meaning refers to the word *olah* that in the literal meaning is to make or mix something which leads to creative action. If we look closely at this teaching, it also contains suggestions that humans do not act passively, statically, or as it is. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, the dancers or *dalang* are required to be creative, among others, through *gawe jogedan* or other creative actions (for example, making modifications) to make the audience satisfied.
- *Ubi* is interpreted as a moral teaching that humans must know the boundaries, clearly not excessive ... *ulatana aja nganti luh* just search for knowledge not to overdo. This means that it does not exceed the limits of ability and adapted to existing circumstances.



Fig. 4. *Kentang, sagu, campu, ganyong, and kacang olah*, Crops (tubers) of buried bush plants (Source: Author's collection).

3) Group of Sura Sumampir

- *Tapi/samping (sinjang)* is interpreted as a moral teaching that humans must be graceful (*legowo*). *Sinjang* has wide and broad meanings. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, *dalang* is demanded to be *masagi*, all-round, all-know.
- *Selendang* is interpreted as moral a teaching that is the importance of controlling lust. Humans must realize how good will always be haunted by evil. In the context of Cirebon Mask performance, if *selendang* is considered as evil, even if it is "thrown away", *disepak* (kicked), *dikepret* (punched), and thrown, it will eventually return to the dancer's body.



Fig. 5. *Tapi* and *Selendang*, costumes and equipment of mask dance (Source: Author's collection).

Analysis to the meaning of each type of objects/items on Kebon Alas as described above may be stated that the meanings refer to the three aspects attached on the objects/items. First, the name of the object/item, it clearly takes vowels (syllables) or slightly changing them, such as *labu (lebo)*, *terong (terang)*, *emes (luwes)*, *kelapa (klapen)*, *kluwih (luwih, more)*, *gedang (padang)*, *kentang (lantang)*, *sagu (ngalagu)*, *campu (sampura)*, *ganyong (sekonyong-konyong)*, and *kacang olah (ngolah)*; second, its taste, like *cabe (pedas)*; and third, its nature, like *kacang lanjaran (menjalar)*, *tapi/sinjang* (wide, large), and *selendang* (flexible).

From these meanings, kebon alas as an entity is a symbol which meaning refers to the suggestions of doing something good and the prohibition of doing something bad (*amar ma'ruf nahiy munkar*). The suggestions and prohibitions include two relationships (vertical & horizontal), namely the relationship between humans and God (*hablumminallah*) and the relationships between humans (*hablumminannas*).

VI. CONCLUSION

The presence of kebon alas in Cirebon Mask performance is in fact not only fulfilling decoration needs, but also has a symbolic content. As an entity, kebon alas is interpreted by *dalang topeng* as a symbol of *angen-angen* (ideas), ideals or expectations. This *angen-angen* is combined with *sedulur papat kalima pancer* (from good back to good, depicted in the mask dance cycle that returns to Panji), which is closely related to *manunggaling kawula gusti*. Kebon alas is considered as the strength of *angen-angen*, which is a pacifier of the heart and as an expression to state good wishes. It appears that there is a common thread between kebon alas in Cirebon Mask performance and the Sufi teachings and which incidentally the creator of Cirebon mask itself, namely Sunan Panggung.

As the final remark, Mask performance is not different from Wayang Kulit show, that in addition to being an entertainment, it also provides guidance. This can be further emphasized by the role and position of the *dalang* who in the early days of Islam in Cirebon played a dual role, namely as Dalang Topeng and also as Dalang Wayang Kulit. *Dalang* and *nayaga* are also missionary endeavours. In Shadow Puppet these symbols are disguised through words and stories (verbal), while in Mask performance the symbols are hidden among others through kebon alas (visual).

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