

Literature in the Midst and After the COVID-19 Storm

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has changed social life orders radically. This changing orders also gives impact on world of literature, discussion activities, and literary or drama performances are made virtually. During the pandemic time, however, discussions on literary issues which are made virtually have passed beyond the geographic boundaries. The discussion participants coming from many areas in the same country and even from abroad can interact easily. However, it is not easy when it deals with drama performances on stage. Drama performances in virtual form have minimized the magic of literature. Virtual form in drama performances cannot present the context and the lively taste of drama performances on stage. The audience cannot get lost and touched when they watch the virtual drama performances in virtual form. For this reason, during the pandemic and in the future, literary activities need to be properly sorted. Activities such as literary discussions can be done virtually, otherwise literary or drama performances should still be carried out directly.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic; Traditional Literature; New world order.

A. Introduction

In early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had slowly changed the movement of life, activities, and various other face-to-face activities in Indonesia. Schools, campuses, offices, crowd centres, and so on chose to reduce activities. High school and college students, employees, and other workers are directed to work from home. In mid-2020, Indonesia was like a dead country. Flights were stopped, seaports were closed, land travel was also restricted.

The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically changed the socio-cultural situation of the Indonesian people, as well as the world. In Indonesia, there are restrictions on people's social movements. Crowd centres were closed, schools, campuses, and even places of worship were closed. The implementation of social and cultural activities that have the potential to cause crowds is also not allowed. This has an impact on changing patterns of communication and community interaction, from being close friends to keeping their distance from one another. Even

sadder, there was an emergence of an irrational attitude of a group of people in the midst of the struggle to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic (Asrif, 2020).

Changes in the order of people's lives during the Covid-19 pandemic have changed and had an impact on many things, including in terms of language, literature, and culture. In the field of language, a number of new vocabularies, terms, acronyms, and abbreviations have suddenly become popular among Indonesian people. The words are self-isolation, self-quarantine, social distancing, large-scale social restrictions (lockdown), new life (new normal), person under supervision, asymptomatic person, person at risk, patient under surveillance, work from home, working from office, virtual performance, and so on.

In terms of literature, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on performance literature, especially traditional literature. Traditional literature as literature that grows and develops in the midst of its supporting community, really

needs sufficient supporting elements to continue to develop properly. Traditional literature requires audiences, stage, and also the interaction of the supporting community. The absence of one of these supporting components can have an impact on the disruption of traditional literature sustainability

This article discusses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on traditional literature, problems, maintenance, innovation, and the new order of post-pandemic literature. The contents of the article come from the revitalization process and the traditional literary festival of the Malangan Macapat in Malang Regency and the traditional literature Macaan Pacul Gowang in Banyuwangi Regency. Besides, the creative process of carrying out a Poetry Musicalization Competition (face-to-face and online) strengthens the narrative of this article.

B. Research Method

A qualitative systematic review was applied as the research method in writing this article. It can be described as a method of comparing

findings from qualitative studies (Grant & Booth, 2009). That is, a strict systematic review process is used to collect articles, and then a qualitative approach is used to assess them.

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Pandemic and the Death of the Literary Community

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has implemented a number of policies to limit community social activities, such as Large-Scale Social Restrictions and Public Activity Restriction Enforcement). Those two restriction forms are accompanied by appeals to apply social distancing, mask-wearing, and other things which in essence are to keep a safe distance between one person to another.

A number of efforts to handle the Covid-19 pandemic above also have a serious impact on the existence of traditional literature in Indonesian people. The studios or literary communities cannot carry out their literary activities properly. The literary studios are temporarily

closed, literary training and performance are canceled and postponed until the Covid-19 pandemic is over.

The handling Covid-19 pandemic turns out to be quite a long one. It is not just a month or two. In Indonesia, the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic has been running for almost two years. The long period of time has significantly and seriously suppressed the literary activities of the people. Literary performances are still not permitted by the government. Literary activists cannot conduct literary performances for almost two years. For that situation, traditional literature¹, literary activists, and their communities are among the parties most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, the impact of Covid-19 on traditional literary actors includes (1) it is difficult for literary players to hold performances, (2) fewer people need literary performance services, and (3) people avoid literary performance places. This situation has not only reduced their social activities but has also stopped their income². The

pandemic has halted various community activities which make many people lose their livelihoods, including artists who have been working in the informal sector³. Literary actors, including other creative workers, can no longer carry out activities like before the pandemic. They need literary performance services with the aim of not only entertaining the public but also keeping their economy run well⁴.

Asrif (2015) conducted a research on traditional literature in relation to literary and economic functions. Asrif found out that traditional literature functions, among others, as a means of bonding social bonds, entertainment, and educational space. In addition, traditional literature also functions as a means of fulfilling the necessities of life (economy) for its activists. The more often traditional literary activists perform performances, the better their economic life will be. On the other hand, the more limited the people who need the services of traditional performances, the less their economic availability will be.

In the midst of the pressure of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of efforts were born to continue existing literary performances. Literary actors are expected to be able to perform virtual performances through various digital media channels. Through social media channels like youtube, zoom, Instagram, and the like, literary actors can show their literary performances. Such social media is seen as a solution to the deadlock of conducting literary performances during the pandemic.

The use of social media as a new space for literary performances is very compatible with social life in urban areas. In cities, the internet network is very adequate. Internet service is available everywhere. There are plenty of computers, electricity, laptops, and adequate gadgets. In addition to this infrastructure, there are also digital human resources available in urban areas who have adequate skills to manage virtual performance or publications.

The situation above will be very different from that of traditional literary activists in many remote

areas of Indonesia. In rural areas, traditional literary performances virtually encounter two main obstacles, firstly, the mastery of technology by literary activists (HR) and secondly, the availability of virtual infrastructures such as the availability of internet, adequate laptops, and adequate electricity networks. Most of the traditional literature players do not master digital technology. They do not understand online apps like zoom, youtube and instagram. They cannot afford and use those virtual channels properly to conduct the literary performances. Traditional literature is identical with conventional literature, which still prioritizes live performances in front of the audience. There is direct interaction and there is a bond of feeling built during the performance (Murgiyanto, 2004).

Besides HR problems, virtual performance facilities are very limited in their area. Traditional literature communities, which mostly live in remote areas, densely populated areas, do not have both internet networks and electricity networks. Therefore, they cannot

carry out virtual performances. Virtual performances can only be carried out in places where the virtual infrastructure is adequate and the human resources for managing virtual performance are quite capable.

2. Awakening and Innovation: Learning from the Pandemic Situation

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of groups sought various solutions to keep traditional literature alive. Various groups ranging from government institutions, universities, non-government organizations, and even the literary community itself continue to create creative efforts so that literary activists can continue to conduct literary activities well. All parties have the same goal, namely literature, as well as literary activists, must remain alive.

Learning from the impact of the pandemic, the traditional literature management can be pursued through two ways of protection and development, namely (1) live performances (face-to-face)

and (2) virtual performances (youtube, instagram, zoom, and so on). The current and future of traditional literature management in the two development pathways is explained as follows.

For the first development pathway (live/face-to-face performances), the public can attend literary performance venues by implementing proper health protocols. Especially in green zone health areas, the public can hold live performances in which the literary activists and the audience become one complementary performance. Ikram recognizes that oral tradition has a clear function for the community that owns it (1993: 3). In traditional literary performances, activists and audiences are part of a complementary/supportive performance.

The treatment given to traditional literature, including its community, is different from contemporary literature. In traditional literature, most of the activists are from traditional, conventional, and community-based circles (located and close to the

community). The inheritance and performance of traditional literature are always community-based which is carried out face-to-face with the audience. Nani Tuloli (2003) mentions that one of the functions of literature is as a means of socializing the community.

Observing these characters, traditional literature only has the potential to develop itself in a face-to-face space instead of virtually. Traditional literature that is performed virtually has an impact on the loss of a number of traditional literary strengths, namely the context of the performance. The context of the performance is one of the important and strategic elements in the creation and implementation of traditional literary performances.

Secondly, traditional literature is performed virtually. The development of this model will basically minify the traditional literature. The literary context is lost. The audiences are not in the same space between the literary actors and the audience. The performance arena changes from a stage/natural setting to a virtual or digital stage. The

peculiarities of traditional literature are slowly being lost and replaced by new requirements in digital/virtual literature. The disappearance of traditional literature can be seen from a number of traditional literary performances that are carried out virtually.

However, traditional literature conducted in virtual space is also important to be developed properly in the future. Traditional literature will always go hand in hand with its society which is slowly moving towards an industrial society. Traditional literature actors need to think about traditional literary services virtually, especially for people who need digital-based services.

Traditional literature to virtual literature is certainly not easy. Traditional literature performers need to be accompanied, given training and facility support, and other things so that traditional literature, in addition to developing directly (face to face) in the community, can also be present virtually in the wider community.

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, efforts to transfer traditional literature to a virtual space are carried out by various groups in their own ways. The ways those groups do cover replaying video recordings of traditional literature, through live broadcasts on YouTube channels, Instagram, or through the virtual channel of the Zoom application. The virtual channel broadcasting is done partially and not well planned. As a result, it is difficult to conduct virtual traditional literary performance well like the way it is conducted live.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought people to think and move quickly to overcome the deadlocks of life activities. In traditional literature, literary actors need to formulate a new order for the protection and development of traditional literature. Traditional literature, besides developing face-to-face, also strives to be able to develop virtually. The virtuality of traditional literature is not only the demands of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic but also the demands of the digital-based industry 4.0 community.

D. Conclusion

Traditional literature grows along with the supporting community. It will adapt to the changes and developments of the times. Virtual performance as a new form of traditional literary performance will continue to adapt to traditional literature. Walter J. Ong (1983) states that traditional literature is something that changes in times, which is followed by changes in people's attitudes and habits. The community negotiates various changes to find a new formula for the development of traditional literature in the future.

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