

RUWATAN: A RITUAL IN TRANSITION

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I. Introduction

"Where are you going, Wayang?" This question was raised by the late Umar Kayam in 1969 (Kayam 1981: 129-135) in his article as a speculative note after a Wayang Festival in Jakarta in the same year. In the article he pointed out that when the Wayang Festival started, Wayang was already very old and weak, because it had undergone a very long journey through various eras and dimensions. Its presence in its old age and at the crossroad of a changing society must have created one or two consequences. The first, Wayang was forced to arrive at new idioms. The second, it must shift emphasis, such as including new images or new identifications because at this point the time and language dimensions had so demanded. He was also predicting that the audience would change and the new audience would have different perceptions towards the characters in Wayang in general [including Wayang Kulit]. They would humanize the characters more. The audience probably would no longer use Wayang as a frame of reference in their life. Wayang would become a modern drama that avoided giving advice, but it would provide several alternatives of life. When future audiences went to a Wayang Kulit, they would no longer search for any symbolism in it. They would rather prepare to enjoy "aesthetical experiences which are full of pleasure". His writing was like a warning about the life of Indonesian Wayang if it wanted to survive and cope with the modernization era where the agricultural life was bit by bit replaced by urban life.

However, Umar Kayam did not specifically look at the future Wayang Kulit in the context of ritual ceremonies, such as *Ruwatan*. Therefore this paper will look at some tendencies at its performance today, especially in the so-called *Ruwatan Masal* (Mass *Ruwatan*), a new trend in Indonesia.

This paper has used the data from various written resources, interviews with *dalang ruwat* (a *dalang* who has the right to perform a *ruwatan* ceremony), and several families that participated in *ruwatan*. Beside that, I was involved through participatory observation as a member of the Organizing Committee of a *Ruwatan Masal*, and as *pengrawit* (gamelan player) in both regular performances and some *ruwatan* ceremonies.

II. Ruwatan

The functions of performing arts have been discussed by a number of scholars. In his book *Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia di Era Globalisasi*, R.M. Soedarsono has come to several conclusions about the functions of performing arts (Soedarsono 2002: 122-123). He states that one of the primary functions of performing arts is ritual. By ritual function, he means that a performance is performed for the spectators that are mainly invisible (deities or spirits). "The ritual is primarily directed at the audience of spirits," says Kathy Foley (Foley 1984:62).

A. Ruwatan Murwakala and Wayang Kulit

In the Yogyakarta tradition, the *Ruwatan* is a ritual which is always connected with a Wayang Kulit performed usually during the day in which the story of *Murwakala* (the birth of Kala) is depicted. In this case, the *ruwatan* is also called *Ruwatan Murwakala*.

After tracing back many old Wayang texts, either Javanese or Sanskrit texts, Jayaatmaja (Jayaatmaja 1996) has come to the conclusion about the meaning of the word *ruwatan*. *Ruwat*, in its passive meaning, literally means 'forced to be powerless', 'forced to be destroyed (the evils, curses, evil influences and so on)'. In its active meaning, *akruwat*, *rumuwat* and *rinuwat* literally mean 'to make something or somebody powerless', 'destroy', 'free something or somebody' from evils, 'free somebody or something from evil spirits.' Furthermore, he points out that the ritual is an act of killing or destroying Kala¹,

¹ Jayaatmaja (Jayaatmaja 1996) has resumed the story of Kala's birth according to the Yogyakarta tradition. The story presented on the screen, *Murwakala*, is about the birth of god Kala (a son of Guru who is the King of gods and goddesses). Guru and goddess Umayi, his wife, are flying on his magic cow called Andini. While flying, Guru wants to make love on Andini's back. Umayi refuses to do that. She believes that love making cannot be done just anywhere, because it is a sacred act. Guru cannot stand it and his sperm drops into the sea. He is very angry and he curses Umayi. Suddenly, her face becomes ogre like. Then, she is not allowed to live in Kahvangan (the place where gods and goddesses reside). She is sent to a place where demons and evil spirits live and assigned to be their queen. Meanwhile, the sperm in the sea transforms into a giant that eats every-thing he meets (plants, trees, stone, and so on). In the story, the giant meets a man and he eats him. For the giant, human meat is very delicious. Then, he continues to eat human beings. This horrible news is heard by the gods. They decide to stop the killings, otherwise, human beings will become extinct. In this case, god Guru has to be responsible. He sends for the giant. He tells the giant that he is his father. He names him Kala. To prevent Kala from eating human beings, Guru develops a riddle. Kala is not allowed to prey on any human being who can tell him about his birth, because it is only Kala's father who knows about his birth. So Guru has to be alert. He disguises himself as a *dhalang* named *Dhalang Purwasejati* and goes down to the world to prevent Kala from preying upon human beings. Everytime Kala is going to eat a human being, *Dhalang Purwasejati* is there and Kala has to refrain from preying on them.

From the *Murwakala* story, we can infer that Guru has the control over Kala. That means he has the control over the *mayas* that he himself has created. As the controller, Guru can free human beings from the *mayas* that cover them.

which according to the *Bhagavadgita* tradition means *maya*, which is 'a shadow, illusion or trick'. It is believed that a human being is covered by *maya*, metaphorically a womb. As long as a human being is trapped in *mayas*, he will always endure suffering. The *mayas* may be in the form of *mada* (drunkenness), *raga* (passions) and *moha* (confusion). Therefore, the *mayas* or Kala which cover a human being have to be destroyed. When this is done, the person has been purified. That means that he is reborn and he can exist as a normal human being.

Furthermore, Jayaatmaja (Jayaatmaja 1996) points out that Wayang Kulit is used as a means in *ruwatan*, because philosophically it represents the existence of a macro-cosm in which human beings live. The puppet Kala, as the central character, is cast on the screen. From behind the screen, we can see the shadow: *maya*. This *maya* will be destroyed by the Dhalang Purwasejati² (The Mighty Dalang). The purpose of all the rites (including the Wayang performance) done by a *dalang* (ritualist) during the *ruwatan* is to invite Dhalang Purwasejati who will be represented by the *dalang ruwat* to free the *sukertas*, those who take part in the *ruwatan* ceremony. It is expected that after the ceremony the participants will no longer live in illusions. About Wayang Kulit in a *ruwatan*, Van Groenendael said that

"Although an exorcistic ritual may be held by itself and be effective in its own right, it is nevertheless considered to be more effectual if it is performed in combination with the presentation of the Murwakala myth in the context of a shadow play." (van Groenendael 1998: 115)

Through the mouth of the *dalang manteras* are sung. They are sung by the *dalang* in certain occasions during the Wayang performance. According to Subalidinata (Subalidinata, et al., 1985: 163) *manteras* are a means of concentration for the *dalang* as well as a way to focus the participants and the audience on the ceremony³ and the most important thing, the *man-teras* also have the power to destroy the *mayas*. There are several *manteras* sung during the *Ruwatan Murwakala*, but according to Niesby Sabakingkin, the following *mantera* called *Rajah Kalacakra*, words written Kala's chest, is one of the most important *manteras*.⁴

² In other traditions the *Dhalang Purwasejati* is called *Dhalang Kandhabuwana*

³ That is why a *ruwatan* usually is performed during the day time, so that this would prevent the *sukertas* and the audience from sleepiness.

⁴ Niesby Sabakingkin, www.minggupagi.com/print.php?sid=6066 (download Nov 5 2005)

YAMARAJA, JARAMAYA	(<i>siapa menyerang, menjadi belas kasihan</i>) Those who attack will feel pity ⁵
YAMARANI, NIRAMAYA	(<i>yang berniat buruk, akan menjauh</i>) Those with bad intentions will stay away
YASILAPA, PALASIYA	(<i>siapa membuat lapar, malah memberi makan</i>) Those who starve others will give food
YAMIRODA, DAROMIYA	(<i>yang memaksa, akan memberi kebebasan</i>) Those who are tyrannical will grant freedom
YAMIDOSA, SADOMIYA	(<i>siapa membuat dosa, bakal membuat jasa</i>) Those who have committed sins will do good deeds
YADAYUDA, DAYUDAYA	(<i>siapa memerangi, malah menjadi damai</i>) Those who create war will make peace
YACIYACA, CAYASIYA	(<i>siapa buat celaka, bakal membuat sehat, sejahtera</i>) Those who create bad luck will give health and welfare
YASIHAMA, MAHASIYA	(<i>siapa membuat rusak, membalik membangun dan sayang</i>). Those who cause damages will rebuild and give their love

According to Sabakingkin, this mantera is believed to be able to change a controversial character into one that is full of hope. He said further that, sukerta is a symbol of one's time allocation which is not harmonious with the demands of life.

As a ritual, Foley suggests that the performance is a kind of sacrament: by playing again the story of Kala, the salvation of man from Kala happens again in reality" (Foley 1984:63).

B. The *sukertas*

There are a number of resource books about *Ruwatan Murwakala*. However, each book may contain differing information about the participants because each region has different traditions (Foley 1984; Kamajaya 1992; Ulbricht

⁵ The *Rajah Kalacakra* is in capitals; the words in italics are translation in Indonesian by Niesby Sabakingkin.

1970). In the Javanese tradition, the participants — people who have to be purified — are called *sukerta*. Subalidinata (Subalidinata et al. 1985: 105-115) has collected various written sources that explain which people should be purified. The following types are some examples of *sukertas* that occur in the sources he has collected: 1) *Bocah ontang anting* (the only child, either a boy or a girl), 2) *Gedhono gedhini* (male + female), 3) *Gedhini gedhono* (female + male), 4) *Sendhang kaapit pancuran* (male + female + male), 5) *Pancuran kaapit sendhang* (female + male + female), 6) *Pendhawa lima* (five children in a family, all boys). All these *sukertas* are considered born in a certain way that, according to Javanese belief, will bring misfortune to themselves which will consequently influence their family. However, there are other participants who are considered as *sukertas* because, as Foley has mentioned, they "have advertently or inadvertently broken some taboo" (Foley 1984: 56).

C. Inviting a *dalang ruwat*

Inviting a *dalang ruwatan* is an important part when one wishes to hold a *Ruwatan Murwakala*. The host-to-be can directly come to a *dalang's* house or he or she could request someone else to go to the *dalang*. What is important is that the person who will go to invite the *dalang* must have sufficient information about the *sukerta(s)* and other related stuff that the *dalang* might ask.

In 1990, my colleague asked me to accompany him to a *dalang ruwat*, Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno ("Ki" is an epithet put in front of his first name for a male *dalang*)⁶, to invite him to perform *Ruwatan Murwakala* for his nieces. We arrived in the morning when the *dalang* had just woken up from his sleep because he had had a performance the previous night. After a greeting formality, Ki Timbul asked us the purpose of our visit. My colleague replied that he was representing his elder brother who lived in Jakarta (one hour flight from Yogyakarta) to invite Ki Timbul to perform a *Ruwatan Murwakala* for his brother's five daughters (Subalidinata et al, 1985: 105, 109, 114) and my colleague was also asking information about the fee that his brother should pay for this purpose. Ki Timbul replied that he appreciated the invitation, but before going further he investigated the *sukertas*. He asked my colleague whether his brother's wife had had any miscarriages. To this question, of course, he could not give any answer. Ki Timbul said that if there had been a miscarriage, a *Ruwatan Murwakala* was not necessarily performed because actually the five girls were not the only five

⁶ Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno is a senior *dalang* and an *abdi dalem dhalang* (a royal servant whose duty is to maintain puppetry of the Kraton Yogyakarta). He lives 17 kilometers south of Yogyakarta, in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta Special Territory.

daughters of his brother's. The next important question was a very sensitive one, about his brother's marital life. Ki Timbul asked him whether his brother only got married once or more than once. If the five daughters came from two mothers, then a *Ruwatan Murwakala* was not needed. Again even my colleague could not give an answer. Ki Timbul carefully asked him if once in his brother's life he had ever had a love affair with "the third woman" from whom a child was born. If it had happened, his brother did not have to perform *Ruwatan Murwakala*. This means, he had to go back home to his brother and his wife with these questions, otherwise this might reveal unexpected answers.

Other informants told their experience with Ki Timbul when they (husband and wife) came to him and invited him to perform *ruwatan* for their only child (a son). With the same investigation, finally it was found that the mother had had one miscarriage, although at that time they could not yet identify whether the fetus was male or female. That means that the son had a sibling whether it was a girl or a boy. If it was a girl and alive, it would have become a *Gedhono-gedhini*. If it was a boy, it would have become *Kembang Sepasang*. These two are also considered as *sukertas*. At this point, the *dalang* had also to do the *ruwatan* for the dead (in the miscarriage). If not, pointing his right hand up (meaning after his death), Ki Timbul said that he would have to be responsible and take the risk, but he did not mention what kind of risks he would take.

In 1996, I was a member of a *Ruwatan Masal* committee held by Balai Budaya Minomartani, a cultural community whose base is in Minomartani, under Sleman Regency (Yogyakarta Special Territory). One of my jobs was to invite the *dalang*. After a long discussion, especially about the budgeting, finally the committee decided to invite Ki Gondo Suyitno from Sleman Regency. I and another member of the committee went to his house one afternoon. Ki Gondo Suyitno who lived in Pakem (about 15 kilometers north of Yogyakarta) was saying that he was around 75 years old. He received us in his house with warm welcome. Then, we mentioned our purpose and he accepted the invitation. We said that there would be around 45 *sukertas*. Based on my experience with Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno, we also mentioned about what the committee might not know about the genealogical background of each *sukerta*. However, the committee provided an expert for the participants or their families who needed a consultation, one month before the dead line of reconfirmation.

In short, once one decides to go to a *dalang ruwat* to invite him to perform a *ruwatan*, he or she has to make a careful study on the *sukerta(s)*. Two important things are the genealogical background and the marital history of both parents.

D. Decisions about how a *ruwatan* is to be performed

When deciding to perform a *ruwatan* ceremony, a family usually undergoes a process that could be long or short. This section will talk about how a family usually decides to hold a *ruwatan* ceremony. My informant, a civil servant, had one son only. He and his wife thought that God the Almighty would only give one child for them. His family lived very harmoniously and happily, though. As Javanese, they learnt from their friends and neighbors that a single child needs a *ruwatan*. They did love their son who was their most precious possession in this world. When the boy was ten years old, they decide to perform a *ruwatan* ceremony. They thought that they could afford the expense for the occasion as both of them worked and they had some relatives to help support the expenses. Then, they made private preparations because they also had to invite their relatives and friends. At that time, in the 1970s, the *Ruwatan Masal* did not yet exist. Then, they went to a friend who knew about a *dalang ruwat*. One important question that they asked was "Who is the best *dalang ruwat*?"

Another informant is a senior professor at an outstanding state university in Yogyakarta. He has two children, a boy (the elder) and a girl (the younger), who as *sukertas* are called *Gedhono-Gedhini*. It was in 1996 when they decided to perform a *ruwatan* ceremony for their children who were undergraduate students of a university where their father was working. The father and the mother were wondering why their son seemed not to live normally. In their eyes, very often he did not know what to do. He just wasted his time outside the house for no specific and obvious reasons. His schooling was also not going well. The parents said that as parents they had whole-heartedly paid equal attention to both children. The parents who are Javanese knew about *Ruwatan Murwakala* and started thinking about performing it for their children. The father then went to the library and read books about *ruwatan*. After that, he also went to meet some colleagues whom he considered to know about *ruwatan* ceremony. One of his colleagues gave him a flyer announcing that there would be a *Ruwatan Masal* organized by a non-profit organizer.

Today, a public institution can also perform a *ruwatan Murwakala*. The reasons for that occasion varied. A famous state university in Yogyakarta held a *Ruwatan* ceremony in 1990. There was a series of deaths among the associate professors, although they died because of diseases but this became the big news in the campus. There were some worries among people in the campus. Some elites of the campus then decided to perform *ruwatan*. As usual, then they

set up a committee to prepare for the event. I was asked to accompany my colleague who was one member of the committee to invite the *dalang*, that is, Ki Timbul Hadiprayitno. We went to his house and he said to him that his university including everyone in it (professors, students, and administrators) needed a *ruwatan* because some incidents of bad luck had happened at the university. Ki Timbul called this type of *ruwatan* is *Ruwat Bumi* (the purification of the earth), although the story depicted was *Murwakala*.⁷

So, a *ruwatan* is performed when the host-to-be feels that some bad luck has happened or he feels that a preventive action should be taken. Subalidinata has pointed out that for a him or her *ruwatan* is a kind of *rite de passages* that is a compulsory, otherwise he or she will always be haunted by worries (Subalidinata 1985: 4).

III. *Ruwatan Masal* in Yogyakarta

Ruwatan Masal (Mass *Ruwatan*) has been popular for the last fifteen years. It is a *Ruwatan Murwakala* ceremony where it is not individually organized and usually involves a number of at least 30 *sukertas* but sometimes the number reaches more than one hundred. Therefore, a *Ruwatan Masal* needs a bigger organizer which usually has a standard management. Sometimes a group of people (amateur) may also organize a *Ruwatan Masal*.

Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, was probably the start of *Ruwatan Masal*. It was organized by several Javanese community groups that wished to maintain and preserve one of the Javanese cultural aspects. The *Ruwatan Masal* has been performed regularly once a year in *Taman Mini Indonesia Indah* (a miniature of Indonesia where each province of Indonesia and its cultural assets are represented in park) in Jakarta. Other communities of wayang lovers, such as *Yayasan Pendhawa Lima*, also regularly holds *Ruwatan Masal* there.

A. The *Ruwatan Masal* organizers

In Yogyakarta today, there are two *ruwatan* organizers which regularly hold a *Ruwatan Masal* once in a year, that is *Yayasan Javanologi Panunggalan* (a non-government institution dealing with Javanese studies) and Ambarukmo Sheraton Hotel (a four star international hotel). Generally such an organizer has a permanent staff of volunteers that consist of experts in Javanese and

⁷ In other traditions, for *Ruwat Bumi* the story is *Makukuhun*

wayang studies, university professors, wayang lovers, *dalangs*, Javanese culture advocates, bureaucrats, reporters, businessmen, and so on.

As it is suggested by its name, the latter seems to be closely related to tourism, especially the domestic tourism. The contribution to join the *Ruwatan Masal* includes one night stay in the hotel. The *sukertas* participating in this place comes not only from Yogyakarta but also from various parts of Indonesia. It is easier for them to stay in the hotel where the *ruwatan* site is in the historical *Pendapa Ambarukmo* just next to the hotel.

B. The budget

On the day of the *ruwatan*, there is always an official report from the chairperson of the Organizing Committee (OC) concerning the execution of the *ruwatan*. They always state that they do not make money out of the *ruwatan*. The contribution from the participants will be always below to total cost. Usually they will go to find sponsors from the local government (Tourism Department, Cultural and Educational Department) and other companies, although in Indonesia it is not always easy to find money for such cultural activities.

From 1994 – 1996, in Yogyakarta there was an amateur *Ruwatan Masal* organizer under the *Balai Budaya Minomartani*⁸ (BBM), situated in Minomartani village under Sleman Regency, but it collapsed after holding two *Ruwatan Masal*, due to financial problems. It was very difficult to get the money from sponsors. The BBM community could not afford the expense while the contribution from the *sukerta's* family was very small, and fund raising from sponsors and donators was not successful.

C. The reasons to join a *Ruwatan Masal*

There are several reasons why people join a *Ruwatan Masal*. According to my informant, a *Ruwatan Masal* was just perfect for him because his family could not afford the expense if he had to do it himself. The cost of joining a *Ruwatan Masal* was affordable, because other participants and donators shared the burden of the total expense. If he did one on his own, he had to do many things which was time consuming. Besides inviting the *dalang*, he had to invite guests, friend and relatives for the occasion. Guests are very important in a *ruwatan*, because before the *dalang* does his duty, he always ask the guests to pray so that the execution of *ruwatan* will go smoothly. In addition, he asks them to give their blessings to the *sukertas*. Beside that, living in the second floor of a

⁸ *Balai Budaya* literally means culture hall and Minomartani is the village where it was located. It is a community group dealing with cultural activities.

campus apartment, of course, my informant did not have a "private" open space for the event.

Another informant said that he did not want to give extra work to his neighbors with his intention to hold a *ruwatan*. If he did it in his house, it means that at least for two days he had to bother his neighbors. There were a number of consequences, such as blocking one or two lanes and "forcing" the nearest neighbors extra work for him, although usually they would willingly help the host.

Other informants mentioned that they did not want their house to become messy. In Java when holding a *ruwatan* ceremony, the host will be like a festival producer. His house and yards will be full of properties (tents, chairs, tables, stage for the gamelan and the puppets). They just did not want to be annoyed by these trivialities.

To sum up, economical and pragmatism are the reasons for joining a *Ruwatan Masal*.

IV. The Procedure

This section will deal with the result of several observations for *Ruwatan Masal* in Yogyakarta by three organizers: *Balai Budaya Minomartani*, *Yayasan Javanologi Panunggalan*, and Ambarukmo Palace Hotel. The focus will be on the *ruwatan* day which starts in the morning.

A. The ceremonial procedure in a *Ruwatan Masal*

The situation of the *ruwatan* site at 7.00 a.m. is similar to a Javanese wedding reception. Many people, including members of the OC, wear Javanese traditional dress. The fragrance from various perfumes and fresh flowers for decoration is strong. Some members of the OC are busy giving information and help to the *sukertas* or their families. Sometimes an announcement from the OC is heard from the loudspeaker. When everything is ready, the MC opens officially the series of *ruwatan* ceremony for that day. The following programs are what they usually follow.

1. *Sungkeman*

In the *ruwatan* day, before the ceremony starts, they are usually in full traditional dress. Before the ceremony starts, each participant performs *sungkeman*, that is, he or she kneels before the (seated) respected one (usually parents) and makes a *sembah*, pressing the nose to the person's knee. The

purpose of *sungkeman* is to show esteem and humility before someone (a respected person).⁹ However, s

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2. Pre-ruwatan formalities

The formalities consist of several points. The first is a welcome speech and a report of what the OC has done and will do to make the *Ruwatan Murwakala* successful. Then, usually one or two speeches from the formal leader will follow. Of these speeches, the speakers always mention that *ruwatan* is a cultural asset that has to be maintained and preserved. They never explicitly say that it is an exorcism ceremony. They always remind all the *sukertas* and the audience that everything in this world is under the control of *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (God the Almighty); and if they hold a *ruwatan* ceremony, they merely want to preserve it and follow what their ancestors have done.

After the speeches, there is a program called handover of *sukertas* to the *dalang*. On the stage are the Chair of the OC, one representative of the parents, two *sukertas* (male and female), and the *dalang*. The representative will say that on behalf of all the parents, the guardians, and *sukertas*, he requests the *dalang* (mentioning the *dalang's* name) to do a *ruwatan* for the *sukertas* and hopes that he accepts this duty. Then the *dalang* will give a reply that he is willing and ready to do the duty. In giving his response, the *dalang* also requests all the audience in the *ruwatan* site to pray to *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (God the Almighty) and give their blessings to the *sukertas*. In addition, the *dalang* also asks the blessings from all the audience, so that he would not find any obstacle in performing the *ruwatan*.

3. Changing clothes

⁹ However, *sungkeman* is optional. According to Manu Jayaatmaja, *sungkeman* is *not* done in a *ruwatan* in the Kraton Yogyakarta (interview in April 1996).

After the sungkeman, all the *sukertas* are requested to change their clothing in a changing room provided. Each *sukerta* only wears a large piece of white cloth or anything in white. What cover a *sukerta's* body are usually pants or underwear, the white clothing, and bra (for female). They are not allowed to wear jewelries (earring, necklace, wristwatch, amulet, rings, etc.), because everything that is on their body must be flung into the sea at the end of the *ruwatan*.

4. The Wayang Kulit: Kala's birth

After changing clothes, the *sukertas* are seated behind the screen. The performance starts about 10.00 a.m. and takes about three or four hours. The *sukertas* must stay there to watch the story of Kala's birth until the end of the Wayang performance. My observation in every *Ruwatan Masalwas*, that a number of *sukertas* do not understand what the *dalang* was saying, because their native language is not Javanese although they are full-blooded Javanese. Nevertheless, they said they knew the story of Kala's birth.

5. Hair cutting

In the middle of the performance after some *manteras* are sung there is a hair cutting rite by the *dalang*. Through a loudspeaker each *sukerta* is called to come in front of the *dalang* (the *sukerta* is behind the screen and the screen is lifted up, so that the *dalang* can do his job from his seat) and he cuts each participant's hair and puts it into a vessel. This vessel with all the *sukertas'* hair will be flung into the sea as appeasement to the deities living in the South Sea (Indonesian Ocean). The hair cutting also symbolizes the death of Kala (*mayas*).¹⁰ After the hair-cutting rite, the *dalang* continues the performance to finish the story of Kala.

6. Siraman

After the *dalang* concludes the story of Kala, the *dalang* will go to the space provided for a *siraman* rite (literally, *siraman* means *to bathe*). Led by the MC, the *dalang* bathes each *sukerta* with sacred water with several different types of flowers. After that, the parents (sometimes grandparents) have a chance to do the bathing for the *sukertas* (their children or grandchildren). This is the last

¹⁰ However, some *dalangs* do the haircutting after they perform the story of Kala.

rite for the *sukertas* in the *Ruwatan Murwakala* in a *Ruwatan Masal*.¹¹

7. *Labuhan*

All the dresses the *sukertas* are wearing during the *ruwatan* rites have to be submitted to a certain place in the *Ruwatan* site for *labuhan* rite which is usually done by the *dalang* and his assistants. *Labuhan* is a rite to flung offerings or anything that is considered unclean and should be cleaned by flinging into the sea. Together with the *sukertas'* cut hair and some of the offerings, the dresses are brought to the South Sea, in Parangtritis beach (27 kilometers south of Yogyakarta). There was a ritual ceremony in a place, called Parangkusumo, that is believed as the gate of the sacred Sea. In this place, the *dalang* will be accompanied by a *juru kunci* (literally means one who has the key) to go to a designated shore for the *labuhan*.

8. Post-ruwatan formalities

As soon as the *sukertas* are bathed, they will get dressed and usually at this time they are allowed to drink or eat their lunch (some *sukertas* are fasting before the *ruwatan*). The post-*ruwatan* formalities consist of handing over the *sukertas* from the *dalang* to the representative of the parents. The *dalang* generally will say that the *ruwatan* ceremony was concluded without obstacles and he will thank the audience who has trusted him to do the performance. Then he would mention expectations for the *sukertas* and all the audience. In ending, he mentions that after the *ruwatan* ceremony all the *sukertas* will have to consider the *dalang* as their father. In one scene of the Kala story, *Dhalang Purwasejati* (through the *dalang's* mouth) says to god Kala that all the *sukertas* are his children so that Kala must no longer disturb them.

The last formality before the closing is handing the certificate to the *sukertas*. These certificates are issued by the OC in which it says that a Mr/Mrs/ Ms X (*name of sukerta*) has participated in the *Ruwatan Masal* as a *sukerta* with the *dalang* a Mr. X. The certificate also contains the name of the organizer, the date and place of *Ruwatan Massal*, and the signature of the chairperson but *not* the *dalang's*. Usually two *sukertas* will be chosen to represent the others to

¹¹ In the night after the *ruwatan* day, sometimes another all night Wayang Kulit is performed to close the whole activities. This performance is still ritual in nature. Balai Budaya Minomartani did that after a *Ruwatan Massal*, but not the *Yayasan Javanologi Panunggalan*. and Ambarukmo Palace Hotel.

receive the certificate. This certificate of course is not like a free pass when they have to face God Kala. However, judging from their expressions, they are eager to get their own certificates from the committee.

V. The impact of *Ruwatan Masal*

A. *Ruwatan Murwakala* and religious belief

One frequently asked question is whether a *ruwatan* ceremony is against Islam or not. In the ceremony, people can see various offerings (Kamajaya, et al. 1992; Soeбалidinata, et al. 1985). In April 2003, an outstanding private university in Surabaya (East Java), *Universitas Tujuh Belas Agustus 1945*, held a *ruwatan* ceremony in collaboration with *Rena Budaya* (An Association of Wayang Lovers).¹² Soetarno Dwijonagoro, the chairperson, said that this *ruwatan* was a purely local and indigenous belief of the Indonesian society, especially the Javanese. He admitted that in *ruwatan* there were many things that could not match with the science and the rules of Islam. About the offerings, for example, he said that they were symbols of thanking God because he had provided all the crops and other things that had to be taken care of.¹³ In this *ruwatan*, there were about 176 types of offerings. Furthermore, Soetarno Dwijonagoro gave a reminder by saying that *ruwatan* was a cultural asset that belonged to the Indonesian. This kind of reminder is always expressed by every *ruwatan* organizer in Yogyakarta, that is, a *ruwatan* has nothing to do with religious belief.

B. The Paranormal and *Ruwatan*

Nowadays, in Indonesia people can find a lot of advertisements in newspapers, magazines, and the television, and radios from paranormals who can perform a *ruwatan* (including *ruwatan* for *sukertas*). These paranormals are not necessarily male.¹⁴ They usually do not include Wayang Kulit performance with the Kala story. The reason is probably like what has been mentioned by van Groenendael that "an exorcistic ritual may be held by itself and be effective in its own right" (van Groenendael 1998: 115).

1. Bambang Yuwono

¹² www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0304/19/jatim/265305.htm (download Nov 2005)

¹³ In practice there are still lots of Javanese who make offerings which is directed to the invisible spirits living in or around the *ruwatan* site, but this is never verbally mentioned.

¹⁴ Even a Catholic priest in Yogyakarta has performed several *Ruwatans* in his own way.

In Yogyakarta there is an outstanding paranormal, Bambang Yuwono, who usually uses Wayang Kulit after he performs a *Ruwatan Masal* of his style. He owns what he calls a private "supra-natural clinic" which is located in Sedayu, under Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. He calls his *ruwatan* has a root of Javanese tradition. The following is a news report from a *Ruwatan Masal* that he performed in March 31, 2001 from 4.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.¹⁵ There were 250 participants who consisted of various people (civil servant, businessmen, and other people working in private sectors). They were required to bring a white cloth and some soil taken from the yard of their house or the place where they were working and some used clothing. These requirements were parts of the means to overcome their problems. He did the *ruwatan* by putting his hand on each of the client's head and after that there is also a hair-cutting rite. Then each participant received some rice (*beras*) in a wrapping cloth. He called this as *beras panguripan* (the rice of life). There was also a *labuhan* rite in Yuwono's *ruwatan*. The piece of hair and the dress that the participants were wearing during the ceremony were flung into the South Sea. The *labuhan*, he said, was a symbol that all the bad luck of the participants had been dispelled. Furthermore he said that according to Javanese philosophy the essence of his *ruwatan* was to help people to solve the people's problems, such as being in debts, wanting to have a child, business problems, and other problems. After the *ruwatan*, there was a whole night Wayang Kulit performance where the story depicted was not *Murwakala* but *Wisanggeni Ruwat* telling about how Wisanggeni (one of Arjuna's sons) was undergoing a purgation. A *Campur Sari* music was taking part in the Wayang Kulit.¹⁶ Yuwono stated that the number of people participating in his *Ruwatan Masal* was increasing from year to year. For him, the most important thing was to help people and at the same time it was one way to preserve the Javanese culture. Therefore, in his supernatural clinic he performs a *Ruwatan Masal* once a year.

Following is my observation of Bambang Yuwono's *ruwatan* in Minomartani, a housing complex, under Sleman Regency, in July 26, 2003. The ritual of the *ruwatan* took about 45 minutes before the Wayang Kulit performance

¹⁵ www.indonesia.com/bernas/042001/02/UTAMA/02sep1.htm (download Nov 5, 2003)

¹⁶ *Campur Sari* comes from two words *campur* meaning (mix) and *sari* meaning (essence) is a new type of Javanese music. This music combines some instruments of Javanese gamelan and several western instruments (keyboard, drum set, and bass guitar). When a *Campur Sari* Group is taking part in a Wayang Kulit, then its ritual nuances would fade away.

started at about 09.00 p.m. Behind the screen of the Wayang Kulit were various types of offerings, but mostly food, beverages, flowers, and some lighted candles. These offerings were prepared by the local people under the control of Bambang Yuwono's assistant who was in charge of the offering matter.

During the *ruwatan*, no sound from the *gamelan* music was heard. Bambang Yuwono was wearing complete traditional Javanese dress. He was sitting on chair facing all the offerings and the screen of the Wayang Kulit. All the audience was standing around Bambang's seat and the tables on which the offerings and the lighted candles were put. Some of his assistants (male and female) were standing near him awaiting his orders. There was a formality before the *ruwatan* started, that is, the chairperson on behalf of the local people requested Bambang Yuwono to perform the *ruwatan* to protect them and their kampoong from bad luck. Then, Bambang Yuwono requested the audience to pray to God in order that the *ruwatan* would go well and the result would be as they expected.

There were no chants or *manteras* heard from Bambang Yuwono, but on his seat people could see that he was praying while sometimes he moved his hands and closed his eyes. One of his assistants handed him a *kris* and one puppet, *Wisanggeni*, that was going to be used in the Wayang Kulit performance where the story was *Wisanggeni Ruwat*. In less than 30 minutes he finished his rites and the audience was requested to eat a bit of *jenang abang* (literally red porridge, a porridge made of rice with coconut milk and coconut sugar). In this *ruwatan* there was no hair-cutting rite and *siraman*. Probably this was not a kind of *ruwatan* for *sukertas*, although its purpose to protect the local people and their environment (*ruwat bumi*). After this, the audience were invited to eat the edible offerings as their dinner. Afterwards, the *dalang* was invited to come forward to receive the puppet *Wisanggeni* from Bambang Yuwono as a signal that he was allowed to start the all night Wayang Kulit. In this *ruwatan*, the *dalang* was not the ritual specialist or the person who did the purgation like in *Ruwatan Murwakala*.

The word *ruwatan* is now becoming popular again when the frequency of *ruwatan* by paranormals is increasing. The paranormals who are not only males but also females reside in various cities, especially in the island of Java. The idea of *ruwatan* that sends away bad luck is now sold in a package of *ruwatan*. A paranormal can even perform a *ruwatan* for an individual. As to the growing number of paranormals performing *ruwatan*, Niesby Sabakingkin has

revealed that a number of supra-natural practitioners sell the *ruwatan* package to gain wealth by exploiting his or her clients who feel that their lives are full of miseries.¹⁷ Niesby Sabakingkin,

www.minggupagi.com/print.php?sid=6066

(download Nov.5, 2005)

2. Joint *ruwatan*: paranormal and *dalang ruwatan*

There seems a shift in *ruwatan* in Java, a *dalang* and a paranormal were doing a joint *ruwatan*. In March 30, 2003, a senior *dalang* from Surakarta, Ki Manteb Soedharsono, and an outstanding parapsychologist, Ki Hudoyo Doyodipuro, worked together for what they called *Ruwatan Ageng* (the Great *Ruwatan*) which was held in a five star hotel in Semarang, the capital of Central Java Province.

The following was the news report by a local newspaper, the principal sponsor of the *ruwatan*.¹⁸ Hendro Basuki, the chair of the OC, said that so far a *ruwatan* had been done partially, meaning only by a senior *dalang* or a paranormal, or a parapsychologist. To gain stronger spiritual power for the *sukertas*, the two powers could do a collaborative work. In the *ruwatan*, the OC also included some experts of yoga whose spiritual power was expected to support the paranormal's. It is also in this basis that the *ruwatan* was called *Ruwatan Ageng* because it involved various *ruwatan* practitioners. The yoga experts would also provide strong spiritual support to all types of participating *sukertas*. It was expected that by involving the yogis, the cleansing of the *sukerta's* burdensome spiritual residue would be more effective. Beside maintaining the Javanese culture, this *Ruwatan Ageng* was intended to help people to eradicate various obstacles in their life and find the solutions. Ki Manteb Soedharsono admitted that all of the people had been experiencing troubles but each individual had his or her own weaknesses that needed to be eradicated by a *ruwatan*. It was in this concern and reason, he was willing to join the *Ruwatan Ageng* when the local newspaper (the

¹⁷ Niesby Sabakingkin, www.minggupagi.com/print.php?sid=6066 (download Nov.5, 2005)

¹⁸ "Ruwatan Ageng oleh Ki Manteb dan Ki Hudoyo", www.suaramerdeka.com/harian/0303/16/nas4.htm (download Nov. 5, 2003)

a therapy for an individual in order that he or she would become a better individual in the society. In practice, a ruwatan tradition has caused a tug of war between the psychological needs and the challenge to cope with this modern life. Hence, it is becomes like a rite for sin redemption and a means to become socially legitimate. However, it seems that a number of sukertas who have participated in a ruwatan by a dalang, a paranormal, or a joint ruwatan may have experienced a level of stress that in some way they need a psychological treatment. Instead of going to a psychologist, they go a Ruwatan Masal ceremony another similar ruwatan. As has been said by Soetarno Dwijonagoro, a ruwatan was also the sterilization of psychological conditioning for people to recover themselves from bad condition or lucks to a better and peaceful condition.²⁰ Consequently, this perhaps would add the types of sukertas in the Javanese [Indonesian] ruwatan.

The world of ruwatan Indonesia has entered into a new phase when paranormals or parapsychologists take part in this business (forgetting those whose purpose is profit making) in which they perform ruwatan on their own or they perform a joint ruwatan with a dalang ruwat in a Ruwatan Murwakala, especially in Ruwatan Masal. Anyway, it seems that the various problems that the Indonesians with its huge population are facing have encouraged the paranormals to give their service. The problems of the sukertas in many ways seem to reflect the national problems that Indonesia has been facing since the nineteen-nineties. This situation also implies that the number of dalang ruwat that Indonesia has are not powerful enough to solve the large number of the sukertas' problems. Probably, Bambang Yuwono's ruwatan in Minomartani probably is an evidence that a dalang ruwatan is now less powerful or even powerless. In other words, in some way there is a shift of the dalang's role in ruwatan.

Referring to *Sudamala*, old text about *ruwatan*, Subalidinata says that in the beginning the purpose of a *ruwatan* was for individual liberation which was oriented to the cleanness and purification of one's heart in order to gain a heavenly life after death; now it has tended to the worldly life (Subalidinata 1985: 4).

Perhaps today a question could be raised, "Where are you going *Ruwatan Murwakala*?" The answer is that the use of wayang for *Ruwatan Murwakala* is fading away.

²⁰ www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0304/19/jatim/265305.htm (download Nov. 5, 2003)

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