



The Aesthetics of Surakarta Palace's *Karawitan* According to *Serat Sri Karongron*

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics is an observation of beauty, values, and judgments that view human works from the perspective of whether they are beautiful and not—*Serat Sri Karongron* by R. Ng. Purbadipura was written during the reign of Paku Buwana X, releasing a pulse of musical life in the Surakarta Palace, which implies the artistic content of the Surakarta Palace's *karawitan*. *Serat Sri Karongron* explicitly mentions the atmosphere of the *Seger sumyah karawitan* feeling. The phrase *Seger sumyah* can be interpreted as something that can make someone feel happy because *Seger sumyah* refers to an excellent or delicious taste. Purbadipura notes that *Seger sumyah* refers to the *gobyog karawitan* presentation at the Surakarta Palace. On the other hand, Purbadipura reported that the *gobyog karawitan* presentation still refers to the *karawitan* presentation with three parameters of *tan sora swaranira*, *rampak-rempeg*, and *sajanturing ringgit*. The aesthetics of the *Seger sumyah karawitan*, which refers to *karawitan* composition with the nuances of *gobyog*, had a chance to live and develop during the reign of Paku Buwana X.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetic of
Karawitan;
Sri Karongron;
Seger Sumyah

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1. Introduction

Aesthetics is about whether or not something is beautiful. The parameters of beauty apply in social artworks or the universe. However, the generally accepted parameters of beauty remain unidentified to date. Many theories are talking about the parameters of beauty. Aesthetics is originally from the Greek aesthesis, which means observation. In general, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that talks about beauty. The object of aesthetics is the observation of beauty. Aesthetics tries to find the essence of beauty and forms of experience on beauty, such as physical, spiritual beauty, natural, and artistic beauty (Surajiyo 2005, 101). Aesthetics is a part of philosophy about values and judgments that view human works from the perspective of whether something is beautiful and not. Beautiful and not beautiful is a dichotomous couple. What necessarily matters is sensing or perception that gives rise to pleasure and comfort on one side, displeasure and discomfort on the other.

Serat Sri Karongron was written in 1912 by R. Ng. Purbadipura during the reign of Paku Buwana X. *Serat Sri Karongron* describes each ceremony and *gamelan* instruments used in the Surakarta Palace. The ceremonies involving *karawitan* are the confrontation (*pasewakan*) ceremony, the celebration of *Garebeg Besar*, a celebration of *Garebeg Mulud*, the commemoration of *Tingalan Dalem Pawukon*, the celebration of *Dalem Tetesan*, *klenengan*, the visit of Paku Buwana X to Yogyakarta Palace, the welcoming ceremony from Germany, welcoming of Patih Danureja, and the farewell and welcoming ceremonies of Prince Hangabehi. At a certain *pupuh*, Purbadipura talks about the aesthetics of the *karawitan* in the Surakarta Palace.

2. Karawitan in the Reign of Paku Buwana X

Paku Buwana X ruled between 1893-1939. During this period, he made a significant contribution to the development of the Surakarta Palace's theater. Pressure from the Netherlands caused the king's political power to decrease, and setbacks in the economic field make the culture (including *karawitan*)

the only power the king had. Through cultural symbols, the king could still play his role, and implicitly used them as a weapon against the Dutch government. Thus, even though the political and economic power of the king was reduced, even lost, it does not mean that his power was over. Paku Buwana X still had cultural symbols that could strengthen his position as a ruler (Kuntowijoyo 2003). Cultural symbols such as *pesanggrahan* (resting place), heirlooms, buildings, various performing arts, and attributes of the king's greatness received special attention. They became the only choice to maintain authority and the power of the king because there was no other choice until Paku Buwana X placed great importance on the cultural symbols (Kuntowijoyo 2003).

The choice of Paku Buwana X by empowering various cultural symbols of the palace has a positive impact on the development and progress of *karawitan* other than as a symbol of resistance to the policy of the Dutch colonial government. The policy of Paku Buwana to empower the cultural symbols of the palace caused the life of *karawitan* at that time to experience enlightenment in various ways both in terms of creation, work, and presentation. In other words, the *karawitan* life reached its peak of glory and gold during the reign of Paku Buwana X. The peak of the glory and golden life of *karawitan* during the reign of Paku Buwana X was marked by the special attention to the various works of *gendhing* (song), the pattern of playing instruments, as well as the development of *wilet* (Waridi 2006, 12).

3. Serat Sri Karongron and the Aesthetics of Surakarta Palace's Karawitan

According to *Serat Sri Karongron*, the aesthetics of the Surakarta Palace's *karawitan* during the reign of Paku Buwana X is explicitly compared to the atmosphere of feeling obtained when someone is drinking red syrup ice, as the following excerpt from *Pupuh Dhandhanggula*:

Sampyeng rempeg penabuhe apik, kang miyarsa datan myat pradangga, kewala mung krasa ngehe, kabeh kalebeng kalbu, lir anggane toya den mori, ing aes setrup mawar, trimurti rumangsuk, yakti tan susah winijang, asaling kang adon-adon dadi siji, mung krasa seger sumyah (Purbadipura 1981, 156).

(The sound produced is so beautiful, the listeners do not see who is playing, all the beauty permeates the heart like ice water with rose syrup, three forms come together into one place, which is so pleasant)

The above excerpt states that the beauty of *karawitan* presentation is like the unification of three elements, namely water, ice, and syrup, which causes the feeling of *Seger sumyah* for those who drink the rose syrup ice. *Seger sumyah* implies something that can make someone feel happy because it refers to a good/delicious taste. This refers to the meaning of *Seger*, which is tasty, fresh, delicious, and healthy (Prawiroatmodjo 1981, 180).

Pupuh Mijil in *Serat Sri Karongron* mentioned that there is room to present *karawitan* with *gobyog* nuances. One verse of *Pupuh Mijil* reads that the *gobyog* presentation is presented without forgetting the ethics and aesthetics of the *karawitan* that has been agreed upon in the *karawitan* of the Surakarta Palace environment. The following is the excerpt about *gobyog karawitan* presentation:

Saya suwé panabuhé sami, uyek muyek gobyog, gebyagané tan sora swarané, rempeg rampak kabèh mung jinawil, sajanturing ringgit, karasa ngesipun (Purbadipura 1981, 84).

(The longer the *karawitan* presentation is, the more rousing it becomes, *gobyog*, even so, it does not sound so loud, but *rampak* is still heard that makes its beauty of the sound still felt)

The above excerpt implies that the aesthetics of *karawitan* during the reign of Paku Buwana X was more about the aesthetics of *gobyog karawitan*. The aesthetics of *karawitan* composition with the nuances of *gobyog* in *Serat Sri Karongron* is explicitly like the atmosphere when someone is drinking red syrup ice like the excerpt of *Pupuh Dhandhanggula*, *mung krasa Seger sumyah* (it feels fresh and pleasant). Listening to *klenengan* is like the feeling of *Seger sumyah* like drinking syrup ice. The aesthetics of *Seger Sumyah karawitan* and the provision of space for living and development of *karawitan* composition with nuances of *gobyog* show that the aesthetics of *Seger sumyah karawitan* leads to the composition of *karawitan* with *gobyog* nuances.

The aesthetics of *Seger sumyah karawitan* manifested by the composition of *gobyog karawitan* during the reign of Paku Buwana X has certain limitations outlined in *Pupuh Mijil* as follows:

Saya suwé panabuhé sami, uyek muyek gobyog, gebyagané tan sora swarané, rempeg rampak kabèh mung jinawil, sajanturing ringgit, karasa ngesipun (Purbadipura 1981, 84).

(The longer the *karawitan* presentation is, the more rousing it becomes, *gobyog*, even so, it does not sound so loud, but *rampak* is still heard that makes its beauty of the sound still felt)

From the above excerpt, the three indicators of *gobyog karawitan* composition in the Paku Buwana X's reign were found, namely *tan sora swarané*, *rempeg rampak kabèh mung jinawil*, and *sajanturing ringgit*. The concept of *karawitan* aesthetics, according to *Serat Sri Karongron*, can be seen in Figure 1.

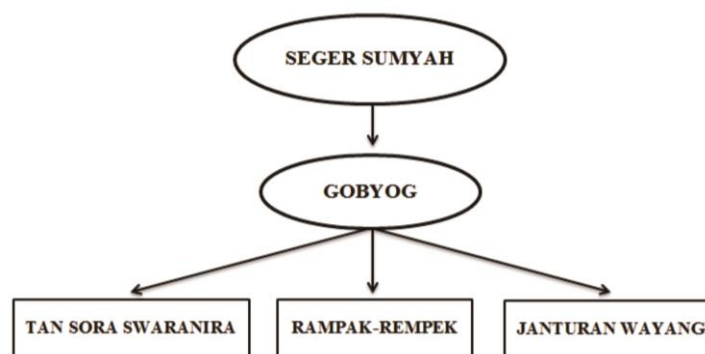


Fig. 1. The aesthetics of surakarta palace's karawitan According to serat sri karongron

3.1. Tan Sora Swaranira

Tan sora swaranira indicates the sound of the playing that is not too loud, and the volume tends to be of the *alus* level. *Alus* culture is enlivened and develops in the Surakarta Palace as the Javanese people generally idolize it. Classical *karawitan*, which is one of the products of Javanese culture, has a system and rules that are understood by the *karawitan* community as musical laws which have *alus* characteristics. We can say that *karawitan* reflects Javanese culture, which idolizes *alus* culture (Waridi 2006, 72). *Karawitan*, as a manifestation of *alus* culture, is enlivened and develops in the palace environment, which is considered a source of *alus* culture. The culture of the palace, classified as *alus* culture, is full of complex and complicated symbols, which is inherited by the nobles and the royal society. The *alus* culture, which is full of complex symbols, is a natural representation of the thoughts of the king and the nobles.

Umar Kayam depicts with the sentence in the *gedhe krajan* as the King sitting on the throne, who becomes the center of the whole cosmos and creates subtle artistic and cultural expressions (Kayam 1981, 26). Thus, it is not so surprising that *karawitan*, which is a representation of *alus* culture, is enlivened and develops in the palace. As the palace *karawitan* is a representation of the king's mind, which eventually produces *alus* culture, the palace *karawitan* as the mainstream of the palace culture becomes a reference for complex and soft *karawitan* composition.

3.2. Rampak-Rempeg

The primary medium of *karawitan* is sound. The medium means the raw material in the form of sound that is used as a tool or means to express the soul experience or for the musician's self-expression, which is manifested in a *gendhing*. These sound elements are processed in such a way to produce a series of sounds according to what the musicians want. These elements are the long-short sound, high-low sound, and timbre. Furthermore, the series of sounds will be a tangle of rhythmic sounds. Rhythm is an essential element in music. In the context of *karawitan* presentation, the presentation of *gendhing* will not sound well if it is not presented with a good rhythm. *Gendhing* instrument playing is deformed if it does not sound rhythmic, in Javanese called *ora irama* (not rhythmic). The rhythm is the breath of *gendhing*. It is what makes *gendhing* as it is or comes alive (Supanggah 2002, 129).

Surakarta's traditional style of *karawitan* places rhythm as the essential element in a *gendhing* presentation. In the presentation of *gendhing*, the rhythm is led by the *kendang* (drum) as the *pamurba irama* that is responsible for regulating the breath of *gendhing* and, at the same time, giving life to the *gendhing*. In carrying out its duties, *kendang* is played together with the fiddle that acts as *pamurba yatmaka* or leader of the soul, the pure spirit of *gendhing*. The fiddle is the soul or the character of *gendhing*. At the same time, *kendang* is more about the physical or physical aspect of *gendhing*, which involves the dynamics of the feeling of *gendhing* (Supanggah 2002, 130).

Kendang, as a leader in the *karawitan* or *pamurba irama*, has a different role from the conductor. In leading *karawitan* presentation, *kendang* has a role more as a *pamong* or aligner. The *kendang* player gives not only the signal as the conductor, but also an example of how loud the *kendang* hitting should be, how complicated the playing pattern should be and how fast the tempo is developed. Other instruments will follow the gradation of volume, complexity, and speed chosen by the *kendang*. In this case, it is not allowed that one instrument overlaps the other (in Javanese, *nyilep*) or drowns out the volume of their partner's playing, especially *nyilep kendang*. The *karawitan* tradition does not recognize self-prominence in its presentation. A *kendang* player must be able to lead his friends so that there is no chaotic volume in the *karawitan* presentation.

The harmony of the *gendhing* presentation becomes the full responsibility of the player so that the *gendhing* presentation will reach the level of *rampak* and *rempeg*. Both *karawitan* aesthetics terms are the primary demands that must be fulfilled in a *karawitan* presentation. *Rampak* is an aesthetic demand that is closely related to togetherness in playing the instrument associated with the elements of speed or time. *Rempeg* is about the sense of togetherness in playing that relates to the elements of volume, space, or dynamics (Supanggah 2002, 124). *Rampak* and *Rempeg* are not only about being together in volume and speed, but also about the dynamics presented by each instrument. Each player makes the dynamics of the *karawitan* tradition through the playing of instruments, which are their responsibility. Supanggah stated that the *kendang* player could someday become a musician as well as a playmaker, even as a general, but he must still be able to act as a moderator, *pemomong* (caretaker and role model) by participating in playing (*ngayahi, nglakoni*) while taking into account the capacity, abilities, and skills of his fellow players. The *kendang* player must also be responsible for the *rampak* and *rempeg* of the *kendang* hitting by observing the context of the place, function, and time at the time the *karawitan* presentation is performed (Supanggah 2002, 132).

3.3. Sajanturing Ringgit

Sajanturing ringgit refers to one part of the *purwa* puppet performance. In the Surakarta *purwa* puppet performance, there is a section to describe the setting or atmosphere of the scene. In other words, in the *purwa* puppet performance, there is a dramatic structure in the presentation of the play. The dramatic structure of the one-night puppet show is a sequence of scenes from the beginning (*jejer*) to the end (*tanceb kayon*), which contains the core story in each scene and is presented in three parts, namely, *pathet nem*, *pathet sanga*, and *pathet manyura*. In each *pathet*, there are dramatic elements in the form of *catur*, *janturan*, *pocapan*, *sabet*, and the *karawitan* of the puppet show, which includes *sulukan* and *gendhing* (Sarwanto 2008, 173).

Janturan contains a description of the scene, both the atmosphere and the setting. Sarwanto defines *janturan* in full as the puppeteer's discourse in the form of a description of the ongoing scene situation. In this *janutran*, the puppeteer usually describes the place setting, time setting, atmosphere, greatness, and merit of a character along with interpretations of meaning accompanied by *gendhing sirepan* illustrations (Sarwanto 2008, 181). In his definition of *janturan*, Sarwanto mentions the word *gendhing sirepan*. *Gendhing sirepan* presentation does not involve all the *ricikan* in one set of *gamelan*. *Ricikan* involved in *gendhing sirepan* is fiddle *ricikan*, *kendang ageng* or *kendang Sabet*, *gender barung*, *slenthem*, *gong*, *kenong*, and *kethuk*. The involvement of several instructions in *gendhing sirepan* shows that in *gendhing sirepan* does not require a hard volume of hitting. However, the essence of *gendhing* to be still visible with the emergence of the *ricikan garap ngajeng* groups, namely fiddle and *gender barung*, the structural *ricikan* group of *kethuk*, *kenong kendang*, and the group of *ricikan balungan* represented by *slenthem*. In general, *gendhing sirepan* presented already represents the full form of the presentation because the three *ricikan* groups, *ricikan garap*, structural *ricikan*, and *ricikan balungan*, are present *gendhing sirepan* presentation.

The complete musical presentation marked by the presence of all the *ricikan* in one set of *gamelan* instruments will come to the level of *nges* as written in the last *gatra* or line of the excerpt of *Tembang Mijil* stanzas, *kerasa ngesipun* if the sound produced by the *ricikan* that presents the *gendhing sirepan* is heard or is not covered by the sound produced by other *ricikan*. The word *ngesipun* is *tembung andhahan*, in Indonesian referred to as an affixed word which comes from the root word *nges*. In the terminology, it is the art of *karawitan*. *Nges* is related to harmony, namely the musical taste that combines the elements in *karawitan*, including the hitting technique, patterns, rhythms and *laya*, *laras*, *pathet*, conventions, and dynamics.

4. Conclusion

The aesthetics of *karawitan* in Surakarta Palace comes from a variety of sources, both oral and written. One of the written sources is *Serat Sri Karongron*, written by Purbadipura during the reign of Paku Buwana X. Purbadipura reported that during the reign of Paku Buwana X, the creativity in *karawitan* flourished. Besides, several stanzas in *Serat Sri Karongron* talk about the aesthetics of *karawitan*. The aesthetics of the Surakarta Palace's *karawitan* during the reign of Paku Buwana X, according to *Serat Sri Karongron*, is explicitly like the atmosphere of the feeling of someone drinking red syrup ice that makes him feel *Seger sumyah*. Three indicators of the aesthetics of *Seger sumyah karawitan* manifested by *gobyog karawitan* composition during the reign of Paku Buwana X were found; they are *tan sora swarané*, *rempeg rampak kabèh mung jinawil*, and *sajanturing ringgit*.

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