



Performing Arts as Communication: The Traditional Media of Wayang Sasak in Digital Era

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Abstract

Wayang Sasak is one of the performing arts in Indonesia. However, in today's digital era, the presence of wayang Sasak is in danger of extinction. This is because the young generation of Lombok is not interested in this art. This objective of this study is to discover the preservation effort of wayang Sasak in the digital era. This research used ethnographic communication method which directly involves the researcher. The technique of data collection is through interview, literature study, observation, and visual audio documentation. The result of the research shows that there are several preservation efforts which have been done by the research's interviewees in this digital era. Several interviewees also suggested a discourse or idea about the innovation to digitalize the performing arts of wayang Sasak in order to cope with the digital era. This research could also be a literature reference about wayang Sasak, because amount the information about wayang Sasak is still lacking.

Keywords: *Performing Arts: Wayang Sasak: Media Studies: Digital Era Performance*

Introduction

The world, through UNESCO, has acclaimed the wayang shadow-puppet as world's cultural heritage of Indonesia in 2003 (Cohen, 2007:339). The international recognition is an important proof to maintain and preserve Indonesia's cultural heritage properties to prevent them from extinction. There are many forms of shadow-puppet performance in Indonesia such as; the wayang *Beber*, wayang *Purwa*, wayang *Golek*, wayang *Wong* (wayang performance, which is played by humans instead of puppets, a theatrical wayang), wayang *Gedog*, wayang Bali, wayang *Sasak* in Lombok, etc. However, the existence of some types of wayang is in danger of being extinct because less and less people, especially the youth, are interested to learn about it.

One of the wayang performances which are now under the threat of extinction is the wayang *Sasak*. The performing art of wayang *Sasak* is one of Indonesia's cultural heritages. This performing art was developed on the island of Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) province.

Until today, in the history of *wayang Sasak*, when and who brought the shadow-puppet show to the island of Lombok has not been discovered. However, some notes suggest that the *wayang Sasak* appeared along with the entrance of Islam in Lombok which came from the land of Java (Tahir, 2014:39). The uncertainty in history of wayang Sasak is due to the lack of available historical sources both in the form of literary and oral sources. Therefore, this becomes an obstacle to discover its history. Other sources mentioned that, in *Babad Lombok*, Islam religion was brought by Sunan Prapen, son of Sunan Giri (Harris, 1997:23).

Results and Discussion

The developments of media such as newspapers, radio and television has brought many changes in the human lives. People can now access more information than before the development of the media. The development of the internet and the new media also further facilitates access to information. On the other hand, developments of technology, such as social media, also have impacts on the younger generation. Because of the reasons stated above, this research is intended to discover the preservation effort of wayang Sasak performing arts, which is one of traditional media in Indonesia.

The research method is by using communication ethnography with qualitative paradigm. The ethnographic method requires the researcher's direct involvement in the study or research and also to involve in communication and interact with a cultural system (Brewer, 2000:10, and Saville-Troike, 2003:2). This research is conducted from February to July 2018 and located on the island of Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The source of data for this research is from interview, literature study, observation, and visual audio documents.

The researchers met the people who are the interviewees of this research such as dalang (puppet master), cultural activist, journalist, culture observer, and the people who are connoisseur and engaged in the performance of *wayang Sasak*. The literature or references of this research are retrieved from various sources such as West Nusa Tenggara local library, Museum of West Nusa Tenggara, books, journal, and the internet.

The performing arts of wayang Sasak, which is a traditional media, is outdated compared to modern and new media in the present. Dixon (1999: 170) argued that the improvement of affordable hardware and software to design multimedia programs or ideas has offered a new form for the works publication. Furthermore, Glen Creeber (2009: 12) stated that our perspective and the society's point of view has been transformed or changed with the development of technology, so that artists and intellectuals or academics will find new ways to represent and articulate it. The idea to digitalize wayang Sasak has been suggested by several interviewees to cope with today's digital era. However, there is not yet any realization of the idea or it still only at the planning stage, but, several forms of innovation in preservation efforts to maintain the existence of wayang Sasak have been carried out.

There are several characteristics of traditional media which is presented in the book of *Wayang Sebagai Media Komunikasi Tradisional Dalam Diseminasi Informasi* written by Nursodik Gunarjo who a member of The Drafting Team of the Ministry of Communication and Information of the Republic of Indonesia was (2011):

1. The story or message which is presented to the audiences is usually without a written script.
2. The messages are presented spontaneously and with improvisation.
3. Humor is the dominant elements in the presentation.
4. The show is in an integrated form.
5. Music accompanies the show.
6. There is a two-way communication which made the show relaxed, simple, and intimate.
7. A long duration of the show.

From the characteristics above, wayang Sasak can be categorized as traditional media which has developed within the Lombok's society since the old times before the emergence of new and modern media.

Serat Menak is an arrangement from the Saga of Amir Hamzah, which from Malay origin, which then translated into Javanese and became the source for the story in wayang Sasak (Yamin and Mahartha, 1993:20-21). However, who first brought the *Serat Menak* to the island of Lombok is still long discussed even until today. Geoffrey E. Marrison, in his book *The Literature of the Sasak of Lombok: A Survey of Javanese and Sasak Texts Part 1*, described that there are 3 phases of language use which can be differentiated to trace the origin of literature in Lombok. The first phase is the arrival of Javanese literature in Lombok, such as the story of *Panji*, the second phase is the adoption of Javanese culture by the people with local version and reference, and the third phase is the writings of original Lombok text by using Javanese (Marrison, 1992:18). Marrison's opinion could be a reference to trace the beginning of the history of *Serat Menak* in Lombok.

The fact is in present day, through the researcher's observation, wayang Sasak is rarely performed at both in official government and traditional events. Other than lack of people interest in wayang Sasak, the number of puppet master and *sekehe* (musician) is also decreasing. The head of Pepadi NTB (Indonesia's union of puppet master/dalang), *Mamiq Lalu Abdurrahim*, explained in his interview about the matter:

The problems here are now we have dalang (puppet master) but there are no sekehe (musician) and we don't have the equipment for wayang performance, there are also one who has a full set of wayang characters stored in a box, likely a legacy from the grandfather, but is not a dalan and therefore cannot perform. In the end, because they cannot use the lontars (texts), they lend it and then it was sold, the wayang puppets are also like that, it's available but there is no puppet master to use it...

From the explanation above, wayang Sasak is less popular compared to other Lombok traditional show such as *gendang beleq*, *rudat*, *kecimol*, *cupak gerantang*, and traditional dances. In the national level, wayang Sasak is also unpopular or unknown to the majority of people in Indonesia. Wayang performances that are better known among Indonesians are wayang from Java such as *wayang Purwa*, *wayang Golek*, dan *wayang Wong*.

The story of *Serat Menak* wayang performance in present time is also not widely known by the people. The most well-known wayang stories are *Mahabrata* and *Ramayana*. Therefore, this research is important because lack of research about wayang Sasak. Moreover, the digital era is one of the challenges for the existence of traditional art shows as a form of traditional media.

This research is also intended to present additional literature or scientific reference for other researches which discuss about wayang Sasak, considering the source of literacy for wayang Sasak is still lacking and rare.

Aside from Lombok, the use of *Serat Menak* (means letters) as the story in wayang performance can also be found in Sundanese region or in Kebumen. However, the wayang performance on both regions is in the form of wayang Golek, while the performance in Lombok has developed into traditional wayang puppet like in Java and Bali. Furthermore, Agus Faturrahman (cultural observer) stated in an interview that:

If we talk about wayang Sasak then we are talking about wayang Menak, wayang Menak is wayang performance which uses Serat Menak story. Serat Menak is a script which originated in Islamic Mataram kingdom and was written by Yosodipuro which originated from Hikayat Amir Hamzah, which is a Malayan script. And the Malayan script is originated from a Persian Script, and then the Sasak people knew the wayang is related with the spread of Islam...

It is uncertain how many *Serat Menak* is circulated in Lombok. The majority of the interviewees, such as puppet master, cultural activist, connoisseur, academics, and the government did not possess the complete and intact *Serat Menak* story series. This is because it is believed that the puppet masters, who are the interviewees of this research, received the story of *Serat Menak* from attending the performance of wayang *Sasak* in their childhood and from the story of their predecessor. However, there are some pieces or volumes of *Serat Menak* in the form of a book safely located in the Museum of West Nusa Tenggara.

There are several efforts in preserving wayang *Sasak* which is done by several parties such as dalang (puppet master), cultural activist, artist, journalist, and culture observer. However, the role of local government and local community in Lombok is still lacking. Mamiq Lalu Abdurrahim as the head of Pepadi or the party close to the local government explained that the government of West Nusa Tenggara has actually done several efforts through Department of Tourism and Department of Education. According to him, Pepadi NTB has helped off find opportunities to perform in local government events and coaching the art studios of wayang *Sasak* in Lombok. However, wayang *Sasak* does not performed that often compared to other performing arts of Lombok.

Most of the puppet masters who participated in this research have developed their own wayang story as an effort to attract the modern audience, especially the young generation. However, the core of their story development still sourced from *Serat Menak*. The story development of *Serat Menak* which is used in the performance of wayang *Sasak* is known, by several puppet masters, as *Kawian*, moreover, some also called it as *carangan* or essay. Safwan, a wayang *Sasak* puppet master, described the story of *kawian* as:

Kekawian is composed by a (Lombok) poet; if Serat Menak is the original text from Java which was written by Yosodipuro, there are thousands of kekawian. We only know hundreds of them, but the storyline is Serat Menak. In its development, for example, we want to take a volume from Menak, and there is a gap in there – a gap to fill in with story... usually we fill it with kawian which has adapted with the spread. If we use the

original text from Serat Menak, that is what we got – just that, no element of da'wah, which means the lack of da'wah elements would resulting in Islamization. This element of da'wah is also a teaching from Sunan prapen. It can be made into story (kawian) but in the end, it must follow the holy religion (islam) according to the rule of Prophet Ibrahim

In line with Lalu Safwan, Mamiq Erwan who is also a puppet master explained that the story of kawian is a non-permanent story, while Serat Menak is a permanent story and its content cannot be changed. The story of *Serat Menak* uses *Kawi* Language or ancient Javanese, while *Kawian* story tend to use Sasak Language.

At the wayang Sasak performance, there are many positive values of life in the form of education, Islamic preaching, etc. The puppet master (dalang), as a communicator, plays an important role in conveying these messages and values to the audience. *Dalang* is a person who organizes and moves all of the wayang characters and arrange the performance of the show (Raffles, 2014:234). The *dalang* is also considered as a respected person by the spectators or the audiences of wayang performance.

Some puppet masters also realize that if they present a *pakem* (standard or fixed) story which in accordance to *Serat Menak*, many viewers would not understand the contents of the story. Language barriers became an obstacle to why so many young people today are not interested in wayang Sasak. The researcher met Mamiq Lalu Sadarudin, a puppet master and a cultural observer, who realized there are less and less people from young generation of today who don't know or interested in the art of wayang Sasak.

Mamiq Lalu Sadarudin took action by setting up an art studio called Pembasak (Sasak Cultural and Tradition Development Institute) which was established on March 3, 2003. According to him, the Pembasak studio initially aimed to unify Sasak artists and cultural observers, because his experience shows that disputes often occur among fellow artists and cultural practitioner in Lombok at that time.

In addition to establishing the Pembasak studio, Sadarudin also innovate the wayang Gejeh (a small-sized wayang from leather and without a fixed characterization) and wayang Tetatu. These innovations are based on the concerns about the future of the art of wayang performance in Lombok. The researchers had met and interviewed *Mamiq* Sadarudin at his home which also the location of Pembasak studio. The following is interview quote about the innovation of wayang Gejeh and Tetatu;

If we only relax and do nothing, our original wayang story will lose its momentum. We will lose our face among the youth. I even have held a wayang performance using Bahasa Indonesia, to show to audience ranging from High School students to kindergarten. In the Museum of West Nusa Tenggara, I have a program which actually received by them, which means the audiences understood it. Even though it was actually difficult, the only way was to create a scenario. In the end I wrote a new story so that the children can understand. So the innovation was intended so that the youngster can love their culture again, love themselves, and love their ancestor through the culture.

Wayang Tetatu is almost similar to Sundanese wayang Golek. However, wayang Tetatu does not have fixed standard in the story and the characterization of wayang characters. The wayang Tetatu characters are used according to the storyline which is chosen by the puppet master. The storyline which is presented in wayang Tetatu doesn't use the story from *Serat Menak*, but it uses Lombok's folklore instead.

Sadarudin's innovation is interesting because it presents a new form of wayang in Lombok and has a woman as the puppet master of wayang Tetatu. Lalu Sadarudin asked Tami to become the puppet master of wayang Tetatu. Sadarudin done that because he realized to receive the attention of today's youth, he needs a puppet master who also represents their era.

Tami, in an interview with the researcher, tells her story of being a wayang Tetatu puppet master through accident. Tami, a student of Indonesian Language and Literature study program at the University of Mataram, has only become a puppet master since October 2017. The use of language has also become an obstacle for Tami to learn about wayang Sasak, so she chooses Indonesian as a way to convey the stories in wayang Tetatu. The use of language adptation for the younger generation's audience was quite successful, although Mamiq Sadarudin demanded that Tami masters the formal Sasak language and Kawi language (original wayang Sasak language) which must be fulfilled in the future.

Preservation efforts were also carried out by a female journalist, from one of the news network in Indonesia, by establishing the Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak (Wayang Sasak Puppet Master School). Fitri Rachmawati brought the idea to establish the Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak because, as a Lombok native or Sasak people, she did not recognize wayang Sasak as authentic performing arts from her places of origin. In addition, Fitri's experience as a journalist moved her when she learned about the present appalling condition of wayang, such as she stated in her interview for the research;

When we were in the puppet master Erwan's residence, suddenly there was a person, an envoy from Bali, who is searching for a hundred-year old wayang, from Anak Agung era. He was told that it was located in Pujut (Central Lombok), and it was stored in an old box and it was really hundred years old. He said he was sent to buy the wayang, because I am a journalist, I thought there is no way he can do that (to freely buy an ancient wayang).

Finally, from the story above of the Fitri's experience, she as an initiator together with her colleagues who named their group as Ide Aksi, around the end of December 2014, participated in a contest for traditional art ideas which at that time was organized by the Rujak Center for Urban Studies (RCUS). The ideas of Fitri and her colleagues managed to obtain the funds which they used to establish the Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak.

Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak was first established in Sesela village, West Lombok, since May 2015. Then throughout its operation the school successfully developed an interactive wayang show. The method of interactive wayang is felt to be effective enough to convey messages or values to the community because this method invites the audience to talk or ask questions to the wayang Sasak characters. Indonesian and Sasak languages are used in the delivery of interactive wayang stories. The presented stories usually are an original story by Fitri and Ide Aksi group. They also recruited Bayu, one of the students who became a puppet master,

to discuss about the theme of the story. The wayang stories they made are usually adapted to the social issues which are intended to be conveyed such as the dangers of corruption, discussion of HIV/AIDS, early marriage, and so on.

The interactive wayang method of Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak has received positively by the society. This is proven when they have received a visitor from a delegation of UNESCO. They also cooperated with various parties for several times, such as Lemhannas, Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Government of West Nusa Tenggara, Children Council of Mataram NTB (DAM), Judicial Commission, Ministry of Communication and Information (Kemkominfo), and so on. However, Fitri admitted that the Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak, which is located in the village of Sesela, West Lombok, had never been visited by the local government of West Lombok.

Fitri and her colleagues in Ide Aksi also initiated a web page which can be accessed by the general public, especially the young generation. Every activities and documentations of Sekolah Pedalangan Wayang Sasak are summarized in the web page of wayangsasak.org. Fitri hoped that in the future, the wayang Sasak can be popular again among the youth who will inherit the cultural heritage of Lombok.

Wayang hip-hop is an example of the development of traditional performing arts into a contemporary direction. A study by Miguel Escobar Varela (2014) shows that wayang hip-hop became a contemporary wayang which can break the boundary of standard wayang show by using digital media, humor, and music without eliminating the authentic element of wayang story. In other words, if it is dressed according to the digital era, the traditional media can compete and exist between modern and new media.

Lalu Abdurrahim admitted that the wayang Sasak itself is actually aimed towards contemporary direction. This is proven by the support of students in Lombok who have an interest in the sustainability of the wayang Sasak in this digital era. For example, Lalu Abdurrahim explained that there were several discourses or ideas from students to make wayang animation that would be created in the future. The results of research by Joost Port, et al, on the perspectives of creators and performers in the digital era shows digitalization as a threat, but it also can provide greater opportunities for control over their work (2013: 22- 23). Today, the performing arts of wayang Sasak is not the only media to which has a big role to convey the message of the values of Islam and life. The people of Lombok, especially the young generations, have experienced the digital era which ease the search for information and various aspects of life. However, various efforts which have been done and the idea to digitalize the traditional media such as wayang Sasak is a remarkable step and it must be continued in order to face the digital era.

Conclusion

This study has discovered several preservation effort of the performing arts of wayang Sasak in various form of innovation such as the use of language, a new style of story which discuss everyday issues in the society, the creation of new type of wayang, and the idea to digitalize the wayang Sasak. All the efforts are intended to face the digital era which is present in the society. In the future, there is a chance that the wayang Sasak will be presented in digital

form because there is still an ongoing discourse and idea to preserve the traditional media of wayang Sasak. This research can also present more information or scientific source for other future research which study about performing arts of wayang Sasak.

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