

Topic: Culture

THE ROLE OF DAMAR KURUNG LANTERN AS A TIME SIGNAL OF GRESIK SOCIETY

Aniendya Christianna

Faculty of Art and Design Petra Christian University, aniendya@petra.ac.id

Abstract

Damar Kurung Craft is one of the typical Gresik cultural products that have been widely recorded the civilization and life of Gresik people through its handiwork. The existence of Damar Kurung has been around since the Hindu-Buddhist era. It is a lantern that made of bamboo paper with painting embedded that become Javanese's symbol of life. This research is qualitative research with descriptive approach. The object of this research is on the use of visual metaphor that described by Masmundari about Damar Kurung. The purpose of this research is to understand the meaning of symbols that embedded on Damar Kurung by Masmundari. At the same time, this writing is made to understand the environmental context where decoration of Damar Kurung is made, in order to establish the identity and identification of Javanese people.

Keywords

Culture, Art and Craft, and Damar Kurung.

1. Introduction

There are many types of variety in Javanese culture, every form reflects the personality and philosophy of Javanese life. Javanese culture is often loaded with many symbols that teach us about the wisdom of human life. Particularly, it talks about about the horizontal relationship between humans and the vertical relationships of humans with their creators.

One form of Javanese culture is painting and handicraft art. Art and society have a complex relationship, both of them have mutual relationship. An art work is made by an artist who is also a product of society where he belongs and his cultural background. In producing a creative art, the aesthetic-artistic, communication, and transcendent experiences become important background.

Damar Kurung Craft is one of the typical Gresik cultural products that have recorded many civilization and life of Gresik people through its painting. The handicraft in the form of bamboo paper-frame lanterns has been around since the Hindu-Buddhist era and has expanded in the same area with Sunan Prapen (the last sultan in Islam who ruled Giri Kedaton). Masmundari is the last female artist who consistently preserve this culture, until finally dies in 2015 in the age over 1 century. Unfortunately, after the death of Masmundari neither the family nor any other society had the same skills to continue her work. Damar Kurung is now in brink of extinction because its collections scattered among various domestic and foreign collectors, and they are not well documented, making it difficult to trace them back. Moreover, the use of this traditional lantern is gradually lost due to technological developments (especially electricity) which it displaces the lantern existence. Damar Kurung which functions as a lighting device is replaced by electric lamp.

The influence of the symbol in Damar Kurung painting as a tradition heritage, must be known by the people, for the sake of art and culture against development of the changing times. Bill Holm (1973: 8) mentions that the relics from the past need to know its meaning, before it really disappeared by the time. Therefore, Damar Kurung must be known before its meaning fade away.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Java cultural and Gresik origin*

Almost every corner of Java Island is inhabited with humans, whereas geographically there are only 7% of the entire Indonesian archipelago. The fact said that 60% of Indonesia's population is located on Java island. It was started by the agricultural in the 4th century AD (Koentjaraningrat, 1985: 31). This agricultural was more established with the existence of rice and irrigation practices. This culture triggered the arrival of Hindus in the 4th. This was the barometer when Java leaved its prehistoric times. Java began to enter the intercultural phase that eventually formed its own social system.

Java is one of the part of Asian nations which mostly use oral language that refers to various expressions and oral traditions rather than the grammar to reveal the thoughts of their lives. Oral tradition has been deeply rooted in the daily lives of Javanese, where mythology can not be separated from it. Through mythology, the Javanese understood the definition of the reality of the Javanese world. The Javanese people live with a mythology that full of symbolism, which gives characteristic to Javanese culture. Complex characteristic at both the thinking system level and the level of behavior. Symbols used in relation in line with values of life and the goals to be achieved through them. The use of symbols by the Javanese people aims as an intermediary message or advice.

A culture located in the northern coastal towns of Java Island is called coastal culture. In Koentjaraningrat (1994: 26), coastal culture is divided into several parts, namely the first western sub-section covering Cirebon, Tegal and Pekalongan; Second: middle sub-section covers Kudus, Demak and the surrounding area and third, eastern sub-center which is centered in Gresik area. According to the ancient Javanese charter from Karang Bogem, 1387 AD, Gresik has been known as the territory of the Majapahit Kingdom located in the interior of East Java (Graaf 1989: 172). Also described in the 'Chinese Islamic Society in Indonesia' (Budiman: 1979) that Ts'e-te'un (Gresik) is an important port where foreign ships anchored. Gresik City as one of the old city in Indonesia, based on history and its influence can be equated with other important old cities like Demak, Kudus and Cirebon.

2.2 *Damar Kurung and Masmundari*

Damar Kurung has been known since Sunan Prapen, the 4th Sunan who ruled Giri Kedaton (1548-1605). Damar Kurung is one of ancestral traditions of Gresik people in the form of painted lanterns. The painting in Damar Kurung has recorded many civilizations and life of Gresik people. It is said that Damar Kurung is made to entertain the children who are waiting for tarawih prayers during the month of Ramadan. Koehandari (2009: 58) defines Damar Kurung as 'resin' is a lamp / light and 'brackets' is a frame. So Damar Kurung is a lamp framed in as a lantern, which is usually lit when the sun begins to set or at the time of Maghrib prayer.

Sriati Masmundari (1909-2015), a woman who has gifted long life is a Gresik artist who consistently develops and conserves Damar Kurung. Drawing on paper and arranging it into Damar Kurung has done by her sister and uncle. The characteristic of Damar Kurung Masmundari's work lies in the observation of the development of Gresik culture which is spontaneously drawn (direct observation

and without sketch first). Scenes in everyday life became the source of ideas and expressions of her work, such as market activity, traditional ceremonies, weddings, circumcision, Indonesian Independence day, religious activities and other public activities that reflect the local culture.

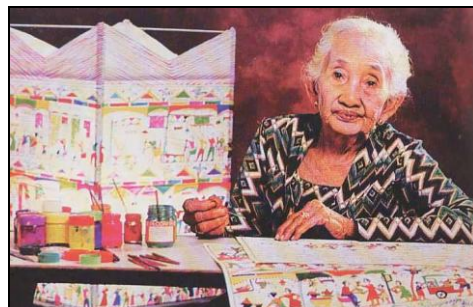


Figure 1. Potrait of Masmundari (Mosaik Magazine February 2003: 106)

At first, Masmundari made Damar Kurung only to fulfill her daily need by selling his work in traditional markets. However, in November 1987, when Bentara Budaya Jakarta showcased Masmundari's work for the first time, society began to pay more attention to Gresik lantern. Imang A.W one of the painters in Gresik City guided Masmundari to change the orientation of Damar Kurung into a two-dimensional painting on wood-framed canvas paper. The changes gave an impact on quality and increased marketing value of Damar Kurung (Indrakusuma, 2003: 4). Since the inaugural exhibition at Bentara Budaya Jakarta, the names of Masmundari and Damar Kurung have continued to rise. Until 11-15 May 1990 held an exhibition titled "Damar Kurung Masmundari Imagination" at Hyatt in Surabaya. By the end of 1990 the invitation for exhibition came from the Government of Daerah Level I of East Java at East Java Pavilion Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII). On May 23 - June 1, 1991, Damar Kurung Masmundari took part in the fourth Indonesian Interior Design (KIDI) exhibition at the Senayan Convention Hall in Jakarta. On that occasion, Masmundari met and shook hands with the 2nd President of Indonesia: Soeharto, and got the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in painting. Masmundari's struggle deserves appreciation because most of her age is spent to preserve this craft, alone! Damar Kurung is full of cultural values and religion, unfortunately its existence is on edge of extinction since Masmundari's death in 2015.

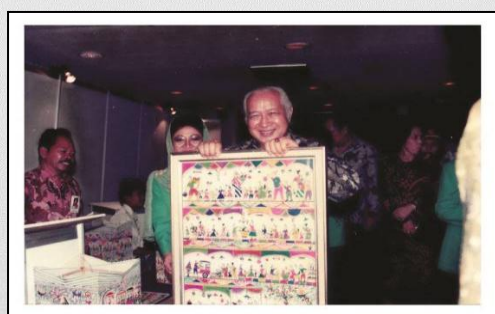


Figure 2. Clipping of Mass Media Coverage (From Documentation of Damar Kurung Institute)

Damar Kurung Craft is basically a lantern made of oil paper with a bamboo frame that forms a 3-dimensional space. Each side of the paper is painted with a variety of ornaments depicting Gresik culture. Before the existence a coloring device on the market, Damar Kurung was stained with food coloring. The colors are widely used in decoration Damar Kurung like red, green, yellow, dark blue, and black. These colors refer to the colors of the mecca of the universe: the north is black, the west is yellow, the east is white and the south is red (Sumarjo, 2002: 285). The unique thing about Damar Kurung's handicraft production is in organizing the field to tell a scene. Each scene is drawn with a

special technique for sacred and profane scenes. Before drawing, the image area has been divided into sections. The drawing process begins from the top of the paper at middle field, then moves towards the right until it fills the field. Back to middle of the field before, painting starts from the left to full. Then, from top to bottom fields.

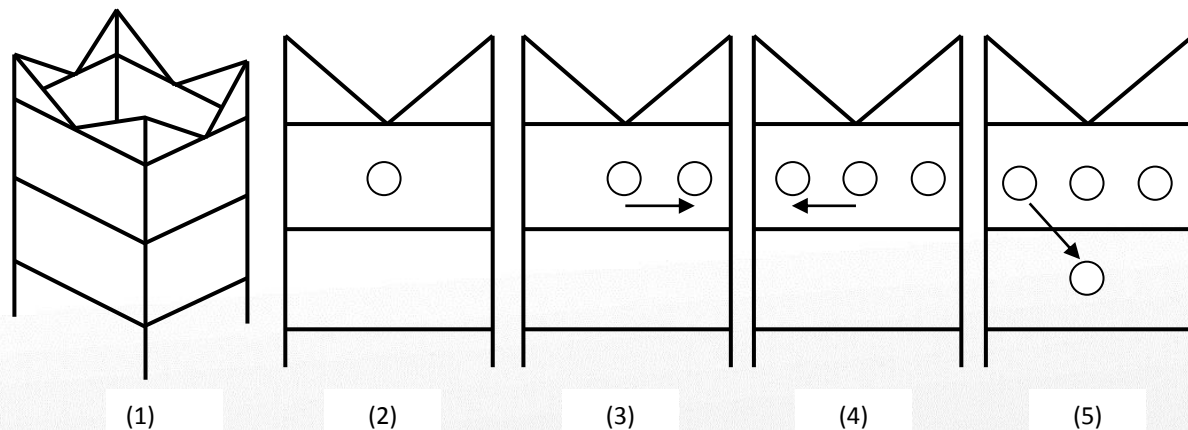


Figure 3. Step by step how to draw Damar Kurung

Each side of Damar Kurung has 1-2 sequences (top-down / bottom-up) on each side. On a broader field, it is divided into 3-4 sequences, with the direction from bottom to top for profane stories. Each sequence describes a scene. When the theme is the sacred scene, the drawing technique and the direction of reading starts from left to right. Masmundari records the era in her 1 century age with a naïve painting style, honest, plain, spontaneous but beautiful.

3. Methodology

3.1 Symbols and languages

This research is qualitative research with descriptive approach. The object of this research is on the use of visual metaphor described by Masmundari on Damar Kurung. The scope of this research is limited to the original Damar Kurung painting by Masmundari from 1987-1990s; because Masmundari worked productively Damar Kurung on that year. Over the 1990s, Masmundari began to experience physical weakness at her 1 century age, so the process Damar Kurung has a lot of interference from other parties. Informants who support this data come from conservationists, founders of Damar Kurung Institute, collector, author of Gresik history book and Culture and Sport Office of Gresik Regency. The working procedure steps of this research are:

- Contact collectors, preservers, book authors, and relevant government agencies to collect data (verbal and visual).
- Data collection and recording.
- Classify data findings based on years and themes that often appear.
- Categorize data based on friends who relavan with the identity of women.
- Analyzes any symbol containing metaphor, based on theoretical framework Identity by: Stuart Hall (1995).
- Describe the identity of women built by Javanese culture through Damar Kurung painting.

3.2 Visual metafora

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980: 3) explain that metaphors in a certain way. This encourages the search for meaning to build commonality between two or more semiotically related references. Previously, metaphor was seen in a form of manifestation of analogical reasoning-a form of inductive

reasoning that assumes two or more entities, similar to each other. In further development, metaphor becomes an expression of how the human mind seeks to create analogies.

The study of metaphors is in the field of rhetoric, where metaphors are seen as one of many figures. However, it has now developed, that metaphor has referred to the study of all figurative languages. Metonymy as a separate part of the metaphor, is a process in which a reference is used for other things associated with the reference.

Based on the explanation, the metaphor can be defined as the expression of language that used for expressing another language in the form of depiction. For example: we can use verbal language like : "I love my lover", at the same time "a bouquet of flowers, a box of chocolates and candy" is the non-verbal way. When metaphors are accepted as scientific facts, metaphors use a conceptual existence in the real world. When signs create referential spheres for humans to reflect, those are used and stored as a knowledge, metaphors are the right strategy for interconnecting each meanings.

4. Discussion

4.1 Wayang and life of Java people

For a long time, *wayang* has become the axis of Javanese life. Wayang is a shadow theater played by a director (called puppeteer), accompanied by a musical instrument from a Javanese orchestra, called a *gamelan* (Permanadeli, 2015: 89). Anderson (1982: 5) mentions that wayang has been the guide of metaphysics and ethics that cultivates Javanese thinking about the universe in where it lives. Knowing that *wayang* is a representation of Javanese thought system, it is clear that *wayang* is used as a cultural tool for conveying value or ideas. Geertz (1973: 126) mentions that studying and understanding wayang is an absolute requirement to explore the Javanese life culture. There are many different kinds of puppets that are known, but in this writing is limited to *wayang kulit purwa*. The source of the wayang kulit inspiration comes from the motifs and reliefs in the temple, which depict abstract-decorative human figures (S. Haryanto, 1991: 17).

Philosophy of *wayang* many delivered in various forms, including *Damar Kurung* picture. On each side of *Damar Kurung* is painted with a variety of human figures with various scenes of daily activities, flattened like puppet. All figures are drawn side by side or stacked from top to bottom, without perspective and use the line as a divider.

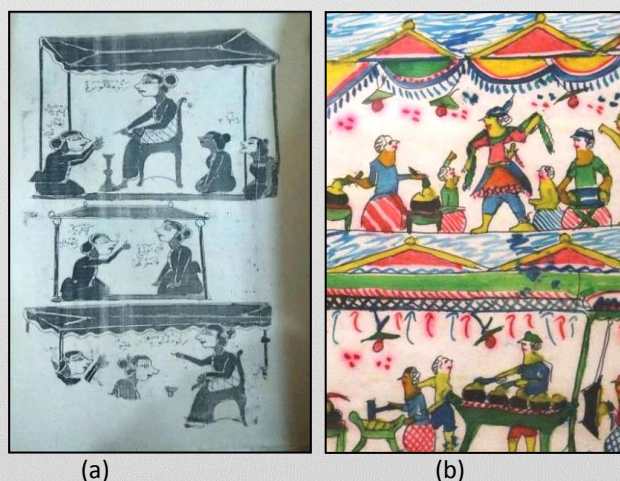


Figure 4. (a) The decoration of Damar Kurung from Sunan Prapen, (b) The decoration of Damar Kurung from Masmundari (Privat Documentation)

4.1 How important traditional ceremony

Based on the findings and classification of Damar Kurung painting, there are many kinds of ornaments that describe social interaction, in the form of rites / ceremonies. The ceremony is a part of people's life of Java that has been implemented since they are young. The ceremony goes hand in hand with the stage of human life, often associated with transitions, such as mitoni ceremony (7 months of pregnancy), childbirth ceremony, circumcision, marriage, until death from seven days to a thousand days. The Javanese ceremony also deals with nature, such as planting season and harvest season. The ceremony in the life of Java determines the life structure of all members of society. Geertz (1973, 1976) proves how the conception of the world among the Javanese manifests in the practice of everyday life. Geertz sees how the ceremony brings together Javanese life in real life. Starting from children, adolescents, adults, elderly, men and women, participate in contributing. Based on the painting articulated in Damar Kurung, it can be underlined that the practice of Javanese ceremony is women's responsibility. When discussing the ceremony in Javanese life, the idea is about a group of people who gather to pray. As depicted in the painting Damar Kurung brackets second panel. Some people with head coverings, face each other and raise their hands up, sit in a kneeling position.

Masmundari describes the process of preparing the ceremony, in the kitchen, is by preparing a distinctive dish. A yellow rice in mountain form, complete with its bottom, and decoration. The dish is called by *tumpeng*. *Tumpeng* is a yellow rice in mountains form and served on a tray that made of bamboo, with a variety of side dishes around it. *Tumpeng* is a sign of submission of human being to his creator. The shape of a triangle / cone / mountain is a symbol of human journey to its creator who enthroned 'above' (known as heaven / nirvana). The preparation of an important ceremony between man and his creator is prepared by women.

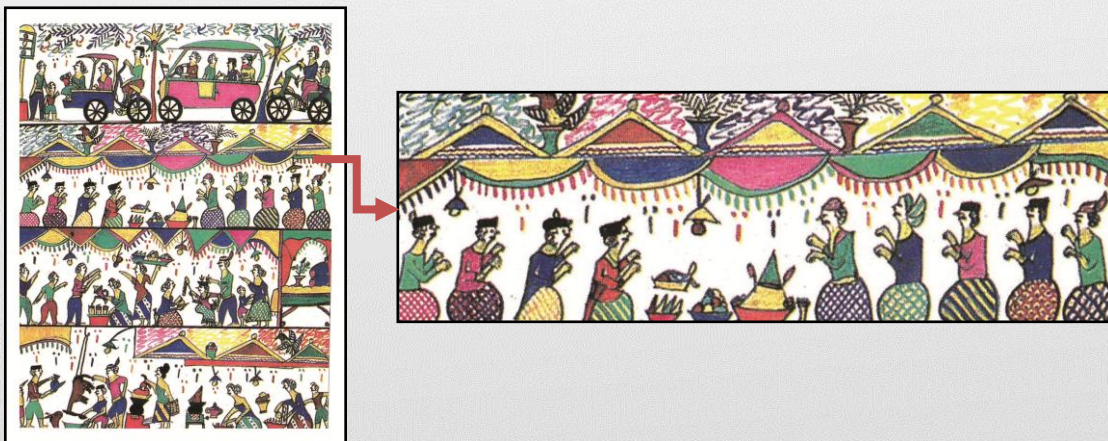


Figure 5. 'Slametan' from The Decoration of Damar Kurung (Privat Documentation)

The preparation of the ceremony in the life of the Javanese has been arranged as a chain of work done by women of any social status, any age and level of education. Unlike in professional work, the preparation work of this ceremony does not explain clear job description. Every woman involved should be able to know how good is her abilities and where she can be involved. Every woman who had the opportunity to integrate herself in the ceremony preparation is a concrete manifestation of the implementation definition in searching woman identity position in the everyday life Java community. It takes a sensitivity and humility to unite in the Javanese world. There is exchange information happens in this process to formulate and build an identity as a Javanese. Through the preparation of this ceremony the identity of Javanese is reflected.

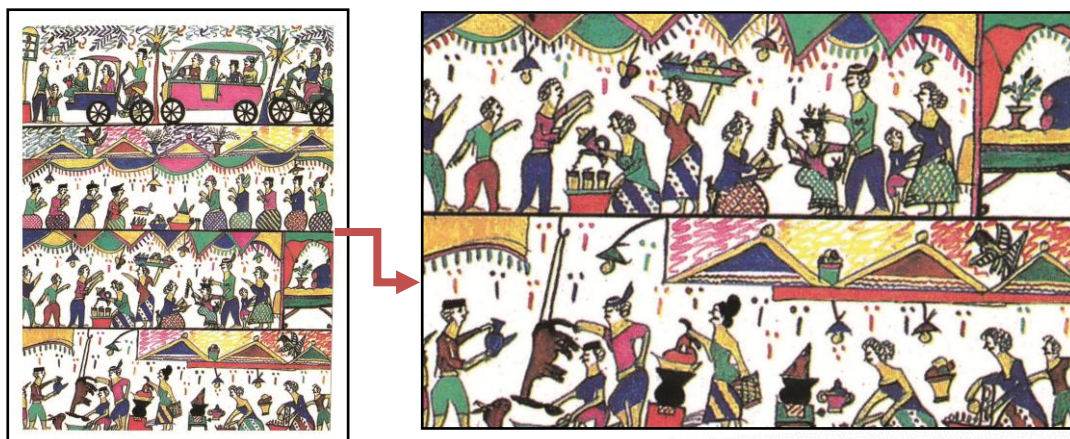


Figure 6. 'Slametan' from *The Decoration of Damar Kurung* (Privat Documentation)

5. Conclusion

Javanese in the Gresik region (representing the Java coast) plays an important role in the preparation process until the ceremonies are held. Where the traditional ceremony is one of the social procession that builds the society in the Java world. The decoration of Damar Kurung clearly shows how the performance and identity of Javanese is defined by the community. The ceremony described by Masmundari explains that every Javanese involved should be able to know how good is their abilities and where they can be involved. Every Javanese has the opportunity to unite his/herself in preparation of the ceremony In this process there is exchange of information, to formulate and to establish identity as Javanese.

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