

Human Manifestations and Tirta Amerta: Struggles to Find a Balanced Point

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Abstract— To maintain good behaviors, humans attempt to find meanings and the essence of life. Humans take respective ways as a process of instilling awareness about life. Humans and tirta amerta (the water of life) are a result of human awareness of the nature of life because the amerta is the essence of all living things in the universe. In the process of creative, a quest for the meaning and nature of life arises due to the struggle of that manifesting forms felt and experienced by the humans. The creation and realization of this art involves the mind and experience of the creator. In this case, the form of water, soil, grass is used as a foundation for humans' struggles in creating arts. The goal is the search for balanced points and harmony in human life. The creation of art in the works of painting is the result of struggles in the artists' life that are expressed through symbols of forms and events from the behaviors of the artists themselves.

Keywords— Tirta amerta, struggle, chaos, balanced point.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a Javanese principle, the *tirta amerta* (water of life) refers epistemically to human life, one of which is reflected in the life metaphor, perhaps to stop *ngombe* (drinking), which means that life is just a drink stop. This means that human life in the world is merely temporary. Therefore, Javanese people seek to interpret their behavior in relation to doing good things in life. The effort to find the *tirta amerta* (water of life), as depicted in the *Dewa Ruci* fiber puppet, represents the story of *sangkan paraning* as an effort to swing the apartment. This means that the goal of life is to achieve the perfection of life[1]. This story is also written by [2], which says that Bima, who was the strongest child among the other five siblings, tried to be removed by the request of Resi Durna to find living water in the Candramuka mountain. Resi Durna said, if he found that water he would get perfect knowledge, stand out in the world, and could protect parents that he respected.

However, Bima did not find it despite breaking down trees and destroying the forest. Then he returned to Resi Durna to ask. Rishi Durna told him to search for it in the ocean floor. But Bima still didn't find it. Until then, he met

Dewa Ruci who asked him to enter into his inner self through his left ear. Bima found himself in an infinite void

and in his vision, he got what he was looking for as the water of life was the origin of himself.

For sure, his mind is divine. He reached the *manunggaling kawula gusti* level, the union of people with God. Bima is a symbol of honesty and determination that must look for the *tirta amerta* (living water) and in Javanese language, it is called *tan keno pejah*.

From the story of *Tirta Amerta*, based on the Javanese culture, water becomes the object of creation which has a broad meaning in relation with struggles in all aspects of human life. Thus, its meaning in the creation of arts not only manifests in the form of water, but also in various forms and events that become human struggles both concerning humans and socio-cultural symptoms. In this sense, as an artist of creation, it is necessary to explore humans' behaviors in life as a process of searching for the *tirta amerta* as a personal identity. Many personal experiences are expressed in the creation of this art concerning the *tirta amerta*.

Water has a mystery that people do not really know ranging from its shapes that can change, its movements and functions in life. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese water researcher discovered that water is a crystal whose form is very dependent on what is confirmed by the conditions, circumstances, and languages of humans. In everyday human portraits, the presence of water fosters pleasure, joy, and blessing in the world. On the other hand, at times water causes conflicts, disasters, grief, and disappointments. Like rain, when it comes at the right time, the earth is hit by drought and all can feel the joy. At the wrong time, in marriage ceremonies, concerts, when driving, some people condemn and avoid it.

The water mystery is partially a response to what emerges in a variety of life behaviors. In the scientific world, rain is a hydrological cycle of the earth, and a human with his or her mind tries to create a way to control it. Existence of rain handlers shows that in some ways rain can be diverted to other places. In the Javanese tradition, there is a rain antidote consisting of roncean onion, and red chilli each of which is stuck to the corners of the courtyard facing the sky.

The phenomenon of rain leads us to see that water is welcomed differently by societies in a cultural context. Every society and culture (according to its criteria) gives meaning to the types of animals, plants, minerals, celestial bodies, and other natural phenomena to create a logical system based on a limited set of data[3]. The human reason responding to environmental phenomena is processed into a

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coherent logical system. This behavior gives birth to a system of knowledge of a society concerned with the environment and its manifestations in the classification, categorization, and taxonomy of environmental elements. The knowledge system in the community is transformed into inheritance and learning used to meet humans' needs.

II. METHOD

This research used a phenomenological and ethnographic approach. The researchers determined the location, the material, and the subject of research concerning the phenomenon of Javanese cultural unity in the ethnographic framework. An ethnographic research is holistic or comprehensive, meaning that ethnographic research directs its attention to one or several specific variables including culture as a whole system consisting of inseparable parts. In principle, through systematic observation and recording, the phenomena were investigated. In a broad sense, observation is a complex process composed of biological and psychological processes. The most important method is the processes of observation and memory strengthened by the basis of a phenomenological approach that describes reflective field findings in detail. They are fully supported by visual, contextual and textual data through literacy studies.

III. DISCUSSION

Culture evolves in the context of human behaviors, characteristics and tastes that remain dynamic and constant considerably. Behavioral changes inherently related to human beings, whether intentional or unintentional, have had a significant impact on various aspects in human life including changes in human cultures or societies. In short, humans always explore and look for a balanced point in line with the *amerta tirta*.

Ethnoecologically, water has a different classification system in every culture and society. For example, in the world of Sawu people[4] relates that the arrival of water in the form of rain was welcomed with a ceremony aimed at driving away the power of negative occult. Rainfall is thought to be able to clear their fields. After the soil has been injured because of a former claim, it must be rested and restored to replant. The universe for Sawu is a system of order based on structural desires. To enter the structure of Sawu's culture is to know the symbolic form of myth in their life and nature. The main goal is not to have nature, but for self-realization, that is formed in relation to the elements of life. In the world of Sawu people, the sun is male, while the moon is female. Likewise lightning is considered as a man and cloud as a woman. Clouds have metaphors as pregnant women and rain as men who come down to earth and fertilize the soil. Classification like this relates to their origin in the world.

a. Struggles to Find a Balanced Point

The public knowledge system about water is developed according to a magnitude of water benefits in human life. This evidence is mainly concerned with an ethnoecological method[5] regarding the capital society that has a classification or categorization in assessing the water of Ciliwung river for the utilization of living necessities.

Knowledge on the Ciliwung suburban community with the city government creates a different perception of water. Whether it is suitable for use or not in the public knowledge, water has several dimensions namely the source, smell, color, motion, purpose, and method of its provision. In the government perception, water is categorized as dirty due to substances, dirt / germs in the water. Thus, the Ciliwung river community has a perception that clean water is clear, odorless, flowing, and so on. While dirty water is the water from the flood, so that its color is cloudy, and smells lots of garbage or dirt. This classification becomes relatively dependent on the symbolic context and use. This symbolic function is a human ability to show realities and signs that shape human perceptions of water.

The creation of myths in society concerning water is a form of interaction between humans and nature. In the myth, local knowledge of the community is related to the existence of water in their area. That experience leads to behaviors within social myths. Disasters and the scarcity of water that hit the country have made humans look for the dimensions of social cultural significance of events. Water then has a symbolic function to explain the sign of the phenomenon, so that humans can read and interpret the sign of an undesirable event. That is why the Javanese people have a natural knowledge system called *Pranoto Mongso*. Historical experience of the community teaches them to understand the meaning and behavior that must be nurtured and utilized.

In the Javanese thinking[6], describe water in association with fertility. The history of Mataram Concert tells the story of the Islamic Mataram kingdom that was destroyed and swallowed by a flood of Opak river water. On the one hand, water also symbolizes fertility. In the context of land processing, the soil can only be processed when there is water at a certain level. The close relationship between human and water deepens the human inner world that will provide an understanding for those who maintain a balance of life. In terms of treating water, human culture will create a certain order that is useful for human life. Therefore, water is not only a source of human supply but is also the source of all the deepest aesthetic feelings of humans since the beginning of life.

b. Struggles to Find a Dynamic Balance

Conceptually, the balance of human life can be described as a dynamic balance, not a static one. The balance of human life is neither fixed, nor the same, and it does not have a definite size for humans. The balanced point aims to discover an effort that is capable of creating harmonization and sufficiently expressed humanity. In works of art, the meaning of feeling in humans will be understood through interpretations or readings of the work. Therefore, the creation of this artwork is one of media used for understanding the meaning of *Tirta Amerta*.

Ecologically, human relations with the environment is a necessity. This means that there are interrelated and reciprocal engagements between humans and environments. We and life are two opposite patterns. Like the Yin and

Yang symbols as the source of all existence and transformation in the universe[7]. Yin and Yang show the existence of a point of balance that has extraordinary power, namely the existence of core contradictions in everything.

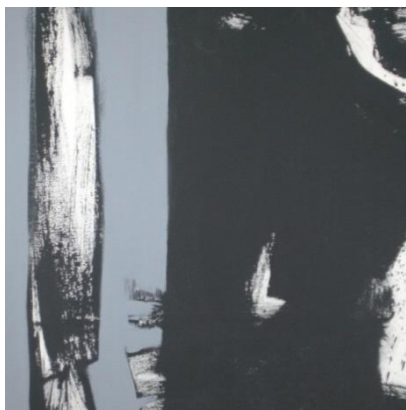


Fig 1: The Power of Life, 2009, Cat acrylic on Canvas, 180 cm x 150 cm (Agus Purwanto)



Fig 2: The Tirta Amerta Performance at Gapura Adicipta Galeri in 2009

In fact, human behaviors and life should achieve a state of balance and harmony. Conversely, a chaos emerges amid the imbalance of life that refers to a chaotic relationship between humans and the world. A chaos is a life dialectic that exists. While humans are paradoxical beings, the search for meaning for chaos occurs in them. The meaning is not located in objects or people or objects, nor do we say the words, or the words we write, and scratch. However, we are the ones who make sure or determine the meaning of things that we make or we do that seems natural and inevitable[8]. The meaning is constructed with a representation system and is defined by a code that establishes the correlation between the conceptual system and our language system. Humans interpret their lives by using symbols, languages, and so on that are the codes to construct the meaning. Human spirituality is important in the meaning of life.

IV. CONCLUSION

Spirituality of *Tirta Amerta* and its Metaphors in the struggle, water of life is not only a single substance, but that it is interwoven with other substances such as nature, environment, plants, and all events in the world. Therefore, water is a counterweight in the chain of life in the world. Abstract paintings in the theme of *Tirta Amerta* represent a struggle for human life that depicts figurative abstract paintings, in which the depiction uses figures of forms or images in the reality of the world undergone a process of depicting other forms or simplifications, so that their shapes and figures can be captured. In this work, it does not directly refer to objects or forms of reality and externals. However, the essence of what is intendedly expressed is visually strong. One of them can be seen in the painting below.

The spirituality or life force of humans is depicted through the form of grass deplete with philosophical values. Grass in human life is interpreted as life force, energy, vibration, vitality, spirit, and the dimension of survival. The power of human life means developing all of the energies for ourselves and for others. The meaning of philosophical values of the grass is interpreted as a power possessed by humans in the struggle to find a balanced point. Humans have magical powers that are described in an art performance by Agus Purwanto. The power of life can also be seen through the symbols used in elements of the art performance held at Gapura Adicipta Galeri in 2009. It can be seen that the elements of water, fire, stone, environment and humans are closely related to life in the world. A dynamic and chaotic relationship often arises in the life events, but the magical spirituality is highlighted through the performance of arts motion as a visualization of human life force in searching for *Tirta Amerta*, the water of life as has been outperformed in the Bima puppet play.

In the process of creating works of art regarding *Tirta Amerta*, water is the essence of humans in search for true self-authenticity. That the water of life is not only expressed in terms of water in works of art, but also forms of expressions of spirituality and human energies including feelings, events from the life behaviors and experiences. Self-experiences are the struggle process of life in facing chaos and looking for a balanced point, that is, the goal of life for the sake of harmonization and survival of a better life for humans as social beings.

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