Ronggeng: Cultural Artifacts and Its Representation in Indonesian’s Fiction

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Abstract

This paper is based on the phenomenon of dancer or tayub which is celebrated as a very popular cultural artifact in public life, particularly in Java. This tradition is originally part of a sacred ritual, which ultimately became a performing art, but tends to be viewed negatively. In a historical context, the dancer was originally seen based on cultural concept and evolves into culturally sacred profane.

Negative reception of ronggeng is not only uttered orally but also embodied in the written tradition. It is found in the genre of literary fiction such as in Tayuban’s Notosusanto Nugroho (1959), Sri Sumarah and Bawuk by Umar Kayam (1975), Trilogy Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk written Ahmad Tohari (1982), and Ronggeng works Dewi Lingga Sari (2007). The results of this study illustrate that the figure of dancer who is represented in Indonesian fiction are various. Although there are similarities, but the authors tend to have different reception levels regarding ronggeng. Ronggeng as cultural artifacts is the manifestation of the ability of local communities to respond and adapt to the environment actively. Similarly, what is represented in fiction about ronggeng is a mirror of the society where the work was born.

Keywords: prose fiction, reception, representation, ronggeng, tayub

Introduction

Ronggeng or Tayub is one of most popular folk dancing and cultural artifact which has undergone many development in Indonesian history. This art is also known as ronggeng, grandrung, lengger taledhek and many others. Ronggeng Malay or Malay Ronggeng is developed in Sumatra, Ronggeng Betawi in Jakarta, Bangkung in Subang, Sumedang, and Jawa Barat. Gandrung is famous in Banyuwangi, Bali and Lombok, while Lengger in Purwokerto, Wonosobo, and Magelang. The word Taledhek, Ledhek, Joged, Ronggeng or Tayub are known East and central Java, meanwhile Jawa Barat is most familiar with Sinden or Ronggeng. According to Raffles (1965: 381) Tayub or Ronggeng were almost found in the entire Java during 19 century.

Ronggeng or Tayub performance is an old tradition in Javanese culture. The term Ronggeng or Tayub was mentioned in Old Javanese-English Dictionary written by P.J. Zoetmulder and S. O. Robson. Excerpt from Kakawin Ghatotkacasraya as below “… tan hunine watok bini hajin panayub anapuk arja sasmita; Excerpt from Kidung Wandbang Wideya “aluwaran sri bupati, kuneng rahaden S. Malih anayub”; Excerpt from Kakawin Arjuna Pralada: “… sang angigel awusan mantuk ndan sang aulun malih anayub prasama linggih mangko” (see Zoetmoler and S. O Robson. R.M. Soedarsono, 1999, Narawati 2003). Those excerpts mentioned the word anayub or nayub which is close to the term Tayub. This means that the term Tayub was known during the twelfth century as shown in Kakawin Gathotkacasraya and Kakawin Bharat Yudha.
The above explanation shows that Ronggeng or Tayub, as a tradition, has evolved because of adaptation. Based on Dennis Lombard’s term, Ronggeng has experienced a silang budaya or cross culture both with the space and with actor of culture. Based on literary studies especially folklore studies, Ronggeng and Tayub can be classified as oral folklore, partly oral folklore, and non oral folklore (Brunvand, 1968). This writing, however, will not focus on folklore; yet it will focus on the tradition of Ronggeng and Tayub evolved in Javanese traditions and represented in modern literature especially Indonesian fiction.

The Meaning of Ronggeng

Ronggeng performance or tayub is a living tradition among Javanese, and it was considered as folk dancing grown and developed in villages. Tayub means dancing which has the same meaning as ronggeng. According to Ensiklopedia Tari Indonesia Seri P-T the name tayub was attributed to part of the dancing when performed with a partner. This implies that tayub means dance or dancing (1986:87).

According to folklore tradition, the word tayub is derived from keratabasa or jarawodosok from word cikben guyub. Cikben guyub mean a well-managed dance in order that the people live in harmony. Etymological meaning of tayub opposes to its literal meaning. In Boesastra Djawa, the word tayub is translated “kesukaan jegojedan ngango dijogedi ing tledek (Poerwodarminto 1939:586). It means dancing happily with taledhek dancer.

From its literal and folklore meanings, it can be concluded that the word tayub implicitly means dance. Yet, how does classical Javanese (Jawa Kuna) define tayub? The word tayub is found in Kakawin Bharatayudha written by Mpu Sedah and Mpu Panuluh during the era of King Jayabaya in Kediri. This kakawin has Candra Sangkala pronounced angakudasuddhacandra which means 1079 Syaka or around 1175 AD. Kakawin which contains tayub is found in pupuh ke XIII, stansa 18th, line 2nd as shown below:

| tekwan pwa ng wulan ashhttami hireng         |
| akon adamara ri                             |
| parraryya ring kuvu                         |
| ramya ng wirra sapanuddawanayub             |
| aghoshti pinigajihana ng                   |
| aremes musuh                                |
| tan mangka bala korawalah apurik mulat i   |
| sira Suyo                                  |
| dhalanara                                  |
| tapwan mren sakulem tekeng rahina          |
| mangkat aruruh umareng                    |
| rannanggana                                |

This section was translated by Wirjosuparto into Indonesian

for the time is 8th part of evening, kings in a camp asked to shed lights the Pandawa in the camp were happy they were dancing and talking joyfully, and those who had destroyed his enemy were rewarded The situation in Kurawa, however, was reversed It was gloomy when seeing miserable Suryodhana They could not sleep during the night, even though they had to wake in dawn and went back to the battle to defense their life from their enemy (my translation)

From the translation it was clear that the word sapanddawanayub is translated by the Pandawa as dancing. This mean the word tayub means dance or dancing. In Kamus Kawin-Kuna arranged by Winter and Ronggowarsita (1987:168) the word nayub translated as nayub, ngombe, sukan-sukan. Peorbatjaraka (1954) said that nayub is not derived from tayub but sayub which means alcoholic beverages. Therefore it implies that tayub has two meanings of tayub, (1) dancing and (2) dancing while drinking alcoholic beverages.
Ben Soeharto (1980:38) in his study on *tayub* conducted in Gunung Kidul shows that *tayub* is closely related to the involvement of drinking alcohol which is considered as an important part of the dance during celebrating an event. He does not distinguish between *tayub* and *nayub*. Because of this overlapping term, alcohol and prostitution occupy *tayub*. The writer of *Serat Centhini* uses another term when describing *tayub* namely *gembyong* or *ronggeng*. According to R.R. Kusumadewa and Soeharto (1980: 10) at first roggeng or *tayub* was an art found in palace only and this dance is very different from *ronggeng* known today.

**Ronggeng Tradition and its Development**

*Ronggeng* or *tayub* is performed by a female dancer who is dancing and singing at the same time. The dancer wears a dance outfit similar to the gambyong dancer’s costume. She wears batik, shawl, tank top, without kebaya, a traditional cloth. On her shoulder is hanging a piece of *sampur*. *Sampur* is a shawl that she will give to her male dancing partner. This kind of performance has been famous since ancient Java era in which *tayub* was known as *angigel angidung* as mentioned in some ancient Javanese prose such as Wirata Parwa and Negara Kertagama written during 14th century (Zoetmudler and Robson, 1982: 669). Haryono (2004: 7) states that *tayub* had been mentioned since 9th century in the inscription Taji dated 828 Saka. During the time was mentioned the existence of a dance (*mangigel*) which was performed by all audience including royal officials. The show of *ronggeng* or *tayub* continued to be performed during the era of Kediri and spread to Demak in 15th century, along with the influence of Islam began to grow (Widyastutiningrum, 2007: 2).


Generally those writings describe *ronggeng* as female dancer *klengenan* surrounded, worshiped and flattered by men, or she can be his partner both as a dancing and a sexual partner. Reffless in his book shows that *ronggeng* has no difference from prostitute who is working for money and sometimes destroy other people’s family.

*Ronggeng* does not dance only, as mentioned by Thomas Stanford, a lieutenant Governor during British occupation in Java in 1811-1816 in his famous book the *History of Java* as below. *The commons dancing girls of the country … are called ronggeng, are generally of easy virtue. They make professions of their art, and hire themselves to perform on particular occasions, for the amusement of the chief and the public. Though to be found in every principal town, their performance is most highly esteemed in the western, and particularly among the mountaineers of the Sunda districts, where the superior graces of the bedaya are unknown … Their conduct is generally so incorrect, as to render the title of ronggeng and prostitute synonymous …* (1965:381).

Claire Holt in his book *Art in Indonesia*, translated into Indonesia entitled *Melacak jejak perkembangan seni di Indonesia* (2000) shows that male dancer’s energetic attitude who is described dancing in the relief map implies an impressive style of dance performed by male dancer from a Javanese dancing party (*tayuban*).

In a book *Toekang Poetret: 100 Joar Fotografi in Nederland Indie 1839-1939* written by Liane Van Der Linden at al in *caturwati* (2008:166) shows many erotic pictures of *ronggeng* dancers and pros-
tute from Java and Sunda who do not wear any outfit but shawl to cover small part of their body.

Other resources stated that ronggeng or tayub is Serat Centini that was written during the oulterity of Pakubuwana IV (1788-1820) and paku Buwana V (1820-1823), Serat Centini narrates its characters who lived from the era of Demak to the era of Mataram Islam. In Serat Centini is illustrated the journey of santri Seh Amongraga, Suluk, Tambanglaras, Jayengresmi, and emban Centini. It is also included the tayub party held by Ki Lembuasta, Pulung dan Wirasaba. Tayub which is called ringgit was held as an entertainment. Moreover, the behaviour of ronggeng and tayub dancer is also clearly described in Serat Centini volume VIII in episode Girisa pupuh 456, stanza 5, 8, and 9.

The performance of tayub and ronggeng which is appealing to men (penayub) is also mentioned in Babad Mangar Volume 1. During the era of Panembahan Senapati in Mataram Islam (16th Century), it was mentioned that tayub held by Sekar Pembayun, the daughter of the first King of Mataram Islam. Sekar Pembayun was disguised as a ledhek dancer or tayub singing around the kingdom (mbarang tayub) as one strategy to attract Ki Ageng Wanabaya, a leader who was known as Ki Mangir (Panembahan Senapati’s opponent). Sekar Pembayun seduced and allured Ki Ageng Mangir through performing tayub or being a ronggeng. Thus Ki Ageng Pembayun attracted to her and married her. After became his wife, Sekar Pembayun revealed her identity as the daughter of Panembahan Senapati. She persuaded Ki Ageng Mangir to meet her father, and Ki Ageng Mangir agreed to come and bowed to him. Yet, when he bowed to him, Panembahan Senapati killed him.

Ronggeng narrated in Babad Mangir shows that Sekar Pembayun as ronggeng was a dancer as well as seducer who attracted men (Ki Ageng Mangir). In this way Ronggeng or Tayub can be defined as folk dancing used as a political means to conquer an opponent.

Zweer (in Caturwati, 2008: 172) said that regardless from the negative description of ronggeng, the personality of ronggeng is more complex and more than just a prostitute. In the history of ronggeng, ronggeng has many meanings: she has been played an important role in ritual ceremonies as an honorable woman in a certain ritual such as a shaman or a person who in her old age has treasured many experience and therefore asked for her advice and vision.

This is in accordance with Alkema’s statement (Wijaya 1976:78) in his book Volkenkund van Nederland Indies (1972) that ronggeng dance is from shaman dance (symanendans) which is a dance performed by female priests to connect the inside world to the outside one, the world of ancestor spirits. Then, this dance was performed when conducting religious ritual.

Ronggeng is a sacrifice ritual for the fertility of agriculture. It was believed to posses magic-sympathetic power and has its influence on the ritual. By performing cleansing ritual for a village, the officers of villages invite the residents to participate in doing dancing in field rice hoping that plants grow well and free from pest and any hazard. Related to fertility ritual, Jamke Highwater in his book entitled Dance: Ritual of experience reveals that dance may induce the miracle (1992:34).

At the same way, R.M. Soedarsono (1991: 35) also shows in his writing, Tayub di Akhir Abad 20 that in an agricultural culture the fertility of the soil is farmers’ most only hope. They believe that the fertility of the soil cannot be gained by increasing new agricultural system, but it is also important to do some efforts by transforming magical power. Among those magical power is in the form magic-sympathetic. This power can only be attained through performing coitus between a man and a woman. In ancient so-
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society, this was translated by a realistic translation. Yet, in advance society, it is considered as a symbol in that magi sympathetic influences the fertility by performing dancing.

Furthermore, Surur (2003: 12) said that when ronggeng or tayub is performed, it becomes the center of people power as slametan (ritual to express thankful to god), hajatan (ritual for hoping something good to come), or even tahajjud (one of Islamic pray) for santri, an Islamic student. Ronggeng is considered to possess magical power and very meaningful to society in that they are not awkward of performing dancing in any condition, especially ronggeng dance. Ronggeng and tayub as magic sympathetic practice is well known by people who live in the area of field rice farming. They consider it as a mimetic of sexual practice. The more erotic the dance, the more power they will receive from the sky and the earth. This means the sky and the earth also performing sexual intercourse by falling rain from the sky to the earth. They believe that dance is capable at forming environment as well as focusing the transmission of the power from the mythical world. Therefore, the fertility ritual is still largely done by society until nowadays.

This description unveils the worship to the goddess of the rice, Dewi Sri in Java Island. Even though the name Sri is from India, this myth was found everywhere in Nusantara, including in an area where Indian cultural influence is not found. Yet, their version and stories are slightly different. Sri sacrificed all her body part and was buried. From his body, the rice and other plants appeared and grew. The worship to Dewi Sri still is practiced today hoping for successful harvest.

Along with society belief in ronggeng’s magical sympathetic power, the show is now performed not only in the field rice but in religious ceremony as well such as circumcision and wedding. The magical power of ronggeng is still believed to fertilize the groom and bridge so that the blessing from ronggeng is still hoped for the birth of the offspring.

From the description above, it is shown that at first ronggeng and tayub was part of religious dancing and then expands to be a sacrificial dance at bedah bumi ritual or cleansing village. This ritual is translated as a ritual that has a connection to the fertility of earth and to the sacrifice done by Dewi Sri. In the next step, ronggeng and tayub became an entertainment in a palace as a tradition among nobility. Ronggeng and tayub evolved outside a palace and become tarditional entertainment. As a traditional entertainment, ronggeng or tayub is considered as low culture because during the performance, ronggeng and her partner (penayub) known to have inapproprite behaviour such drinking alcohol and sexuality. Now, the meaning of Ronggeng or Tayub has slightly shifted to a more positive meaning since art academy and the government gave an attention to common people’s art. Ronggeng or tayub has been prepared and packed in many forms of dance and grown in many areas.

The Representation of Ronggeng in Indonesian Fiction

The word Ronggeng and Taledhek and Tandak which have negative connotative meaning refers to female prostitution, and prostitution is also associated with tayub dancer. So, the problem here is how the reception of society toward ronggeng or tayub, based on historical analysis as mentioned above, it belongs to many meanings, and now people in large has already associated ronggeng or tayub with negative percepcion.

This negative reception is not only found in oral tradition but also in literal tradition as shown in a short stories “Tayuban” in short stories collection Tiga Kota (1957) written by Nugroho Notosusanto. It illustrates a noble man, Gusti Kanceng of Rembang, who has been polluted by low culture, that he considered tayuban or ronggeng was the same as na-
yuban, so he ordered his officers as below:

“Bupati zaman dulu sudah seperti raja, bukan nenek?”

“Ya, seorang bupati kalau bertitah, adalah seperti Kanjeng Gubernemen sendiri memerintah.


... Dan kakak ngibing terus dengan terhuyung-huyung harap jatuh dan dipeluk perempuan itu. Akhirnya kakak keluar dari gelanggang dan masuk ke salah satu kamar dengan perempuan itu (Notosusanto, 1959: 28-29).

This quote shows the ronggeng or tayub is one of social dances that tend to translated negatively because it is accompanied with alcohol. Meanwhile the dancer, both joged (dancer) and her guess (tayuban) performed movement which arouses sexually. If the condition is heated, the rule of dancing is ignored, even ledhek/joged directly find one room with the male partner.

In Sri Sumarah dan Bawuk (1975), it is also found the representation of Ronggeng and Tayub. The behaviour of nobleman before the independent of Indonesia or during the colonial period is portrayed as shown below:


From the short stories quoted from Bawuk written by Umar Kayam, it pictures how ronggeng and tayub has been part of nobility’s tradition. A nobleman was required to have charisma like Cassanova who is able to melt in Tayub dance: dancing, drinking, even whoring. Ledhek or Ronggeng is described as a seducer who seduces men’s last by dancing with him,
stories Bawuk written by Umar Kayam is not different from those described in Tasyuban by Nugraha Natasusanta.

Besides that, the representation of ronggeng or tayub is also found in one of trilogy novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk by Ahmad Tohari and Ronggeng by Dewi Linggasari. Ronggeng dukuh Paruk is one of masterpeice in the history of Indonesian fiction. This novel unveals the life of ronggeng in 1960s in a ritual called bukak klambu.


Interestingly that after the decision on who was able to bestow peice of gold to ronggeng shaman, the person had the right to take Srintil’s virginity. However, Srintil had already given hers to Rasus because she loves him. Besides that Srintil is described to rebel to tayub practices. It is clear that Srintil’s attitude is ambiguous between obeying the culture or avoiding it. Srintil consciously chose to be a ronggeng as well as prostitute for Dukuh Paruk will be empty and gloomy without ronggeng.

From folk culture presented by Ahmad Tohari in his Trilogy Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk, Srintil as ronggeng is associated also with the fertility of soil. The climacs of ronggeng is when woman and man dance together called ngibing. Generally honourable people will have the first opportunity to ngibing with ronggeng which is called bedah bumi. In this novel, it is described the the spirit of Ki Secamenggala in Kertarejo’s body when ngibing with ronggeng. This relation reveals that ronggeng is a cosmic figure connecting a transcendent world to through the spirit of indang. This kind of functions is shown Srintil graduation as ronggeng in cemetery near Ki Secamenggala’s tomb. This ritual is translated as bedah bumi for the purpose of prosperity of the people in the earth. This kind of relation of ronggeng is believed to influence the fertility of the soul. However, ronggeng who has ritual function is now become a secular show. As shown by Ahmad Tohari that one requirement of being Ronggeng is ritual bukak klambu and after that ronggeng belongs to public.

In Javanese agricultural society, this sacred ritual has its functional in the process of living. During harvets time, many ceremonies are conducted and ronggeng served the society. In those ritual, dancing movement, taledhek character or ronggeng, alcohol is considered part of abangan practices and tradition (Clifford 1976: 299).

Furthermore, in the novel Ronggeng written by Dewi Linggasari, the tradition of ronggeng is represented by a ronggeng dancer called Pursilah. Pursilah is beautiful javanese woman. This woman has bad memories of her family and powerless to face her destiny as ronggeng. The picture of real ronggeng is found in Pursilah personalities.

“Konon, Pursilah adalah bocah kecil yang dipungut dari keluarga petani miskin setelah kematian emaknya. Sang bapak tak kuasa menduda dan pergi entah ke mana? Kabarnya ia menikah lagi dengan seorang janda di desa tetangga dan tak peduli lagi akan nasib Pursilah. Sejak masih seorang kananan Pursilah sudah sangat nyata, ia memiliki kulit kuning bak buah langsat, wajah berbentuk bujur sirih, sepasang mata jernih seperti air telaga, dagu yang runcing, dan rambut

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selegam arang. Tubuh gadis itu tinggi semampai dengan tungkai yang panjang dan pinggang ramping menyangga pinggul yang padat berisi. Sementara dadanya adalah gundukan sepasang bukit yang aman sehat. Dia amat gemar menari (Linggasari, 2007: 62). "Sama seperti ibu-ibu dan kaum wanita yang bertanggung jawab terhadap asap dapur, Pursilahpun merasa perlu untuk berbelanja sekaligus bersenang-senang di tengah keramaian. La menikmati jerih payahnya sebagai seorang ronggeng... (Linggasari, 2007:36)".

Pursilah is a famous ronggeng in the entire village. She was grown up with a nyai, so she is very obedient to whatever the nyai order her to do. Until one day she found herself rebel to the nyai. She felt that she was used by the nyai, and she was unable to life a normal life as an ordinary woman who marry a man, have a normal family, and bear her own children. Then, she was blind and run with someone’s husband hoping to build her own family.

Economically speaking, Pursilah had everything. Her income as a ronggeng and serving man was enough to support her life with her nyai. Psychologically, she felt emptiness because she could not have a normal life as a woman, even until her death. While the writer illustrated her nyai becoming an established woman after transforming Pursilah into a ronggeng. Nyai was a poor farmer before she found Pursilah. She arranged her life and took care for her only property.

As a ronggeng, Pursilah had to serve men sexually, so she was not allowed to marry and bear a baby. This situation made her bored. She became a rebellious by persuading Prambudi, Sarinah’s husband, and she had an affair with him. Her dream of being a traditional woman who had a family led her to forget her roles. Nyai was the one who was responsible in that situation and who had infused ideology to Pursilah to be a ronggeng. When Pursilah began to avoid her fans, nyai did her all effort to stop her rebellious attitude. Her effort, however, useless. Pursilah needed a normal family, a husband and children. She wanted to marry Pambudi. Even thought, at the end her effort was useless, she died tragically. She was a victim of a system created by nyai, yet her rebellious behavior ruined her.

The representation of ronggeng in the novel Ronggeng written by Dewi Linggasari is not far from those described in the history and tradition regarding the development of ronggeng or tayub as female klangenan dancer surrounded by men, flattered, cherished, or taken as partner both in the arena of dancing and arena of love. Pursilah, as Gendra in Serat Chen-tini, is described as a female dancer who had the ability to charm her audience. Similar to this, Rafles also shows in his book History of java (1817-381) that ronggeng has no any different from that prostitute.

Ronggeng or tayub is presented in Indonesian fiction, novel and short stories, in fact has many different variations. Even though it bears similarities, writers has different reception regarding what their describe as ronggeng. In Tayuban, Nugroho Notosusanto represents ronggeng as woman seducer. Umar Kayam shows ronggeng as part of nobility tradition. Novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk perfectly describes the personality of ronggeng; from her role in ritual to her willingness to become public property. Dewi Linggasari in her Ronggeng represents ronggeng as a negative art performance and the personality of ronggeng as seducer. The representation of Ronggeng in fiction reflects society’s thought of ronggeng, This proves that literary work is the mirror of the society from where the art was written.

Conclusion

Ronggeng or tayub is a very popular cultural artefact in the society especially in Java. Ronggeng or tayub show has been a tradition since in the ancient time. The
term of ronggeng has been known in the ancient time. Ronggeng and Tayub at first was a sacred ritual and then become an art performance and tend to translated with its negative attribute such as alcohol and sexuality. In 1960s, the government banned ronggeng or tayub. Based on history, ronggeng was considered as sacred ritual and it becomes a profane art performance as represented in many literary works.

Ronggeng or tayub as cultural artefact in other regions may have different forms and values. It will be based on the ability of society adapting it to its environment. What have been represented in fiction and prose is the reflection of society’s reception where the art work is produced.

References