

# THE ELABORATION OF *GORO-GORO* IN WAYANG PLAY OF *TEATER KOMA* (A Case Study of Riantiarno Plays' *Semar Gugat* and *Republik Bagong*)

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The research is financed by the Directorate of Research and Public Service of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Republic of Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

*Teater Koma* which was established by Riantiarno in 1977 has been successful in creating specific works characterized by local colors potentials. Riantiarno's strongest choice is *wayang* as the expression media containing multi dimensions and multi functions. The works ideology of *Teater Koma* is that theatre is the explanation of thought, criticism, and self-criticism. The elaboration of Riantiarno's concept is through continuous engagement in theatre which moves as the times flow.

*Wayang* is an entertainment as well as a guidance teaching values of good and bad as well as right and wrong. *Wayang* is a mirror through the events in the plays derived from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The honesty values in *wayang* can be seen in *goro-goro* scene positioning *Panakawan* as the fighter of "honesty voice" in the society.

*Goro-goro* is the events functioned as efficacious pneumonic devices. *Panakawan* are elaborated into inspiring significant characters or even as protagonists in Riantiarno plays. In this case, *Panakawan* are positioned as tragic characters undergoing tragic rhythm. This is become the source of dramatic and aesthetic exploration to answer the present problems in the society.

**Keywords:** *Panakawan, goro-goro, elaboration, dramatic and aesthetic exploration, Teater Koma*

## I Riantiarno's *Teater Koma*

*Teater Koma* which was established by Riantiarno in 1977 has got a very long story related to its theatre activities. Those activities result in specific accomplishment. The specific here means related to a background of various potencies of local colors. One of the local colors chosen is *wayang* (puppet show). *Wayang* is chosen since its certain position, role, and function as the media expression having multi dimensions and multi functions.

The works ideology of *Teater Koma* is that theatre is the explanation of thought, criticism, and self-criticism. The disclosure of thought maintained is the concept of continuous engagement in theatre which moves as the times flow.

*Teater Koma* also perceives theatre as one of the roads to happiness for the human inward feelings so that it should be beneficial and friendly to the society. *Wayang* in the context of past till present time is still a guidance as well as an entertainment. The guidance since the teachings developed in *wayang* are good and bad values as well as right and wrong values.

*Teater Koma* instills theatre as a place to reflect oneself always learning that the society is "a clear mirror", meaning that there is honesty in the society toward the situation and condition of their country. Likewise, *wayang* is also a spot to look at one self in a mirror, especially from the events based on *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The scene of honesty in *wayang* is *goro-goro* positioning *Panakawan* as the fighter of "honesty voice" reflecting the society.

*Teater Koma* also instills that the real life is an endless theatre source for the artists who can catch the phenomena surrounding them. The phenomena in the society are indeed the endless source for the theatre.

## II *Goro-goro* as the Source of Inspiration

*Goro-goro* or *gara-gara* is an event that functions as pneumatic devices which is very remarkable in *wayang*. *Goro-goro* always presents the characters of *Panakawan*. *Panakawan* is “companions who are witnessing” various events causing conflicts between *Pandawa* and *Kurawa* in *Mahabharata*, or between *Rama* and *Rahwana* in *Ramayana*. The scene *goro-goro* usually depicts natural disaster caused by a knight doing *mesabrata* (meditating) or the manners of gods or humans violating the rules (Kustantina, 2010: 422).

*Panakawan* as “the companions witnessing” become a kind of “representation of honest voice in the society”, where the witness is considered legal. The witnesses are those whose positions are close to and knowing something that should be seen. The world of *wayang* has given birth to these witnesses, they are *Semar*, *Petruk*, *Gareng*, and *Bagong*. *Teater Koma* functions these “companions witnessing” as significant characters, in fact as protagonist character. They are usually positioned as the character of tragedy undergoing tragic rhythm.

Riantiarno as the playwright as well as the director conducts the process of elaborating *goro-goro* becomes a dramatic and theatrical play. Dramatic here means the playwright manages a creative interpretation to position *Panakawan* as protagonist characters suffering tragic rhythm, as in the Greek drama: poema-mathema-pathema. *Panakawan* should pass through a difficult time being sacrificed as if for the sake of the kingdom’s welfare in fact for the individual sake, for the lust to power. Then, the *panakawan* undergo the phase of “rescuing self” or “changing self” in their sufferings, after that they think about their life. Finally, they receive “momentary mercy” before reawakening to “return” to their position as *Panakawan* or “the companions witnessing”, as their destiny.

However, Riantiarno develops the position and puts *Panakawan* as more humane character. *Panakawan* are people passing through ups and downs as the masses, who are always sacrificed by the authority but they do not remain still or suffer the whole time. The united masses can be great and terrifying power for the authority. This is just like thousands of small fish which can sink a boat or even a ship. Riantiarno urges that *Panakawan* are put into tragic rhythm since they are indeed always made tragic by the misconduct authority.

Meanwhile theatrical here means Riantiarno chooses to present the play with local idioms gathered with visual power of folk theatre in Indonesia, such as, *wayang kulit* (leather puppet), *wayang golek* (wooden puppet), *wayang wong* (show with actors speaking the lines themselves and a *dalang* is also used), *ketoprak* (a type of modern popular play depicting stories mainly drawn from Javanese history plays, with improvised spoken dialogue in modern realistic acting and a clown who comments on current public topics), *sandiwara masres* (a folk play from Cirebon, west Java), *lenong* (open-air folk play of Betawi people), etc.

The examples of the explanation above are elaborated in the two of Riantiarno plays below.

### *Semar Gugat*

*Semar* is actually a god in the human body, in a vague shaped, neither male nor female, midget, black, fat, neither old nor young. There is a forelock on his head like a kid, and he also often cries. He cries either when he is happy or sad. He cannot acknowledge happiness or sorrow (Siswoharsoyo in Susantina, 2010: 420). *Semar* is assigned to take care of the knights who are in their tough asceticism. *Semar* takes care only knights with good and strong asceticism. *Semar* is known in some identities and some names:

In *Kayangan* (heaven), *Semar* is called: *Batara Ismaya/ Batara Tejamaya/ Batara Jagadwungku/ Sanghyang Jatiwasesa/ Sanghyang Suryakanta*. In asceticism, *Semar* is called: *Kaki Janggan Smarasanta/Kaki Badranya/kaki Nayantaka*. In palace or *Kasatrian*, *Semar* is called: *Kyai Lurah Semar/Kyai Lurah Badranaya/Kyai Duda Manangmunung* (Kustantina, 2010: 421).

The figure of *Semar* enables Riantiarno to build *Semar* into a dramatic character undergoing tragic rhythm, instead of making him only as “a companion witnessing”. There have been plays showing the existence of *Semar* such as *Semar Mbabar Jati diri*, and *Semar Barang Jantur*<sup>1</sup>, but these two plays are made as counter culture by

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<sup>1</sup> *Semar Mbabar Jati* and *Semar Barang Jantur* are *pakem* plays (original and principal) which are very popular in Javanese leather puppet. These two plays position *Semar* as a prominent character of *Panakawan*. For Javanese, the character of *Semar* is sacred, considered as a god having a noble character, with divine

Riantiarno through his play, *Semar Gugat*. As his counter culture, *Semar Gugat* is a different play from the previous two plays.

Semar is positioned as the victim of the authority ambition, in this case Arjuna (the second Pandawa). Arjuna who proposes Srikandi cannot refuse his new wife to be asking him to cut Semar's forelock as the wedding gift. Arjuna does it for his own need, not for the sake of ethics and moral. In fact, cutting "the forelock" is actually a really symbolic action. The strands on Semar's forelock in *Sufi's* viewpoint is understood as *asmaul husna* (99 names of God). Thus, when it is cut it will cause a disaster. Meaning that there is no belief in God anymore. Arjuna forgets his dignity as the knight responsible for maintaining the noble values and high respect to the elder. Arjuna only satisfies his worldly desire, while Srikandi's demand is because she is "possessed" by the spirit of Durga (who is demonic and satanic) symbolized as the character of evil. However, Arjuna has promised to fulfil Srikandi's request. Semar is a loyal servant, he is a *panakawan*, a companion witnessing. Semar holds back his feeling ashamed when his grandeur forelock is cut before the crowd. He surrenders but he protests against God in *Kayangan*.

He challenges *Kayangan* and wants the god, in this case *Batara Guru* (which is actually his own brother), to return his real existence as a handsome knight<sup>2</sup>. However, in Riantiarno's *Semar Gugat*, Semar does not ask for his handsome shape but only his supernatural power. *Batara Guru* accepts Semar's demand. Semar becomes the ruler in *Simpang Bawana Nuranitis Asri* kingdom and is given a noble title Prabu Sanggadonya Lukanurani.

Meanwhile Semar's wife, Sutiragen, does not believe his husband becomes a king. For her, Semar is still a *panakawan* not a king. Semar gets distressed, he is wondering what his fault is. Riantiarno intentionally puts this position for Semar so that Semar undergoes "the tragic rhythm" to complete him as a tragic character.

More tragically, when Semar as Prabu Sanggadonya challenges Arjuna and Srikandi for "power contest". Semar loses since Arjuna and Srikandi are helped by Durga Betari Permoni. Indeed Semar had invulnerable power with his fart, but Prabu Sanggadonya's fart is not powerful anymore. Finally, Semar demands to return to be *panakawan* again, as it is the real him. However, he is still in his tragic confusion although as *panakawan*.

Tragic Semar is Riantiarno's attitude toward this prominent *Panakawan* character since so far the people have been made tragic and suffered by the authority. Riantiarno does not maintain Semar in his myth but "humanize" Semar as a tragic man, as a suffered position because of the ruler. The authority like Arjuna may forget his responsibility as a knight because of the world temptation through Srikandi, his wife to be, who has been "possessed" by Durga

The tragic rhythm which becomes the pattern in the Greek characters is grounded by Riantiarno through *panakawan* characters. This is because *panakawan* as "the companions witnessing" are frequently made into "victims" by the knights or the rulers. This represents the real people in the real life.

*Goro-goro* is made as inspiration since this is really inspiring for *Teater Koma* as their expression media. *Goro-goro* opens the freedom to "wildly" explore characters and events in a scenography scope and local colors of aesthetic values. The "wild" concept is presented into theatre performance containing guidance and entertainment, as in the *goro-goro wayang*. The Semar family is explored into creative exploration.

### ***Republik Bagong***

*Bagong* derives from Semar's shadow (*Batara Ismaya*). Bagong means *Gombak* (forelock). In the past time in Java, most kids have forelock style of hair to make them stay young as kids (Sayid in Susantina, 2010: 33).

As his father Semar, Bagong also gets creative exploration from Riantiarno as the main character passing through tragic rhythm. Initially in the play, Bagong is a man who must be sacrificed for Amarta's prosperity. Yudhistira obeys Kalapati, his noble counselor. The character of Kalapati has no clear background. As a counselor, he does not give good advice but the bad one. He suggests to sacrifice Bagong as "the companion witnessing". Here, Kalapati is presented to position Bagong as the character undergoing tragic rhythm.

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characteristic. Semar can be anything because of his 'supernatural powers', for example as a magician in *Semar Barang Jantur*.

<sup>2</sup> *Pakem* play in Javanese leather puppet is *Semar m'nta Bagus*. In this play, Semar returns as a real soul, a powerful and handsome God.

Bagong is ordered by Semar to go away as far as possible in order not to be caught by Arjuna and Gatotkaca who are chasing after him. Bagong then leaves with his, *Ni Pesek*, but they are blocked by their hunters. However, Bagong and his wife can run away but enter a deep and dark ravine. In this context, Bagong is in his new suffering. He is in his “tragic rhythm”. He is in his tragic condition but no one helps.

In his escape, Bagong is always visited by mysterious and unknown characters “five Bagong”. Finally, they are acknowledged when one of the five Bagong becomes *Batara Kresna* who is “missing” after giving *Jimat Kalimusada* (*Kalimusada* amulet)<sup>3</sup>.

Bagong who is then given responsibility to hold *Jimat Kalimusada* becomes a leader of Amarta. He bravely defeat the rebels led by Kurawa who are helped by Durga (an evil character). *Jimat Kalimusada* helps Bagong to expel all the rebels and the noble Kalapati who is mysteriously missing.

However, Bagong then realizes his position as *panakawan*, as “the companion witnessing”. Meaning that he is not born as the ruler but the servant loyally accompanying and helping the knights in happiness and sorrow. Yet, in the end of the play Bagong gets more suffered because whoever holds *Jimat Kalimusada* will have a very big responsibility. Bagong then returns *Jimat Kalimusada* to the owner, Yudhistira (the eldest of Pandawa), who previously forget his duties because of Kalapati’s advices for the power.

Bagong should gather with his family, the *Panakawans*: Semar, Petruk, Gareng as “the companions witnessing”, not as the ruler. If he becomes the authority, he will forget his duty as *panakawan*. This *republik Bagong* is the play made by Riantiarno to criticize the authority who forget their duties. They just take short cuts sacrificing their people in order to get their mere needs as the rulers.

In the epilogue of *Republik Bagong*, Riantiarno shows his distinctive interpretation toward the play. He stresses his message that the masses will always be suffered and made vague by the authority.

### **Goro-Goro Turns into Aesthetic Exploration and Economic Exploitation**

Riantiarno intentionally explores the two plays inspired by the events of *Goro-Goro* in the aesthetic context positioning the two *Panakawan*, Semar and Bagong. He really realizes that *wayang* (in any kinds) has great opportunity to be explored especially aesthetic exploration.

The local colors presented can be seen in any “visual charm” such as costume, make up, stage scenography, and dialogue between characters taking concept of *guyon parikeno* meaning that they criticize while entertaining. This concept makes the criticism sound finer. Actually, this concept is very traditional but Riantiarno develops it into more lively dialogue. The example of the dialogues of the plays can be read in the following, Semar Gugat (1995) dan Republik Bagong (2001).

Gareng:

*Banyak satria yang tetap hidup mesti tanpa kepala. Mereka dianugerahi dewa kekuasaan untuuk memerintah dunia. Akibatnya, mereka semena-mena. Ada malah di antara mereka yang di samping tidak punya kepala, juga jantungnya tidak ada. Lebih celaka lagi, para Panakawan mereka masih lengkap wujud mamusia : dengan jantung dan kepala. Itu kenyataannya...*

[There are several knights can still live although without head. God bestows them with power to rule the world. Therefore, they treat people unjustly. Even some of them have neither head nor heart. However, unfortunately the *Panakawan* are still in their complete human body: with head and heart. That’s the reality...]

Semar:  
(Menangis)

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<sup>3</sup> *Jimat Kalimusada* is creative interpretation of *walisanga* to “the unity of God” the Islam concept to *wayang*. *Kalimusada* is an abbreviation of *kalimat syahadat* (muslim confession of faith). Whoever owns *Jimat Kalimusada* will always remember their creator (God). Therefore, whoever they are, they will be honest men and will be able to become leader.

*Apa mereka ingin supaya aku jadi sama tidak lengkap ? Lalu aku ini siapa kalau aku hidup di dunia dengan  
tanpa kuncung tanpa kepala ? Aku masih manusia*

(Crying)

[They want me not to be complete like them? So, who am I living in the world without my forelock, without my  
head? I am still human]

(*Semar Gugat*, page: 35-36).

Gareng (Menyanyi, lalu diikuti Petruk dan Bagong).

*Rencana Bencana:*

*Panakawan merancang rencana  
Para satria mengirim bencana  
Isi kepala terbang kemana-mana  
Badan macet tidak kemana-mana*

Gareng (singing, then followed by Petruk and Bagong).

[The plan of disaster:

*The Panakawan design the plan  
The knights send the disaster  
The content of the head flies here and there  
The body stays still, go nowhere]*

*Panakawan merancang rencana  
Para satria memecat sesukanya  
Tawa gumbira tak sehat katanya  
Otak maalah ruwet banyak tainya*

[The *Panakawan* design the plan  
The knights discharge arbitrarily

They say happiness smiles are not healthy  
The brain will be complicated with dirt]

*Oo rencana ini, rencana itu  
Tak guna jika tak punya kuasa  
Oo bencana ini, bencana itu  
Sering terjadi tanpa rencana*

[Oo this plan, that plan

Useless without power  
Oo this disaster, that disaster  
Often happens without plan]

(*Republik Bagong*, page: 9)

Beside the aesthetic exploration in the dialogue, Riantiarno also explore the aesthetics in the make-up and costume. Make-up in the folk Javanese theatre, especially in *wayang wong*, becomes the starting point of *Teater Koma* in developing performance make-up based from *wayang*. Likewise, the costume worn by the actors, especially the *Panakawan* are developed from such folk theatres. The following is one of the pictures of *Semar Gugat* performance.

*Semar Gugat Performance. Courtesy: Viriyaparamita. Teater Katak.org*



It is a charming performance with extreme local colors, in which the colors are mixed glamorously. The tradition of simple *Wayang Wong* is explored by *Teater Koma* into a new aesthetic concept, which can be called the aesthetic of *Teater Koma*.

Beside aesthetic exploration, *Teater Koma* is also successful in doing the economic exploitation. *Teater Koma* performances based from *wayang* are always successful in drawing large number of audience during a month.

To find out why there are so many audience for those *Teater Koma* performances, the observation and interview to random audience are conducted. Among the questions are why they are willing to pay much for the performance. The answers show that they believe *Teater Koma* performances are always entertaining and also guiding from the contextual criticism. They feel that they are represented by the *guyonan parikeno* presented by *Teater Koma*. Riantiarno is able to make the audience enjoying the elaboration of the *goro-goro*.

### III

#### Conclusion

*Goro-goro* is the source inspiration of Riantiarno in creating plays of *wayang carangan* (plays that depart from the events depicted in epics or in mythology). It has shown that the *Panakawan* characters as “the companions witnessing” can be interpreted and resulted in the performance entertaining and guiding.

Riantiarno plays’ *Semar Gugat* and *Republik Bagong* are the results of Riantiarno’s exploration from *goro-goro* which is based from *wayang*. *Wayang* as the world heritage has been born and developed in any parts of the world in any forms of the artists’ media expressions. One of them is by Riantiarno in the form of theatre performance with his *Teater Koma* group established in 1977.

Through this article, the writers would like to thank Riantiarno and all *Teater Koma* personnel in Jakarta, Indonesia who have willingly spared their time to share about their art activities. Our gratitude also for Research and Public Service Unit of *Institute Seni Budaya Indonesia* (Indonesian Art and Culture Institute) Bandung which has recommended for this study, and also for Directorate of Research and Public Service of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Republic of Indonesia which has supplied the grant to conduct this research.

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#### Figure

Viriyaparamita. Teater Katak.org.

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