

Indonesia: Javanese Gamelan and
Shadow Puppet Theatre
(*Wayang Kulit*)

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Indonesia

- Consists of an archipelago of several thousand islands of which Java is the largest.
- During colonial times Indonesia was known as the Dutch East Indies
- Consists of many diverse languages and cultures.
- The development of a common national language “Indonesian” made it possible to build the unity needed to win the revolution against the Dutch (1945-1949).
- Major religions include: Hindu/Buddhism; Islam; and Christianity.

Javanese Gamelan Performance: Wayang Kulit (shadow puppet theatre)



Wayang Kulit

- All night shadow puppet show: goes from approx. 9:00 PM until 6:00 AM
- Led by a master story-teller, musician, puppeteer called a Dhalang
- Plot consists of material from taken from two epic stories: the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana.
- Although these stories have Indian origins, they have been reinterpreted based upon the rivalries between kingdoms that existed at one time within Indonesia.

Wayang Kulit

- Pathet Nem: Plot begins with and introduction of the key characters and a conflict arises between two feuding families, one portrayed as good and the other as evil.
- Pathet Sanga: Hero goes into the forest to meditate and struggle to solve the conflict. During this lull in the plot, a set of “clown scenes” take place to entertain the children before they have to leave to go home and sleep
- Pathet Manyura: Great battles are waged and the hero arises triumphant: Good conquers Evil.



The Dhalang - puppeteer



The Gamelan behind the Dhalang



Wayang characters are (roughly) divided into seven types:

halus (refined);
gagah (vigorous);
gusen (coarse);
putri (women);
danawa (ogres);
wanara (monkeys) and
dhagelan (clowns)

In addition to these, there are puppets representing:
the tree of life (*kayon*),
various animals (horses, elephants, tigers etc),
and props (swords, arrows, daggers, letters etc).

There are differences of size as well as form.

These character types apply not only to puppet design,
but to accompanying gamelan pieces,
terms of address used in dialogue,
puppet movement and voice characterization as well.

Kayon: tree of life



Halus: Refined Characters



Gusen, Gagah, and Danawa : Course Characters



Dhagelan: Comic Characters used in Clown Scenes



Conflict between a *wanara* and a *halus* character



Javanese Social Order

- For the Javanese, however, the cosmos is not only teeming with life and living energy, but is also elaborately ranked and ordered. Java has never had a caste system. Yet something of the pure idea of caste, shorn of its rigid Indian barbarities and with greater emphasis upon function than on birth, struck and maintained strong roots as the appropriate symbolic expression of a hierarchical community.

(Benedict R. O' G. Anderson. *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*. Jakarta & Kuala Lumpur: Equinox Publishing, 2009:17-18)

Javanese Social Order

Implicit in an unequal hierarchical social order is the idea that each rank or level has its own particular functions within the social structure . . .

- **The king:** communicates with the supernatural powers and secures their benevolence [goodwill or kindness];
- **The *brahmānā*:** perform the rituals of the state and transmit the culture of the community to the next generation;
- **The *satryā*:** have the duty of administering the government and protecting the state from external attack;
- **The traders:** maintain economic prosperity;
- **The artisans:** construct the material apparatus of the civilization.

Social Order & Morality

- Out of the concept of function there now emerges the idea of morality. Precisely, because all functions are interrelated, and because each order is essential to the others, social approval for individuals within each order depends on how adequately they fulfill their order's functions. (Anderson 2009:18)
- **The *satryā*:** who behaves perfectly in the artisan "manner" is a bad *satryā*, regardless of the good work that he may in fact do.
- **The trader:** who lives as a trader is a better member of society than the trader who leads the life of an ascetic *brahmānā*.
- So there develops a stratification of moralities according to caste and class, each of which may be in contrast or conflict with the others. (Anderson 2009:18)

Character Development in *Wayang*

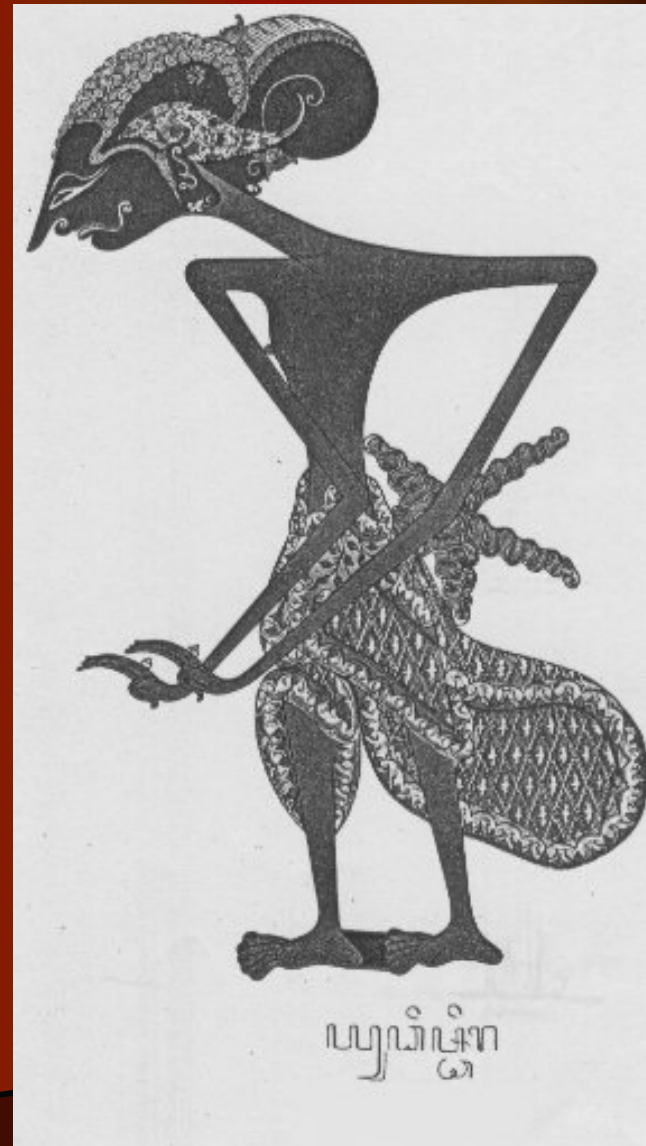
- Although the ethical requirements of each life-style in the *wayang* may be rigid and austere, the existence of a plurality of such life-styles, each with its own code of behavior, gives the *wayang* world a wide variety of psychological contrasts, a sumptuous array of characters, and, on occasion, an unmatched moral poignancy. (Anderson 2009:18)
- Moral pluralism suffuses the whole world of *wayang*. For example, the criticism leveled at the *kuråwå* [family] is not that they are bad men but bad *satryå*. The hero Adipatu Karnå fights on the *kuråwå* side but is approved of because he lives and dies as a real *satryå* should. (ibid.)

Character Development in *Wayang*

Characters of *wayang* are **not** simply divided into Left and Right, Kuråwå and Pendåwå, gods, kings, *brahmånå*, *satryå*, princesses, giants, apes, and clowns, each with their own style and way of life. Each of these general categories contains within itself a wide range of personalities, which must be analyzed, however summarily, in their aspect as human types and as bearers of contrasting values. (Anderson 2009:23)

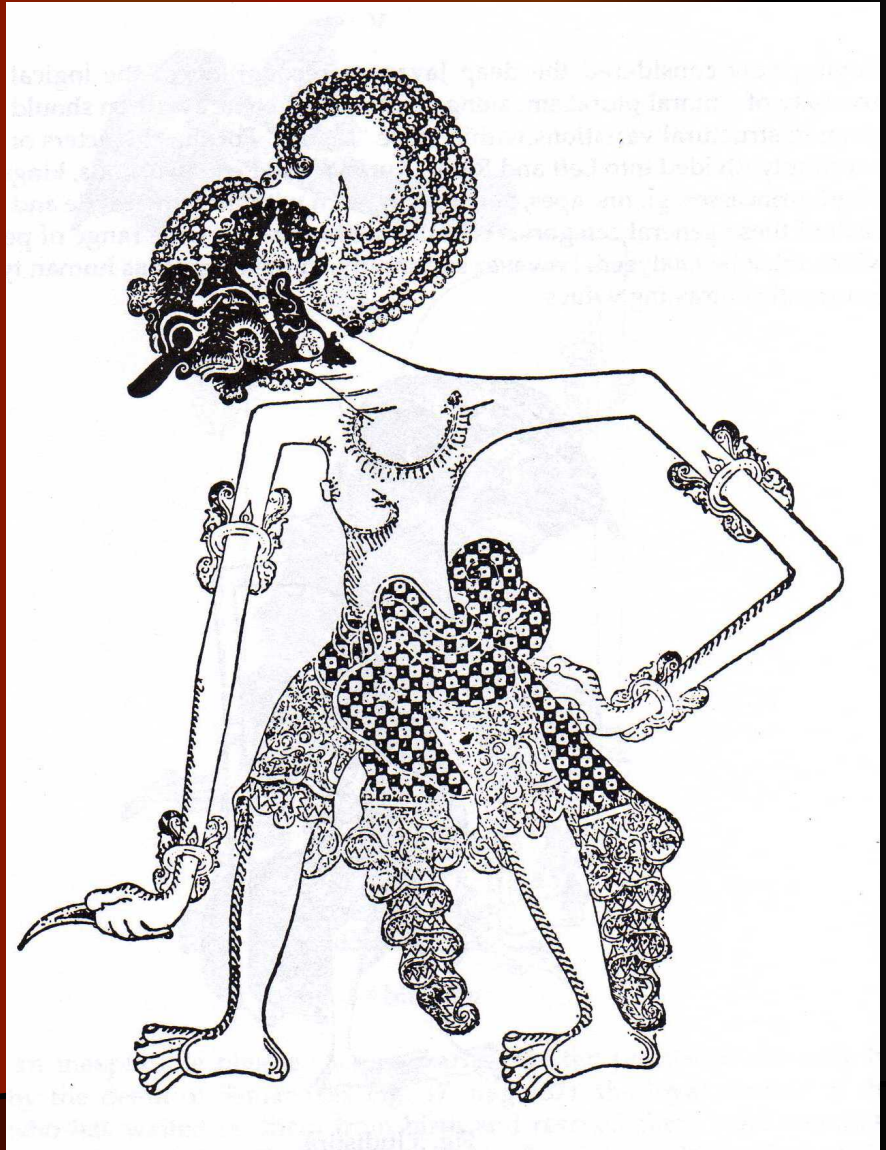
Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Judistira: The eldest of the Pandawa brothers. He is a pure type of the Good King and his humility is shown by the “gentle introspective inclination of his head” as well as his simple attire. “He never raises his voice in anger, never fights, and never rejects a request from anyone, however humble. His time is spent in meditation and the accumulation of wisdom. Unlike other heroes, whose chief magical attributes are weapons, Judistira’s sacred heirloom in the mysterious *Kalimasada*, a holy text containing the secrets of religion and the universe.” (Anderson 2009: 23).



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Bimā (second Pandawa brother): “is the most feared of warriors, creating havoc with his terrible club and atrocious fingernails. He distains to ride in a chariot and strides through forests and deserts and over mountains and seas without any difficulty. He bows to no one. Merciless to his enemies, gigantic, ungainly, heavily muscled, hairy, with protruding eyes and thunderous voice, he is a complete contrast to his elder brother. Nevertheless, his unswerving honesty, loyalty, fortitude, and military skill make him among the most admired figures in *wayang*” (Anderson 2009: 24).



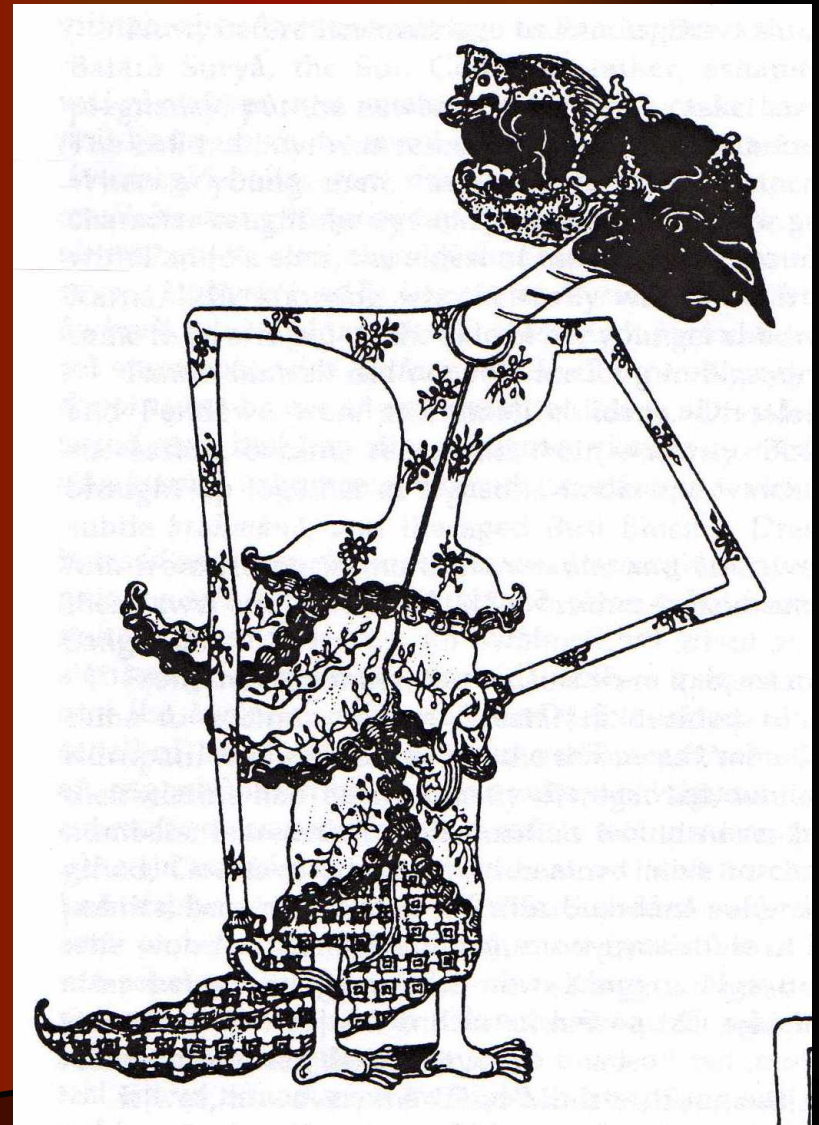
Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Arjunā (third Pandawa brother):
“Unequaled warrior in the battlefield, yet physically delicate and beautiful as a girl, tender-hearted yet iron-willed, a hero whose wives and mistresses are legion yet who is capable of the most extreme discipline with a deep feeling for family loyalty who yet forces himself to kill his own half – brother, he is to the older generation of Javanese, the epitome of the whole man . . . he represents the physical grace and gentleness of heart prized by [the Javanese]” (Anderson 2009: 25).



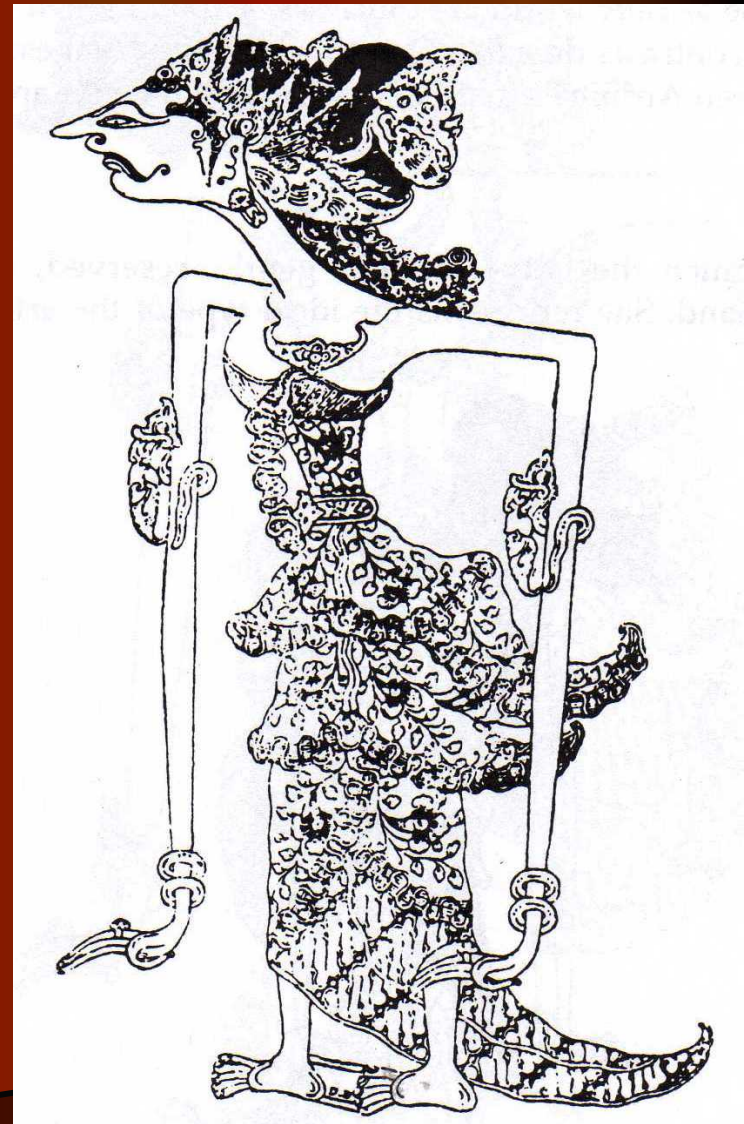
Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Dewi Kunti: is the mother of the three eldest Pandawa sons. Her refinement is evident in the position of her head (averted downward gaze), her overall body posture, and her style of dress. She is known as a wise and perceptive who has attempted to guide her sons through the difficult struggle of succession for the throne of Hastina. In return, her sons are loving and unfailingly obedient.



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Dewi Srikandi: is the exact opposite of the refined, humble female who lives in the shadow of her husband. Srikandi is “talkative, strong willed, warm-hearted, fond of hunting an excellent archer, she is quite ready to debate with [her husband] Ardjuna or take on a passing *satrya* in battle. She enjoys travelling about Java, either in search of her periodically missing husband or seeking adventures of her own . . . For the Javanese, Srikandi is the honored type of the active, energetic, disputatious, generous, go-getting woman” (Anderson 2009: 36).



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Betari Durgā: “is the goddess of violence, darkness, and death. Her abode is in Sétrāgāndāmaju where she holds sway over ghosts, vampires, and other malevolent spirits. In the *lakons* she is always associated with the Left (Kurāwā) faction and unceasingly schemes to destroy the Pendāwā. Most dreaded of Gods, even her husband, Batārā Guru, cannot prevail against her will. It is only Semar before whom she flees in helpless terror” (Anderson 2009: 47).



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Kresnå: “is part God, an incarnation of the mighty Wisnu. He is the consummate politician, diplomat, and strategist of war. By far the most intellectually brilliant of the Pendåwå faction, it is Kresnå who makes their final victory possible. On the other hand, he is a conscienceless liar and an unscrupulous schemer who never hesitates to break the rules when he feels it necessary. Though a *satryå*, he repeatedly ignores the lesser values of the *satryå* class. Only duty to carry out the will of the gods and his own destiny claim his allegiance” (Anderson 2009: 25).



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Radèn Kumbâkarnâ: “Similar to Karnâ in his outlook and morality, Radèn Kumbâkarnâ, hero of the Ramayana, also dies to defend a king whom he realizes has dishonored his position . . . The main difference between Karnâ and Kumbâkarnâ is one of physical type. Kumbâkarnâ is the most colossal of giants and is the largest *wayang* puppet of all, sometimes one and a half meters in height. He is the monstrous giant type in extreme form, with brutal red features, bulbous nose, hyperthyroid eyes, clumsy, hairy torso, and wolf-like fangs. These are all physical characteristics which the Javanese find repugnant. Yet Kumbâkarnâ is among the best-loved *wayang* figures, and the prize example of inner nobility and purity belying external appearance” (Anderson 2009: 31).



Examples of *Wayang* Characters

Dahjang Durnå: “is a *brahmånå*, magician, and teacher. When they were still boys, both Kuråwå and Pandåwå learnt the arts of war from him, and to the end he retains a deep affection of his favorite pupil Ardjunå, though they are arrayed on opposite sides in the Last War. The tendency in *wayang* today is to portray him as a half-sinister, half-comic figure, but this is not the older, traditional perspective. He was then Kresnå’s great adversary, but with the Gods against him and without Kresnå’s divinity . . . In the long struggle between Kuråwå and Pandåwå, he matches Kresnå trick for trick, stratagem for stratagem.” Similar to Kresnå, “he stands outside the *satryå* code,” obeying a higher morality (Anderson 2009: 31).



Kjai Lurah Semar: is the most venerable of the *punakawan* (clown) class of characters.

“Partly this is because Semar, though a humble and comical character, is yet the most powerful of Gods, so that the Lord Shiwa himself, Batârâ Guru, must on occasion submit to him. Partly it is just because he is a clown, a man of the people, to whom the rules of *satryâ* behavior do not apply, and who by his presence alone offers an implied criticism of the whole range of *satryâ* values. Partly it is because Semar is the physical denial of the *satryâ* type. He is immensely fat, with heavy breasts and a vast behind. He is ornamented like a woman, his clothes are those of a man, yet his face is that of neither man nor woman. He is the repository of the highest wisdom, yet this flashes from in between his gentle jokes, his clowning, and even his persistent, uncontrollable farting. Anyone who has witnessed a Javanese shadow-play will recall the wave of deep affection and respect which flows out of the audience towards Semar when he appears” (Anderson 2009: 37).



Playon “Lasem” a scene from a Wayang Kulit performance

- Dhalang knocks on the puppet chest to signal the gamelan musicians to begin playing.
- Begins in “soft style” (complete with a female singer: *pesindhén*) but then speeds up and gets loud at the end of the first phrase.
- Completes the entire *gendhing*, begins to repeat but then is interrupted by the puppeteer banging on metal plaques as he engages the characters in a fight.
- Drumming and banging on the metal plaques continues until the dhalang performs a pattern of knocks on his wooden box to signal the gamelan to move toward the ending phrase.
- Knocks continue as gamelan musicians continue to slow down and begin their transition to the next piece.