



## Topeng Sidakarya Dance; A Man who made it a success

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### ABSTRACT

*Topeng Sidakarya* dance is a masked *wali* dance originated from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A typical old art performance that utilises a mask to express the figure's character. It is believed the art was choreographed after a brief visit of Brahmana Keling, a sage from eastern Java to Bali at the time King Dalem Waturenggong was reigning Gelgel Kingdom. The tour of Brahmana Keling to the grand ritual held in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by King Dalem Waturenggong gave birth to *Topeng Sidakarya* dance; An art to dedicate Brahmana Keling's service for Gelgel kingdom. His service had led Bali to reach its prosperous time

for an extended period. The dance is recognised by its unique mask characteristics: a white-based colour mask, squinting eyes, black or white moustache, smiling expression and exaggerated overbite teeth. *Topeng Sidakarya* dance served as a complement of religious rituals based on King Dalem Waturenggong's decree for the future generation. It is compulsory to perform the sacred art as it carries a symbol that the ceremony has been well-acted, and the organiser would meet their expectation for the ritual.

**Keyword:** Topeng Sidakarya, Dance, Ritual, Success

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### INTRODUCTION

Balinese dance is classified into three types, namely *Wali* dance (sacred dance), *Bebali* dance (ceremonial dance), and *Balih-balihan* dance (performing art).<sup>1</sup> There are strict rules that separate each type of dance though it is unwritten, to ensure its limited means as part of Balinese culture. Furthermore, recently Bali's governor through joint decision letter composed a written statement to protect the dance from further exploitation. It aims to empower as well as to preserve the existence of Balinese sacred dance.<sup>2</sup>

One of *wali* dance is *Topeng Sidakarya*; an ancient dance originated from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. *Topeng Sidakarya* is a masked dance. A typical old art performance that utilises a mask to express the figure's character. In some cultures that hold a strong belief in animism and dynamism, a mask sometimes serves as a sacred object, and it would be only presented or performed on a special occasion. The society would also treat the item with care to protect its holy value.<sup>3</sup> *Topeng Sidakarya* dance is connected to a story of Brahmana Keling, a sage from eastern Java who visited Bali at the time King Dalem Waturenggong of Gelgel was reigning.<sup>4</sup>

### THE TALE OF BRAHMANA KELING

In a village of Keling, East Java, there was a noble sage who mastered the secret art of soul liberation. He was known as Brahmana Keling. He was the

son of Danghyang Kayumanis, grandson of Mpu Candra, a relative of Mpu Bahula and great-grandson of Mpu Beradah.

One day, on his way from Java to Bali, he took a rest at a coastal village, Muncar Village. There he met his father, Dang Hyang Kayumanis. The latter told a long story about the Kingdom of Gelgel, with its King Dalem Waturenggong and Dang Hyang Nirartha as the spiritual advisor were planning a grand ceremony *Eka Dasa Rudra* at Besakih Temple. Brahmana Keling was a sworn brother of Dalem Waturenggong; they spent their childhood together at the time Dalem Waturenggong visited East Java. After hearing the story about his brother's upcoming ceremony, the sage headed to Bali to visit Gelgel Palace. Unfortunately, when he arrived at Gelgel, the Palace was empty, only to be accepted by several community leaders in the Palace. Since the King and the priest were not in the Palace, the community leader suggested Brahmana Keling visit Besakih Temple. He was informed that the King and Dang Hyang Nirartha were engaged with their escorts in preparing the *Eka Dasa Rudra* ceremony procurement at Besakih Temple. Without delay, the sage continued his journey to the Besakih Temple. At the court of the temple, he was greeted again by the royal officer in the temple.

Brahmana Keling responded that he wanted to meet his brother Dalem Waturenggong and Dang Hyang Nirartha. The faraway journey caused his clothes to become dirty, ragged and torn in many

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Figure 1. Topeng Sidakarya<sup>5</sup>

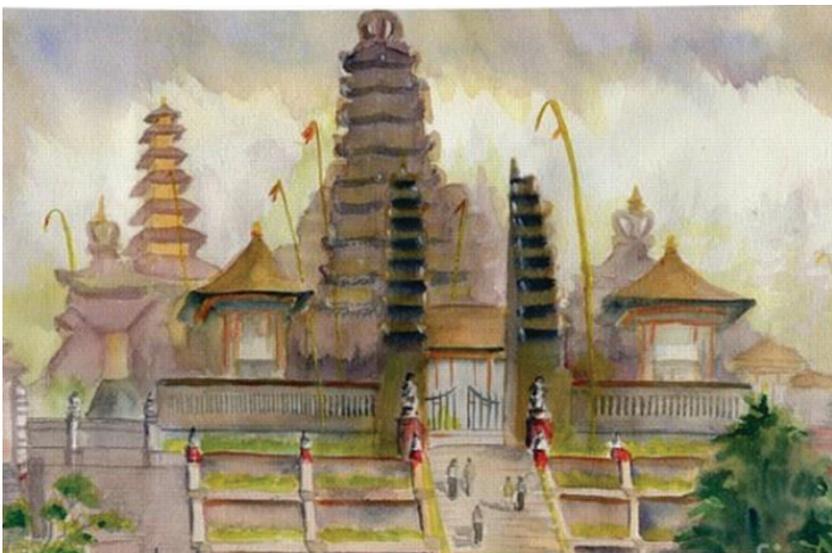


figure 2. At the time of Brahmana Keling expulsion, he cursed “The ceremony at Besakih temple would be unsuccessful, the earth would be drought, plague and pests would be unstoppable”<sup>6</sup>

parts. The community did not dare to inform the King because they assumed that the priest was hardly the King and Dang Hyang Nirartha acquaintance due to his disgusting appearance. Instead, the officer was offended by the sage’s claim that he was a brother of the King. Nevertheless, Brahmana Keling insisted and slipped to the main area. There he sat on top of shrine *Pelinggih Surya Chandra*, to take some rest. In the distance, King Dalem Waturenggong enraged to see an unknown man dare to sit on Pelinggih Surya Chandra. With a trembling voice, he commanded the soldiers, patrons, and the people to immediately drag out the man who was suspected of being insane. The soldiers and the community mocked and dragged the sage harshly. The hermit did not put up any resistance and succumbed on the situation. He deeply disappointed to the King who had no longer recognised him as a brother.

At the time of his expulsion, he cursed “*The ceremony at Besakih temple would be unsuccessful, the earth would be drought, plague and pests would be unstoppable*”. Lightning struck abruptly in broad daylight, while all the people were gasping, and stunning in shock. Then, Brahmana keling left the Besakih temple to the Southwest. No one noticed how the sage made his way to Badanda Negara (Sidakarya Village), a small village on the southern coast of the Badung kingdom. There, he made a hut to conduct his daily ritual as a hermit.

### THE CURSE LIFTED

It did not take a long time for the sage curse showed its effect. After Brahmana keling departure from the temple, a few days later the atmosphere on the Bali island, suddenly changed. As the curse said, all tree and plants for supporting the ritual such as: coconut, banana, rice, vegetables withered. Fruits fell from its tree before ripened, plague and pest such as caterpillars, mice maliciously attacked the farmers’ crops. The earth experienced drought, while a mysterious epidemic was starting to spread. Everything was in chaos. The condition forced the officer to delay the ritual’s timetable. King Dalem waturenggong requested Dang Hyang Nirartha to conduct prayer, to find a solution regarding the sudden jeopardy. However, the prayer did not solve the situation, even make all things worsened. In his confusion, king Dalem decided to meditate at Besakih temple. One night Dalem Waturenggong received a whisper from the deity, who resided in Besakih temple. The voice revealed that he committed a terrible sin, he had disdained his sworn brother, thus to stop the situation, only the sage that would possible to restore the situation.



**Figure 3.** Brahmana, keling was known as Dalem Sidakarya. Sidakarya means the one who makes it a success.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 4.** Costume of Topeng Sidakarya<sup>10</sup>

After the King realised his mistake, the next day, the King summoned his Prime Minister to create an escort team to find Brahmana Keling in Badanda Negara immediately. After a few days of searching, the group arrived at Brahmana Keling's hut in Badanda Negara. The group made a prostration under the King's name and were begging for mercy. They also informed the sage about their purpose to escort him to rendezvous with the King. Realised that it was the King's request, the hermit agreed to visit the Gelgel Palace as soon as he could. He requested the entourage to return to Besakih temple to inform their King without him, only to be shocked that Brahmana Keling was in the temple at the moment of the entourage's returned. Upon the arrival of the sage at Besakih Temple, the proper welcome ceremony was given to him with utmost courtesy, respect and friendliness.

In the conversation between Dalem Waturenggong and Brahmana keling, they were accompanied by Dang Hyang Nirartha. The King promised and would be willing to admit Brahmana Keling as a brother if he could return all the situation to normal. Brahmana Keling gladly agreed. Without any instrument nor ritual preparation, he chanted mantras and all returned to its original state. The people were amazed and fascinated because they had never seen such a bizarre phenomenon occurred. In the end, Dalem Waturenggong admitted that the Brahmana Keling was his brother, and asked for an apology. The officer then resumed the ritual on *Purnamaning Sasih Kedasa*, Saka year 1437 or 1515 AD (16<sup>th</sup> century) with Dang Hyang Nirartha and Brahmana Keling led the ceremony procession. Since the kingdom experienced severe drought, thus the country conducted *Nangkluk merana* together with the grand ritual of Eka Dasa Rudra.<sup>8</sup>

## THE DANCE

Thanks to Brahmana Keling's service, the kingdom experienced prosperity for an extended period. Since he fulfilled the expectations of Dalem Waturenggong thus the sage was awarded by the title Dalem. From that moment on Brahmana Keling was known as Dalem Sidakarya. *Sidakarya* means the one who makes it a success. Then, Dalem waturenggong announced a decree for his people, that from the moment onwards, for every Hindu in Bali who will carry out a ceremony, they must request for Tirta Penyida Karya (holy water) from Pesraman Dalem Sidakarya at the southern coast of Badung kingdom. Therefore, their ceremony would be considered a success. To honour the sage, Dalem Waturenggong ordered Pasek Akeluddadah

to make three masks depicting *Tri Sakti* figures. *Tri Sakti* was Dalem Waturenggong, Dang Hyang Nirartha and Dalem Sidakarya. Those three masks each symbolise the character of The King, The Priest, and The Sage. As a series of the ritual to sprinkle the *Penyida Karya* holy water, it should be accompanied by these Mask performances. However, sometimes the ceremony only performed sidakarya dance without the other two characters.<sup>9</sup>

Costume of Topeng Sidakarya dance consists of several items. The dancer would wear a long-black sleeve cloth, a long white pants, white garment cloth around waist, badong (necklace), gelang kana (arm bracelet), sash, stewel, a crown with long-spikey white hair and a wide-squared fabric (*Kasa merajah*). What makes Topeng sidakarya recognisable, is the unique wooden mask the dancer would wear. The mask has white-based colour, squinting eyes, black or sometimes white moustache, smiling expression and exaggerated overbite teeth.

In its performance, The Dancer of Topeng sidakarya carries a metal bowl (*bokor*) containing *canang sari*, incense, yellow rice grain, and mixed flowers with perfume (*Sekar rura*), as a symbol of harmony. The movement of this dance is bound by basic traditional Balinese dance, with several modifications. Its footwork includes occasional hopping, and swift grasp to the young spectator. The dancer then would give the caught spectator holed coins, means as a symbol of spreading welfare and treating the unfortunate. Continued by chanting mantra, and spreading the yellow rice grain as well as *Sekar rura* as a symbol to ward off evil spirits, and to share good fortune.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The tour of Brahmana keling to the grand ritual held in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by king Dalem Waturenggong gave birth to Topeng Sidakarya dance; An art to dedicate Brahmana Keling's service for Gelgel kingdom. His service had led Bali to reach its prosperous time for an extended period. The dance is recognised by its unique mask characteristics: a white-based colour mask, squinting eyes, black or white moustache, smiling expression and

exaggerated overbite teeth. Topeng Sidakarya dance served as a complement of religious rituals based on king Dalem Waturenggong's decree for the future generation. It is compulsory to perform the sacred art as it carries a symbol that the ceremony has been well-acted, and the organiser would meet their expectation for the ritual.

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