

## **DHALANG SEJATI: THE LEGACY OF CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN RUWATAN CEREMONY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Ruwatan* ceremony is held with leather puppets show organized by a *ruwat* dhalang or puppeteer. *Ruwat* Puppeteer is also known as the true puppeteers who are determined by the lineage of the puppeteers, with specific criteria must be a descendant of a *ruwat* puppeteer (the ordained puppeteer). This study is a qualitative descriptive research which focuses on the descriptive-qualitative explanation. The primary data is obtained from information of the research sources and direct observation in the field according to the characteristics of the data obtained from *ruwatan* ceremony. Secondary data is the text stories "Serat Murwakala" copied version from RM Citrakusuma. *Ruwatan* tradition as many found today was a new product of Sultan Agung of the Mataram dynasty. This tradition has evolved to be a monopoly business impacted from the ritual services, particularly *ruwatan* ceremony has been started since 17<sup>th</sup> century which along with the exercised hegemonic power of the Mataram Kingdom in Kerta.

**Keywords:** *tradition, ruwatan, puppet leather, true puppeteer, Sukerta.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

A puppet leather show for the supporting community is seen as not only a form of performance, guidance and entertainment, but they believe that this show could be a means for certain celebration interest, one of which is as a remembrance on the important events in a life or journey of human life from being in a mother's womb to the death such as *mitoni* tradition, wedding *supitan*, *nyatus*, *nyewu* etc. (Wibisono, 1974: 61). Puppet leather performances are also seen as a frame of reference and can be used as a reflection of life, depictions of attitudes and behavior of the supporting community. For the community, the narrated stories in a leather puppet performance are believed to be able to depict various life events and valuable life teachings. The performance is, therefore, deemed to be a bridge towards the interests of the

community, especially as a kind of worshiping tool through conducting a *ruwatan* ceremony (Ibid).

*Ruwatan* as a ritual performance is part of the Javanese local traditions or *kejawen*, a traditional Javanese philosophical system of principles of which involves a search for the inner self with fundamentally concerns on bringing a peace of mind for the practitioners. Additionally *ruwatan* is a ritual cleansing of a place or person deemed to be in danger because of some constellation of events or individual location. This ritual ceremony has been trusted as a medium preventing the individuals who hold the tradition from common misfortunate life called *sukerta*. *Sukerta* describes as individuals of those who experiencing bad luck, born into disadvantageous sibling order and locations- whole villages, dangerous intersections, these misfortunate people or places can be effectively cleansed or exorcised through a performance of the *ruwatan* ceremony (Endraswara, 2003). *Ruwatan* is often called as Murwakala, the word *murwa* means 'proletarian' which defeat and control the *kala* 'time'. This means that in the lives of human beings from time to time, the supporting community could find the outer and inner tranquillity.

The supporting community keep in believing that if he/she should be included in a class of people who has to be held a *ruwatan* ceremony then it is assumed that they are the people who are believed Bathara Kala would eat. Thus, the supporting communities in the past were among the people who conducted man shows at least until the 90s but in recent years after, the *ruwatan* show begin to decrease on its numbers (ceremony). This *Ruwatan* ceremony has been a deeply rooted belief in the hearts of the supporters even it could grow the autonomous strength from the various religions that blended into one in preserving the works of show that are descended from the ancestral traditions and contains a hyper-spirituality beliefs (Derlin DE, 2011).

In this *ruwatan* ceremony the leather puppets are used as a display media to tell the story about Murwakala, in which the birth of Bathara Kala until at a certain point where Bathara claimed his right to get a food and to the story that Batharakala be defeated or controlled by the puppeteer Kandhabuana or the true puppeteer (Kusuma, 1923). In the scene, Bathara Kala was confronted by his father Bathara Guru and asked him for his promising foods, and among the people who are eatable to him will be the variety of people who fall into the category so called *wongsukerta* (Soetarno, 2004: 52).

In *pakempang ruwatan Murwakala* and *Serat Centhini* there are told sixties types of people who fall into the category people of *sukerta*. In *Serat Murwakala* there are 147 types of *wong sukerta* and in *Pakem Murwakala* there are 136 types, for example 1) *Ontang-anting*: single male child in a family, has no siblings; 2) *Unting-unting*: single daughter in a family; 3) *Gedhana-gedhini*: two children in a family, male and female; 4) *uger-ugerlawang*: two sons in a

family; (5) The twin pair: two daughters in a family; 6) *Pendhawa*: five sons in a family; 7) *Ngayomi*: five daughters in a family; 8) *Julungwangi*: a born child at the sunset time; and 9) *Pangayam-ayam*: a child born during the middle of the day. Among other types of people who deemed to be in the category of *sukerta*, they were considered mistaken because dropping cormorant, when cooking rice and breaking the *gandhik*, a tool used to clam herbs (Soetarno, 2004: 53).

In *ruwatan* puppet shows, it will be led by a puppeteer called Dalang Sejati 'the true puppeteer'. The true puppeteer is a trusted person to lead the way the *ruwatan* ritual ceremony is held and considered capable of releasing bad luck or could clean people of *sukerta* by conducting *ruwatan* ceremony even they are the people who have to be responsible for the safety of all who are in the show including all the supporting accompaniment or crew puppeteer, guests and spectators as the attendants of the show. A puppeteer will be referred as the true puppeteer if such puppeteer is mere descendant of the *ruwat* puppeteer. Similarly, in his social status he should be able to be a role model or beyond reproach and must already have conducted several *laku tirakat* 'behavioral penance' in advance even on each conducting *ruwatan* performance, the puppeteers must definitely undergo fasting or *ngirangi* (Subalinata).

In this age, the perspective towards the mainstream that exists in *ruwatan* has stagnated or exceptional rigidity and leading to reducing the *ruwat* puppeteers which could eventually lead to the extinction of the *ruwat* puppeteers at the end will affect the tradition of *ruwatan* performances. The researcher as part of the supporting community for *ruwatan* feel encouraged to find solutions on the conditions and there required a variety of sources to find the sources of data about the history or traces / trace of the True Puppeteer, myths, rules and so on which are expected to become a new discourse in the show of this *ruwatan*.

## **METHOD**

This study is a qualitative descriptive research. Focusing on the qualitative descriptive explanation, this study is capable of explaining a complex-meaningful phenomenon that cannot be well-explained by the quantitative model of approach (Sutopo, 2002: 35). The primary data is information from sources of research and direct observation in the field according to the characteristics of the data of *ruwatan*. Secondary Data is the text stories "Serat Murwakala" copied version from RM Citrakusuma published by Tan Kun Swi Kediri in 1926, which tells about the birth origin of Bathara Kala, among those that are *ruwat*, conditions and procedures of the *ruwatan*). Serat Candra Pustaka" in the Javanese language of Kalawarti No 123 and 132 texts by Pujono S and Dra. S.A. Satiti issued by the Javanese Language and Literature Development Project of Central Java in 1989, contains about the understanding of *ruwatan* and classification

of people who should be blessed in *ruwatan* and contains about the history of Heaven and Gods who found a place called Nusa Java follows the journey of gods who created a new place in the land of Java until the story of the birth of Bathara Kala. The writing of R.Tanoyoin 1971, entitled "*History of Prince Pandjangmas Leluhuripun Para Dalang Karaton Mataram-Kartasura-Surakarta*", recounts the journey of the Prince Panjangmas as the puppeteer in the palace at the time of Sultan Agung Mataram until being ordained as Prince Panjangmas (of *ruwat* puppeteer or the true puppeteer) and on the legitimatization of Prince Panjangmas against other *ruwatan* puppeteers.

Data collection techniques in this study follow the interactive and non-interactive techniques (Goetz and Compte, 1984 in Sutopo, 2002: 58). The techniques involved three folds; (a) interviewing; the interviews were conducted to engage with informants / speakers. The purposive questions are in open ended, that the interview method is, therefore, not structured and directed to the depth of information, thus various fundamental and complete information can be well-revealed, i.e., spells used in *ruwatan* can be well-revealed. Observing; the researcher as the human instrument directly involved in study that take place around the environmental field of the puppeteers to understand the procession of *ruwat* performances. The researcher also employed the enclosed observation method, which additionally examined particular cultural behaviour, such as on the problem of meditation, magical techniques and sacred rituals of *kejawen* (Endraswara, 2003: 210). Content Analysis; the researcher conducted a series of work, observed, analyzed various data of *ruwatan* or on the texts of *ruwatan*, and these texts were compared with the real situation in the field so as to know the difference, intent, purpose and meaning of all of them (Yin, 1987 in Sutopo, 2002: 69).

Data analysis techniques employed the interactive analysis which processes in the organization the needed data to find a theme and can formulate the hypotheses. The research directions undergone several stages they are the data reduction, data presentation and verification of data continuously and keep considering the meanings of the formed situations (Sutopo, 2002: 96). All the collected data are the object of this study and they were analyzed with a various theories and approaches that include using the concept of Barthesian myth with the definition of that myth which is the formation of a special system, and build from the semiological chain which has been exist before (1972). Semiotic theory is also employed as a basis to examine this phenomenon and consider what is happening in society is as a sign. (Rusmana, 2014: 31). In viewing the cultural phenomenon such as *ruwatan* activity, the researcher also employed the hermeneutic theory, which is a process of decomposition to get the hidden meaning of certain conditions and according to Ricoeur, "hermeneutic tries to understand the meanings which lay behind the structures" (in Endraswara, 2003: 42).When the data has been completed analyzed the next stage is on the approach discussing issue of power around the puppeteers, especially done

under the paradigms of cultural hegemony and is expected to get the conclusion of reading the position of Dalang Sejati 'the true or *ruwat* puppeteer' within the culture of the Javanese community.

## DISCUSSION

The sanctified (*ruwat*) Dalang or puppeteer also called *Dalang Sejati* 'the true puppeteer'. The *ruwat* puppeteer must be a descendent of seventh generations of the great grandparents and further described on the definition of the true puppeteer is a member of the Javanese community who shared the same puppeteers' lineage; both paternal and maternal side should be from the pure generation of *ruwat* puppeteers (Rusdy, 2012: 42).

The above opinion is also corroborated by the opinion of Ki Manteb Sudarsono who stated that "of course, if you want to be a *ruwat* puppeteer, it must go through the process of learning with a teacher. And of course, in selecting a teacher from the senior *ruwat* puppeteer is not a simple matter, *ora sak karepe dewe*, it must be a descendant *ruwat* puppeteer, either from the grandparents or elders. This is intended to generate genetic purity of *ruwat* puppeteers, like the oath which was taken from them to be ordained as *ruwat* puppeteers. Other requirements of *ruwat* puppeteers are those who must have ever settled marriage for their children or children in-law, must not be a widower, must not have two wives, and must not violate religious taboos. Those are among the mandatory requirements of *ruwat* puppeteers) (<http://www.soloblitz.co.id>).

Statements regarding the requirements to become a true or *ruwat* puppeteer has becomes mainstream trusted by majority of the supporting community. Because they hold a belief on the ability of the *ruwat* or true puppeteer for these puppeteers are the descendant of *ruwat* puppeteers. The descendant puppeteers are believed to be able to help people releasing *sukerta* afflicted by the responders who held the *ruwatan* ritual show. The ritual ceremony of *ruwatan* held by Mr. Sukiman fom Tirtomoyo, Central Java invited Ki Surono, *aruwat* puppeteer descent. In the ceremony Mr. Sukiman expressed some utterances;

*"kula menika ngawontenaken ruwatan amargi ngleluri tembungipun tiyang sepuh utawi leluhur, amargi anak kula klebet golonganipun bocah sukerta inggih menika Bantheng Ngirit Jawi supados saget tebih saking sengkala. Lajeng kula angrawuhaken ki surono menika amargi sampun tradisi saha pitados menawi Ki surono menika saget angruwat anak kula, Ki surono menika dalang ruwat ingkang turunan dalang ruwat ugi"*.

## Translation

"I am holding this *ruwatan* for obeying and preserving the messages from parents and ancestors, because my child who is afflicted by *sukerta* 'impurity' *Bantheng ngirit Jawi* (both male & female) in order to get away from danger. Then I invite Ki Suroño because it has been our tradition and I believe that Ki Suroño could purify '*angruwat*' my child. Ki Suroño is a *ruwat* puppeteer, a descent of a *ruwat* puppeteer" (Sukiman, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

In conducting a *ruwatan* show Ki Suroño started the ceremony by burning the incense and began reciting *pangruwatan* spells. After having finished praying, Ki Suroño began the show with leather puppet performance on the story of Murwakala beginning from Bathara Kala who was told to seeking for his father Bathara Guru and asked him for name of victims which shall be the exact foods. Then. Bathara Guru mentioned some foods that can be consumed by Bathara Kala, among the recommended foods are *bocah ontang-anting*, *kembang sepasang*, *bantheng ngirit Jawi* etc. At the scene of Bathara Kala, it will be purified by a puppeteer Kandha Buana (true puppeteer), Ki Suroño mention that he is entitled to purify '*angruwat*' because he is a descendant from Javanese ancestors who had occupied a professional career as a *ruwat* puppeteer.

*"mulane aku wenang angruwat amarga aku turas ki Panjang mas, banjur maringi palilah ki Kadamsari, ki Kadamsari maringi palilah marang ki Karsono, ki Karsono maringi palilah marang ki Kande, ki Kande maringi palilah marang ki Kasino, ki Kasino maringi palilah marang ki Suroño ya aku sang dalang Sejati"*.

### **Translation**

"Because I'm entitled to purify '*angruwat*' because I am a descendant of Ki Panjang Mas, who gave his blessing to the Ki Kadamsari, ki Kadamsari then gave his blessing to the Ki Karsono, Ki Karsono then gave his blessing to the Ki Kande, Ki Kande then gave his blessing to the Ki Kasino, Ki Kasino ago gave his blessing to the Ki Suroño yes here I am the true puppeteer "".

These expressions as mentioned above have also been performed by Ki Sahir from Giriwoyo, Wonogiri, Central Java and by Ki Hardo Sutino from Eromoko, Wonogiri and thus being performed by some other *ruwat* puppeteers on their each performance. The utterances have indirectly turned the puppeteer into consecrating themselves having the right to *angruwat* 'to take part in the process of purification'. To track down who was puppeteer Panjangmas which constantly used as the top source figure of the *ruwat* puppeteers will be elaborated in the following paragraph.

Puppeteer Panjangmas or Ki Lebda Jiwa is a member of the Javanese royal palace so called Kraton at the time of Sultan Agung Mataram Anyakra kusuma. Panjangmas or Ki Lebda is



the beloved puppeteer to the King. The only reason he became the beloved and pride of the king is due to his excellent service of being able to entertain and able to make happy the king then he was given a full right to organize the play as recorded in the following mandatory:

*"ing samangke kyai Lebdadjiwa kaparingan nama kyai Mulya inggih kyai Mulya Lebdadjiwa, lestantuna dados kekasih-Dalem, sarta kinen amadhanana para abdi dalem dalang karaton, lan para kawula Dalem dalang ing padhusunan sadaya, ingkang sami kabawah ing karaton-Dalem, sarta wiwit ing samangke saking keparenging karsa-Dalem, sakathahing dadalng ing padhusunan, menapa dene tiyang ambarang topeng, taledhek, ringgit beber, sasaming bangsaning bebarangan, sami kakengingaken prabeya nama pajeg Pajuwehan, ing saben satengah tahun kedah asok upekti dhateng kyai Mulya Lebdadjiwa, kathahipun satanggapan, inggih punika, sapintenipun angsal-angsalipun pituwasing ambarang sdinten sadalu, kyai Mulya Lebdadjiwa ingkang winenangaken amupu pajeg Padjuwehan wau, dadosa kamukten lan kawibawanipun. Kejawi gegaduhan siti lenggahipun tanah Pajang, selawe jung utawi satus karya, dhusunipun Karajan ing Gledheg, ingkang sampun kaparingaken wiwit kakarsakaen dados abdi-Dalem dhalang Daleman ing karaton, kala jamanipun Kanjeng Panembahan Adi Anjakrawati rumuhun, kalulusake dadosa gegaduhanipun. Kajawi punika, wiyosing dhawuh pangandika-Dalem, para abdi-Dalem dhalang sadaya mboten kalilan Angruwat Amurwakala, kajawi Kyai Mulya Lebdadjiwa, punika dipun absahaken angruwat. Sanadyan para dhalang ing padhusunan, manawi angruwat kedah nedha idhi dhateng Kyai Mulya Lebdadjiwa, utawi dhateng saturun-turunipun ing tembe wingking, ingkang sami anggentosi kalenggahanipun. ....(R Tanaja, 1971: 44-45)*

## **Translation**

“Now Kyai Lebdajiwa was given a name Kyai Mulya or Kyai Mulya Lebdajiwa, be eternal to be the beloved person of the king, as well as be given the right equal position to the other Abdi Punggawa, and by the king from now on, all the puppeteers across villages or the person who sings with a mask, *tayub*, *wayang beber*, essentially intangible singers, all taxable money is called Pajak Padjuwehan, the individuals of each once every year must pay the taxes.” To Kyai Lebdajiwa, the amount of money for once singing performance, for whatsoever the earnings in each day and night, and Kyai Lebdajiwa is authorized to take the taxes, for the reasons of prosperity and nobility. And also belongs to the ground in Pajang twenty jung or hundred works in the village Krajan, Gledheg region, which was given up when Kyai Lebdajiwa was given an authority to serve the king since the rulling period of Kanjeng Panembahan Adi Anjakrawati in the past, his belonging too. In addition to that,”all the servants of the King of among the Puppeteers are not given any access to conduct ngruwat Murwakala (purification) except Kyai

Mulya Lebdajiwa and is ratified *angruwat*. Although the puppeteers who intend to perform *ruwatan* are incumbent to ask permission from Kyai Mulya Lebdajiwa or the descendents who in the future will take his position”.

The belief embraced by the supporting community of *ruwatan* toward the ability of the true puppeteers has been a strong and established belief in the hearts of the community. Thus, in case any member of community wishes to hold a puppet leather show, he/she would invite a *ruwat* puppeteer as so called the true puppeteer.

The existing phenomena occur in the world of wayang kulit, despite of having services in demand or good sell of the shows, but each of them still do not dare to accept any request to play as a *ruwat* puppeteer because they are aware for their genetic position as beyond the lineage of the true puppeteers. This situation indirectly marginalizes other puppeteers who are not genetically belonged to the '*ruwatan* puppeteers' lineage as so called *pangsa pasar*. In this sense, there seem to be the only true puppeteers and the family deserve the right to hold any *ruwatan* ceremony with the puppet show.

In accordance with the phenomenon, Camus (2013: 44) argues that scholars should take their side in supporting those who are under the marginalization by doing research and discovery based on the existing problems. In case there is no one who would fight against this marginalization, then the extinction of *ruwat* puppeteer becomes inevitable for the next generation. To achieve the ideals of the hegemonic existence of the *ruwat* puppeteers usually use the primordially emotional movement, which is through the framework of a magical-religious or mythical thinking (Purwasito, 2002: 129). Andrik further emphasizes that the resistance of the symbolic thinking realm clearly define the foreign powers as a threat to the local stability. However, in this case, "foreign powers" should be understood as other forces beyond humans.

### **Representation and Myth**

Representation is interpreted as a picture of something or reality to be interpreted to be interpreted as the desire of the producer of meaning. Representation is manifested in the form of a political picture present to represent a certain meaning. A meaning is constructed by a representational system (Hall, 1997: 27). The meaning in practice is constructed through codes. It is this Code that builds the correlation between the concept / system in our minds with the language in a way that when thinking of a concept, the recognition of a *dhalang ruwat* as a real *dhalang* politically positioned the *dhalang ruwat* group of descendants as the sole holders of the *ruwatan* ceremonial control in the land of Java . Theoretically, the *dhalang sejati* representation will be interpreted as a sign that produces constructed meaning in the mind of the *ruwatan* culture as a consequence of its marking practice (Hall,1997, p.24).



The discussion of representation in the phenomenon of cultural dominance dhalang *ruwat* is not left behind by the understanding of the sign as formulated by Roland Barthes. Barthes (in *Mythologies* 1957) mentions the material culture created by the group. It is this cultural material which we then know as myths. Myth as a communication system that carries messages, myth is not an object, a concept or an idea, but an embodiment of meaning production (Gillian, Rose cited in Rusnalasari, 2012: 35). In essence, the myth is not only a verbal message (oral or written words), but also in other forms or a mixture of verbal and nonverbal forms. For example, all myths are imposed during the *ruwatan* procession and certain conditions attributing dhalang genealogically the descendants of dhalang *ruwat* to spiritually provide guidance to *sukerta* through wayang kulit performance of Murwakala's play.

According to Barthes, meaning is an ideology which becomes the dominance of meaning. The myth acts to be a media in transmitting meaning, thus in this case, the myth is ideological. The role of myth is classified based on verbal and nonverbal acts is quite significantly affirms the dominance of the dhalang *ruwat* in *ruwatan* ceremony performing Murwakala's play. Verbal: everything that the *dhalang* uttered during the *ruwatan* show. In particular when the *ruwatan* performance is about to begin, the dhalang instruct pregnant audiences (if any), to temporarily move away from the place of activity until the completion of the wayang performance in *ruwatan*. Such a thing is done so that those who are pregnant do not experience a miscarriage over the influence of the mantras that the dhalang read out. The non-verbal aspect: the discourse indicates the community at a time the dhalang Kandha Bhuwana begins to recite the *ruwatan* mantras/spells by asking for the sound system to be shrunk / shut down. The idea which arises from such interaction is as if the spells are considerably secret and only the dhalang *sejati* (the true dhalang) of the *ruwatan* only has the mantra.

Southeast Asian societies as small can be exemplified through the identity of the Javanese community in practice inherent in the magical belief (myth) (Malinowski, 1945: 82). The myth is the element of controlling the minds of the Javanese people who support the *ruwatan* ceremony so that everyone will be involved in imposing social punishment on every consensus violator. One of the most prominent myths in the text is the myth of the catastrophic fall of the people who held the *ruwatan* ceremony with the medium of wayang kulit led by the dhalang outside the dalang derivative (real puppeteer). The myth was raised as an attempt to purify the descendants of the elite class of dhalang descended from Ki Panjang Mas which ultimately led to the process of violation of their power against the other actors of wayang kulit play culture outside the lineage (ordinary puppeteer).

The phenomenon of cultural dominance that occurs in the layers of dhalang *ruwat* society is inseparable from the Javanese mindset, which in their daily life still depends on various mythical

beliefs (Peurson, 1976: 18). This makes the position of the Ruwatan tradition and the perpetrators are always associated with a sacred aura. The Javanese belief system in practice juxtaposes ritual activities with aspects of symbolism. Of course, about the ruwatan tradition, the sanctity of a dhalang and the consensus of ratifying the *ruwatan* activity rely on a condition of the puppeteer or dhalang, undertaken without having to present a real descendant dhalang of Ki Lebda Jiwa or Ki Panjangmas. The social implications of the legitimacy of Ki Lebda Jiwa consequently results a great force for the dhalang community of beyond the genealogy of the true dhalang *ruwat*.

## CONCLUSION

There are many characteristics of people who should be taken into purification *angruwat* and finding those who hold the traditions are quite easy, even the *ruwatan* tradition itself has ever been a life style in the Javanese community. It can be summed up that the *ruwatan* tradition is a form of mass culture that had been wrapped by cultural myths. *Ruwatan* tradition as many found today was a new product of Sultan Agung of the Mataram dynasty, (Pigeaud in de Graaf, 1986: 24). The monopoly business impacted from the ritual services, particularly *ruwatan* ceremony has been started since 17<sup>th</sup> century which along with the exercised hegemonic power of the Mataram Kingdom in Kerta. Thus the success of such a designed monopoly practices is a working network between power and knowledge (Foucault and Grace, 1993: 57).

In 1998, when the Indonesian people afflicted by financial crisis that have a great impact on the decline of the *ruwatan* show performances, the embracement of new ideology and belief has either been an inevitable factor. The above phenomena are among the extrinsic factors afflicted by different types of art performance, especially in the case holding the *ruwatan* performance. Departing from the decline of the *ruwat* puppeteers because of the restricted requirements for the requisite of being the *ruwat* puppeteers and the remaining problems of the *ruwat* puppeteers who are not blessed with children or offspring. This is apparently the most inspiring aspects of the study triggered the researcher to seek for the discursive solutions to such phenomenon.

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