Oral Tradition: Dramatic and Theatrical Concepts in ‘Bari’ Performances

Mardiana, Lena, Zolkipli

To Link this Article: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i2/16390

Received: 02 December 2022, Revised: 05 January 2023, Accepted: 23 January 2023

Published Online: 06 February 2023

In-Text Citation: (Mardiana et al., 2023)

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s)
Published by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society (www.hrmars.com)
This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode
Oral Tradition: Dramatic and Theatrical Concepts in ‘Bari’ Performances

Mardiana, Lena, Zolkipli
Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia
Email: mardiana.ismail@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

Abstract
‘Bari’ performances refers to a traditional art in the form of oral tradition. It originates from east coast of Malaysia. At the beginning of its appearance, it served as the basis for other traditional performance, a medical platform and also as an entertainment platform. Through ‘Bari’ performances, a ‘Tok Bari’ plays his role as a narrator as well as an intermediary in delivering his performances or medicine. A research has been undertaken to identify the dramatic concepts that shape this art in addition to introducing the theatrical elements contained in ‘Bari’ performances. This effort is to enhance the understanding of the community while providing attractive value to ‘Bari’ performances. Dramatic concepts as well as theatrical elements are parsed using the approach of Aristotle Dramatic Theories. Through the process of analysis, this art is introduced as a dramatic and theatrical performance art because it contains elements of the formation of a performance such as spaces, languages, time, story collection, storytelling themes, plot and action as well as characters. The presence of melody, sound and music further strengthens its formation as a dramatic and theatrical performing art. It also shows its uniqueness when ‘Tok Bari’ who is identified as a shaman has the same role as an actor. This research attempts to find an alternative approach to documenting ‘Bari’ performances as one of the theatrical arts by emphasizing dramatic concepts in its performances.

Keywords: ‘Bari’ Performances, Tok Bari, Dramatic Performances, Theatrical Performances

Introduction
Based on the Third Edition of Dewan (2002), ‘Bari’ means Story (old). ‘Bari’ is a term or dialect commonly used by the east coast residents to welcome nearby citizens or family members to watch and listen to ‘Tok Bari’ telling stories. Therefore, ‘Bari’ performances can also be defined as a literary piece produced from the stories told by figures with the talent of storytelling, recounting folklores and ancient stories. Figures aforementioned are those who are used to mene activities (means traditional performance from east coast of Malaysia such as Makyung, Menora, Selampit, Dikir Laba, Dikir Barat, Bageh, Main Teri, Asyik Joget, Wayang Kulit Kelantan or Siam, Wayang Melayu or Jawa, Wayang Topeng, Tari Inai, Ulek Bubu, Wau, Rebana Kercing, Rebana Mangkuk, Rebana Riba, Rebana Ubi, Rebana Besar, Gasing Pangkah, Main Choh, Sepak Raga, Sepak Bulu Ayam, Tikam Seladang, Kertok, Lokan, Silat Tari, Silat Tongkat dan Belaga Kukoran, etc).
However, ‘Bari’ performances isn’t as popular as it was before, and it’s slowly fading from the society. This is caused by the lack of exposure on this art towards the general public, and they don’t know that ‘Bari’ performances is also a traditional art in the form of verbal arts. Parallel to the changes in time and the development of technologies, ‘Bari’ performances is now only treated as an alternative form of entertainment and not a valuable performance. The respect for ‘Bari’ performances is extremely low, neglecting it without any effort to re-create the glory by widely performing it. There should be an appreciation towards ‘Bari’ performances before the existing artists decreases by the factor of age and health.

‘Bari’ performances is a significant performance in the development of art and culture among the community in Kampung Gong Manok, Besut, Terengganu and Kampung La Loh, Kuala Krai, Kelantan. Recently, the growth of ‘Bari’ performances is halted due to the uprising of various mass media platforms such as Facebook, Netflix, television and radio programmes, films played in the cinemas, Tik Tok, Instagram and others.

Meanwhile, ‘Bari’ performances and activities have to compete with the emergence of mass media since surely, virtual viewing is more entertaining than watching Tok Bari’s performance. Hence, this artpiece needs to be documented via (i) recordings followed by (ii) academic research so that its existence can be known as a traditional verbal art performance.

This research was conducted based on the argument and opinions from several scholars such as Rahman (2018); Yousof (2004); Salleh (2005); Isa (1987); Ahmad (2004); Osman (1975); Sheppard (1983); Sweeney (1994); Matusky (1980, 1993); Wright (1980) and Mary Beth Osnes (1992). They succeeded in collecting and obtaining data, analysing them and presenting the date about traditional arts into one research system which later becomes a reference to other researchers. Beginning with the attempt of documentation by the scholars, producers, government and private art agencies, owners of printing publications, mass media and electronic media had started to produce performances based on the findings shared by the mentioned scholars.

Therefore, it proves the understanding and awareness within the community on how important it is to preserve traditional arts and re-deliver them using whatever methods that are suitable need to be encouraged. With that, ‘Bari’ performances needs to be lifted to see how far can ‘Bari’ performances owned by the community in Kampung Gong Manok and Kampung La Loh impact the industry like the previous traditional arts.

Other than that, to further strengthen the findings and processes of data analysis, this research had chosen to involve Aristotle’s Dramatic Theory to convey a more special perspective for ‘Bari’ performances.

**Research Problems**

In the research about ‘Bari’ performances, no academic study is found that lifts ‘Bari’ performances as a traditional art. This is due to the non-existent studies that focus on the characteristics and artistic structure of ‘Bari’ performances. There isn’t any study involving the understanding on the function of ‘Bari’ performances too.

All the questions above were roused and need to be analysed by first identifying the origins and development. Once certain, the information about ‘Bari’ performances can be spread.
These questions were raised with the excuse of representing the responsibility towards the fading traditional arts due to the advancement in technology.

Research Objectives
There are three objectives in this research which are;

- Analysing ‘Bari’ performances
- Applying Dramatic Theory as an approach to summarise the functions of ‘Bari’ performances to show the placement of ‘Bari’ performances within the community
- Petitioning for ‘Bari’ performances to be categorised as Warisan Seni Ungkapan which shape the culture and identity of the eastcoast community.

Research Questions
There are three research questions that need a solution to manifest this research;

- How does ‘Tok Bari’ deliver to show in detail the characteristics and structure of ‘Bari’ performances?
- Does the community in the eastern coast has rights towards ‘Bari’ performances, or is it just practised by several activists to empower the cultures in the village? This is an important matter since the origins of ‘Bari’ performances is an activity that helps to cure the soul and physical of the residents in the community.
- How does the drafting in National Heritage Act 2005 (amendment of Act 645), where Cultural Heritage that is divided into Intangible Heritage and Tangible Heritage, Natural Heritage and Under Water Cultural Heritage gazetted on December 31st, 2005 and enforced on March 1st, 2005 be a guide to maintain and preserve this country’s heritage?

Research Methodology
This research is a qualitative research oriented on instrumental cases. Multi Method Approach is applied to obtain research data. Primary data is obtained from a field research that involves an interview using Tandom Interview with half-structured questions. The questions were asked towards a Key Informant and two additional informants.

Secondary data is obtained by observation on field and related documents. Hence, observation via Non Participant Observation is chosen while ‘Tok Bari’ is performing the ‘Bari’ performances. The purpose is to obtain a more in-depth data resources.

The secondary data is also obtained from official and unofficial documents such as pictures and video recordings of ‘Bari’ performances. All these data is interpreted and analysed based on the application of the elements in the Aristotle Dramatic Theory.

Literature Review
Below is the academic writing related to ‘Bari’ performances found including an essay entitled Pendidikan Pendalangan Di Dalam Wayang Kulit Kelantan written by Jamaluddin Osman. In the writing, Jamaluddin Osman has stated that:

*Someone who wants to master and go deep into storytelling techniques need to be patient. That individual needs to spend at least 7 months to understand everything. In the second month, teachers will teach storytelling and speech techniques.*
**Research Findings and Discussion**

1) **‘Bari’ Performances**

*Mene* is the shortform for ‘permainan’ or performance. For the eastcoast community, every performance art is considered as play art. This shortform usually refers to traditional performances or ceremonies that involve rituals. Figure 1 shows the understanding on the concept of ‘Bari’ performances in the secular performances in eastcoast.
This research also pay particular attention to the use of spelling and pronunciation of ‘Bari’. Since the communities to these two villages are a Thai minority and have a wide distribution then the differences in pronunciation and spelling may be a confusion. An example of the use of the standard spelling is Bari but when referring to the pronunciation of the locals it reads Ba Ghi. While some communities in Kampung La Loh call it Bhar Ghi. However, the meaning still describes "storytelling". To avoid confusion, this research used the spelling ‘Bari’, as this word is found in the Kamus Dewan.

While Figure 2, displays the levels of mastering ‘Bari’ performances. It’s divided into three education stages which are Berguru, Berlimau and Berbari. Each stage involves imitation by the apprentice through observation of the speech and behavior of their Adiguru (master). Since the study of ‘Bari’ performances involves imitation system, it has some similarities with informal education. For apprentice without basic blasphemy or not involved in any traditional performance, they will be exposed to learning via “training-view first”. Only then, they were allowed to start learning each stage of ‘Bari’ performances. They must pass each level one by one.
2) The role of ‘Tok Bari’ as Shaman and Actor
‘Tok Bari’ is the main character. During the storytelling, other characters emerge such as male characters, female characters, animal characters, rich characters, poor characters, supernatural characters and various other characters that need to be acted by ‘Tok Bari’. The actions are acted through describing words or characters with body movement.

However, in the ‘Bari’ performances, the most obvious admiration is Tok Bari’s ability to relate to supernatural powers directly in his unconscious realm. Every action and conversation of ‘Tok Bari’ with supernatural powers that takes place directly in front of the eyes of the audience has evoked a spectacular experience of its own.

In order to relate relevantly that ‘Tok Bari’ has similar characteristics to shamans, a few definitions of shamanism will be presented in this section. Norazit Selat mentions that a shaman is / as an expert in the field of magic and religion (Norazit, 1989). While, Richard Winstedt in The Malay Magician (1951 p. 11) argues that shamans in Malaya include bomoh, pawang, dukun and so on.

Also, most traditions of shamanism are inherited from generation to generation, either through word-of-mouth inheritance (Adiguru to their apprentice) or special ceremonies to recognize recipients (Balzer, 1990). Tok Bari's expertise is also usually acquired from generation to generation either by teaching or through several phases as discussed in section of Mastering ‘Bari’ performances. Table 1 shows the similarities of Shaman and ‘Tok Bari’ in a ceremony or a performance.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHAMAN</th>
<th>TOK BARI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>as a healer of physical and mental illness</td>
<td>specialist in the healing (penyakit ‘Angin’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as preservers of heritage such as stories and songs</td>
<td>expert in the field of oral storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be the head of spiritual ceremonies and worship</td>
<td>expert in blasphemy ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fortune tellers and interpreters</td>
<td>bomoh, pawang, dukun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political, economic and social reference experts</td>
<td>reference expert in the social, economic and political matters of his community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The world of traditional performance arts in Malaysia is a complex entity, because it consists of various mixtures of tribes and ethnics and some of them are imported by immigrants. In certain circumstances, traditional performances have undergone some modifications to be adapted into local industries. However, the effort to preserve the style and techniques becomes the importance for a community.

Although this research is not intended to resolve the polemics that arise, at least through the discussion, the reader manages to gain a different perspective on the ‘Bari’ performances. In conclusion, it managed to reach an agreement in defining the position of the ‘Bari’ performances as a dramatic performance and containing a theatrical aspect.

This art is no longer just known as an art that exists in the world of the east coast community only. Although the future of ‘Bari’ performances cannot be expected, but with the efforts made, at least we can place it as the identity of the community of Kampung La Loh and Kampung Gong Manok and the entire clump. Hopefully with the birth of this study, the next topic will be extended in order to preserve the function of ‘Bari’ performances as a symbol to the art and aesthetics of the nation.

Therefore, this research aims to contribute to the use of Aristotle’s Dramatic Theory approach which includes the elements of theme, ideas and thoughts, plot and action, character and characterization, language and diction, music, melody and sound and the element of admiration is a mechanism to support the idea of the dramatic development of Bari’s performance. Meanwhile, the second mechanism is as a crossover to create and produce a performance that contains the style of a theatrical performance. This is important so that Bari performances can continue to be conservation, preserved and restored.

Acknowledgement

This paper is based on the research project entitled “Membina Kandungan Produk Digital dan Fizikal Menerusi Karya Kreatif Sebagai Usaha Melestarikan Pendidikan Seni Persembahan Warisan dan Gunaan Menerusi Pendekatan Art Based Research”. The authors would like to extend their gratitude to the Research Management and Innovation Centre (RMIC), Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) for the Strategic University Research Grants 3/2022 (code: 2022-0044-107-01) that helped fund the research.
Corresponding Authors
Dr Mardiana Binti Ismail
Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University, 35900, Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia
Email: mardiana.ismail@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

References