

DILEMMATIC PHASES OF DRAMA GONG IN BALINESE ART PERFORMANCE STAGE

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ABSTRACT

Drama Gong is one of the art forms of Balinese folk theater balih-balihan (spectacle) without any ties to Hindu rituals, so its existence is merely entertainment. The golden peak of Drama Gong, which lasted until the late 1970s, began to dim into pop culture. Therefore, Drama Gong undergoes very dilemmatic phases in the Balinese art performance stage in the global era. This assumption is very interesting to examine from the perspective of cultural studies that can be critically dissected through theories of hegemony, deconstruction, and semiotics. Penelitian is designed as a qualitative research procedure with a phenomenological approach. The object of study is in the text and its context in society. This study produced data in the form of words and images that can be observed and described clearly without using statistical procedures or by other quantification. All field data and the results of classified literature studies are studied logically and systematically through the cultural studies paradigm. Thus, the application of descriptive methods of analysis is clearly unavoidable. The determination of informants was carried out using purposive random sampling techniques and developed with snowball techniques. Data sources are also strengthened by instruments in the form of observation guidelines, in-depth interview guidelines, recordings, and document studies. The results showed that today's Drama Gong is very dilemmatic. Its existence on the Balinese art performance stage is not only marginalized, but also slumped, lost multi-role, and dimmed is fading without taksu, making it helpless: life is reluctant to die unwillingly.

Keywords : *dilemma, drama gong, Balinese art performance stage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Drama Gong is a form of Balinese theater/performance art that is staged with acting, verbal dialogue (Balinese language), and accompanied by *gamelan gong kebyar*. Historically the theatre was first founded in 1966 by Anak Agung Gde Raka Payadnya, the son born in Puri Abianbase, Abianbase Village, Gianyar Regency. This art is known as *Drama Gong Wijayakusuma*, which further inspired folk theater artists in Bali at that time to form Drama Gongs in their respective regions, so that since the establishment of *Wijayakusuma Drama Gong*, then in several areas in Bali many *sekaa* have sprung up Drama Gongs with their own characteristics, are like mushrooms that grow in the rainy season. Drama Gong then became a very popular art because it was popular, entertaining, interesting to watch, and even became an idol of the Balinese people from various generations. Therefore, at that time there was almost no day without the staging of drama gongs in Bali which managed to bring in a very large number of viewers. It was from this enthusiasm of the community that the drama gong developed very rapidly and managed to reach its golden peak / glory until the late 1970s.

Some of the drama gongs that emerged later became very popular after *Wijayakusuma Drama Gong* can be mentioned including: *Drama Gong Kacang Dawa* (Klungkung), *Drama Gong Cakra Bhuwana* (Sukawati, Gianyar), *Drama Gong Puspa Anom* (Banyuning, Buleleng), *Drama Gong Bintang Bali Timur* (Denpasar), *Drama Gong Dewan Kesenian Denpasar* (DKD. Denpasar), and *Drama Gong Duta Bon Bali* (Gianyar). The presence of Drama Gong in the Balinese art performance

stage in addition to really being able to entertain the hearts of the people is also felt to have become part of their life needs, So drama gong has not only succeeded in occupying the main stage of Balinese performing arts, even more than that, namely being able to shift several positions of the previously famous traditional Balinese theater such as: arja, topeng, wayang, janger and others. This is caused by several factors such as the popularity and ability of the actors to improvise in playing roles on stage. Drama Gong was then able to occupy a position as a primadonna in the Balinese art performance stage.

However, since the 1980s, the artistic activities and creativity of the drama gongs in Bali have begun to dim with the times. Cultural paradigms and innovations including people's lifestyles are beginning to be faced with new challenges that cannot be avoided. Modern art forms and interesting and alluring types of spectacles began to enter people's homes through electoral media such as television, which further made people prefer to watch at home instead of going down to banjars or to open fields to watch drama gongs. Television has provided a variety of traditional and modern arts that can make people feel at home watching at home while drinking a cup of hot milk coffee. Various types of electronic mass media such as television, handphones, radio, films, audio recordings, videos, and others have presented many forms of innovation and cultural adaptation that have a great influence on changes in people's mentality and lifestyle. From the rapid development of the mass media, one by one from the previous drama gong art (the old one) began to be marginalized, and finally they disbanded. The drama gong in the Balinese art performance stage in this global era is really in a very dilemmatic position, the situation is in such a difficult choice, like a leaf umbrella (*payung don*) that is needed suddenly and forced in the rainy season to cover the head and body so that it does not get wet. But alas, once the rain subsides and the weather begins to light up the leaf umbrella is no longer needed. He was thrown in any place and then trampled by everyone who passed by there. Or in other words the fate of the drama gong can be said as mentioned in the Sundanese proverb: "life is reluctant to die unwillingly"

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This form of cultural studies research is designed as qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The research site was conducted in Denpasar City, in Abianbase Village, Gianyar Regency, in Taman Bali Village, Bangli Regency, and in Banyuning Village, Buleleng Regency (Singaraja). Research primary data sources include primary informants and supporting informants. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are obtained from observation records, books, scientific journals, scientific magazines, archival and personal documents, official documents, related photographs, and VCD (Video Compact Disc). The determination of informants is carried out by purposive random sampling based on considerations that are considered to have capacity and authority (competence, expertise, knowledge, experience, including their concern for drama gong). The auxiliary instruments used are interview guidelines, tape recorders, voicerecorders, photo cameras, and field notes.

In the data collection process, participatory observation methods, in-depth interviews, document studies, as well as recording techniques and focus group discussions (FGD) are used. Analysis techniques are obtained based on the interpretation of facts, field data, and documents. The entire data obtained was carried out in one process through three activities simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (verification) (Miles and Huberman in Basrowi and Sukidin, 2010: 209).

The presentation of the results of data analysis is carried out verbally. The presentation technique is carried out sharply, objectively, clearly and concisely, which can also be called a qualitative descriptive presentation technique because in addition to words and sentences, the presentation can also be done in other forms of narrative. The logic used is based on inductive and deductive reasoning. To be

able to support the quality of the narrative, the presentation of the results of this research is also carried out in the form of tables, images, charts, photos, and maps. The systematics of writing and presenting the results of this study is poured into the results and discussion in detail.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This description is more directed to the subject matter of the periodization of drama gongs in the Balinese art performance stage which includes: (a) the pilot to golden phase; (b) the dimming phase; and (c) The dull phase. To obtain critical, logical, and systematic analysis results, the following three sub-subjects are described one by one.

3.1 Stub To Golden Phase (Year 1966 - late 1970s)

Drama Gongs in the Balinese art performance stage always display the characteristics of the community's closeness to its culture. Therefore, drama gong as a folk theater in Bali has extraordinary potential and function in transmitting various educational aspirations to each of its fans. Nevertheless, the fact that exists now shows that drama gong is increasingly alienated from the society that once idolized it. The drama gong can only be performed according to the annual agenda of the Bali Kesenian Party (PKB), and after that it stagnates (in a stopped state) again.

The results of this study show that the current drama gong is indeed still very dilemmatic in the Balinese art performance stage. Drama Gong began in 1966 and reached its popularitas and golden peaks until towards the end of the 1970s. Then from the 1980s gradually drama gongs began to be abandoned by the supporting community, meaning the fans. It is caused due to internal and external factors of the *sekaa* (association) of the drama gong itself. So that at the beginning of 1990 the drama gong was really in a state of starting to be suspended animation in the midst of the currents of globalization.

When drama gongs reached their heyday/golden age, in Bali there were several Drama Gongs that were very popular and even truly became people's idols. Drama Gong is very close in people's hearts and has become people's dream. Therefore, the drama gong always fills people's days. There is no day without drama gong, there is no time for people without telling stories about drama gongs and admiring their dream actors. Some of the drama gongs that developed and were very famous at the time include; *Drama Gong Wijayakusuma* (Gianyar), *Drama Gong KacangDawa* (Klungkung), *Drama Gong Cakra Bhuwana* (Sukawati, Gianyar), *Drama Gong Puspa Anom* (Banyuning, Buleleng), *Drama Gong Bintang Bali Timur* (Denpasar), *Drama Gong Denpasar Arts Council* (DKD. Denpasar), and *Drama Gong Duta Bon Bali* (Gianyar). After there began to appear dim signs of the golden age of each of the drama gong, there emerged a *sekaa* drama gong in the milineum era around the end of 1990 or near the beginning of 2000. *Sekaa* drama gong is known as *Sekaa Drama Gong Sancaya Dwipa* with the play *Galuh Kembar*. The leader of the drama gong is better known as I Dolar (alm), which is the name of a punakawan actor who is very popular in the hearts of the people. Dollar, whose real name is Tarma, is famous as a figure as well as a senior actor from Bangli Regency. The other actors who supported the theatre were those from top performers from some of the previous drama gongs that had dimmed. In other words, they are *bon-bonan* players (loan/leased players) who merge into one. This drama gong is quite capable of attracting the attention of the Balinese people who are still very hungry for entertainment, but it is a pity that this folk theater only lasts a few years because after that it has faded and displaced by modern art full of innovative styles according to the tastes of the times.

From a number of drama gong mentioned above, it turns out that after in-depth observation based on the results of the inputs / views of the informants as well as the results of the respondents obtained, including based on secondary sources from

several written references, the *Drama Gong Wijayakusuma* (Abianbase Village, Gianyar) with the play *Jayaprana*. It seems to be the most famous in the heart and is loved and respected by the community. This can be seen from its popularity, the frequency of performances, and the number and enthusiasm of the audience watching the show. In addition, during its popularity, the theatrical arts group managed to stage 111 (one hundred and eleven) titles based on various old literature sources as plays such as; chronicles, folklore, puppetry stories, Panji stories, and also Balinese history. The mandates delivered by the characters at the stage are truly laden with moralist didactic meaning. Therefore, this form of folk theater can be used as a non-formal educational medium that prioritizes moral values, ethics/ethics, as well as the values of Balinese cultural arts in general and traditional theater in particular.

Every time a drama gong performance is held, people will come in droves to watch it. Although the venue for the show was quite a short walk from where they lived, they were still happy and excited tirelessly. The dark night is not equipped with street lights, clouds that have poured light rain/drizzle, some even holding their children and grandchildren, are not a barrier for them to get to the venue. Surprisingly, even though the drama gong performance lasted overnight (meaning: from night to morning) people still followed and enjoyed it until they were satisfied. Then when they got home, they did not immediately rest (sleep to relieve sleepiness) but still immediately rushed to get daily work tools such as working on farmland, plantations, some trading, some working as construction workers, going to school for children, and so on.

3.2 Dimming Phase (After 1980 - 2000)

As a folk theater that belongs to the *balih-balihan* (art of spectacle) art group, drama gongs are staged solely to entertain the public. The staging of drama gongs can be carried out anywhere, with a rough presentation system according to the situation and conditions of the venue for the event, such as; in *wanttilan / bale banjar* (community meeting hall), in the field, in the yard, and so on. Drama Gongs generally feature plays related to several kingdoms in Java, for example; the kingdoms of Kahuripan, Daha/Kediri, Singosari, and Gagelang with their subjects who were always obedient to their wise kings.

The existence of drama gong as one of the folk arts is very popular with Balinese people from various generations, both those who live in the countryside and those who live in the city. The various stories/stories it presents really reflect the vision and mission of Balinese culture, so that drama gong performances become interesting and always awaited by the public. Drama Gong was finally able to last long enough on the Balinese art performance stage as a folk art that managed to entertain the public from the chaos.

Noting the increasingly worrying condition of drama gong in this global era, Balinese performers and observers of performing arts have made various empowerment efforts to protect, save drama gong from its marginalization, for example by means of; (1) change its display/presentation in the form of electronic cinema; (2) translating his verbal dialogue from Balinese into Indonesian through television shows; (3) shorten the serving time to make it more efficient and less boring; (4) adapting to the conditions of the times but not reducing the packages that have been neatly ingrained from the beginning; (5) holding intensive coaching in each regency/city in enlivening the Bali Arts Party (PKB); (6) holding youth drama gong competitions/festivals on various occasions; (7) the regeneration of drama gongs, (8) combining classical themes in old literature with the needs of today's society so as not to look monotonous, and so on. No matter how persistent these efforts are, the existence of drama gong in Bali is still marginalized in the Balinese art performance stage. The drama gong is really dim, dull in the dilemma so that the condition is just getting worse until now.

Drama Gong is classified as a very popular Balinese folk theater. The shape of the theater is very simple and spontaneous in nature. The educational and sociocultural values reflected in it are full of blending with the personality of the Balinese people. Elements of modern theatre that have influenced drama gong performances include: its realist-style décor, the use of sound effects, acting, and a more realist fashion. Drama Gong for the first time in Balinese performing arts is considered to be able to provide new enthusiasm for the community to start doing social activities after the G.30 S. However, that spirit has continued to fade until then drama gong in Bali which was once very popular is now only a memory.

Monotonyity classic themes of drama gong such as virtue, soul sacrifice of true love in the fight against spirituality, pride, hatred, envy, and also greed that has always been maintained throughout the history of the popularity of drama gongs in Bali, is now no longer the main hope for its own supporters. Because they take into account the performers who will appear on stage more than the tragic plays that continue to spin around the traditional secatra without being innovative. Since the emergence of drama gong in the Balinese art performance stage, it has begun to be known for its star system in Balinese folk theater art.

3.3 Dull Phase (after 2000 - present)

3.3.1 Taksu Drama Gong Weakens

Signs of a form of traction in Balinese drama gong began to appear in the early 1980s. Some of the factors that cause the marginalization include: (1) the existence of drama gong performance art seems to have been very rarely performed, even there is almost no longer a performance schedule except in the Bali Arts Party (PKB); (2) the public began to be less sympathetic and less interested in pursuing drama gong both as performers and simply watching the show; (3) there is a tendency for fans of drama gongs to switch to more modern, interesting, and innovative forms of spectacle; (4) the cast (actors) of gong plays are mostly very old/old. They feel saturated and even unable to play drama with beautiful, sharp and alluring verbal dialogues as they used to because they now have many limitations, especially in movement and remembering the plays they will perform; (5) drama gong has begun to lose its *taksu* (*taksu* drama gong has faded); and (6) one by one, the drama gong disperses without regeneration.

3.3.2 Pop Culture's Booming Drama Gong

According to the *Big Indonesian Dictionary* (KBBI) popular or often abbreviated as 'pop' has the meaning of being known or liked by many people (general); according to the needs of the people in general, mudah is understood by the crowd, liked and admired by the crowd. In a more extreme sense, the popular term has four meanings, namely: people's liking; deep type of work; work done to please others; and a culture that people do create for themselves (John Storey, 2007).

Popular culture is always changing and appearing uniquely in different places and times. For example: the phenomenon of TikTok, smartphones, electronic cinemas, and so on. Popular culture according to McDonald's is defined as a dynamic force that destroys ancient boundaries, traditions, tastes, and obscures all kinds of differences. In this case popular culture is born out of its association with the media. The fact that the media is able to produce a form of culture, then the public will absorb it and make it a form of culture (Strinati, 2007).

Coinciding with the development of communication technology as above, the fundamental values in a culture have shifted. A set of values in the form of local wisdom from cultures that have been passed down for generations or often referred to as high culture (*adilihung*) began to get a counter culture. This is what drama gong is now experiencing. In recent years, drama gongs in Bali have not been managed by professional art management which regulates the more flexible governance of production, distribution, and presentation forms both in context, space, and time. In this global era, it is easier for people to obtain various forms of performing arts that

are more interesting for them to watch directly through electronic mass media. Therefore, it is easy for drama gong to be hyped by pop culture.

3.3.3 Drama Gong Loses Multi-Role

Drama Gong in the Balinese art performance stage today has really been marginalized. Drama Gong is undergoing suspended animation since a few years ago. This situation caused a deep sense of public anxiety, especially the shock and disappointment that shackled the hearts of the artists themselves because they felt that they had lost the jobs that had been used as a source of income to support the daily necessities of their families' lives. At the time they were still actively devoting themselves to the world of roles in the art of drama gong, their family life was very well-off, more secure and also comfortable. However, because drama gongs no longer exist, their income has been greatly reduced. The family economy began to be unstable, and to recover it took a long time to successfully pursue a new profession. On the other hand, whether we realize it or not, that so far the Balinese folk theater, namely the drama gong sela in, has lost its role in the family economy, has also lost its role as a reliable and very essential non-formal educational art medium based on local culture / wisdom that is very essential for the Balinese people. So, all of this is a serious threat that leads to the extinction of Balinese folk theater "drama gong" in the Balinese art performance stage as one of the cultural factors of the archipelago in the future.

3.3.4 Drama Gong Empowerment Has Not Been Maximized

Drama Gong can provide people's spirit, self-enlightenment through entertainment, deepening the nature of religious rituals, as well as guidance on the value of life and the purpose of human life in *Hindu dresta Bali*. These values have become an inseparable part of the socio-cultural life of the Balinese people until now. However, in facing the marginalization of drama gong in this global era, the attitude and attention of the provincial and regency/city governments have not seemed optimal, so that the drama gong that is the choice and favorite of the Balinese people has finally become more fragile, helpless, especially without any encouragement from the love of today's young Balinese generation who want to be responsible for the weak position of drama gong as has been done by Balinese youth before. So, inevitably the drama gong had to swallow the bitterness of the fate of its slump to date.

3.3.5 Drama Gong Life Reluctant to Die Unwilling

The existence of drama gong in the Balinese art performance stage today does not change like an umbrella leaf (Balinese: *payung don*). It is only useful at certain times. For example: if the weather is suddenly cloudy and then it rains heavily, then many people on the way rush to find a banana leaf or taro leaf to protect themselves from getting rained. However, if the rain has begun to subside and the weather has begun to lighten, then the umbrellas of the leaves are thrown away in any place. Not many people care that the leaf umbrellas were torn and shattered without any apparent appearance, use, and meaning. So, drama gong today exists in a crisis position of form, function, and meaning. The proverb says: life is reluctant to die unwillingly.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Drama Gong as a folk theater in Bali is always staged with acting, verbal dialogue (Balinese vernacular), and accompanied by *gamelan gong kebyar*. The plays that are staged are sourced from local Balinese stories, including chronicles, history, Panji stories and others. The players always appear dressed in typical Balinese dress. Since the beginning of 1980, this folk theater has begun to fade in the stage of Balinese art performances. This is due to the external and internal factors of the *sekaa* (organization/association/group) of the drama gong itself.

The existence of drama gong in Balinese art performances today is very concerning. The position of the drama gong is completely dim in its own dilemma. The

identity/hallmark of drama gong is increasingly marginalized in its Balinese cultural arts diaries despite efforts made to save its popularity. Drama Gong still cannot rise as it did in its golden days of the 1970s. Due to the rapid development and paradigm change of the times due to the rapid adaptation and innovation of foreign cultures in the global era, drama gongs have become victims of pop culture hegemony.

Until now, the empowerment of drama gong in Bali in general and in regencies/cities in particular has not been carried out optimally because the available budget for it is still limited, so this spectacle can only be watched as it is once every year when the Bali Provincial Government holds the Bali Arts Party. In facilitating the dilemma of drama gong on the Balinese art performance stage, all parties consisting of elements of the Provincial Government, Regional / Regency / City Governments, art actors, observers of the performing arts, including community leaders, stakeholders must be able to synergize for revitalization, innovation, and redesign drama gong in accordance with the needs of the community and the conditions of the times.

Drama Gong in Bali New Era must be able to take part again in rebuilding its golden image that has long been buried. This will be able to heal the sick drama gong, wake up the drama gong that is in suspended animation, so that it no longer loses multi-role so that it remains empowered in the midst of the roar of a new civilization.

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