

THE EXISTENTIAL DYNAMICS OF KETHOPRAK BHAKTI KUNCORO IN POST-PANDEMIC MODERNITY

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Abstract: Bhakti Kuncoro Kethoprak's art performance from Pati Regency, Central Java Province is interesting research. Based on the source of informants the head of the art group has faced existential challenges in maintaining and developing the traditional theatre art of kethoprak. This research aims to find out the strategies applied by Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro amid unhealthy art market competition between groups and how the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affects the implementation of performances and the sustainability of traditional art groups in the era of modernity. A qualitative approach with a narrative type is used in the research by relying on empirical data from socio-cultural phenomena. Data collection was done through literature study, observation, and interviews. The results of this study include aspects of the existence of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro involving the founding process, organizational structure during the performance, and factors that influence its existence. In addition, this research uses important elements in kethoprak, namely the play, dialogue actors, clothing, makeup, equipment, and musical accompaniment. Kethoprak functions as a ritual, entertainment, and a means of non-formal education through the values contained in the performance. This research is expected to make an important contribution to further understanding of the dynamics of traditional art groups amid changing times, as well as revealing the sustainability and adaptation of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak group in Gunungsari Village, Batangan District, Pati Regency, Central Java Province.

Keywords: existential art, bhakti kuncoro, kethoprak

1. INTRODUCTION

Kethoprak art is one of the Indonesian cultures that must be preserved, but kethoprak enthusiasts are increasingly disappearing due to the difficulty of regeneration among young people today, and modernization makes kethoprak art lose its existence. Coupled with the time of COVID-19 that attacked Indonesia this kethoprak art is not allowed to be played or temporarily stopped (Yuwono et al., 2023). Thus, efforts to revive this lost kethoprak art by holding regeneration and socialization aimed at making kethoprak art able to be performed again and be enjoyed again by the surrounding community (Faturrahman et al., 2023).

Kethoprak is a traditional Javanese theatre art that is still developing in Pati City, Central Java, which tells the stories of life that occurred during the Kingdom era and also tells the story of life in ancient times against the background of living conditions of the community. This ethogram art show also provides an alternative for the surrounding community to receive stories that have often been heard by everyone but are packaged in the form of dance, theatre, and



several other songs. (Suprihatini, 2023). Kethoprak art is usually performed on special occasions such as earth alms, circumcisions, and weddings. The enthusiasm of the community is very large in watching kethoprak art performances which are used as folk entertainment. Many people also hold these events to improve the people's economy in the form of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (Setiaji et al., 2023).

Economic and cultural shifts have a general impact on the welfare of community groups that support kethoprak performances. The impact of kethoprak performances has practical benefits for people who are business, cultural, economic, and social actors. The community is also presented with local cultural literacy education to preserve learning based on cultural values for the next generation.

Cultural education provides learning resources for generations to understand and understand the contextual material around them (Waryanti et al., 2022). According to Ardiansyah, (2021) and Jawoto & Sunarno, (2008), kethoprak is a folk art that tells about life stories which are legendary stories that exist in society against the background of Javanese royal life. According to Lisbijanto, (2013), Kethoprak art is also a folk theatre that tells the story of heroism and the life journey of the Royal family. According to Anwar, (2017) explains that kethoprak is a traditional art in the form of a drama performance that tells certain stories, usually legends.

Bhakti Kuncoro as one of the modern kethoprak has been known in all walks of life, whether they live in villages or cities, whether they live in the lower class, middle class, or even the elite. especially for the people of East Java, in general, they do not feel strange anymore. This is possible because Bhakti Kuncoro is classified as a professional kethoprak that always moves its performance locations to various places. In addition, the elements of the play or story performed can always captivate and capture the hearts of the audience (Niswan et al., 2018), or at least the audience is impressed, and interested after seeing the staged play. Likewise, the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak is supported by quite qualified actors. Based on these assumptions, the researcher aims to explain the existence process of Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak, the elements of kethoprak, and the function of kethoprak in the city of Pati, hoping that in the future this research can be developed and can be used as a source of reference for further research. A more detailed description can be explained in the framework of scientific work designed as an initial step to explore local cultural arts.

2. METHOD

This research uses basic research with a narrative qualitative research form. The narrative method is a research method in the social sciences. The essence of this method is its ability to understand a person's identity and worldview by referring to the stories (narratives) that he listens to or tells in his daily activities. Thus narrative research can be defined as the study of stories that tell and explain an event that is the center of the researcher's attention based on a certain time sequence in detail (Anna et al., 2022).

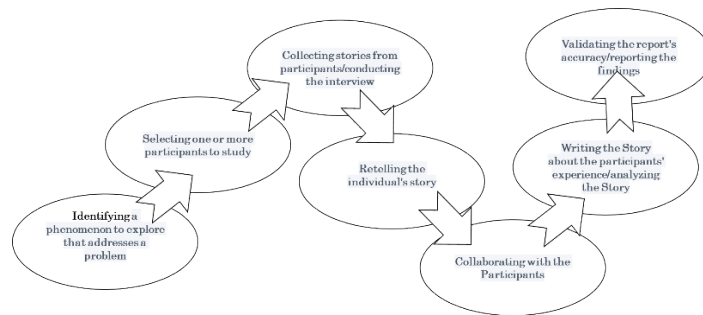


Figure 1: Narrative Research Flow Chart

The research location chosen in this study is Gunungsari Village, Batangan Sub-district, Pati Regency, Central Java Province. This research activity is about the typical kethoprak art of Pati Regency. The data sources in this research are divided into two, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources in this study are data obtained directly from sources conducted through interviews about the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak art, namely Mr. Agus Subekti as the leader of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak. Meanwhile, secondary data sources are books, journals, documentation, archives, references, literature on Kethoprak Pati Regency, and previous studies. The subject of this research is kethoprak art. While the object of this research is to examine how the existence of Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak. This research uses data collection techniques with interview methods, observation or observation, and documentation.

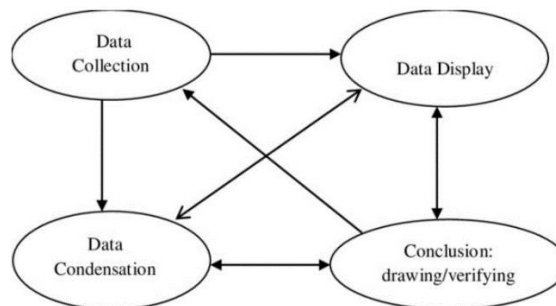


Figure 2: Research steps

The steps in this study are data collection from various sources, both written, field observations, interviews, or video documentation, then the data reduction process which includes the process of selecting, focusing on simplifying, abstracting, and transforming rough data that emerges from written notes in the field, the next stage is data presentation until the final stage, namely concluding (Miles, M. B., 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The traditional theatre art of kethoprak is one of the performances that can provide entertainment for the audience. Kethoprak is also one of the tangible forms of local wisdom owned by the Indonesian people. Kethoprak itself is experiencing quite rapid development among the community, through the theme of everyday life and supported by

actors who are proficient in stage control, kethoprak still exists and is accepted by the surrounding community (Sani, 2023). The results of the article discuss the findings and analyses on the existence and elements of kethoprak, Bhakti Kuncoro. The description can be explained in the following sub-chapters;

3.1 Existence of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro in Pati City

The existence of kethoprak is part of the pattern of society as a culture for generations. This type of culture is empirically part of the existence of popular entertainment as well as life guidance. Kethoprak art is quite popular in Pati Regency, Central Java Province (Diani & Prasetyo, 2022). Along with the times, the art of kethoprak according to the artist, Mr Agus Subekti, has great hopes to be able to develop this traditional theatre art. Before becoming the head of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak from Gunungsari Village, Klagen Kec. Batangan Kab. Pati admitted that he had joined a kethoprak group, Wahyu Manggolo, led by Mr Sarjimin, known as Mogol (Yunitasari, 2018). After years of developing his acting potential in Wahyu Manggolo kethoprak, Mr. Agus Subekti finally decided to be independent to establish a kethoprak with the help of some of his friends.

In 2013 Mr Agus Subekti officially established a kethoprak troupe, Bhakti Kuncoro. The name Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak is taken from the name of the kethoprak leader, Bekti, with the hope that Bhakti Kuncoro will succeed in Pati Regency. In addition, the name Bhakti Kuncoro is interpreted linguistically as Bhakti which means the name of the person, and Kuncoro which means always giving the best, some of the philosophies contained in it are that a human being must always remember to do good. Likewise, Bhakti Kuncoro, which here is the role of Mr Agus Subekti, must always remember fellow artists and be able to contribute to society. With various experiences as a kethoprak performer, Mr. Agus Subekti took the initiative to create an organizational structure for the performance of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak. The structure of the performance implementation contained in the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak includes the chairman/leader, director, and paraga coordinator.

The chairman or leader was taken over by Mr Agus Subekti. Leadership is the effort of someone who encourages followers to act to achieve certain goals, which represent the values and motivations, wants and needs, aspirations and expectations, of both leaders and followers. The genius of leaders lies in the way in which leaders see and act alone with the values and aspirations of their followers (Julia Sari, 2019). Thus, Mr. Agus Subekti as the leader of Kethoprak carried out a strategy so that the organization ran well by starting to collect capital to complete the needs of Kethoprak, followed by learning all matters related to Kethoprak administration, namely: licensing, both licensing for the establishment of kethoprak and licensing for kethoprak performances, management of equipment and equipment to the distribution of members' wages. Ki Anom Hartono was assigned to be the director. One of the director's duties is to create a scenario or illustration in general of the kethoprak storyline, according to the host's order. So, the main task of the director is to create a sanggit kethoprak play according to the needs of the performance (Heriana & Asnawi, 2023), or in kethoprak terms, it is known as ngewosi which means equipping the paraga. Additional duties for the kethoprak director usually become a kethoprak paraga if there are other paraga who are unable to attend (Lidyasari et al., 2023).

Another important role in the structure of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak performance is someone who serves as a coordinator. Someone in charge of being a coordinator must be able to supervise their members, as well as have the courage to be responsible for everything related to the community or organization (Syauqi, Ahmad Zufahmi & Setyowati, 2020). As a coordinator in the structure of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak performance, there are three positions, namely the coordinator of wayang kepruk, magersari, and Magellan.

The wayang kepruk coordinator is entrusted to Mr Agus Pakel. The responsibility of being a wayang kepruk coordinator is to be able to remind members regarding the duration of performance time, clothing, makeup, and war patterns and clearly must understand each other's atmosphere, both to the audience, the host, and his teammates. The position of the next stage implementation structure is as a magersari coordinator, this position is entrusted to Sri. The task of the magersari coordinator is to organize everything in the emban scene related to clothing, dance, and singing. The third position is the Dagelan Coordinator. Dagelan coordinator is entrusted to Ananda Abhinawa. The task of the dagelan coordinator is to manage the members of the dagelan starting from the flow of jokes, joke material, dances, clothing used when performing, and even techniques or ways to master the stage so that the audience is not bored as well as singing a song by changing the original verse into a funny sentence. The dance pattern in the performance is an aesthetic intertwining in creating a performance between the stage, movement, music, and the atmosphere or conditions of art (Riyanti et al., 2023; Umiatun et al., 2002).

After the leader of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro prepared everything well, it turned out that there were still several factors that affected the existence of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, although in interviews with the leader of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro did not say clearly that there were factors that hindered the progress of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, the author tried to interpret from his words, the factors faced by Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro Pati Regency included unhealthy competition and the Covid 19 outbreak (Yuwono et al., 2023).

Unfair competition, namely the existence of several members who try to damage or have a negative impact by influencing other members to leave the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak and establish a new kethoprak. Unhealthy competition between kethoprak leaders is also a factor inhibiting the existence of kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, for example, other kethoprak leaders charge kethoprak at substandard prices. COVID-19 has also destroyed the order in various sectors, one of which is the world of arts (Bisangadatika, 2022). During the ten years of Bhakti Kuncoro's work, COVID-19 was the biggest obstacle to the progress of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, because, for two full years, Bhakti Kuncoro could not hold performances in the Pati Regency area in particular. The performance schedule that had been neatly arranged had to be postponed and even canceled, hundreds of millions of money in front of the eyes just needed to be taken away. For artists who do not have other skills besides their talent in the world of kethoprak, their economic activities are certainly completely dead, a large number of artists are forced to be unemployed.

Although several factors hinder the progress of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, Mr. Agus Subekti as the head of the Kethoprak has never given up hope in maintaining the existence of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro, precisely to these problems his enthusiasm for learning is

increasing to find solutions so that Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro is more successful. The factors that encourage the growth and development of Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro include:

Human resources are one of the keys to success in an organization or company. Since its inception in 2013, Bhakti Kuncoro members, especially the pengrawit and the paraga, have never held special training. Kethoprak Bhakti Kuncoro has its way of training unskilled paragas to become skilled quickly, namely by giving words / instructions before the performance, and must be demonstrated when performing. Likewise, with gambyong and magersari dancers, they must first have the basics to become good dancers and singers as needed. Training is only carried out at the performance location without scheduling special training. Kethoprak performances have no such thing as memorizing dialogue texts before the performance, because usually, the stakeholders ask for the play suddenly, only a few hours before the performance begins, so the actors must listen to and understand the words/instruction so that they can present the storyline according to the plot of the play (Nugroho, 2023).

Competition is something that is usually done by business actors, but it is different from the competition that exists in kethoprak in Pati Regency, the large number of kethoprak troupes makes the paraga compete to show their best, so they are glimpsed and invited to join other kethoprak, to be able to get more wages than joining the previous kethoprak troupe. this phenomenon is quite troublesome for kethoprak leaders, so the idea arose to create an association that discusses paraga wages. The association consisted of 10 kethoprak organizations. The essence of the paguyuban is to make an agreement on the rates/wages of one kethoprak paraga with another kethoprak paraga, even if there is a difference, the difference is not too much. In addition, the kethoprak paguyuban in Pati City also provides a lot of information related to the development of kethoprak art. Competition is not only related to paraga rates but also the modern art industry with more attractive and practical presentation packaging. The existence of this modern form of art performance is not a reason to abandon the traditional kethoprak art world but is considered a challenge to make new and relevant breakthroughs according to the times.

Public appreciation and enthusiasm are extraordinary when watching Kethoprak's performances. For the people of Pati City, maintaining the traditions of the ancestors is something that must be maintained, because most of the people of Pati Regency have the belief that by preserving the traditions of the ancestors, blessings will flow to their families. The people of Pati City are accustomed to organizing kethoprak performances in various events, ranging from earth alms, sea alms, ruwatan, circumcision, and weddings, to tasyakuran events so that an event feels incomplete if it has not staged kethoprak. Based on this description, it can be said that one of the factors that made Mr. Agus Subekti still choose to develop kethoprak in this era is because the public trusts in the art of kethoprak.

3.2 Elements of Kethoprak

As a performing art, kethoprak has several elements that are interrelated with one another. The elements contained in kethoprak are Lakon, paraga, dialogue, acting, clothing, makeup, equipment, and musical accompaniment. The definition of Lakon in kethoprak can

be interpreted as the main character or dominating character in the story and also lakon means the meaning of the play itself. An example of the use of the word lakon in the first sentence in Javanese is "pentas kethoprak ndek bengi lakone sapa?" which means "last night's kethoprak performance whose main character?", and the second example of the use of the word lakon in a sentence in Javanese is "pentas kethoprak ndek bengi lakone apa?" which means "last night's kethoprak performance what story?". In addition, lakon can be interpreted as a stage text (stage imagination when reading a play) is a form of play on reality that is constructed by the scriptwriter into an imaginary reality, a montage reality of images, sounds, narratives, plots, themes, characterisations, characters, worldviews, etc. (Faishal & Hariyanto, 2018). According to Mr. Agus Subekti, usually, the play in kethoprak is related to the topic being performed by the actors, the dialogue in a play is written in full and some are delivered orally only.

In addition to the play, there is another element, namely the Paraga, which is the most important element in kethoprak performances, because it is the paraga that will convey characters and values verbally and on stage. As a kethoprak paraga, you should have a good mentality when you are on stage, therefore, training independently or when performing is needed to become a paraga that matches the criteria with the needs of the presentation (Doyin, 2001). A good kethoprak paraga should have the basics of acting such as not having stage fright, speaking fluently, and having a posture that suits the role in the play. In addition to the play and paraga, another element in kethoprak is related to the clothing or clothing worn on the paraga according to the character played in the story. Like the clothes of a king who wears a crown complete with accessories, the clothes worn by the people are only shorts with short jarik, without sparkling accessories, wearing a plain black surjan shirt.



Figure 3: Kethoprak with folk dress

Kethoprak actors are required to be able to understand kethoprak makeup, where makeup is a good scribble or painting on the face or limbs of a character that is adjusted to the character being played. For example, if a character is old even though the character is young, the make-up must show that the character looks old.



Figure 4: Documentation of parents' make-up

In addition to makeup, kethoprak actors must master dialogue. The dialogue in the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak uses conversations between the characters on stage. In this dialogue, a character must be able to say sentences according to the character being played (Akbar, 2022). One example of the dialogue of the kethoprak character Saridin is "yes wis tak angstukke, mengko tak isine jedhinge" which means "yes, I will get water, later I will fill all the bathtubs". The dialogue is spoken at a relatively slow and calm tempo (Bakhtiar et al., 2022).



Figure 5: Kethoprak weapon accessories

The equipment in kethoprak includes all the tools used in supporting the performance, namely: swords, krises, shields, spears, arrows, and several other weapons. The equipment for stage needs is Geber, irah-irahan, tables, chairs, leaves, or the like to add aesthetic value to the stage, lights, and sound system. Apart from equipment, another element supporting the kethoprak performance is music. The music used as an accompaniment to kethoprak usually uses gamelan, both pelog and slendro tuned (Nugroho, 2023). The accompaniment music in kethoprak performances has a strong role, even dominating each scene because the music can illustrate the atmosphere of sadness, horror, majesty, gel, etc. In sad scenes, for example, the music of the gamelan can be used to illustrate the sadness, horror, majesty, gecul etc. In the sad scene, an example of the music used to support

the scene is gending Tludur. Another example is the role of dram instruments that function to respond to all the movements of the characters, especially in war scenes.



Figure 6: War Scene

3.3 Function of Kethoprak

Kethoprak is a traditional traditional art that developed in Central Java and surrounding areas. Kethoprak, which is present amid society and developed in the era of modernity, has functions (Bujang, 2007), namely as a ritual, entertainment, and educational function. The ritual function of kethoprak performances is still visible today, namely, kethoprak is presented in the context of ngluari nazar to be free from misfortune and be able to get blessings for the family. In addition, kethoprak is also performed in cultural ritual activities such as earth alms, sea alms, ruwatan, and slametan. Another function of kethoprak is as a means of entertainment for the surrounding community. performing arts are not just a large artistic presentation, but are related to spiritual needs in the sense of pleasure for entertainment (Sartika & Mulyana, 2021). One example of the kethoprak scene that the community is waiting for is the emban scene, because in this scene the royal servants are shown dancing and singing to entertain the king's daughter.



Figure 7: Magersari Scene

The picture above shows that the community is very enthusiastic when seeing the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak performance, it is clear that the front of the stage is filled with many spectators, and in addition to the audience getting entertainment from the behavior of the paraga, the audience can also see the beauty of the ornaments found on the kethoprak stage.

The meaning of kethoprak has an educational function, not kethoprak as a means of obtaining formal education but non-formal

education, kethoprak as an educational medium can be seen through the values contained in the performance of each scene, characterization, musical accompaniment, gending etc. An example is described in the play Bhakti Kuncoro. An example is depicted in the Saridin kethoprak play in Sarini's dialogue as follows: "My son, you are patient, see your mother like this you don't cry, later when you grow up be a successful person" which means "my son, you are patient, son, see your mother like this you don't cry, son, later when you grow up be a successful person", The quote of the sentence is a moral message conveyed is a mother's love for her child, parents who educate their children with patience, even though their lives are deprived, but the most important thing is that children remain healthy and can eat, with the hope of achieving success in the future (Bakhtiar et al., 2014). , 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been carried out, this paper contains the existence of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak, which includes the structure of the Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak members to the driving and inhibiting factors for the development of kethoprak, the elements of kethoprak, and the function of kethoprak as a means of ritual, entertainment, and education implicitly. Although in the process Bhakti Kuncoro Kethoprak is faced with unhealthy competition and affected by COVID-19, Bhakti Kuncoro still tries to maintain its existence by building human resources, collaborating with the Pati Kethoprak paguyuban, maintaining public trust, and the role of Bhakti Kuncoro kethoprak performances which function as a means of ritual, entertainment, and education.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

We give our appreciation to ketoprak artists in Kudus district, Central Java for preserving local culture and unique art in the East Pantura, Central Java

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