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1 SYMBOL DIMENSIONS STATUE OF A SNAKE WITH THE HEAD OF GATOTKACA IN BANYUWANGI *Susanne K. Langer's Symbol Study*

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Abstract

1 Banyuwangi is a regency at the eastern tip of the island of Java which has wealth, natural beauty and has very strong cultural roots. In Banyuwangi there is a snake statue with the head of gatotkaca which is very iconic. The shape of this statue is neck to bottom shaped snake, and the neck up is the head of Gatotkaca. The location of this statue is scattered in almost all Banyuwangi districts, this statue is easy to find in local government offices, subdistricts, villages, schools, village entrances, and so on. This statue was popular in 2 eras. First during the era of the Blambangan kingdom which was led by Prabu Tawangalun (1655-1659), and the second was during the new order during the era of Regent Joko Supaat Slamet (1966-1978). This research was conducted by using field observation and literature study methods. This statue was studied using the Susanne K. Langer Symbol theory approach. In the investigations conducted, it was found that this statue was not only a visual form, but a living form of its philosophical meaning, legitimacy, identity and self-image. This statue of a snake with the head of Gatotkaca is not only an objective reality, but a subjective reality and its form is a living form.

Keywords

City icon, symbol, the statue of Banyuwangi, Susanne K. Langer Symbol theory

1. Introduction

1 Banyuwangi is a district located at the eastern tip of the island of Java which is also the largest Banyuwangi district in East Java as well as the largest on the island of Java with an area of 5,782.50 km². [1] In addition to having the richness and beauty of natural potential Banyuwangi also has a very strong cultural roots, because in this district is the location of the establishment of the Blambangan kingdom. Due to the strong cultural history, many cultural manifestations have been preserved in the daily



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life of the Banyuwangi people. One form of cultural manifestation is stored in the **snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca** which is easily found in various parts of Banyuwangi. This statue has become a very common symbol and is attached to the Banyuwangi community, the shape of this statue is from the neck down in the form of a snake, while the neck up has the head of Gatotkaca (is a character in the epic Mahabharata), this statue does not have hands or feet like a snake in general. This symbol was initiated by the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet around 1974 as a form of decoration for the pavilion. [2] This symbol is also easy to find in local government offices, subdistricts, villages, schools, village entrances, and other strategic places.



Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca on the entrance gate of the village
Source : personal documents

In 2011 there was a discourse to replace snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol of Banyuwangi by the Regent of Banyuwangi, Abdullah Azwar Anas. This had warmed the ears of Banyuwangi culturalists, as well as Banyuwangi people who knew exactly that the symbol had been perched on Angklung Caruk Ancak since the art existed.[3] The impact of the discourse launched by the Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas was so impactful that the number of snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca began to decrease in number around Banyuwangi.

According to the elder and native poet of Banyuwangi Andang C.Y., this **snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca** is known because it is often used in carvings or ornaments of gamelan musical instruments in Banyuwangi and has a strong philosophy. "The philosophy is that Gatotkaca is a symbol of the sky, *dadi uripe wong ndhuwur* (people who live in heaven/above) and the snake is a symbol of the earth (land) which is always below. So if people are already at the top, don't forget the ones below." [4] With all the meanings contained in the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca and the upheaval of the political situation that occurred in Banyuwangi, this statue has a noble value but on the other hand its position is threatened with extinction, the extinction is due to the change of power and differences in the aesthetic values of the rulers. The situation that is increasingly marginalized **m**akes it important for this article to be made to preserve the value contained in the **snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca** which is typical of **the** Banyuwangi district.

2. Method

In this article, several problems arise and are attempted to be identified, the problems studied and the answers found in this paper is whether there is a relationship between the Banyuwangi people's way of life and the forms and values of the symbolic philosophy of the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca. Is there a relationship between the symbols in snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca with the community's experience with others? Further exploration of the problems that arise will try to be explained by using Susanne K. Langer's aesthetic theory approach, regarding the extent to which Susanne K. Langer's aesthetic theory can provide a framework for philosophical understanding of the symbolic dimensions of the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca in Banyuwangi.

3. Snake Statue With The Head Of Gatotkaca in Susanne K. Langer's Symbol Theory

3.1 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a presentational symbol

Presentational symbols are derived from the synthesis of discursive symbols. Langer questioned the possibility of another kind of symbol whose understanding did not depend on the positive laws that govern the relationship between its elements. Sourced from the context of neopositivism which relies on reasoning (discursive) modern logic analyzes statements. Langer put forward a new thesis that it was possible to understand symbols by direct intuition. Symbolic understanding does not depend on the laws that govern the relationship of its elements. The understanding of symbols is carried out as a whole, thoroughly, not part by part from smaller elements.[5]



*Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca in front of SDN 3 Karangbendo, Rogojampi, Banyuwangi
Source : personal documents*

Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a presentational or form of presence, it must be understood that this statue is not just a statue for a statue, but there is a wider and deeper meaning behind the statue itself. In this statue, two objects that represent different meanings, meaning of a high degree with Gatotkacha as a celestial being, and snakes as living beings in general, are brought together to bring up a new



narrative that is as advice which is described as a material that imitates the catch of human logic or society Banyuwangi itself. The two meanings that represent the object merge into a new identity which is interpreted as a unit that can consciously or unconsciously be interpreted by the people of Banyuwangi. This simple logic, actualizes the transcendent into immanent, which is what Langer means as an understanding of symbols with direct intuition,[6] in which the understanding of symbols is carried out as a whole, comprehensively, not partially from its smaller elements. A presentational symbol is a symbol that does not require a certain intellectual ability to do it, but spontaneously presents what it contains, and stands alone as a full symbol, not as a construction, nor an element of a construction or arrangement,[7] then the meaning of the Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol is captured in the overall sense, namely through the relationship between the elements of the symbol in the overall structure.

If you read further, the knowledge to understand is not obtained by the public instantly, but this understanding can also be obtained from information stored in DNA inherited from previous generations, where this symbol had previously been used during the Blambangan kingdom as a symbol to invite underground war. The door to reading how information about an object can be understood can be done by tracking Bio-aesthetic or genetic factors. Dobzhansky asserts, "nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution".[8] This confirms how the people of Banyuwangi can understand this symbol.

3.2 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a virtual space

Sculpture becomes a real form of pseudo-ideas, which is able to explain something "that exists yet to be understood" with symbols.[9] For example, Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) viewed sculpture not from the point of view of representation or imitation, but from the point of view of expression and invention.[10] Sculptures generally do not simply copy reality, but create distinctive new symbols.

In this case the Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca is also included as a work of art created from the basis of artistic creation, namely primary illusion (illusions). So, virtual space is a symbolic bridge from the incomprehensible to the comprehensible. Therefore, the Snake Statue with the head of Gatotkaca in the belief of its creator explains the concept of Gatotkaca as a symbol of people who are in heaven in this case can be interpreted as an official, while his body has a snake which means that he has to walk crawling, or in contact with the ground, or in another sense can mean humble. Overall, it can be interpreted that this symbol is an advice for officials or anyone who is above to always stay grounded and humble. This understanding can be revealed in the symbols in the Gatotkaca-headed Snake statue. This statue becomes a real space where the existing symbols form an understanding that can be fully interpreted by the people of Banyuwangi.



*Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca in Sempu subdistrict
Source : personal documents*

3.3 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol of art

The symbol of art is not only an arrangement that has no meaning, nor is it a structure or construction, but the symbol of art is a creation that is complete, complete, and stands alone as a single symbol. Logical reason itself is a substantial or real factor, in itself, uniting all abstract determinations and constituting their proper, truly concrete unity [11]. Likewise, the Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca in Banyuwangi is a symbol of art. The Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca is a symbol of one and complete art, because it does not only convey "meaning", but also gives a "message" that needs to be absorbed by the community.

3.4 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a living form

The virtual form of a work of art is a living form. It is called a living form because it expresses life, growth, motion, and many other things. Art as a living form can be found in all kinds of art. For example, decorative designs that show a feeling of life into visible shapes and colors.[12] As stated by Hegel in the Phenomenology of Mind which explains the process of the emergence of the identity of thought forms or concepts and objects.[13] The object that was present, namely the snake with the head of Gatotkaca, became a living object, because of the identity and meaning contained in it.

In the case of the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca, it can be interpreted as a living form where the shape of this statue takes the form of a character who is narratively a celestial being, namely Gatotkaca, who is strong and powerful, while his body takes the body of a snake. The merging of these forms produces a new form that can be interpreted as a living form and represents imagination and reality itself. According to Langer, art is also like science. Art carries the contents of the emotional world, but does not only provide pleasure for the viewer. Rather it instills an

understanding (conception of beauty) for observers which is also in the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca in Banyuwangi.

3.5 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol of power legitimation

¹ The Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca is not only a work of art that has meaning but can also be interpreted as a symbol to legitimize power. In earlier events, this symbol has been used since ancient times, starting from the Blambangan kingdom when it was led by Prabu Tawang Alun. Historically, during the leadership of Prabu Tawang Alun, upheaval and resistance to the invaders had been ignited. This symbol is used in order to carry out social movements, to carry out underground wars against invaders. The social movement itself is an attempt to change the situation or fight injustice [14], this movement arises because of the desire to be free from the shackles of the invaders. In history, it is stated that during the leadership of Prabu Tawang Alun, upheaval and resistance to the invaders had been inflamed, which was then continued by Wong Agung Wilis, Sayu Wiwit and the courtiers of the Blambangan kingdom. The resistance carried out by Wong Agung Wilis, Sayu Wiwit and punggawa was one of the millenarian movements, freeing the Blambangan people from the shackles of the invader became the main motive for the ongoing social movement.[15]. It is not surprising if we see the symbol of the Snake-Headed Gatotkaca installed on the gamelan angklung and gongs, in meeting halls, and strategic places in Banyuwangi.[16]



Symbol of the Snake-Headed Gatotkaca on gamelan

Source 1 : <https://indonesiakaya.com/pustaka-indonesia/gamelan-banyuwangi-sentuhan-bali-pada-budaya-jawa/> accessed at : 12.19 – 04/05/2021

Source 2: https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamelan_Banyuwangi accessed at : 12.20 – 04/05/2021

In a more recent era this symbol was initiated by the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet around 1974 as a form of decoration for the pavilion, in local government offices, sub-districts, villages, and schools. This can be read as a symbolic relic of the era of the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet.

Of the 2 eras mentioned although they have different functions. In the era of the Blambangan kingdom, the symbol of the snake-headed Gatotkaca functioned as an invitation from the king to carry out an underground movement, which can also be



interpreted as a symbol that signifies the king's power and makes an appeal to the people. In the next era, in the era of the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet, this statue became a message given to the people, and this symbol can also be read as a sign that the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet had served and made a legacy.

3.6 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol of moral control

The message embedded in the **statue of the snake with the head of Gatotkaca** is a moral control carried out by the authorities, so that the people or their subordinates in government ranks remain grounded even though they have high positions. Moral is a product that comes from the human mind. Reason, which is the sphere of ideas, is a self-revealing truth in which the concept reaches a realization which is absolutely adequate for it, and is free insofar as in this real world, in its objectivity, it recognizes its subjectivity, and in this subjectivity it recognizes that objective world.[17]. With this statue, moral control is trying to be conveyed by an embedded leader, of course this moral message is a subjective message but is widely agreed upon and becomes an unwritten rule for the people in Banyuwangi.

3.7 Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca as a symbol of identity and self-image

This statue has become a symbol of Banyuwangi Regency since its construction was initiated by the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet. Although this statue is intended as a message that is noble, but in its application this statue is not everyone can interpret that way. As one of the cases, the Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas, who served in the 2010-2021 period, did not have the same perception about the statue, which resulted in him restoring and removing the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca from the pavilion.[18] he did not want the symbol to shackle the people of Banyuwangi, because its nature is considered like a snake.[19] The perception of a meaning that gives rise to identity is, of course, inevitable. Erikson conceptualizes identity as a partially conscious, partially unconscious feeling about who one is and where one "fits" in the world, identity being "*Motiv des Forchens*—what makes you move".[20] With the difference in perception that the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca becomes a symbol that becomes the identity of the Banyuwangi people in an unfavorable sense, it appears and of course this is a very natural thing.

Although there is an action from the Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas to restore the snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca, the image of this statue is already attached to Banyuwangi Regency, so that this symbol becomes an iconic object related to the identity and self-image of Banyuwangi Regency. Identity is what gives a person's life purpose and meaning, in various social contexts.[21] So this statue should be interpreted correctly so that the identity that is read is an identity that radiates positive things.

4. Conclusion

The **Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca** is a statue that became a symbol of Banyuwangi Regency, this statue is intended as a message to the people of Banyuwangi which was initiated by the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet around 1974 as a



form of decoration for the pavilion.[22] The philosophy of this statue is Gatotkaca as a symbol of people who are in heaven, in this case it can be interpreted as an official, while his body has a snake which means that he has to crawl, or come into contact with the ground, or in another sense can be interpreted as a populist. Overall, it can be interpreted that this symbol is an advice for officials or anyone who is above to always stay grounded and populist. Although it was only proposed in 1974 by the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet, actually this symbol has been used for a long time starting from the Blambangan kingdom when it was led by Prabu Tawang Alun as a symbol to carry out an underground movement against the invaders.

This statue has a special position in the general symbolic value proposed by Sussane K. Langer. This statue has several dimensions of symbols. First as a Presentational Symbol, where the Snake statue with the head of Gatotkaca can only be captured through the overall meaning, it cannot be divided into certain units. As a Virtual Space, this statue becomes a real space where the existing symbols form an understanding that can be fully interpreted by the people of Banyuwangi. As a symbol of art because this statue is a symbol of one art and gives a "message" that needs to be absorbed by the community. As a Living Form in the case of the gatotkaca snake head statue, it can be interpreted as a living form where the shape of this statue takes a form that represents a living creature and represents the imagination of reality itself. As a symbol of the legitimacy of power, the statue of the snake with the head of Gatotkaca became the legitimacy of 2 eras of power, during the Blambangan kingdom era and during the era of the Regent Joko Supaat Slamet. As a symbol of moral control, this statue refers to the philosophy of staying grounded despite having a high position. And the last one is the identity and self-image of Banyuwangi district.

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