

The Representation of Sasak Society in the Text “Gugur Mayang”

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of Sasak society in the text “Gugur Mayang”. It aims to semiotically explain the significance and communication of the text in Sasak culture by applying Paul Ricoeur’s interpretation method. Analysis shows that the “Gugur Mayang” text represents Sasak society while highlighting the sadness, tragedy, and grief of a life that is full of danger and pain. By interpreting the text within sociocultural, spiritual, and literary context, the researchers have been able to obtain a transcendental (rather than empirical) understanding of Sasak society.

Keywords: *Gugur Mayang; interpretation; Sasak; semiotics; text*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomena being experienced by the Sasak, an ethnic group in Lombok, Indonesia, are closely linked to the issue of Sasak cultural heritage—including the defense and preservation of literary works—and its increased erasure by the state. All cultures have their own heritage, with folklore, fairy tales, myths, and songs becoming deeply integrated into society. In order to defend and maintain such heritage, some cultures continue to teach it to younger generations, either through performance or study. Through this heritage, societies symbolically, ideologically, socially, and historically define themselves.

To understand this selfhood as it pertains to Sasak society, this study focuses on a traditional oral text, a song titled “Gugur Mayang” (GM). It is unknown when and by whom this song was created; it seemingly emerged spontaneously. Sasak parents teach GM to their children, using it as a lullaby and hymn, therefore guaranteeing its intergenerational transmission.

At the same time, however, GM is a highly emotional text. When singing the song, or even hearing it, parents often cry and reach out for physical comfort. GM brings its audiences to the past, to a time of tragedy

and heartbreak, as it is reminiscent of past events that continue to shape Sasak culture. This song, therefore, has the representational purpose of symbolically marking the singer (the performer) as a member of the community. GM has an iconic relationship with Sasak culture, and indexically indicates actual phenomena.

Based on the above, it can be recognized that GM, as a literary work, has what Faruk (2012, pp. 77–78) terms a dual existence, being simultaneously within the realm of the empirical and non-empirical. As a world through which consciousness is built, this text provides audiences with a paradigmatic image of the events it contains and embodies, especially past and present events through which the Sasak people represent themselves, their thoughts, views, and feelings. In its representational relationship with Sasak society and culture, GM can thus be used to identify the essence of being and humanity. Such songs, known among the Sasak as *pengareq-areq*, offer proof of *araq* (existence).

This article understands the self as a fixed concept, as remaining the same in all spaces and times. This is the true self, the essential self, the self behind the symbols.

Lacan (Sarup, 2008) argues that there is no subject in itself, except in representation, and no representation can completely represent the subject. As such, the true self is only represented by language, through what Lacan calls its discussion of symbolic reality. Language provides a personal, cultural and even sociocultural representation of the self. It is this relationship, the relationship between textual representation and community, that will be revealed in this study.

This article applies Peirce’s theory of semiotics, which holds that cognition, thought, and even human being itself constitute a semiotic nucleus (Noth, 2006, p. 41). For this theory, Peirce advances a concept of representation as means of conveying and understanding signs (Noth, 2006, p. 42). Signs exist within a trichotomy, with the first part being the signs themselves. Peirce recognizes signs as consisting of three elements: the qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Qualisign refers to the quality of the sign, which does not actually manifest until it is implemented (Noth, 2006, p. 44). Upon implementation, this qualisign becomes a sinsign, a sign that really exists. As such, qualisign refers to the traits and inherent concepts of a sign, while sinsign refers to its appearance in reality. Finally, legisign refers to the sign as part of a generally accepted system (Sobur, 2006, p. 97).

The second element of the trichotomy is the object, that which is usually understood as “something else” (Noth, 2006, p. 42). Depending on how it is represented, this object produces icons in the firstness category, indices in the secondness category, and symbols in the thirdness category.

The third element of the trichotomy is the interpretant, which refers to the understanding of the first and second elements of the trichotomy. In other words, the interpretant indicates the result of interpretation, that which occurs when the process of semiosis requires a person to interpret the sign. Pierce identifies the interpretant as consisting of three elements: rhema, dicent, and argument.

For its analysis, this study applies Paul Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation as part of hermeneutic phenomenology. According to Ricoeur, something can only be deemed a sign if it is recognized as such (Kaelan, 2009, p. 304). Its interpretation, thus, cannot be separated from human will—the willingness to recognize a sign *qua* sign. Data collection was done through in-depth, unstructured interviews, which was intended to avoid informant subjectivity (Sugiyono, 2012, p. 137).

One study of Sasak society was conducted by Usup (2011) and titled *Ta Melak Mangan*. In this study, Usup (2011) explored the self-representation of the

Sasak people. He showed that the kings of Lombok came from Java, Madura, and Majapahit, rather than the Sasak community itself. Consequently, the Sasak have experienced a cultural blending, in which Java served as the center of their cultural orientation. Sasak society was ruled by the Javanese Majapahit Kingdom (Fauzan, 2013), with local aristocrats being the sole Sasak representation (SatryaHD & Muttaqin, 2018). It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the relationship between GM and Sasak society.

DISCUSSION

Gugur Mayang

*Gugur mayang leq kuripan
Kembang gadung sedin gunung
Awun-awun panas jelo
Aseq ate lalo telang*

*Ngumbe daye side nune
Semu ayu balas ale
Iling-iling ring ubaye
Leq kuripan araq sengkale, aduh king ale*

*Umbak umbul leq tembuak
Redo tangis gumi sasak
Pasek dese hilang sirne
Mangdeq jari tutur mudi, leq semeton jari*

Through this song, the Sasak convey their understanding of things that occur in the world. Just as literary works hold the secret of the author’s soul, they also signify the dark journey of the society that produces them. All societies experience tragedy, with their younger generations seemingly consumed by the doom and gloom in the world.

All of this pain and melancholy are implied in the title “Gugur Mayang”. The word *gugur* denotes falling (as leaves), but often connotes death in unfavorable situations within the context of revolution, war, competition, and social contestation. The term *gugur mayang*, thus, denotes the falling of *mayang* (the fruit of the areca plant, known as *buaq* in the Sasak language) from the areca palm. This too has connotative meanings. The Sasak people are often identified as *lomboq lolon buaq* (the straight trunk of the areca palm tree), with the areca palm being an icon of Sasak society and *mayang* a symbol of its youth.

In the context, thus, *gugur mayang* does not only denote the falling of young areca fruit, but also the death

of youths in a revolution or other struggle against power. *Mayang* symbolically represents the Sasak youths who have fallen in their fight against outside forces, the invaders and colonizers who subjugated the Sasak people. These youths were not only the children of their parents, but also the future of the Sasak people. The word *mayang* symbolizes hope, beauty, while *gugur mayang* implies loss of this hope.

Etymologically, the word *mayang* is derived from the word *maya*, which means life. This word is synonymous with the Javanese (and Sasak) term *urip*. Such an interpretation is reinforced by how the Sasak people position areca palms and their fruit. Areca palms (*mayang*) are used in Sasak culture for rituals, clothes, and everyday equipment. These trees are central in a cultural competition known as *jurakan*, during which young men climb up oiled palm trees in order to retrieve the prizes hanging on them. This competition is a tough one, as climbers must also deal with their opponents as they attempt to reach the top. *Jurakan* competitions are usually held on the anniversary of Indonesia's independence, or shortly before the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*Maulid Nabi*).

Applying Ricoeur's model of interpretation, *jurakan* culture can be understood as a rhema, while the rules of this competition (including its determination of winners) are a dicent. Within this context, the peak of the areca palm may be understood literally (as the top of the tree) and metaphorically (as the peak of self-knowledge). These trees thus not only symbolize the culture of the Sasak people, but also their life philosophy.

Returning to the lyrics of GM, the phrase *leq kuripan* refers to a place called *Kuripan*; in other words, the first line refers to the fall of a young areca palm fruit in this place. Although there is actually a place called *Kuripan* in Lombok, this term does not refer to a physical location; rather, it refers to life itself, as indicated by the fact that the word *kuripan* is etymologically derived from the word *urip*. It is also linked to the Arabic word *arafa*, which means 'to know', in this case to know one's self or to know the creator of life (*robbil alamin*, i.e. God). Life (*kuripan* or *urip*), thus, can serve as a marker for a broader concept of humanity or the cosmos.

In Sasak culture, life (*urip*) is a qualisign. Meanwhile, as a sinsign, *urip* represents the manifestation of knowledge of God in everyday life. At the sinsign level, *urip* can be achieved through an understanding of time (and season). Finally, as a legisign, *urip* refers to the laws of nature, those that determine the times and seasons, that which determines the direction of the wind and the sun, as well as 'good' and 'bad' days. These

understandings are internalized by the Sasak in their life journeys, and incorporated into their rituals such as *mituq*, *nyiwaq*, *nyithu*, and *nyiu*. This knowledge is even used to determine when women should be taken from the house for marriage, when weddings should be held, when farming should begin, when land should be cleared, and when one should begin travelling.

Kuripan, thus, is an icon of the life struggles of the Sasak people. At the index level, *urip* is the cause of Sasak practices and struggles. It is the process through which one achieves freedom from the shackles of self-will and power. This process cannot be separated from the cultures that have influenced the Sasak people or migrated to Lombok, including the Javanese, Makassarese, and Balinese. For instance, the traditional marriage procession of the Sasak resembles that of the Balinese, including in its use of the *cupang gurantang* story. Similarly, schools teach the Balinese script as the Sasak script, as the Sasak script is not recognized by the the National Language Center. Conversely, ancient manuscripts and folklore utilize the old Javanese language; as noted by Marrison (1999), the Sasak literary language is Javanese, or more specifically East Javanese (Van der Meij, 2011). Traditional Sasak arts such as *rudat* (a form of traditional theater) have traces of Malay culture, while the Sasak (as with the Javanese and Balinese) incorporate *gamelan* into their rituals. In their puppetry, the Sasak follow Javanese traditions; for instance, *serat menak* (commonly performed in Lombok) was created by the Javanese king Paku Buwono X (Fathurrahman, 2017).

A sign (rhema) achieves an understanding through its historical context. What is considered to be Sasak culture has also been identified as Balinese, Javanese, and Malay culture; as such, there is seemingly no claim as to the original form of Sasak culture. However, in the postmodern world there is no question of authenticity, as there is no original form. At the dicent level, this returns the interpretation of the sign to an assertion of belief in God. As shown by Fajdri (2015), the Sasak people are strongly influenced by Islam, and this—in conjunction with the traces of their past—provides the Sasak with the laws that guide their everyday lives and influences their self-representation.

The third line, *kembang gadung leq sedin gunung*, represents a complicated situation, one where fulfillment is difficult. The term *kembang* denotes flowers, but serves as an icon of things enjoyed by everybody. *Gadung*, meanwhile, refers to a valuable fruit that was once a staple food of the Sasak people. In conjunction, *kembang* and *gadung* thus indicate things of value, and thus symbolically represent the material aspects of life,

being sinsigns of matter, body, and physical needs (i.e. food, clothing, and shelter). As a legisign, meanwhile, *kembang gadung* represents the biological laws of human existence.

Humans have certain basic needs, which they must fulfill even when they have difficulty doing so. The phrase *kembang gadung* symbolizes these basic needs, referring denotatively to a staple food consumed by the Sasak people at a time when corn and rice were unavailable. Processing *gadung* fruit requires expertise, as the raw fruit is poisonous, as is overly ripe fruit. To prepare this fruit, one must carefully regulate the temperature and water composition. As such, as a qualisign *gadung* refers to the foresight and thoroughness of the Sasak people.

Meanwhile, the phrase *sedin gunung* symbolizes a place that cannot be easily reached. As a dicent, this phrase refers to the difficulties experienced by the Sasak people in their everyday lives, particularly the dangers of their natural environment. *Leq sedan gunung* metaphorically represents a dangerous, difficult, and complicated situation. Such a situation resulted from the Javanese and Balinese hegemony in Lombok (Kraan, 1981; Satrya HD, 2018), during which the Lombok people were subjugated and their cultural identity was obscured. In this context, the phrase *kembang gadung* and *sedin gunung* offer an argument, a legisign, that fulfilling one's basic needs requires one to conquer obstacles and overcome significant hurdles.

Kembang gadung sedan gunung thus refers to the difficult existence of the Sasak people. As *gadung* shows the harsh conditions under which the Sasak people live, as does the word *sedin*. The word *gunung*, meanwhile, indicates a dangerous natural world that must be mastered. It implies the law of power, the fact that those who arrived in Lombok sought to control it, to marginalize the Sasak people (*leq sedan gunung*). This was the bitter reality experienced by the Sasak people under the rule of the Balinese Karang Asem Kingdom, the Javanese Majapahit Kingdom, as well as Dutch and Japanese colonialism. Under the rule of these outside forces, the Sasak people suffered and were driven away from their original identity.

The phrase *awun-awun panas jelo*, meanwhile, refers to a difficult life that is full of obstacles. The word *awun-awun* denotes clouds, while symbolizing the fact that life goes on even when one faces hurdles. Just as clouds block one's view of the horizon, yet cannot erase it, obstacles do not necessarily stop one from achieving one's goal. Nonetheless, these obstacles significantly influence one's life journey; the more *awun-awun* (desire, lust, etc.), the greater effort required.

As a sinsign, *awun-awun* connotes a wishful

aspiration, something that people journey to achieve or realize. As a legisign, meanwhile, it indicates that every desire requires sacrifice to achieve. *Awun-awun panas jelo* is thus a worldly symbol, a symbol of the objective world. It is the cause of human existence; human beings are full of aspirations, and without them they cannot be human. At the same time, however, they are hindered by the presence of *awun-awun* which conceal that which lies behind it.

The line *aseq ate lalo telang*, meanwhile, infers a deep sadness, a melancholy caused by the harshness of human existence and the difficulty of improving one's circumstances. The phrase symbolizes the complexity of life, including the difficulty of leaving one's homeland even as circumstances demand it. *Aseq ate* is a qualisign that conveys a deep sadness, one that is rooted in one's passions and endless desires. For the sake of their aspirations, *awun-awun*, many Sasak have migrated to Malaysia in search of *ringgit* (money) as a means of alleviating their poverty (Haris, 2002). At the same time, however, parents often remind their children that *pade ke atas langit lek te dait lek to* (the sky is equally high here and there), informing them that they need not travel for the sake of their *awun-awun*.

The second stanza, *ngumbe daye side nune / semu ayu bales ale / iling-iling ring ubaye / leq kuripan araq sengkale*, express the problems of life. The phrase *ngumbe daye* means power and effort, without which one has nothing left to surrender to the Almighty. The Sasak people recognize God's power as present in all aspects of worldly and heavenly life. As such, *ngumbe daye* is a dicent that refers to the Sasak's resignation and acceptance of the complex reality of life. It is a sign of their surrender to God, to the 'one' that 'is' (both of which are denoted by the Sasak term *saq*). As a qualisign, the phrase *ngumbe daye* indicates a total surrender of the self to God, a recognition that all worldly events occur because of Him.

The phrase *side nune*, meanwhile, is used in Sasak society to refer to a beloved child. The word *nune* denotes a 'man' or 'male'. As such, its use in GM is iconic of the patriarchal Sasak culture, wherein sons are more important than daughters. At the same time, it connotes the power and ability to overcome the obstacles and complexities of life. As a legisign, meanwhile, the word *nune* (man) indicates the hopes of the Sasak people, the backbone of the Sasak family tradition. The resolution of life problems is entrusted to men, who are deemed strong and reliable.

The next line, *semu ayu bales ale*, means 'good is rewarded with evil'. The phrase *semu ayu* indicates

good qualities or goodness, as realized through attitudes or deeds. Basically, humanity is inherently good, but because of their desires and aspirations (*awun-awun*), this good is corrupted by evil. As a qualisign, meanwhile, the phrase *semu ayu* indicates a sincerely given kindness, one that is not always responded in kind by others. Indexically, the good nature indicated by *semu ayu* is correlated with the dicent phrase *ngumbe daye*, clearly emphasizing that the Sasak people have a strong and good character.

Bales ale, meanwhile, indicates an evil design or response. The word *ale* is an abbreviation of the word *sengkale*, which means ‘obstacle’. Human beings experience many *sengkale*; in other words, they experience significant difficulty overcoming their obstacles and reaching God. In a historical context, the Javanese and Balinese have been *sengkale* for the Sasak people, as they have prevented the Sasak from finding their own identity. The current Sasak identity is the result of an orientalist construction, one that identifies Lombok as part of Java (Kraan, 1981). Sasak identity is conceptualized not in its own terms, but in the terms of other nations (Sudirman & Bahri, 2014; Tim Penyusun, 1977; Tim Penyusun Depdikbud, 1977), particularly those seven nations that have exerted colonial control over Lombok. Such colonialism is identified as the evil with which the kindness of the Sasak has been repaid. Even as they give goodness, they experience only pain. They lose their selves and their lives under the colonial and hegemonic rule of foreign nations.

The next line, *iling-iling ring ubaye*, shows an awareness of the *ubaye* (danger) *leq kuripan* (in life). This means that, in life, one will experience danger and obstacles. *Iling-iling* represents human conduct, while *ubaye* symbolizes the nature of worldly life. Humans who do not have *iling* (awareness) will experience *ubaye*, and as such they must always be vigilant as they conduct themselves in their everyday lives. *Iling* (awareness) is an icon of humanity and its higher consciousness, and it is this awareness that has enabled the Javanese, Balinese, and Dutch influence over the Sasak people to endure. All of these are *ubaye*. Life is related to death, as *iling* is linked to *ubaye*, which itself is an icon of human life filled with *awun-awun*. *Iling* is a sign of the higher concept of *sa sak* (the One).

The word *iling* is also correlated with *lolon buaq* (palm tree), a straight tree that is iconic of Sasak. It is thus a qualisign of the Sasak people’s character, particularly their awareness of the good and bad in life as well as the need to avoid missteps. Such an attitude is also evident in the phrase *adeng-adeng entan bekelampan* (travel with caution), which symbolically refers to the act of *iling*

itself. This is emphasized by the last line of this stanza, *leq kuripan araq sengkale*.

The phrase *araq sengkale* is a sinsign of the phrase *leq kuripan*. Life is always replete with *sengkale* (disasters, obstacles); there is no life without *sengkale*, and as such *sengkale* is an inevitable prerequisite for life. It is *sengkale* and *ubaye* that make humans ultimately *iling* (aware) of God. In this context, the phrase is a clear legisign of the law of causation, indicating that every *sengkale* contains within it good/bad results or goals. This reflects the goodness of *semu ayu* and the evils of *beles ale*, which implicitly emphasizes the causal effect of the word *sengkale* itself. The word *iling* is therefore a dicent, indicating the strength of Sasak society.

The last stanza, *umbul-umbul leq tembuak / redo sumi gumi sasak / pasek dese hilang sirne / mangdeq jari tutur mudi / leq semeton jari* again refers to the miserable situation experienced by the Sasak people. The phrase *umbak umbul* symbolizes the enormous ordeals that occur in life. The question, thus, is what is *umbak*? Where does it come from? Where does it appear? The Sasak word *umbak* denotes waves in the sea, while *umbul* means ‘to appear’, ‘to arise’, or ‘to stand out’. *Umbak* is an icon of the nature of the heart, whence the *umbak* arise. The heart can be harsh, tender, hard, sore, ambitious, good, or bad. Such waves appear in man, and the self is filled with *awun-awun*. The phrase *umbak umbul*, thus, is a sinsign that presents *semu ayu* (good) and *ale* (evil) simultaneously.

The phrase *leq tembuak*, meanwhile, refers to the place where hope and life emerge (i.e. the place where *umbak* or trials occur). *Umbak* come from the depths of human heart, the turmoil it experiences as it seeks to fulfill its desire for wealth, sex, and power—all of which are basic libidinal urges that ultimately deceive people. The desire to free oneself from the shackles of oppression is one such *umbak*, the consequences of which must be accepted *pasek dese hilang sirne*.

In the phrase *pasek dese hilang sirne*, the word *pasek* means ‘turning point’, and thus provides an icon of leaders, youths, and the hopes of society. In Sasak culture, the word *pasek* also identifies the first person to occupy an area, who thus has strong social influence. Such a person is a determinant, a pedestal of society. Within the context of GM, this term refers to Sasak youth. *Hilang sirne*, meanwhile, means ‘lost’. As a rhema, it does not indicate a physical loss, but rather the loss of spirit, the loss of Sasak principles and identities because of *awun-awun panas jelo*. The index of the phrase *pasek dese* is *redo tangis gumi Sasak*. *Redo tangis* means crying in a low tone, a deep wailing and melancholy. The phrase

redo tangis, thus, refers to the tears that are shed when a situation is still deeply felt. These tears are shed in *gumi Sasak* (the land of the Sasak) because *pasek dese hilang sirne*. *Pasek dese* may refer to the self, to the youth, to future generations. With their loss, Sasak identity is also lost, growing to resemble Balinese, Javanese, Madurese, and even Makassarese culture, while the hopes and aspirations of the Sasak people become nothing more than *tutur muri* (stories) for future generations. The last line, *mangde jari tutur mudi*, underscores the importance of hope, of recognizing the lengthy struggle to maintain Sasak identity, to overcome the trials and difficulties of life, and of remaining aware of *sengkale, umbak, ubaye, and awun-awun*. This can be realized through discourses and messages that are continuously provided to future generations.

CONCLUSION

Sasak society, including its civilization and tradition, is represented in the song "Gugur Mayang". This can be seen from the first line of the text, and is manifested in phrases such as *gugur mayang* (falling fruit), *kahuripan* (life), *kembang gadung* (gadung flowers), *awun-awun* (clouds), *aseq ate* (concern), and *lalo telang* (sorrow). It also represents the threat to Sasak identity and culture posed by outsiders, by the ethnic groups that have long dominated Lombok, through such phrases as *ngumbe daye* (helplessness), *bales ale* (evil), *iling-iling* (human conduct), *ubaye* (danger), *sengkale* (obstacles). At the same time, it underscores that the Sasak must deal with these threats, as indicated from the phrases *leq tembuq* (inside), *redo tangis* (crying), *pasek dese* (Sasak youth), and *ilang sirne* (loss). Finally, it shows that Sasak identity has become obfuscated, being concealed by outside influences. This text thus presents a transcendental, rather than empirical, understanding of the Sasak condition, and thus offers a deeper understanding of how the Sasak represent themselves.

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