

# Visual Expression of Bondres Mask (\*)

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**ABSTRACT** There are many Balinese topeng dance drama, Pajegan, Panca and Prembon, also known as Wali, Bebal, and Balih-bali dance. Balinese topeng dance drama has many kind of topeng characters and the most intriguing ones is a common topeng called Bondres. Bondres visualise an ugliness facial expression that may caused by disability or disorder; Craniofacial Malformations, as the medical term known.

Bondres visual expression as a commoner is very contrast compared to its counterpart, the Dalem character, which is more superior and mighty. Bondres represent wong cilik; the commoner in Balinese dance drama with its own distinct gesture and not bound to any decorum, unlike the king or queen that bound to its common gesture to be superior and mighty. Topeng Bondres is topeng wicara or sibakan thus humour or parody are essentially their act.

**Keywords :** Mask, Bondres, visual expression, gesture, speech mask

## INTRODUCTION

Mask is a culture material facial mask, masquerade art, and also part of religious rituals. Thus mask can be classified as arts. Generally, mask picturing the concept of personal transformation, sensation and social culture. Mask is an articulation from the human head or face, imitations, or as an embodiment of supernatural beings. All of them also function as a symbol of disaster repellent, rituals equipment, and performing arts. As a masquerade, mask hide ones real characters and become something else differently. In a book titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (New York, 1959:112) mentioned that the social reality of human life is a (theatrical) stage separates between the “Front-side” defined as “... part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” and the “Back-side” defined as “... the place closed to and hidden from the audience where the techniques of impression management are practised”. In correspondence with the purpose of a mask, Goffman explained that there are few thing hidden human life – away from the front-side.

Mask is a culture material in Indonesia, especially Bali, with its own characteristics and function in traditional rituals and Balinese Hindu rituals. Various shape and type of mask in Bali has it own function according to the rituals traditions. For example, human mask appear in dance drama Pajegan, Panca and Prembon. Among the sociological hierarchy, there are Bondres figure, which is in Bali, represents with the lowest class. Bondres also mean ‘folks’.

Mask as a culture material always showfacial expression visual with various shapes, from the norm to the extreme. Bondres is the extreme example, showing the ugliness or the deformed part of a face. This classifies Bondres as a spoken mask, which enable Bondres to communicate with the audience. Bondres visual expression also completed with gestures, made the performing art even more interesting.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper will take a deep dive into The Visual Expression of Bondres Mask, the ugliness, the disease that may cause them. Similar to the narration in DJAWA magazine from Dutch published in 1937, an article titled “Maskers en Ziekten of Java en Bali” by H.H. Noosten and Dr. G.H.R Von Koenigswald. The article listed there are four kinds facial disease documented in form of a mask; 1) Lepra masker, 2) Framboesia masker, 3) Hazenlip masker, and 4) Kanker masker. Koeningswald made the mask for educational purpose in medical. The mask with disease trigger creativity the mask maker, turn it into arts, especially in Java and Bali. Noosten believe that the process making the mask also a way to avoid the said disease, instead of the artist creativity.

Samuel R Wells in a book titled “New Physiognomy” or signs of character, as manifested through temperament and external forms and especially in “The Human Face Divine” from 1829 – 1875 reveal the methods to elaborate the signs of the characters of human facial expression as a behaviour, personality, and external facial. Richard Carson developed the method for stage make up to shape the physical character and facial character of an actor according to its role. While M Stricker published about facial malformations caused by illness in his book titled *Craniofacial Malformations* (1990, page 1-7). The study later also translated into visual expression mask, especially Bondres.



Figure 1. Facial malformations or Craniofacial Malformations, Dr. G.H.R Von Koenigswald (Djawa Magazine, 1937)



Figure 2: Visual Expressions in New Physiognomy: the human face divine

Samuel R. Wells (1829 – 1875)

The visual expression concept in Bondres, other than physical, also visualised through the colour choice depend on the malformations or the illness chosen. This visual expressions concept aimed to represent the image visualised through the mask, in this case, Bondres. Bondres' visual expression is a form of a communication with its audience. Mask usually communicates through a gesture, visual gesture, movement or voice gesture.

Performing art in Balinese society has been through shift in purpose, from magical or sacred to aesthetic; according to I Wayan Dibia in his paper titled *Topeng: A Masked Dan Theatre of Bali* (23 – 30 September 2008, Pg:4) explains that the foundation rationale of Mask among Balinese Society is a locale belief system which also integrate worship to the ancestor. According to this system, Balinese society has 3 types of dance drama based on its functions; 1) Wali, a sacred dance performance for rituals and religious, 2) Bebali, the dance drama involves the society and government, 3) Balihbalihan, which is a entertaining dances. These three dances are a hierarchy shows levels, separation in time and space, storyline, actors and drama dance equipment. Bondres appear in all three drama dances, which made Balinese drama dances even more appealing and in demand.

Truthfully, visual expression is a process represent image, a form of communication or object reading based on gesture, visual gesture, movement or voice gesture. Visual expression has openness towards judgements and the audience opinion.

## PROBLEM STATEMENTS

Bondres show visual expression in ugliness, which made it an interesting communication form. Visual expression or Gatra from a Bondres attributed as a marginal identity of *Waisya* dan *Sudra* caste in Balinese society. Although Bondres visual expression shows ugliness; scary, disgusting, peculiar or malformation, as a character, Bondres bound to deliver good thing, entertain, even sometimes they also delivers the government policy. The ugliness of Bondres Gatra only as a deviation in physical form, however, the figure of Bondres also anticipated in every drama dance. The visual expression reading of Bondres as a cultural inscription gives new meaning considering Bondres function in Balinese drama dances. Autonomy status rises with the Gatra; facial gesture, function and its meaning.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper written by collects various studies and literature exploration, thoughts and observation regarding the visual expression of Bondres. Looking for data relevancy to prove that the uniqueness of Bondres visual expression through Balinese cosmology. Utilising both past data and newer data also the expression of Bondres itself. This paper tries to link between: 1) the visual expression of Bondres with cultural activities and its tangible creation with 2) studies about the sustainability and evolvement of Bondres expression in general.

## RESULT OF ANALYSIS

Etymologically, *Topeng* originated from the words *tapuk* (RM Soedarsono 1997, Pg. 5), meaning mask, facial cover, hide ones true identity or character. Initially, mask is an activity covering ones face with materials such as dirt, or some kind of a tattoo according to the role or expression in a ceremony or rituals. Basically mask is a portrait represents a human or beings facial form. Mask; or *tapel* in Balinese, in denotative meaning refers to things covering ones faces. In short, mask function as a religious and cultural rituals medium, entertainment, and a human character figure.

Edi Sedyawati explains mask is a symbolic expression to channel a specific cultural concept through visual in a grotesque way; frightening, tremendous, peculiar or disgusting. Ernest Cassirer (1979:27) explain that mask is an *animal symbolicum*, where the art of mask used as a symbol in religious rituals, disaster repellent medium, or an equipment used in a drama dance. Mask also used when they go hunting, this could be translated to use a mask with animal facial form to disguise oneself. The culture of mask in Indonesia has vary function, this paper will focus to see the meaning of it from cultural point of view, especially drama Dance in Bali.

Mask culture among Balinese society dominates every sacred and religius rituals in form of dance drama. Previously explained in preface that there are levels in Balinese drama dance; 1) Wali drama dance, known with Pajegan dance drama played with only one person who played all roles (*majeg*). It is very sacred and shows in religious and cultural rituals. 2) Bebali drama dance or Panca drama dance or scular drama dance. The drama dance involve five persons like *Penasar Cenikan*, *Kelihan*, *Dalem* (Kings and Queens), and Bondres, also the audience. 3) Balih-balihan drama dance or Prembon drama dance which provide entertainment through social activities. Hierarchy dance drama in Bali is an effort to elaborate levels in *Desa Kala Patra*, or cosmological value in Balinese Hindu also known as *Tri Hita Karana*, which is a profane-sacred from dance drama (contemporer). In hierarchy dance drama, shows a lot of human mask character according to its function and the social hierarchy Balinese Hindu (*Brahma*, *Ksatria*, *waisya* and *Sudra*). The philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* is to incarnate three harmonies in the life of Balinese. All these values also include in drama dance



along with the equipment. In short, the harmony between human and God (worship and practice religious values), natural environment (social – cultural – economic) and the society.

The cosmology Bondres; in Balinese society life, the world made up in the balance social nature, cultural-economic and nature things as reality of universe. Balinese in details established three groups of time and space, *Nista* that show the low and the high. *Madya* represents the middle area or neutral, and *Utama* that represents high places or centered in the head. (Angela Hobart, 1996 – 101). Thus the cosmology of Bondres mask in Bali society has its own function or role in every drama dance; sacred, shows or contemporary. With these cosmology classification, Balinese society by philosophical divided the world into two big part, the mountain (upper world, nirvana) the places where the Gods resides; *Kaja*, and *Kelod* the underworld, where mistakes, ugliness, which actually an area to release all the fault and starts anew. This cosmology concept represents the meaning of life where there the supernatural force and physical life force back and forth.



Figure 3 : Ekspresi Visual Topeng Bondres Karya I Wayan Tangguh dan I Wayan Diya

Data visual diatas bermula dari data Dr. G.H.R Von Koenigswald, tentang cacat atau penyakit muka yang ditemukan.

Aside from the cosmology comprehensions *KajaKelod*, visual expressions, gesture, Bondres role can be arranged and adjust according to the concept *Desa Kala Patra*. For Balinese Hindu, the belief of *Desa Kala Patra* is very universal. While the concept of *Desa* focus on the location and being, *Kala* is time and *Patra* reviewing the situation and condition. Despite Bondres is a representative of the lower society with ugliness, Bondres still bound to the concept of *Desa Kala Patra*. This is clearly shown in the role and function of *Desa Kala Patra*; actual relevant and represent the time.

The phenomenon Bondres as a human mask who can talk making Balinese drama dance interesting and anticipated. Bondres can eliminate the rigidity standard of sacres ceremony, communicate ethic / moral message which also deliver by the *Pedanda* (the priest) or *Penasar* words deliver in ancient Kawi or Sansekerta into more down to earth style. The way Bondres deliver a ethical or moral message with humour (*igel-igelan*) or even sometimes an upgrade caricature to critics, soft

pinch that easier to digest (*Primadi, Kelayakan Estetis-Etis, 2006-h:18-26*). With the ugliness visual expressions, Bondres able to deliver goodness, education and spread regulations, the information from the government, important informations with a more expressive way and with the current expressions and easier to digest by the audience.



Figure 4 Ekspresi visual Topeng Bondres dalam dramatari topeng Bali

Source nusabali.com



Figure 5 Bondres Perempuan

Source [www.fotografi.net](http://www.fotografi.net)-sumber gambar UNHI masks

## CONCLUSION

The visual expression of Bondres revealed along with the scientific data form the medical about facial malformations (Craniofacial Malformations) documented in three dimensions. Based on the documentation, seen that there are increase in creativity for facial mask with share of Bondres (with the ugliness et, al).

Bondres visual expressions display human's facial ugliness *gatra* as an psychic articulations and social classifications. As a culturas preserve in Bali, Bondres refer to the studies bout human identify and its cosmology. Bondres as the as sign and text, the paradox

visual expression with the function Bondres in traditional drama dance. The visual expression about Bondres as an speaking mask, represent freedom, dominated power and deliver various role and its function while still relevant to Balinese Hindu cosmology. Visual expressions Bondres as can have various meaning and reading depend on the representation and the dance drama framing shown. Bondres is a synergy duality, the physical ugliness and its goodness in the communication. The metaphor visual expression Bondres in dance drama accumulated from various scoring system; *sekala-niskala* as commoners, marginality and simplicity become neutral.

The face of Bondres as a non-narrative natural articulation can be a medium for human reasoning towards his supernatural power. Bondres pre is a multidimensional crisis-releasing media, covering the dance and song movements. Visual expressions of the characteristic caricature of the mask of Bondres are precisely the proportional focus of humor; humor in the campaign or other interests. Bondres visual expression will function on the stage of the mask dance when the Penasar character, the Village Head, or a community leader opens the theme of the conversation.

In the Balinese mask drama, the visual expression of Bondres' mask became a creative medium for the faces of masks in the media of creativity in the design and form of traditional fashion characterized by Balinese culture, traditional accessories from mask actor Bondres. The visual expression of Bondres's mask can bring a lot of creativity to new works with images of bad / disfigured faces ofondres, in the future it is not impossible that the expression of Bondres Mask will appear in an animated caricature program program.

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