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## **Transforming wayang for contemporary audiences: dramatic expression in Purbo Asmoro's style, 1989-2015.**

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## BIRTH OF AN IDEA: ALL-NIGHT CONTEMPORARY-INTERPRETIVE STYLE

In 1989, a short three years after graduating from ASKI, the 27-year-old Purbo Asmoro<sup>1</sup> premiered a radical, new concept in all-night wayang performance practice, at the most respected gathering of dhalang, wayang critics, and *pedhalangan* educators in Solo. He borrowed from the concepts of *pakeliran padat*, reshaped them, and wove them back into an all-night format, for a historic performance at the home of Anom Soeroto. Over the next decade, Purbo Asmoro further developed and refined this new package, referred to within academic circles as *garapan sedalu* (all-night *garapan*), and by 2000 had crafted it into a style that has become his trademark. This chapter takes a look at the artistic atmosphere surrounding the 1989 premiere, what this first attempt at all-night *garapan* looked like, and what factors shaped Purbo Asmoro's continued exploration of the style. In order to understand the truly revolutionary step Purbo Asmoro took with his debut in 1989, we will first take a

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<sup>1</sup> Purbo Asmoro was born 17 December 1961, so on the date of this debut was still 27 years old.

look at his upbringing, and the situation in the greater *pedhalangan* world when he emerged from ASKI, ready to start his career.

### Purbo Asmoro's Upbringing and Training<sup>2</sup>

Purbo Asmoro was born in 1961 in the small village of Dersana, Pacitan, in East Java, as the eldest of six children. His great-grandfather Krama, grandfather Suradi, and father, Damiri Soemarno, were all modest but established local dhalang from the Pacitan area. The lineage of dhalang in the family reportedly stretches back seven generations. Dersana, in the remote West Pacitan county of Pringkuku, was a harsh place to grow up. This tiny enclave trapped within the stark, boulder-stridden mountains above the southeastern Java coast, inaccessible to vehicles larger than a motorcycle, and where fresh water was scarce six months of the year during the dry season, felt even more remote than its 120 kilometers from Solo. As Purbo Asmoro describes it:

I am village-born. Not only village-born but from the mountains—and not only that, but from the dry peaks. If you saw this place from the sky, you would say to yourself, “Do people actually survive there?” It’s truly not fit for man. Truly not fit. The southern mountains—limestone chalky constructions, with bare boulders strewn every which way. And yet it was there that, from a very young age, my daily life became forever one with the arts.

Purbo Asmoro's father was not only a dhalang, but also a teacher in local Dersana schools. He owned one of the few gamelan sets in the village. Even though it was a simple iron set, his was the only collection that boasted both the *sléndro* and *pélog* tunings.

In those days, in a village like that, gamelan was it. Every day after school my friends and I would first gather wood, then gather food for the goats, and finally get to go play on the gamelan. And when it was time for bed, my father would tell me wayang stories. He would start with the *Ramayana* and then move on to the *Mahabharata*. He would often fall asleep while telling an episode and I would wake him up, “Hey, hey, Pak! You weren't finished! How did it end?” I definitely learned wayang stories from my father's bedtime tellings.

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the information and all of the direct quotes in this section, are taken from Purbo Asmoro's informal chatting session (*sesi ngobrol*) on 16 October 2010 at Sanggar Suket, the home and studio of the late Slamet Gundono, in Mojosoongo, Solo. This was part of a routine series in which experimental performance-artist Gundono invited local renowned figures to share their life stories with a small, intimate group of neighbors, friends and colleagues. Purbo Asmoro confirmed this information repeatedly at numerous venues between 2007 and 2014, but he was especially detailed and eloquent on that occasion.

Purbo Asmoro received accolades in his primary school days. This sign of potential, together with him being the eldest and most independent son, led his father to send him away for his middle-school years to the “big town” of Pacitan. Purbo Asmoro describes being quite unhappy during this time:

I was still so young [12 years old] and yet was expected to go off on my own. I had to walk down the mountain to school once a week, 30 kilometers by foot, and then walk back up to Dersana, 30 kilometers, every Saturday. And not only walk, but also carry my food supplies for the entire week on my back. I did just fine in middle school but did not graduate with any honors, as I was unhappy and felt torn from my family and from my life in Dersana.

After Purbo Asmoro graduated from middle school, his father had great dreams for his eldest son.<sup>3</sup> He was to be the first in the extended family to attend school in Solo, at the famed High School of Performing Arts (Konservatori, also known as SMKI).<sup>4</sup> Purbo<sup>5</sup> reports having no interest in being a dhalang at this point. “I had seen my father’s life as a dhalang and decided it was way too difficult a profession, so I decided to enter the Karawitan Department.” After one semester, however, he felt “less than satisfied,” and moved to the Dance Department. “But I found the long sequences of movements I had to memorize too taxing, so I decided to give *pedhalangan* a try.” After one semester in the Pedalangan Department, Purbo Asmoro was restless and wanted to move again, perhaps back to music or dance, but his advisor told him he was not allowed to. “I told myself, ‘You need to be at peace with your decision. You need to focus and dedicate yourself to this.’ And so I did. And that’s how it started.”

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<sup>3</sup> Purbo Asmoro has one younger brother, Bambang Tri Santoso, also known as Bambang Asmoro, who is a dhalang and works for the Department of Communication and Information in Jakarta. He has four sisters: Esti Setyowati, married to the highly-regarded, Semarang-based dhalang, Mulyono Harjowidodo and an occasional practicing *pesindhèn*; Eni Pujiastuti, a professional caterer; Anis Lukitasari, a *pesindhèn* with Mayangkara; and Rina Anggraini, married to Mayangkara *gérong* singer, Wiji Santosa, and a non-practicing *pesindhèn*.

<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1950, Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia di Surakarta (formally shortened to KOKAR but more popularly known in the community as “Konsèr”) is the oldest high school-level arts academy in the country. In 1976, the year before Purbo Asmoro enrolled, the government upgraded its status, renamed it SMKI (Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia), and opened the Pedalangan and Dance Departments. It took a decade or so before the name SMKI caught on, and then, in 1997, it was renamed SMK (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan) Negeri 8. It is located in the center of Solo, in the Kepatihan neighborhood.

<sup>5</sup> Indonesians often have only one name, and there is not a tradition of given name followed by family name. When Indonesians have two names, either of the two could become the primary one a person goes by—in Purbo Asmoro’s case, Purbo being the primary name (although he went by “*Mas As*” at one point in his younger years). For variety here, I use both “Purbo Asmoro” and “Purbo,” although it would be unthinkable for me, when speaking Indonesian or Javanese, to omit a title before his name: *Pak* Purbo (elevating my respect for him when speaking in public), *Mas* Purbo (as we are friends and of the same generation), or *Ki* Purbo Asmoro, *Ki* being a dhalang’s title as a performer and important figure in society.

The program at Konservatori was four years long and Purbo Asmoro had already spent a year moving departments, so it took him five years to graduate from high school. During that time he moved from boarding house to boarding house and only went home to Dersana for holidays. By his second year, his father was unable to support his tuition, room, and board, so he went through a period of extreme poverty:

I was destitute for a full year at Konservatori, as my father, it turned out, could no longer finance me. I remember distinctly a full week that I did not eat from one Wednesday to the next Wednesday. Oh it wasn't a form of asceticism, I just was flat broke. There was not a scrap for me to eat. It turned out I didn't drop dead though, now did I? Turns out you can be pushed quite far and you won't perish. I remember I would go to the well, hold the dipper to my mouth and drink and drink as much as I could, until I felt full. I was in a boarding house in Danukusuman at the time and had to walk to school and back every day [about three kilometers one way].

After the experience of starving for a full week, Purbo Asmoro decided he could not be on his own anymore. He heard of an elderly dhalang, Gandamargana, in Gumpang, Kartosuro, some 10 kilometers from SMKI, who was willing to take in an apprentice. Although he had to walk to school and back, Purbo spent a year with Ki Gandamargana, learning how to carve and paint wayang, and how to make and mix paints from natural materials. But by his third year at Konservatori, he moved back to Solo due to the long distance to get to school. He was starting to perform a fair amount, mostly as a gamelan musician for his elder *pedhalangan* classmates, and could earn small chunks of money that got him through.<sup>6</sup> His last two years in high school were highly successful both academically and artistically, and in 1982 he not only graduated with honors but was asked to take up an entry-level teaching position at Konservatori. Purbo Asmoro wished to continue his education however, and instead enrolled in ASKI's Pedalangan Department, and was given a teaching-assistantship that covered all his expenses.

So it was that Purbo Asmoro's talents were further honed in the cauldron of artistic innovation at ASKI-Sasanamulya from 1982 to 1985, and then for his final

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<sup>6</sup> Purbo Asmoro's first all-night performances were in villages around Pacitan through family connections, with the very first in 1982. His first performance in Solo (1981) was an abbreviated version (*ringkas*, not *padat*) of the lakon *Arjuna Piningit* (*Arjuna is Hidden Away*), and was broadcast on SMKI's dedicated radio station, Radio Konsèr.

year, 1985 to 1986, on the newly built Kentingan campus in the northeastern corner of Solo. The atmosphere at ASKI during these years of exploration under the direction of Gendhon Humardani was described in detail in Chapter 3. Purbo Asmoro was influenced every day by the whirlwind of ideas and experiments that were taking place, from new interpretations of dance dramas (*dramatari*) to the recently invented *wayang sandosa*,<sup>7</sup> and, of course, continuing developments with *pakeliran padat*. He never had any direct interaction with Humardani, who passed away in 1983, but remembers seeing him from afar on campus a number of times, and has described him as having “an imposing, scary, and strict presence.”

Among Purbo Asmoro’s *pedhalangan* professors at ASKI were the well-respected traditionalist pedagogues Padmatjarito, Pringgosatoto, Soetrisno, and Darsomartono, the performer and guest-pedagogue Naryocarito, and founding members of the Gendhon “club”: Bambang Murtiyoso, Bambang Suwarno, and Soemanto. The composer Supanggih, although away in Paris attaining his PhD for most of Purbo’s time at ASKI, had left his legacy in provocative dance drama scores still being used throughout the Dance Department. Some of Purbo’s elder classmates, most notably Blacius Subono (graduated in 1984) and Sukardi Samiharjo (graduated in January 1986), were busy exploring gamelan accompaniment that strayed much further from tradition than any of the early *padat* scripts. Also, Subono and his colleagues were immersed in debut performances of *wayang sandosa*, many of which Purbo participated in.

At that time, the first five semesters of a dhalang’s training were steeped in palace-classical performance practice, with each semester focusing on a different set of scenes from an all-night wayang. Purbo reports his 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester course schedule as below, all in conventional performance practice:

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<sup>7</sup> *Wayang sandosa* was first developed in 1982 at ASKI, by a team of Gendhon Humardani followers. In this form, an extra wide screen is used (hence also known as *Pakeliran Layar Lebar*, or Wide-Screen Wayang Performance). A team of dhalang manipulates the wayang figures—standing, crouching, moving, and swaying—with the audience only viewing the wide-screen shadow side, in a theater venue. Some of the figures are oversize but most are traditional figures simply given extra length by wooden extensions on their sticks. The entire text is in Indonesian, and in fact the name “sandosa” comes from a compressing of the two words *bahasa* (language) and *Indonesia*. Gamelan accompaniment for *wayang sandosa* uses the same *garapan* concepts as *pakeliran padat*, and *wayang sandosa* practitioners have been even more consistently radical in this regard. Performances are from 30 minutes to an hour long. For more details, see Sunardi, 2005.

#### Ch 4: Birth of an Idea

- *Pakeliran* (Performance Studio), 4 times per week
- *Catur* (literary techniques), 2 times per week
- *Sabet* (movement techniques), 2 times per week
- *Suluk/Dodogan* (*suluk*, *cempala*, and *keprak* techniques), 2 times per week
- *Iringan* (gamelan accompaniment), 2 times per week
- Theory and History of *Pedalangan*, 2 times per week

His 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> semesters were similar, with the addition of courses once a week in Yogya-style wayang, *wayang golèk*, and a sung-poetry class (*Tembang*) taught by *pesindhèn* pedagogue Supadmi. But aside from his intense work at ASKI during this time, Purbo Asmoro was also soaking in all he could from the entire *pedhalangan* scene throughout the greater Solo area:

So, coursework started. Yes. And it was here that I was trained rigorously. All I have attained at a conceptual level about the world of *pedhalangan*, and the arts in general, comes from my work at Konservatori and then ASKI. What I got from my instructors and professors reached deeper and deeper as the semesters went on. If I think about it though, what I got from my schooling and what I got from outside ASKI was actually of 50-50 proportion. If I had only cared about coursework I would never have become what I am now, and yet if I had only known the performing world and nothing else, my vision would be limited. I studied both—I apprenticed with performers, yes, I performed myself, and I applied myself to my courses as well.

During those years at ASKI, semester-six students took both theory and practical courses on how to create a *padat* script, and then in their last two semesters registered for a single studio course with their adviser, which they used to prepare for their final exam. For his final exam, Purbo Asmoro created an innovative, highly conceptualized *padat* script of the traditional lakon *Samba Juwing* (*The Mutilation of Samba*), which he entitled *Tresna* (*Love*). In this lakon, Samba is brutally murdered by his half-brother Boma, because he and Boma's wife, Hagnyanawati, are in love. Purbo reconceptualized the lakon away from the traditional focus on fate, destiny, and a face-saving murder, into a humanistic, tragic love story. The original plan for the exam was as a team—his classmate Harbono would write the script and Purbo would be the dhalang. When he ended up doing all the work, both script-writing and performing, one of the alterations he made was to change the title to *Tresna*, as a



way of “marking it as his own” (interview, 2014).<sup>8</sup> After a highly successful exam performance, Purbo Asmoro graduated from ASKI in 1986 with honors,<sup>9</sup> and struck out into the professional performing world to build his career as a dhalang.

### Forging a Career among Giants

When Purbo Asmoro graduated in 1986, the *pedhalangan* performance world in Central Java was dominated by two formidable giants: Ki Nartosabdo who had just passed away the year before, and Ki Anom Soeroto, who was 38 and already a superstar.

#### *Ki Nartosabdo*

Born in Wedi, Klaten in 1925, Soenarto (his birth name) relocated early in his musical career to Semarang, on the north coast of Java, to be the drummer for the *wayang orang* troupe Ngesti Pandawa. Relatively late in life, around his early thirties, Nartosabdo decided to become a dhalang, and at that point had settled permanently in Semarang. In 1971, when Purbo Asmoro was 10 years old, the first wayang cassette recording ever was produced by the Lokananta Studio in Solo: a recording of Nartosabdo performing *Banowati Janji* (*Banowati's Promise*). Although Purbo Asmoro only had the chance to see him perform live on three occasions, all during his years at Konservatori or ASKI, he grew up listening to Nartosabdo's eventually dozens of recordings over the radio. While Nartosabdo's movement techniques were known to be somewhat basic, he was a master of drama, oration, characterization, and story telling, as well as a prolific composer of pieces and vocal texts to support certain scenes. He brought a new structure into the *Gara-gara* interlude (from Yogyakarta-style practice) and initiated the practice of inserting this feature into every performance. He shaped both *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara* into extended attractions,

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<sup>8</sup> During this interview, Purbo Asmoro adamantly denied any connection between this title choice and his name (*asmara* and *tresna* are synonyms for love). Still, one has to wonder if it was a kind of *sandisastra* (embedded literary code) that perhaps he feels hesitant to admit now? It is a highly unusual, one-word title, synonymous with his name, which he created while on the surface allowing Harbono to be credited with the script. At any rate, in 1996, Harbono circulated an altered version, under his own name, with the title *Tresna Mawa Prahara* (*Love Brings Destruction*) for use at SMKI where he was an instructor at the time. Although I was able to obtain most of the artifacts of this process—Purbo Asmoro's hand-written *padat* script, an audio recording of his performance at ASKI in 1986, and Harbono's 1996 reissued script—still, examination of the *Samba Juwing*→*Tresna*→*Tresna Mawa Prahara* process did not fit directly into this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Among his graduating class he was given the honor of *Siswa Teladan*, or Most Exemplary Student.

interacted with *pesindhèn* through direct dialogue, and composed new, light, pop songs in a variety of styles (*dhangdhut*, *jaipongan*, Balinese) to be showcased during these interludes. Nartosabdo became the first dhalang superstar, eventually garnering the highest fees ever heard of at the time. He had a troupe of gamelan musicians and singers whose name, Condhong Raos, became a household word in artistic circles by the late 1970s.

#### *Ki Anom Soeroto*

Anom Soeroto, born in Bagor, Juwiring, Klaten in 1948, was a rising star by the time Purbo Asmoro was only 10. He started recording for mass distribution soon after Nartosabdo, also at Lokananta, and gained popularity quickly in the 1970s. Having been accused of dangerous political ties during the tumultuous mid-1960s, Anom Soeroto unabashedly and completely associated himself with the ruling Golkar Party in the 1970s and 1980s. He became a spokesman for the government through wayang, and his career skyrocketed. According to Kuwato (2001, 61), an instructor and researcher at ISI, the seeds for this association started as early as 1969:

One stipulation in the Orde Baru's ["New Order" of the Soeharto reign, post President Soekarno] Development Plan, announced 1 April 1969, was specifically that dhalang were to be used to spread information about development plans through wayang performances.... Ganasidi, or the Lembaga Pembinaan Seni Pedalangan [Institute for Development of the Art of Pedalangan], founded in July 1969, was created for this purpose ... and later solidified official ties with the Golkar (Golongan Karya) party of Soeharto.... Various functionaries and officials within the Golkar party in effect created Anom Soeroto's success, leading up to the 1971 elections.

Regardless of how his fame started, Anom Soeroto was gifted with a gorgeous voice, record-breaking breath support, and a gracious, eloquently strong, classical aura at the screen. He had captured the respect and awe of wayang fans all over Central and East Java by the 1980s, and he was also an occasional visiting instructor at ASKI when Purbo Asmoro was in school.

Both of these superstar figures contributed to the images in Purbo Asmoro's mind of what a dhalang's life and influence could be like, and were a vital part of his mental landscape upon graduating. However, even more influential to his

development was an event that Anom Soeroto hosted each month at his home, known as Rebo Legèn.

### *The Rebo Legèn Community*

In 1979, Anom Soeroto was asked to perform the lakon *Pandhawa Matirta* (*The Pandhawa Purify Themselves*) for the Javanese lunar calendar New Year's celebration (*malem Satu Sura*, falling on 20 November of that year) in the outdoor courtyard of the Main Legislative Building in Jakarta. He did not know the lakon and had no idea where to start with his preparations. Already relatively well-off and living in a substantial home in the Notodiningratan neighborhood of Solo, he decided to invite a senior dhalang, Sujarno Atmagunardo of Baturetno, Wonogiri, to his house to make a study recording. Since his monthly Javanese birthday fell on Rebo Legi,<sup>10</sup> he decided to do the recording on Rebo Legi Eve, 6 November 1979, and invite the greater Solonese dhalang community for a discussion as well. After a few similar and successful events, always falling on Rebo Legi, Anom Soeroto decided to hold the gathering on a routine basis every thirty-five days. This was the beginning of a tradition that continued, rarely interrupted and despite Anom Soeroto's various moves to new homes, through to about 2010 when some health problems and other changes in his family caused him to temporarily suspend the event.<sup>11</sup>

Purbo Asmoro began attending Rebo Legèn from its earliest stages in 1980, while a third-year student at Konservatori, and described this monthly happening in an interview in 2011:

We had the chance to see all the great dhalang perform by going to Rebo Legèn. The great Klaten masters who were all still alive back then like Mbah Tukas, Pak Tikna "Karungtalun," Pak Joko "Mokaton," Mbah Ganda "Maktal," Pak Gaib, and of course most of all Mbah Darman—oh he was probably called on to perform a

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<sup>10</sup> The Javanese traditional calendar has five days: Kliwon, Legi, Paing, Pon, Wagé. These five days are superimposed on the seven-day Western calendar, resulting in a 35-day cycle. Each single combination, such as Wednesday-Legi (or Rebo-Legi in Javanese) occurs every 35 days. Many traditionally minded Javanese know what combination of days they were born on, and some observe the occurrence every 35 days with fasting, offerings, or even an event. Many artistic events in Solo, to this day, are determined by the confluence of the five-day and seven-day calendars. Rebo-Legi is the day, while Rebo Legèn refers to the event itself.

<sup>11</sup> In February 2016, Anom Soeroto started Rebo Legèn back up again as a forum and gathering place for dhalang, although not yet with any featured performances.

hundred times or so.<sup>12</sup> Pak Mujoko, Mas Sri Joko, Mbah Jarno, Mbah Panut—too many to name. And the atmosphere was so alive, with everyone there—Pak Kasno, Pak Sayoko, Mbah Warsino—everyone gathered there together every month, ranging from dhalang friends to musician friends to ASKI friends.

This large gathering of dhalang egos in one spot resulted in some interesting performance-practice traditions, specific to Rebo Legèn. I attended four or five events in the early 1990s and another dozen or so in the 2000s, and would agree with this description by Sears of Rebo Legèn performances in the mid-1980s (1996, 240):

These performances differ from other wayang performances, as they gather a number of puppeteers from different areas in one place.... Since so many well-known puppeteers attend these events, performers are often thrust into a position of wanting to amuse their friends and make fun of their host through friendly but pointed humor. Thus a style of flashy puppet movements, suggestive humor, and the breaking of conventions has become dominant in these performances.

She goes on to describe some of the “breaking of conventions,” which I would concur with having witnessed this gigantic peanut gallery of esteemed dhalang:

There is often interaction between the audience and the puppeteer, and on occasion the puppeteer will turn around and say something to the host or to a heckler.... Often the puppets are thrown off the screen or onto the screen in unconventional and abrupt ways. Fights take place between characters who would never fight in more conventional performances, and the jokes often begin in the first audience hall scene, a place where the humor is usually banned.

For Purbo Asmoro, a young and talented dhalang from Dersana, Pacitan, this was a phenomenal opportunity. He was able to attend performances by a large variety of senior dhalang, while sitting among other senior dhalang, as well as critics, sponsors, and pedagogues. This exposure went on every month for years; it was an easy twenty-minute walk from Konservatori to Anom Soeroto’s house. In the case of a few of his favorites—Gandadarman, Tikna “Karungtalun,” Mujoko Joko Raharjo, Kasno— Purbo Asmoro would then search out opportunities to see them perform in other venues, at more traditional and typical occasions across the greater Solo area.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Bayu Aji Pamungkas, Anom Soeroto’s son and a popular, virtuosic dhalang himself, there are over 100 recordings of Gandadarman from the Rebo Legèn days, although others doubt there could be that many. Bayu is, as of this writing, digitalizing, cataloguing, and backing up all the recordings, which have been entrusted to him. He reportedly has plans to build a “listening and viewing library” at the Anom Soeroto family mansion in Timasan, Sukoharjo.



Figure 4-1: Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra at a panel discussion in Solo, 2008.

### *Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra*

Tristuti (see Figure 4-1), a dhalang, scriptwriter, and elder of the Rebo Legèn community since its inception, requires special mention here, as he had a direct and tangible influence on Purbo Asmoro from around 1980 to his death in 2009. Born in 1939 of dhalang lineage from Jombor, Klaten, Tristuti grew up in Grobogan, Purwodadi, and lived much of his later life in Mojosongo, Solo. An up-and-coming dhalang with a promising career ahead, he was suddenly imprisoned without charges in 1965. Fourteen years later, after being held as a political prisoner on the remote Buru Island and elsewhere, Tristuti was released but

banned from taking on public engagements as a dhalang, since the new Soeharto government accused him of having ties to the Communist Party.

Anom Soeroto had seen Tristuti perform *Udawa Waris* (*Udawa Receives an Inheritance*) in 1963 at Sriwedari in Solo when he was only 15, and had never forgotten the power of his performance. Tristuti was released from prison in 1979, and in April of 1980, during the first full year of Rebo Legèn events, Anom Soeroto invited him to perform. Because of Anom's strong government ties and the fact that this was not really a public event in the strictest sense, Tristuti felt it safe to perform, and prepared the lakon *Gandamana Sayembara* (*Gandamana Puts on a Competition*). Purbo Asmoro describes what Tristuti once told him about his preparation for that night (Asmoro 2004, 31):

As this was a major opportunity and he had not performed in so long, he intended to put forth a dramatization that would truly strike right to the heart and touch the audience. In order to do this, he gathered up all the experiences in his soul and went all out in the areas of story interpretation and narration. He used many new narrative techniques, and many new poetic phrases in the dialogues and monologues. Anom Soeroto was completely taken by the performance.

Three months later, in July 1980, Anom Soeroto was to perform *Déwa Ruci* (*The God Ruci*) in Malang, East Java and asked Tristuti to create the narration for the Tribrasara Forest scene in which Bima has been rendered paralyzed. While in traditional versions Bima is paralyzed as a result of being cursed by forest spirits, in Tristuti's version he has simply been bitten by the deadly *lemut gangga*. In Tristuti's realistic version, this is the final strike in a whole series of discomforts Bima faces in the forest, from poison ivy to diseased mosquitoes, infectious worms, and insidious bloodsuckers. Cloaked in a striking poetic style, the content of Tristuti's narration was taken directly from his own experiences in prison. The language borrowed no phrases from the stock literary language of classical wayang.

After that night, Anom Soeroto invited the destitute Tristuti (who had been working on construction sites to make ends meet since being released) to come live with him in Notodiningratan, writing narrations, dialogue, and debate sequences for specific scenes in exchange for room and board. This relationship continued for seven years, and it was during this time (1980–1987) that Purbo Asmoro came to know and admire Tristuti, 22 years his elder, each month at Rebo Legèn. Purbo observed Tristuti's innovations in the areas of literary techniques and story interpretation from afar, as well as his presence as essentially a court poet and *pedhalangan* tutor in the "kingdom" of Anom Soeroto.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Ki Manteb Soedharsono*

While Nartosabdo, Anom Soeroto, and the entire Rebo Legèn community were legendary before Purbo Asmoro had even graduated from ASKI, one more element to the backdrop of Purbo Asmoro's early development was Manteb Soedharsono. Born in Jatimalang, Mojokaban, Sukoharjo, in 1948, the same year as Anom Soeroto, Manteb was extremely popular in the outlying areas when Purbo was at SMKI, but he was not a superstar yet. By the late 1970s he was gaining a name as an extraordinarily talented *dhalang sabet*, with clean, precise, subtly complex

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<sup>13</sup> There is more regarding Tristuti's influence on Purbo Asmoro in this and subsequent chapters. In 2004, Purbo Asmoro received his master's degree in Performance Studies from UGM in Yogya, writing his thesis on the effect that Tristuti's scripts had on the *pedhalangan* community of the 1990s (Asmoro, 2004). The information in this section comes from this thesis, but has almost all been confirmed in private conversations with Tristuti as well, whom I studied from, 1997–2009.

movements infused with a certain soul, weight, and timing that made the wayang figures truly come alive on the screen.

From 1979 on, Manteb had shown an interest in the *pakeliran padat* movement and, although holding only one year of conventional high school education and no academy training,<sup>14</sup> he was fascinated with the developments going on at ASKI. He could frequently be found on campus in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and was considered a drop-in student of both Gendhon Humardani himself and the Gendhon apprentices. In 1981 he won first place in the Central and East Java Regional *Pakeliran Padat* Competition with the lakon *Jaka Maruta* (also known as *Kangsa Adu Jago*, or, *Kangsa Stages a Match*—in other words the favored *padat* lakon from 1955). The performance was prepared collaboratively, with ASKI literary talent Sri Sadhono Amongrogo (Sri Dadi) of Kartosuro preparing the script, Bambang Suwarno consulting on expressive movement techniques, and Blacius Subono arranging the gamelan accompaniment (Subono, interview 2015).

It was in 1987, however, the year Purbo Asmoro was just setting out on his career, that Manteb Soedharsono rose to superstar status. He was hired by the non-profit organization Rara Wilis in Jakarta, working together with the Suara Karya newspaper and Bentara Arts Association, to perform 12 episodes over one year, covering the story of Bima's life.<sup>15</sup> The performances would be held once a month at Balai Sarbini in Central Jakarta, under the artistic directorship of Soedarko Prawiroyudo, then head of the central branch of PEPADI.<sup>16</sup> Because this was an important contract and Manteb was so busy with other nightly engagements, these monthly events featured, for the first time in all-night wayang performance history, a small committee of artists with individual responsibilities: script writers, gamelan

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<sup>14</sup> This is typical of traditional Javanese artists from his generation and previous, such as Anom Soeroto and many old-style musicians. Formal government schooling was expensive and time-consuming and not considered essential for a performer. In fact it could be a hindrance, with time better spent apprenticing, practicing, and performing from a young age. Dhalang might attend the various *pedhalangan* schools associated with the palaces, as Anom Soeroto did, but formal government-school education was not a priority for artists before the establishment of Konservatori and ASKI.

<sup>15</sup> The twelve episodes of the *Banjaran Bima* series, spanning from his birth through to his death, were, in order: *Bima Bungkus*, *Balé Sigala-gala*, *Gandamana Sayembara*, *Babad Wanamarta*, *Déwa Ruci-Bima Suci*, *Sesaji Raja Suya*, *Pandhawa Dhadhu*, *Wiratha Parwa*, *Kresna Gugah-Kresna Duta*, *Dursasana Jambak*, *Duryudana Gugur*, and *Pandhawa Muksa*.

<sup>16</sup> PEPADI stands for *Persatuan Pedalangan Indonesia* (Indonesian Puppeteer's Alliance) and is an organization, founded April 1971 in Yogyakarta, which brings together dhalang from all over Indonesia. Each town has its own branch. The various PEPADI branches, some more active than others, meet regularly and put on conferences, seminars, festivals, performances, and competitions.

accompaniment arrangers, light and sound directors, wayang figure designers, and Soedarko heading up a committee that discussed lakon interpretation (*sanggit*).

The performances were expected to be varied and of high quality, so Tristuti was brought in to write the scripts for the *Banjaran Bima (The Life Story of Bima)* series. Anom Soeroto had let Tristuti go earlier in the year, as he was running for public office and could not be seen to have a direct connection with a former political prisoner. Tristuti started writing for Manteb Soedharsono with the *Banjaran Bima* contract, and continued for 12 years, until 1999. Unlike his work with Anom Soeroto in which Tristuti was only asked to write snippets of narration or bits of crucial dialogue, for Manteb Soedharsono he composed entire scripts (Asmoro 2004, 36). This ensured that although Manteb might perform some 20 times in a month, all of them broadcast on radio or even television, there would be substantial depth, beauty, and variety to every performance.<sup>17</sup> After the success of *Banjaran Bima*, the contracts continued, with the influential Soedarko securing almost monthly performances in Jakarta at various departments and ministries for a number of years. Between this and his strong team of writers, musicians, and technicians by his side, Manteb's fame skyrocketed as of 1988.

#### *Purbo Asmoro's Start, 1986–1989*

So it was, with awareness of all the giants in his midst, that Purbo Asmoro set off on his career. He had no dearth of tools or inspiration:<sup>18</sup> Nartosabdo's legacy, Anom Soeroto's eminence, Manteb Soedharsono's newly attained frenzy of fame, the Rebo Legèn community's depth of experience and talent, his entire conceptual education

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<sup>17</sup> It must be noted that Manteb Soedharsono insisted in an interview at his home in 2014, that even from the early days he substantially altered Tristuti's scripts and they only had minimal influence on what he actually used on stage. Tristuti, in an interview in 2008, stated emphatically that for the period 1987–1999 Manteb used predominantly his scripts, often verbatim. Copies of the original *Banjaran Bima* series scripts all existed in Tristuti's library when Purbo Asmoro catalogued his life's work in 2004, and when I inventoried his personal library after his death in 2009. What is clear though, is that by 2008 or so (according to Purbo Asmoro's observations) Manteb was no longer using snippets of Tristuti scripts in any capacity in his performances. A week before his death, Tristuti willed his scripts to Purbo Asmoro while at the same time agreeing to sell them to the University of Washington in Seattle for a considerable fee. On his deathbed, when asked to clarify, he said: "They go to Purbo. And to that university that wants them." In the end, the originals went to Seattle, with Purbo Asmoro making photocopies before they were sent. (Purbo Asmoro and I were both witness to this whole process. We were at the bedside of Tristuti, together with Tristuti's wife, on three occasions within a month of his death.)

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 6 for a complete, annotated list from 2008 of what Purbo Asmoro described as his "top 100 influences," as well as the anecdote of how the list came to be.



at ASKI, and his rigorous, skill-based classical training at both Konservatori and ASKI. Also ever present as an influence were his early struggles and harsh beginnings in the limestone, dry mountains of Dersana. The economic growth of the 1980s, a relative, imposed stability in Java, and a golden era of wayang sponsorship enveloped and supported him as well. It was a time of great opportunity and potential for dhalang. Manteb Soedharsono commented in an interview at his home in 2014: “There has been no decade like the 80s in *pedhalangan* in our lifetime. Not just for me—for anyone who was out there performing at that time. People were sponsoring wayang left and right, and there was huge and substantial government support.” Purbo Asmoro made a conscious decision at this point in his life, one which he often speaks of to this day: to start out by being a “parrot.”

After watching so much wayang and so many dhalang while in school, I realized at one point, “Well, there are endless approaches among the elder dhalang. So-and-so does it like this and so-and-so does it like that, while so-and-so does it a different way. Then there is Pak Narto, the master of drama and oration (*dhalang sanggit*), Pak Anom the master of vocal technique and stage presence (*dhalang kung*), and Mas Manteb the master of movement techniques (*dhalang sabet*).<sup>19</sup> Who will I be?” I decided I’d be a parrot first. Just like a parrot. In other words, just imitate. “So be it. That’s what I’ll do—I’ll just imitate others first. At some point I’ll find my own identity. But I need to start by imitating.”

I got a hold of a recording of Pak Mujoko Joko Raharjo—*Kresna Gugah*—and I imitated it down to a tee, down to his vocal quality. Down to his literary passages. Then I watched Mas Tikno “Karangtalun” perform and I imitated everything, down to his *sulukan*. Down to the exact manner with which he removes a character from the scene. I was a parrot. For anyone. I listened to recordings of Pak Hadi Soegito [Yogya] and I imitated him. His texts, his *sulukan*. All of it. I imitated Mbah Nartosabdo and lakon *Kresna Duta*—ah, that was the be-all and end-all of interpretations. The way Salya argues with Karna—I imitated it. Mbah Darman, anyone. I showed up at any wayang of Mas Manteb’s that I possibly could. I tried to imitate everything.

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<sup>19</sup> It is a common tradition in *pedhalangan* for performers to be referred to using a two-word phrase: dhalang \_\_\_\_\_, with the second word meant to encapsulate their claim to fame. Aside from *dhalang sanggit*, *dhalang kung*, and *dhalang sabet*, I have heard *dhalang ndhagel* (a dhalang who tends to prioritize comedy), *dhalang édan* (Djoko Hadiwidjoyo received this label for his outrageous and crazy stage behavior), *dhalang sastra* (a highly literary dhalang, such as Sutino Hardokocarito), *dhalang kethèk* (Warsino Gunasukasno held this title, as he specialized in virtuosic manipulations of monkey figures), *dhalang Bagong* (Nyotocarito held this title as he specialized in the gait and voice of the figure Bagong), *dhalang sétan* (referring to Manteb Soedharsono and his formidable stamina as a dhalang), *dhalang ngruwat* (an elder dhalang who no longer performs all-night and only does shorter cleansing ceremonies known as *ruwatan*), and *dhalang Baratayuda*. There have also been political references, which tend to have slightly accusatory connotations: dhalang GOLKAR, dhalang PKI, dhalang Orde Baru, dhalang Reformasi. For a list of the labels given to Purbo Asmoro over the years, see the opening of Chapter 8.

Among the loftiness and idealism though, it was also time to settle down and earn a living. Purbo Asmoro was already married at this point, to Sudi Rahayu, a dance graduate of Konservatori. His first child had been born during his graduation year at ASKI, Indhung Prabancana, a boy, born 20 March 1986. Immediately after graduation Purbo had been taken on as a paid instructor in ASKI's Pedalangan Department. He welcomed this job as a honor and took it seriously. However, not only was the salary not enough to support a young family, but Purbo was also passionate about his performing career.

He started receiving invitations to perform, most often in the Jatipuro region of the district of Sragen, northeast of Solo, due to some connections he had there. Little by little he received jobs in other outlying areas all over Sragen, and then in Karanganyar, Klaten, Wonogiri, Boyolali, Sukoharjo, Solo, Jakarta, and across East Java. For a few years, he kept a small book with his performance records (see Figure 4-2), where he jotted down the location, event, and fee. Not all the entries in the book are in order, as he made the entry when he was paid, hence the signature. By looking through the pages, a somewhat complete replica of his schedule can be reproduced, for example, the month of August 1987:

3 August 1987, Jatipuro, a wedding party at the bride's home ( *mantu*), Rp. 150,000  
7 August 1987, Palur, a village cleansing (*bersih désa*), Rp. 50,000  
13 August 1987, Klaten, a blessing ceremony (*sokuran*), Rp. 75,000  
14 August 1987, Tulungagung, a wedding party at the groom's home (*ngundhuh mantu*), Rp. 40,000  
18 August 1987, Jakarta, a village cleansing (*bersih désa*), Rp. 300,000  
19 August 1987, Banjarsari, Solo, an Independence Day celebration (*pitulasan*), Rp. 175,000  
22 August 1987, Krisak, Wonogiri, a circumcision (*tetakan*), Rp. 275,000  
25 August 1987, Jambon, Klaten, an Independence Day celebration (*pitulasan*), Rp. 205,000  
27 August 1987, Palur, a village cleansing (*bersih désa*), Rp. 70,000  
28 August 1987, Karangasem, a village cleansing (*bersih désa*), Rp. 100,000  
31 August 1987, Klaten, an Independence Day celebration (*pitulasan*), Rp. 180,000

Assuming he did not neglect to jot down any performances, Purbo collected a gross total of Rp 1,620,000 that month (in 1987 equivalent to US\$982, at \$1 = Rp 1,650) by performing about one out of every three nights. Out of that gross total though, he would have had to pay his musicians and singers, and perhaps provide for and transport some of the necessary equipment.<sup>20</sup> Since he did not note any of these

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<sup>20</sup> Mayangkara was not formed yet, and at that time Purbo Asmoro's troupe was named Asmorolaras. It consisted of mostly ASKI studio musicians, recently graduated students, and other local players.

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details in his book, it is impossible to determine his net profit. Purbo estimates today that perhaps he finished a month like that with about Rp 400,000 (in 1987, US\$242), after expenses.<sup>21</sup> This was a good income for a young dhalang just starting out.

For about two years, 1986 to 1988, life for Purbo Asmoro was focused on being the best dhalang he could. He presented a basically traditional, all-night style, using all the inspiration and teachings he had garnered. There were a few innovative pieces of *sanggit*, a few Tristuti texts, a spattering of new ideas here and there, but these probably went over everyone’s head except for a few discerning musicians or friends in the audience. Everything was focused on gaining a fan and sponsor base, little by little, throughout Central Java, parts of East Java, and Jakarta, supporting his young family, and saving up for a simple house and perhaps some gamelan instruments or wayang figures.

No	Nama	Alamat	Telepon
8	Joemadi KPR	Singosaren	Rp 300.000.
	Blok D. 31	Jenangan	500.000
		Poworogo	400.000.
		17 Juli - 87.	AM
9	Kec. Pemang	4 - Juni - 87	Rp 15.000.
	keitran		AM
10	Jombon	25 - Juni - 87	
			AM
11	Sukoharjo.	20 - Juni '87	Rp 125.000.
	siswa ker.		AM
	Kadrempon.		
12	Parti, keitran	11 - Juni '87	Rp 200.000.
			AM
13	B. Nanto Pathi	22 - Juli '87	Rp 10.000
			AM
14			

  

No	Nama	Alamat	Telepon
14.	Baini Ben	Tgl. 27 Ag. 87.	Rp 70.000
	Bha. Palur		AM
15	Sukuron	Tgl. 13 - 14 - 87	Rp 70.000
	Klaten		AM
16	Berai desa	Balean Palur	Rp 50.000
	7 - Agustus	purug. '87.	AM
17	Tilak	Tgl. 10 - 10 - 87	Rp 165.000
	pati puru	Sepas. mb. ny. ke	
18	Pipulatan	Klaten	Rp 100.000.
		25 Agustus '87	AM
19	Aqunthul Mak	Tulom Tulung	Rp 40.000
		14 Agustus 87	AM
20	Sukuron Cee	24 Agustus '87	Rp 275.000
	Burono/keitran		AM

Figure 4-2: Two pages out of a small book where Purbo Asmoro kept a record of his performances in the late 1980s.

<sup>21</sup> By contrast, in 2014, during a typical month, Purbo Asmoro probably was able to net a profit of about Rp 200,000,000, or US\$17,391 (US\$1 = Rp 11,500) after performance expenses, while scheduling only an average of five choice engagements per month. Hence his earnings have gone up by some 200 times in 27 years, or about an average 7-8 times increase in earnings each year over 27 years, while his frequency has about halved. He is no longer a typically paid dhalang, but rather one of the three or four top-paid dhalang in the world (after Anom Soeroto and Manteb Soedharsono, rivaling Enthus Susmono).

In 1989, however, Purbo Asmoro received an invitation that changed the direction of his career and, ultimately, the direction of wayang performance practice.

## A Historic Rebo Legèn

### *The Invitation and the Idea*

Nine years had passed since the first Rebo Legèn, and over 100 dhalang had performed at Anom Soeroto's routine event in Notodiningratan, Solo. Purbo Asmoro had been a loyal member of the audience, attending every month as long as he himself was not performing elsewhere. Then, during one of the events and to his astonishment, Anom Soeroto approached Purbo and invited him to perform at a Rebo Legèn a few months to come. Purbo Asmoro was taken aback, since there had only been two other ASKI-affiliated dhalang ever to perform in this venue. Around 1987, Bambang Suwarno had been asked to present his famous *padat* version of *Déwa Ruci* for an informal discussion session on *pakeliran padat*. While this event fell on Rebo Legèn, it was a completely different situation from the typical all-night crowd. Blacius Subono had also been invited by Anom to perform at Rebo Legèn, a few months before Purbo's invitation, but had used the opportunity to "prove to the Rebo Legèn community that an ASKI graduate can also be entirely classical, and with grace" (interview with Blacius Subono, Jan 2015). Subono prepared a strictly classical version of *Séna Gugat (Bima Rebels)*, a *lakon carangan* by his father, a well-known dhalang from Klaten. Anom Soeroto's son Bayu Aji Pamungkas explained in an interview (Jan 2015):<sup>22</sup>

I recall my father saying something to me about how he had invited Pak Bono for "some variety," hoping and assuming he would present ASKI-style innovations. When he performed entirely classically my father enjoyed the lakon but was a bit disappointed by the fact that it had been done in traditional style. He decided to give Pak Purbo a try a few months later. Remember that Father was a guest instructor at ASKI at that point, and knew about the developments there.

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<sup>22</sup> Bayu Aji Pamungkas was born in 1984 and was only five years old when Subono or Purbo performed at Rebo Legèn. He was obviously just repeating a story he remembered being told, but it does make sense. Much of Bayu Aji's time these past 10 years has been spent pouring over the Rebo Legèn-recording archives, and this has sparked many a conversation with his father on the various performances. Unfortunately, although I tried persistently over a one-year period, Anom Soeroto himself was unavailable for an interview.

Purbo Asmoro became obsessed after receiving the invitation. He consulted with friends and colleagues every chance he got, protesting that he had nothing to offer the Rebo Legèn community and nothing that would be of any interest or note. Subono remembers, with his characteristic chuckle, Purbo coming to him to ask his advice: “Actually I said to him, ‘Don’t do anything crazy, just perform using the traditional style and you’ll be fine.’ Well, he didn’t listen, did he? Ha, ha, ha, ha.” Finally, an idea came to Purbo, which he has described on many occasions since 2006.<sup>23</sup> Here he is waxing nostalgia, speaking through the character Pétruk, during the *Gara-gara* scene of a performance in Pekalongan, Central Java, 16 March 2014.<sup>24</sup>

**Pétruk:** Ah, I was still young, still a kid. I knew that my knowledge was deficient, my character lacking, my vision still leaving much to be desired. Yet I was asked to perform for that community of respected elders. Mbah Gandadarman, Pak Suti—the point is, esteemed dhalang all of them. Back then the most junior dhalang to be found was the likes of Mas Kasno. Now, why me? What did I have to offer? Clearly if I were to perform in a conventional way, like all those revered types, I would pale in comparison. I would be nothing next to their abilities. So I had an idea. What if I took the concepts of *pakeliran padat* and applied them all night, all the way through to the ending. It seems that no one else has ever done that? That’s it. That’s what I’ll do.

After some input from his former teacher Bambang Suwarno, Purbo Asmoro decided to take the *Kunthi Pilih* (*Kunthi’s Choice*) script Sukardi Samiharjo wrote for his own final exam at ASKI Pedalangan in January 1986 (see Chapter 3 for extensive information on this script) and adapt it for an all-night performance. Purbo Asmoro had been one of the gamelan musicians in Sukardi’s exam performance, had attended a dozen or more rehearsals in preparation, and had always admired the script, the interpretive details, and especially the *iringan*. He called together a gamelan troupe made up of many of the same musicians who had played for Sukardi’s exam, and organized two or three rehearsals. Supadmi, a respected performer and ASKI pedagogue, was the only *pesindhèn* he brought with him, and he knew that there would be three or four *pesindhèn* supplied by Anom Soeroto on

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<sup>23</sup> In 2006, on a tour to the USA, Purbo Asmoro came across a video of the Rebo Legèn performance that Jody Diamond had made while studying in Solo. In January 2009, Diamond sent him a copy of the recording, and ever since he has mentioned it in a number of public venues.

<sup>24</sup> I had mentioned to Purbo Asmoro about an hour before the performance, that this month was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rebo Legèn performance, which had taken place in March 1989.

the night of the performance. Subono was on drum, and ASKI studio musicians Muryana and Nartosindu played *rebab* and *gendèr*, respectively. Supadmi recalled with nostalgia during an interview at her home in January 2015:

Of course I was the *pesindhèn* chosen. At that time I was even known by the nickname "*sindhèn Kunthi Pilih*," because I had been in every single performance of that lakon *padat* by Pak Kardi. Nak Purbo was one of the most talented students I had. He had been in my *tembang* class at ASKI. He knew how important the vocal parts were in that script, and therefore entrusted part of the success of the performance to me. The emotion of the opening *macapat Kinanthi céngkok miring*, with Kunthi lovesick over Pandhu and despairing about the upcoming competition for her hand in marriage—oh, that must be performed in a heart-wrenching manner [she beats her chest]. The audience was struck silent from the very opening.

Subono also uses the image of an audience struck silent:

The evening was phenomenally successful. The audience was struck silent. Silent. Intense attention to the screen. I'm sure many were thinking along the lines of, 'What is this ASKI kid doing bringing this *padat* stuff here—is this performance going to be all-night or not?' [chuckles] but whatever they may have been thinking, he was ultimately capturing their attention alright. And when Mas Purbo got to the debate between Basudéwa and Kunthi, oh my, I got goosebumps. That part was not in Pak Kardi's script but was one of the ways Mas Purbo developed and filled out the interpretation. We didn't hear it during the rehearsals. I'm telling you, I got goosebumps.<sup>25</sup>

So how exactly did Purbo Asmoro shape this first attempt at what is now called *pakeliran garapan sedalu*, or *garapan* for short; contemporary-interpretive style, or all-night *garapan*? The next section will examine how Purbo Asmoro crafted the *padat* script into an all-night wayang for that historic performance on 28 March 1989 at Rebo Legèn.

### *Before the Performance*

It was nine o'clock on a clear night in late March, and about 200 guests were already gathered,<sup>26</sup> as had been the case every month on Rebo Legi at the home of Ki Anom

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<sup>25</sup> This is a meaningful compliment, as there has been a fair amount of professional competition between Blacius Subono and Purbo Asmoro, off and on over the years.

<sup>26</sup> This description of the pre-wayang atmosphere is possible because Jody Diamond's video recording started 30 minutes before the actual wayang, and caught many the comings and goings of guests. Since I have been in Anom Soeroto's Notodiningratan home many times, I was able to interpret and infer from the shots. Even details like whether or not it was raining that night can become clear from keen observation if you have lived in

Soeroto for over nine years. The screen and gamelan were set up in the large open common space, which one reached immediately upon entering. One could watch the shadows by walking all the way around and further into the house, but there was only space there for about 20 viewers. The unspoken rule was that this was reserved for the dhalang community and regulars “in the know.”<sup>27</sup> Revered elders such as Kestik Kسدolamono of Klaten, middle generation dhalang such as Kasno and Mujoko, influential wayang supporters, and any wayang enthusiasts with confidence enough to consider themselves guests of Anom Soeroto, had all found their way to a comfortable sitting position on the floor. The gamelan had been playing for 30 minutes already—*Ldr Wilujeng*, followed by the classical overture suite *Gd Cucurbawuk kt 2 kr mg Paréanom kalj Ldr Sri Katon ktm Ktw Sukma Ilang*. Wayang-figure designer and *pakeliran padat* expert Bambang Suwarno was visibly harried up at the screen—the only one on the slightly-raised platform, wearing everyday clothes—making sure his former student had all the special *wanda* prepared for this debut, in the correct position to the left and right of the dhalang’s platform. More members of the ASKI community were in attendance than usual, since one of their own was performing, but other than that the atmosphere was typical.

Suddenly and ceremoniously at about nine-fifteen (according to the video camera timings) there was a rustle of activity from the host, the host’s staff, and a number of regular photographers, when, to everyone’s surprise, the Governor of Central Java arrived. Governor Muhammad Ismail, who had been in office for three years, had received invitations to attend Rebo Legèn in the past whenever Anom Soeroto ran into him. Although there were plausible rumors on a number of occasions that he was to show up, this was the first time he had actually attended. The gamelan musicians greeted his entrance spontaneously with the obligatory and patriotic *Lancaran Identitas Jawa Tengah (Central Javanese Identity)* by Nartosabdo, the vocal text of which praises national principles and the culture of Central Java. Finally

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Java and know what to look for, so the video was a goldmine of information even beyond the details of the performance itself.

<sup>27</sup> This is according to both Subono’s description of Rebo Legèn in the mid and late 1980s (interview, Jan 2015) as well as my own personal observation from the 1990s. Although Sears mentions in her book (2005) that the shadows were not on display, this must have only been during a limited period when she attended. For most of the years referred to in my interviews, and from the 1990s to the present, the shadow side was viewable to the host and his special guests and colleagues, much like at a village event.

Anom Soeroto came forward and, standing with Purbo Asmoro next to him, made his traditional welcome speech, perhaps a bit more formally than normal due to the presence of Governor Ismail.<sup>28</sup> When the speech was complete, Purbo Asmoro made his way back to the screen, supported by the gamelan playing another abbreviated overture of *Ayak-ayak-Srepeg-Srepeg Banyumas*, and finally *Sampak* as he got settled. His brother, Bambang Asmoro, took a place right behind him to assist with the wayang figures. The audience was relatively silent in anticipation after the reverberation of the last *gong* of *sampak* died away. The dhalang looked ready to start, but then a gecko started in, loudly calling out in a series of five barks from somewhere very near the stage platform (*èk-ok ... èk-ok ... èk-ok ... èk-ok ... èk-ok*), so Purbo slightly and quietly readjusted a few wayang figures until the lizard fell silent.<sup>29</sup> Then the performance began with a pattern of *dhog*-s from the dhalang's *cempala* against the wooden wayang box, as wayang performances have for centuries.

#### *A Startling Opening*

The opening, when it finally came, surely startled most of the audience. The series of *dhog* knocks on the box played by Purbo Asmoro was not the signal to the traditional *Ayak-ayak* in *sléndro manyura*, but rather was the rhythm signaling an instrumental introduction. This in itself was not particularly unusual yet, as the audience could reasonably expect the *gendèr* introduction to *Kabor*, *Kawit*, or *Krawitan*—these being the only alternatives to using *Ayak-ayak* in the history of Rebo Legèn and almost every wayang for a century or more in Central Java. Or, the signal could have been followed by a *rebab* introduction to the handful of alternative opening *gendhing* used by Nartosabdo from the early 1980s, such as *Mégamendung* or *Pujangga*. Or even, at the outer limits, audiences could perhaps expect a lively *bonang* introduction to *Béndrong* or some other *lancaran*. This would accompany an ogre dance (*kiprah*) to

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<sup>28</sup> This ended up being quite a career boost for Purbo Asmoro. Ismail was the governor of Central Java for 10 years, from 1983 to 1993, and supported Purbo Asmoro in many ways throughout his career. He passed away in 2008, so I was unable to interview him for this research.

<sup>29</sup> These lone, rather large, male lizards, known as *tokèk*, are usually not easily visible, but call out from their position on the wall or in the garden in a short series of three, four, five, or sometimes more, “barks.” Javanese often chant a wish on the series (similar to the daisy-petal plucking “loves me, loves me not”): “rich, poor, rich, poor....” It would have been in bad form to start before the *tokèk* was finished, as he lent a kind of approval from nature that the time was right to begin this potentially auspicious performance.



stir things up a little before slipping into a completely classical treatment, reflecting Gandadarman style and *wayang orang* style.

Instead, the space was filled with the spiritually-laden *gendèr* introduction to *Ldr Gadhung Mlathi* in *sléndro sanga*.<sup>30</sup> These ethereal pitches accompanied the appearance of an innovative *kayon* figure by Bambang Suwarno, and a single female presence, Kunthi (see Figure 4-3). Granted, every well-known member of the audience, and perhaps some 75% of the total audience, was familiar enough with the 14-year old *padat* movement at ASKI to immediately identify the style affiliation this represented. Yet the effect would still be shocking on a number of levels: this being an all-night *wayang*, before an audience well-established in their classical tastes and direction, combined with the extreme nature and extent of this particular presentation. A lone, strong, female main-character boldly cast against the expressive movement of an unusual *kayon* was the first image on the screen, as opposed to the expected two, small-frame, anonymous maid servants demurely skittering across the lower part of the screen. What is more, the initial musical orientation was in *sléndro sanga*, the single mode out of six that is exclusively reserved for the middle of the night. Even a perusal of 20 *padat* scripts from the ASKI era, shows not a single one that opens in *sléndro sanga*, except this one by Sukardi.

Then without any formalities or stock phrases, before any utterance from the *dhalang*, and a mere 20 seconds into the performance, the audience was thrown immediately into the raw emotional content of the plot. Kunthi's reaction to the competition for her hand in marriage was exposed using a newly composed poem sung solo by the *pesindhèn* Supadmi, to an unorthodox melody, with a highly-charged emotional content (*sekar macapat Kinanthi, céngkok barang miring*):

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<sup>30</sup> It is considered risky, by some traditional spiritualists in Java, to play this lengthy *gendèr* introduction in its entirety, and continue on to the *ladrang*, without the proper offerings. The piece is believed to summon the spirit of the Queen of the South Seas (Ratu Rara Kidul), who may wish to snatch up mortals from this world to use as her servants. My own *gendèr* teacher, the late Tukiman Wahyopangrawit, would not play the *buka* in its entirety, even for study purposes. When I recorded it in 1991 he played short bits only, stopping in between to wipe the nervous sweat off his brow (and this is a man who never sweated in public). Some more moderate traditionalists feel that playing the *buka* through to the *ladrang* is perfectly safe, as long as it is not followed by the entire *Gadhung Mlathi* suite. Some are brave enough to attempt the entire suite, but with substantial spiritual guidance. In Sukardi's version the *buka* is followed by an ASKI-esque, brash, loud entrance of the *ladrang* (already breaking tradition, so perhaps not invoking Ratu Rara Kidul's attention), and then only a fragment of the *ladrang irama wilet* is used before it is cut off. Still, the audience would have no way of knowing from the opening where this was leading. At any rate, it is impossible to over-emphasize how unusual the use of this piece is to start a *wayang*, for these multiple reasons.

#### Ch 4: Birth of an Idea

*Oh gods in the heavens, great powers that be,  
You have broken your promise,  
In deep misery and utterly heartbroken,  
All is crushing in around me,  
Should it come to pass that I am to be married,  
I would choose instead to end my life.*



Figure 4-3: The very first scene of *Kunthi Pilih*, March 1989 (video by Jody Diamond).



Figure 4-4: Pandhu and Kunthi's love frolicking, first minute of the *Rebo Legèn* performance, March 1989 (video by Jody Diamond).

One minute had transpired, and was followed by six more minutes of prologue in which not a word from the dhalang was spoken. Purbo Asmoro led the audience through a movement montage of Kunthi and Pandhu's frolicking, flirtations, love play, all to unusual accompaniment fragments in *sléndro sanga* and taken in its entirety from Sukardi Samiharjo's *padat* script from 1986 (see Figure 4-4). Then

suddenly Pandhu pulls away and departs, to the accompaniment of another Sukardi-composed solo sung by the *pesindhèn*, this time to the rarely heard poetic form *sekar tengahan Balabak*:

*Princess Kunthi is left by her lover Pandhu, oh the pain;  
Her heart restless, lifeless, lusterless, and so it seems;  
Unsettled, disturbed, and out of control, become her actions.*

Kunthi's father, King Kunthiboja of Mandura, enters (see Figure 4-5). Visions of the 1,000 foreign kings who have already lined up to take on the challenge for his daughter's hand in marriage haunt his psyche, as depicted through mime play.



Figure 4-5: King Basudéwa, distressed by the foreign kings applying to marry Kunthi (video by Jody Diamond).

Finally as part of this vision, his daughter's lover, Pandhu, shoos all the competitors away with a single arrow. This arrow flies through the air, pierces a *kayon*, and thus metaphorically transforms the scene to the official court audience scene in Mandura Kingdom. The prologue is over, and the gamelan players move from *Sampak Tlutur, sléndro sanga*, at pitch 6, into the familiar *Ktw Gd Krawitan kt 4 kr* in *sléndro nem*. A traditional opening court scene appears to be ahead.

One can only imagine that a majority of the guests may have sighed with relief as they heard the familiar opening to *Krawitan* and saw King Kunthiboja again, this time with his two demure maidservants entering in a classical manner. The emotionally and intellectually challenging prologue over, their focus could relax a bit and the evening would now move into the traditional, beloved, familiar wayang structure they knew how to interact with. This young upstart from ASKI had made his point, and now it was time to get on with it. The seven-minute prologue would have been revolutionary enough for the Rebo Legèn community, and for any all-night wayang at that point. Purbo Asmoro, however, had much more in store for the audience and was going to ask much more of them before the night was over.

- Hening  
 - Kunthi ... , Kuning kawirawa yang pusingta  
 lungiting pampandaka Pungun Hing paditya anjal  
 Cahayana sumirat ebra muktata, tumondok ny kama,  
 Kama kambabak swatana makarya tumapang  
 mhinna Kpaleti was singkain wotaning mnyakala,  
 mit lampahing gogot, kadeging Sang Heki mrelawani  
 etah, kwahing kalimom, sing pugeribawa mung dajung  
 kang gumllak  
 Angwanyi wanci wong lara, kong gimupitay  
 kawi, munglah pumwakanj kaula, konyggid meger  
 kong mawitug gogot, gelaring agresi Montusa ya Pore  
 Komba. huncarone kalobegiat prabawone, kongge  
 dalya pepelij lomun duk agum. Kadeging agresi sang  
 had silih sangkutug pambud daga. Gudom komardha  
 kong kuesthi, katabukan darma minal tubusij jira  
 kwi, kabanter watabing mami, putunging kalung,  
 ushang bantia danya. Paradent songa bala legam  
 anthepomi Bumi khesid, sebga kusuma bongsa,  
 Oiondhi emania, sinerat ny lita setna, kuber da  
 dya musthikanj sabiya bonda.  
 Puraya gung ngmeala suta, jingang jiro binet  
 ay kandel sinung geyuka anyelua longit, Paucak  
 siji bajalungit, Kimpungap lila jiti ngkong. Umbal:  
 dwaya watek aaretep ay taritrom mawek dajung  
 Sathona.  
 Nagwai siri ny pepromon, mukung agesthi  
 utanang budi. Jira mawaka mawagal beba swij  
 kawula elit ngawij, gumolong, saryek salubi praja  
 An rekasa Amille koma was wihon ny tata pantiy lila.  
 Jijing paladai, wana karga, bumi longit kinyan  
 komulyming kadula Sadaam.  
 Wening dan Ulayna,

Figure 4-6: Purbo Asmoro's handwritten manuscript of the opening narrations for the *Kunthi Pilih* performance, 28 March 1989, at Rebo Legèn.

*Padat Structure Embedded Into All-Night Wayang*

In this first attempt at a new style, Purbo Asmoro started with a fully developed *padat* script. This is not the modus he used once he continued to pursue this style, but it was nonetheless an interesting, and perhaps essential, transitional method before settling into his more complex current process, discussed in Chapters 5 to 7. He retained the *padat* structure of the Sukardi script in its entirety, embedding its scenes into an all-night structure as points of intensity and focus within tradition. The original *padat* script is limited to the following scenes of approximately the following durations, for an estimated total length of one hour 45 minutes:

1. Prologue (7 minutes)

PATHET NEM (40 minutes)

2. Court Audience Scene: Mandura Kingdom (6 minutes)
3. Kunthi's Quarters (27 minutes)
4. Overseas/Foreign Court Scene: Plasajenar Kingdom (7 minutes)

PATHET SANGA (42 minutes)

5. A Meeting up in the Forest: Gendara-Madrim-Pujawati (11 minutes)
6. A Prince in Meditation: Pandhu (15 minutes)
7. Gendara Battles Pandhu (16 minutes)

PATHET MANYURA (16 minutes)

8. The Competition: Mandura Kingdom (16 minutes)

Each one of these scenes is highly *garaped* in the Sukardi script, meaning, again (see Chapter 3), that: story details are presented in unorthodox ways, characters are developed in new ways, scene structure is altered from tradition, literary passages are newly-composed, dialogue is to the point, innovative movement techniques reveal emotion as much as dialogue does, and the gamelan accompaniment tightly fits the needs of the dramatic structure. Focus at all times is on Kunthi, her struggles, and the nature of the difficult choices she faces in her life. Dialogue or scenes not directly addressing this theme were discarded by Sukardi.

Purbo Asmoro kept this structure, and all of these scenes, complete with the density, meaning, innovation, and focus on theme developed in Sukardi's *padat* version, and complete with reconceptualizing all six of the main performance elements. The scenes are dispersed, however, across seven hours of the all-night version. Aside from dispersing the scenes across seven hours, Purbo Asmoro did three further things that transformed the *padat* version into an all-night version: he reintroduced a second plotline that had been removed from the *padat* version; he deepened and thickened the *padat* scenes themselves with more character and interpretive detail; and finally he added attractions from traditional all-night performance-practice that the *padat* structure had no room for.

#### *Adding Back a Second Plotline and Theme*

In the *padat* version, Sukardi eliminates the plotline concerning the Priest Bagaspati (see the traditional version lakon summary, Appendix 2). We never meet Bagaspati, and never experience his tragic death at the hands of his own son-in-law, Narasoma. Narasoma's sister, Madrim, and his wife, Pujawati, do get accosted by ogre King Gendara while traveling alone in the forest. In Sukardi's version, however, this encounter is present only to develop the heroism of Pandhu, who saves two women he does not know, out of pure chivalry. There is a brief mention of how the two women are trying to catch up with Narasoma, but only to emphasize how fatefully wrong Kunthi's first choice of Narasoma is in the competition, and to show how Madrim becomes Pandhu's wife only out of circumstance and not love. Every snippet of the plot connects to Sukardi's professed theme for the lakon, concerning the nature of love and women's choices.

In Purbo Asmoro's all-night version for Rebo Legèn, the Bagaspati tale is told in full, in a separate plotline with a separate focus. In fact, Purbo spends a heavy 109 minutes on it. He first develops Narasoma's rebellious and slightly cocky character in a 23-minute *Sabrangin Alus* scene with the servants Togog and Bilung. He then, symmetrically, develops Pujawati's character in a 23-minute scene with her father, Bagaspati, in the Arga Belah Hermitage. There follows a 23-minute love scene between Narasoma and Pujawati, and then a 22-minute death scene in which Bagaspati sacrifices his life so that his daughter and son-in-law may be the next king

and queen of Mandaraka. This is followed by an 18-minute scene in which Narasoma goes back to his father's kingdom but is rejected due to the disgrace of Bagaspati's death. This tragic sub-tale, told in 109 minutes right in the middle of the lakon, is symmetrical not only due to the balanced durations of the subscenes but also in the way it mirrors the length of the dispersed *Kunthi Pilih padat* scenes, 104 minutes. Although this second plotline is intensely dramatic, and surely would bring tears to many in the house, it is not *garaped* in the ASKI *padat* sense of the word. Purbo Asmoro uses traditional *iringan*, literary passages, and movement techniques. It is as if the *garapan* were reserved that night for the sections that came directly from the *padat* script, spread out throughout the performance, with a somewhat more classical second plotline of approximately equal length stuck in the middle.

#### *Deepening and Extending Padat Scenes*

Obviously Purbo Asmoro does more than simply present the *padat* version and add the classically treated Bagaspati tale in the middle, or the performance would not have lasted all night. He also deepens and extends a number of the *padat* scenes, in particular the Mandura Kingdom audience scene and the scene in Kunthi's quarters.

While in the *padat* version, the Mandura Kingdom scene is only a brief five minutes of functional dialogue, it is a well-developed 45-minute scene in the all-night version. Purbo writes his own opening narration (see Figure 4-6). He also takes the opportunity to add in an extended *wejangan* (set of philosophical teachings) from King Kunthiboja to his son Basudéwa, on the nature of a first-born son's responsibilities to himself and others. Purbo also adds a scene in which Kunthi's chambermaid, Nyai Sedhah Mirah, is called in to report on Kunthi's condition. This adds color, variety, and comedic relief to the scene.

While the scene in Kunthi's private quarters is a substantial 27 minutes in the *padat* version, the most elaborate scene in the performance, it is a full 71 minutes in the all-night version. Purbo adds an extended explanation from Kunthi's teacher, Druwasa, as to how Kunthi came to be with child. This is mostly humorous, but quite literary in nature as well. He also adds much more of Kunthi's emotional reaction to having to part with her child, as well as a more extended debate with her

brother, Basudéwa (the one that gave Subono goosebumps). This will come to be quintessential Purbo Asmoro-style in the years to come: extended reflections by characters, *wejangan*, debates between characters, and the revealing of the contents of a character's heart through heart-wrenching monologues and dialogue. In this way, Purbo Asmoro actually rejects both the "efficiency" of *padat* and the generic nature of classical plotline. He develops his own lengthy, expansive, psychological explorations of characters and their motives in all-night *garapan*.<sup>31</sup> He takes the *padat* scenes and extends their depth and intensity even further.

### *Traditional Popular Scenes*

The second 109-minute plotline, and the extended character development and debate embedded in the Mandura court scenes (84 minutes) add about three hours to the *padat* version, for a total of four to five hours. This brings the all-night version to about three hours longer than the *padat* version. But the performance lasted about seven hours. The remaining time came from popular scenes brought back from the traditional all-night wayang:

- a 9-minute *Limbukan*
- a 10-minute *Paséban Njaba* (Outer Audience Hall Scene)
- a 19-minute *Budhalan* (Troop Departure Scene)
- a 35-minute *Sabrangan* (Foreign Kingdom Scene, King Gendara's Plasajenar)
- a 23-minute *Prang Gagal* (Plasajenar versus Mandura Kingdoms)
- a 22-minute *Cakilan* (Pandhu versus Cakil and other ogres in the forest)
- a 20-minute humorous interaction between Kunthi, Madrim, and Pandhu (such extended humorous scenes are not condoned in *padat* treatment)

In summary, Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* debut consisted of the entire *padat* script but spread out throughout the night (104 minutes), a fully-developed second plotline (109 minutes), a deepening and enriching of the *padat* scenes using philosophical teachings and more detailed character development (84 minutes), and the insertion of beloved attractions from the traditional all-night style (118 minutes).

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<sup>31</sup> This is explored in more detail in Chapter 7.



This is akin to the way his performances were to look in future years, with a few important differences: the second plotline will come to be equally as *garaped* as the main plotline, many of the traditional popular scenes will be more heavily *garaped*, and the starting point in terms of preparation will not be a *padat* script per se.

### Elements of *Garapan* prior to 1989

Purbo Asmoro has always expressed certainty that Rebo Legèn was the first all-night *garapan* performance in the history of wayang, and no one I have spoken to has been able to offer any earlier examples. But in October 2008, preparing to write the Introduction to the Lontar translations, I decided to organize a panel discussion at the home of Rahayu Supanggah in Benawa, on the eastern outskirts of Solo, to explore this further (see Figure 4-7). My intention was to invite discussion on two points:

1. What were some of the earliest examples of what ASKI calls *garapan* that occurred in otherwise traditional all-night wayang: examples of flashbacks, daydreams, visions, alternative gamelan accompaniment, prologues, montages, non-traditional character development.
2. What/when was the first performance to use a *garapan* approach throughout every important moment in the evening, rather than just a single special moment? If I did not get much response I planned to present this question: Is it possible that Purbo Asmoro's Rebo Legèn performance on 28 March 1989 was the first one? I would challenge participants to come up with performances before this one, would show them the video to get reactions, and in general hope to encourage a discussion.

The invited discussion members were:

- Rahayu Supanggah
- Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra (who passed away a few months later)
- Toto Atmojo (an elderly, village dhalang from Sukoharjo)
- Bambang Murtiyoso
- Bambang Suwarno
- Jungkung Darmoyo (a non-ASKI trained younger dhalang and the late Mujoko Raharjo's son)
- Saguh Hadiraharjo (an elderly musician who played with the late Nartosabdo)
- Soewito Wito Radyo (a middle-aged musician with wide experience across much of Klaten)
- Suratno (a musician from Kartosuro and the late Naryocarito's son)
- Prapto Panuju (from PEPADI in Jakarta)
- Kuwato, author of a master's thesis on the *hura-hura* era in wayang (2001)
- Purbo Asmoro
- (Manteb Soedharsono and Anom Soeroto were invited, but declined)

I visited each participant in the months before the seminar, interviewed them alone, and notified them of the topics to be covered when we all gathered in October. Some



Figure 4-7: Panel discussion on *garapan* elements from the past, Benawa, Oct 2008.

TOP (left to right): Suwito, Prapto Panuju, Kathryn Emerson, Purbo Asmoro, Saguh.

MIDDLE (left to right): Bambang Murtiyoso, Suwito, Kuwato, Purbo Asmoro, Saguh, Bambang Suwarno, (Danang-video), Suratno, Toto Atmojo, Prapto Panuju, Jungkung Darmoyo, Tristuti.

BOTTOM (left to right): Suratno, Toto Atmojo, Prapto Panuju, Jungkung Darmoyo, Tristuti, Bambang Murtiyoso, Suwito.

ended up arriving with written responses (Bambang Murtiyoso, for example) and some with notes (Purbo Asmoro), but most arrived empty-handed yet full of ideas. It was unanimously agreed, after very little discussion, that Purbo Asmoro was the first to employ *garapan* principles all night, across an entire performance on that night at Rebo Legèn, which almost all of them had attended. But there were most certainly predecessors in the process, and these were the bulk of what became the subject of rich discussion over the three-hour get-together.

*Mujoko Joko Raharjo, RRI Solo, 1984*

In 1984, Mujoko Joko Raharjo of Gombang, Sawit, Boyolali, brought an innovative *garapan* technique into the mainstream spotlight during an all-night performance of *Sesaji Raja Suya* (*The Grand Offering of the Kings*) at the national radio broadcasting station in Solo. During the *Pathet Nem* section after *Budhalan*, as Kresna, Arjuna and Bima discover the wailing drum at the entrance of Jarasandha's kingdom, Mujoko moved suddenly and shockingly into a flashback.<sup>32</sup> Over the next hour and a half, he played out the birth of Jarasandha to explain the wailing drum, rather than simply having Kresna describe it. Having a character describe such events from the past is the traditional way of inserting them into a performance, and is referred to as *pagedhongan* (essentially, storytelling). A *pagedhongan* that is played-out on the screen, rather than simply narrated, is referred to in *garapan* circles now as a *sisipan*: the insertion of a major event from a prior lakon within a lakon.

Mujoko's ninety-minute flashback cleverly took the perfect shape of the scenes it replaced, although in the context of a flashback. The *sisipan* started with what was, in effect, an *Adegan Sabrang Alus*, when Jarasandha's father, Brihadrata, received a visit by the god Naradha. Although all a flashback, this is in fact precisely where the structure had stopped when the flashback started, just before *Adegan Sabrang*. This was followed by a scene similar to *Prang Gagal*, when Naradha and his troops battled Jarasandha's father when he would not relent in his demand to be granted a child. The *Prang Gagal* concluded with a climactic event, as is typical: Naradha giving Jarasandha's father the magical mango. This was followed by what could be viewed as a *Magakan* or *Sabangan Rangkep* scene, when Brihadrata returned

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<sup>32</sup> Readers may find it useful to consult the summary of *Sesaji Raja Suya*, found in Appendix 2.

to his kingdom, and Jarasandha was born. When the flashback was over, Mujoko moved seamlessly into *Pathet Sanga* and returned to the main story where it left off. Hence, it was revolutionary in that it was a flashback, but the sequence fit without a hiccup into the traditional order of scenes. (Recording in Purbo Asmoro's collection as of 2010, courtesy of RRI Solo.)

Twenty-five years later, the Solo artistic community still talks about this amazing night, as many were either in the audience, listening on the radio, or had heard subsequent rebroadcasts of the performance throughout that year. When I interviewed the Lontar panel discussion participants in 2008 to ask their opinions on the beginning of *garapan* techniques in all-night wayang, more than half of the interviewees quoted this flashback or *sisipan*. Mujoko was a visiting instructor at ASKI and was quite familiar with the *padat* movement, although he had no taste for this new development, as evident from his comments documented in Chapter 3. Whether his creation of the flashback as a *sisipan* was inspired specifically by *padat* techniques, by something else, or from his own creativity shaped unconsciously by the times, his performance has become a *garapan* milestone in the minds of Solonese artists.

Twenty-three year old Purbo Asmoro, although not in the audience that night, heard about Mujoko's innovative technique and had the opportunity to witness it later that same year at a performance of *Sesaji Raja Suyu* by Mujoko in the general Solo environs. At one point shortly after, he even acquired a recording of one of the performances, studied it for a bit, but then lent it out and it was never returned. However, 25 years later, he chose *Sesaji Raja Suyu* as one of the lakon for this project partly based on his memory of the performance he saw that year and—like his development of Sukardi's *Kunthi Pilih*—his desire to further explore the *garapan* potential of this lakon while building on something already started.

#### *Other Early Examples of Garapan*

For over a century now, there has been a practice in Klaten of combining a number of Baratayuda War episodes into one all-night performance for annual village-cleansing rituals. Because many episodes are combined into one, the traditional structure of a wayang performance must be altered. Hence there is a deliberate *garap*

*adegan*, which strays from tradition by combining lakon, and also because characters are not present as traditionally expected. On the battlefield there is no Queen's Quarters scene, for example, and the troops are not only already dispatched but also waning in number, so a typical, showy, grand, *Budhalan* would be ludicrous. The traditional narrations must be discarded as well, since opening scenes take place on battlefields rather than in palaces. Hence we find some of the first *garap catur* with narrations created solely for the dramatic purposes of a single performance. Many dhalang have cited the creativity and innovation found within this Klaten Baratayuda tradition as an example of *garapan* long before its days at ASKI (Soewito Wito Radyo, interview, June 2011).<sup>33</sup>

Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra introduced what would now be labeled as *garapan* elements into his performances as early as the mid-1960s. He recalls that many performances during that tumultuous time took place after extended political speeches and many nights he found himself unable to start the wayang until 11:00 PM or even later. He recounts sitting in a chair waiting during the speeches, while planning a creative solution to the dilemma. He did not want to start with a lengthy court scene, and he did not find simply shortening everything in equal proportion (like a *ringkas* performance) an interesting prospect. So he tells of how he routinely started with a prologue, developed in his mind during the one- to two-hour wait before the performance. He needed to somehow engage the audience in the story with dramatic flair from the beginning, grabbing their attention so they did not just leave, exhausted after the political meeting (Tristuti, interview 2007). Hence although his motives and circumstances stemmed from different principles, he was developing prologues a decade before the *padat* movement at ASKI.

There are many examples of bits of ASKI-style *garapan* in an all-night format (whether actually ASKI-influenced or not) among creative dhalang of the past. Purbo Asmoro tells of watching performances by Gandadarman in which he began with *kiprahan* as a prologue (usually an antagonist type of character dancing an arrogant show of his prowess) to entice audiences. Supanggih tells of an inspiring dhalang by the name of Mintaraga from Nganjuk, who as far back as the late 1950s and early 1960s was employing various *garapan*-like elements, straying dramatically

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<sup>33</sup> The *Baratayuda* lakon, as the first example of a multi-episode construction, is explored further in Chapter 8.

from tradition and rejecting generic scene structure, narration and accompaniment choices. Bambang Murtiyoso remembers a performance in the late 1970s by Naryocarito of Kartosuro (lakon *Prabu Nausa*, or *King Nausa*), which began with a prologue that visually encapsulated the entire story. Who influenced whom and for what purpose will never be known, but what is generally agreed upon in the community is that Purbo Asmoro was the first to universally, consciously and somewhat rigorously apply all elements of *garapan* to the all-night format.

### *Wayang Hura-hura: 1990–1998*

After the revolutionary debut at Rebo Legèn in 1989, one could easily assume that Purbo Asmoro simply returned to his slowly building career, performing small-scale wayang for village cleansings, weddings, and circumcisions, receiving modest fees, and attracting relatively contained audiences in the hundreds. It would be hard to imagine when he would have the opportunity for showcasing, let alone further developing, something as thought- and rehearsal-intensive as the all-night *garapan* style, and where an appreciative audience would come from. But Purbo Asmoro's performance had made an impression on Governor Ismail who, along with a committee of Ganasidi officers (see p. 99), was concocting a plan to "spectacularize" wayang. Ironically, this would lead to giving Purbo Asmoro a platform and the authority from which to convert audiences over to his new style—meant not to spectacularize wayang, but to deepen and further enrich its dramatic content using innovative and dynamic techniques, appealing to contemporary audiences.

#### *The New Order's Vision for Wayang*

The ruling Golkar Party that had supported Anom Soeroto's rise to fame in the 1970s, continued to see great potential in the power of wayang in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Kayam comments (2001, 75):

... compared to their attention to other art forms, the attention the New Order paid to wayang was huge, both economically and politically. To go even further, wayang could be referred to as the ultimate "New Order art form," or the official art form of the party ... even to the point that New Order influence came to dominate and regulate almost all aspects of *wayang kulit*.

Kayam continues with the observation that, during the 1980s, wayang was still a mystical and spiritual happening when in the realm of the palaces, while in the villages it remained a harmonizing force between man, society, and nature. In academic institutions it had firmly been declared as an aesthetic, artistic, and intellectual endeavor, while the superstar dhalang of the age, such as Nartosabdo, Anom Soeroto, and Manteb Soedharsono were approaching wayang as story-telling mixed with a heavy dose of entertainment. Now, the New Order proposed that wayang could be, more than ever before due to mass broadcasting media such as radio and television, a tool for informing and controlling the masses. This was repeatedly expressed in a phrase coined by Harmoko, President Soeharto's Minister of Information from 1983 to 1997,<sup>34</sup> that wayang should be: *tontonan, tuntunan, dan tatanan* (attractions to watch, lessons to learn from, and a sense of order to live by). Kayam notes that this seemingly innocuous catch phrase was in fact emblematic of the way the regime manipulated the art form for its own good. "The powers of the New Order tended to mobilize the authority of other idioms [wayang] and then manipulate and misuse them for their own purposes and interests (Kayam 2001, 71)."

#### *Sudjadi and Wayang "Spektakulèr"*

Along this vein, Sudjadi, a career politician from Yogyakarta and the head of Ganasidi, began plans in 1989 for expanding the use of wayang as a communication tool for the government. Together with colleagues, a program was designed to put on a large-scale, *wayang spektakulèr* on Central Javanese Governor Ismail's monthly Javanese birthday (*Thursday-Legi*). But this event had to be different from all others, and colossal. They would use two extra-wide screens instead of one, and hire flashy, glamorous dhalang. Two dhalang, one at each screen, would alternate scenes or at times create a scene together. Sometimes a third or fourth dhalang would be included. There would be special lighting effects, and massively powerful sound systems. For the *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara* interludes the committee would invite comedians (either famous stand-up comedians or clowns from the *wayang orang* tradition) and *dhangdhut, kroncong, campursari*, or rock bands. These performers

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<sup>34</sup> A position interpreted by many as "Minister of Propaganda."

would be given their own separate platform or space, usually to the dhalang's left, opposite the wayang box. The interludes would run well over an hour each. This would ensure enough time for the *tontonan*, while still giving the dhalang plenty of opportunity for *tuntunan* and *tatanan*: to pass on messages from the government about birth control, farming techniques, new programs, impending dangers (such as if there had been an outbreak of counterfeiting) or other matters deemed important. A huge awning, taking more than three days to set up and secure against the wind and rain, would cover not only the entire dhalang, screen, gamelan, and comedian-band stage area but also the rows of plush, satin chairs for honored guests. Everything down to the carpet on the stage, the dhalang and musicians' jackets, and the singers' and comedians' outfits would be Golkar Party golden-yellow.

None of these ideas were new, in and of themselves. Multi-screen, multi-dhalang experiments had been explored in the 1960s by the artist league, Communist Party-linked Lekra Association. Supanggah recalls the power of some of these experiments. The intention there, however, was to use the multi-screen space for pointed story-telling and aesthetic reasons, rather than to turn wayang into a Las Vegas spectacle (interview, 2008).<sup>35</sup> As for the interludes, Nartosabdo had already extended and adopted the *Gara-gara* scene, as mentioned previously, in the 1970s. He was reportedly the first to interact with *pesindhèn* during *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara*, and started the tradition of actually turning in their direction to interview, heckle and joke with them. In 1975, a separate platform had already been used for guest stars, when the comedy troupe Srimulat had their anniversary celebration in Solo. They invited the star *kroncong* singer Waldjinhah to join the wayang by Ki Nartosabdo, setting up a designated platform for her to stand on during the interludes. Nartosabdo continued this practice in later performances and it caught on in some circles. Manteb Soedharsono had also been showcasing Waldjinhah since 1983, complete with keyboards and viola for *campursari* selections on her own platform. He had also been using a bass drum and trumpets for departure scenes, and flashing, colored lights with sound effects for battle scenes since the early 1980s.

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Supanggah told of getting goosebumps when he witnessed a troop departure scene in a Lekra wayang using three screens and three dhalang, in which a soldier on a horse started from the screen on the left and continued seamlessly through all three screens. This was meant to evoke the impending horror of war, as the horse picked up intensity approaching his destination. Another scene in the same *Baratayuda* lakon performance featured one battle on one screen, alternating with another battle from another front on the other screen.



In fact, the dhalang Harjunadi, from Nganjuk, East Java, had been using a clarinet, bass drum, and snare drum for departure scenes as early as the 1960s, according to Bambang Murtiyoso, a native of Nganjuk (interview, 2008). What was new was to intentionally put all these elements together in one package, institutionalize it as policy for each monthly event, and proudly identify the events with the labels *spektakulèr* and *kolosal*.

The first of these monthly *wayang kolosal* took place on 10 March 1990, in an indoor, air-conditioned theater at Gedung Wanita in Manahan, Solo. It featured two superstars, the Solonese Manteb Soedharsono and Banyumasan Sugito Purbotjarito, and one up-and-coming Golkar favorite, Djoko Hadiwidjoyo from Semarang, known as Djoko “Édan” (“Crazy” Djoko) for his irreverence on stage. The lakon, meant to be determined and fleshed out by Sudjadi’s committee in order to align with party motives, was *Baladéwa-Balarama*, concerning an imposter posing as Baladéwa. This first event was held to celebrate the 11 March 1966 anniversary of Soeharto’s taken over from Soekarno. The official monthly birthday celebrations for Governor Ismail began in May of 1990<sup>36</sup> and from then on, all of the events were held in the courtyard of the Semarang National Radio Station (RRI Semarang).

#### *Purbo Asmoro Joins Wayang Spektakulèr*

After four successful monthly *spektakulèr* birthday events in Semarang, Governor Ismail requested that the young, talented dhalang he had seen at Rebo Legèn perform. On 19 September 1990, Purbo Asmoro presented the lakon *Bima Suci* (*Bima as Sage*) in a two-screen *spektakulèr*, together with senior female dhalang Suharni Sabdowati of Sragen. On 28 November 1990, Purbo was invited again, this time performing with Crazy Djoko, presenting the lakon *Sirna Satru Bebuyutan* (*The Death of Evil Enemies*). Hence, Purbo Asmoro was chosen by Governor Ismail, Sudjadi, and the general committee, to perform for two of the first eight occasions. As the events progressed, the glitz of the format increased. It came to include officials being invited on stage by the dhalang to offer speeches or songs, as well as crowd-gathering gimmicks such as lucky draws for the audience to receive prizes (fans, kitchen appliances, bicycles, even motorcycles) during the interludes.

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<sup>36</sup> A wayang was not held in April 1990, due to the Islamic fasting month, Ramadan.

The exposure Purbo Asmoro received as a result of these *spektakulèr* engagements was incomparable with anything he would have previously dreamed possible; it included not only mass promotion of his talents before audiences in the thousands and high-ranking officials by the dozens, but also instant radio and television fame. By mid-1991 his popularity surged, he was able to increase his fees exponentially, and he was on a track to superstardom only a short two years after the Rebo Legèn debut.

Purbo had yet to find another opportunity to experiment with all-night *garapan* style though. He was obligated to follow the *hura-hura* format designed by the Sudjadi team in the various government-sponsored wayang he performed, and he continued to offer primarily traditional performances in more modest situations. Nonetheless, Purbo also continued his more aesthetically minded endeavors. In 1990 he won first place in the Central Javanese Dhalang Competition, presenting a slightly revised version of the lakon *Kunthi's Choice*. He continued teaching at ASKI, which in 1988 had been elevated to an official higher education institution and renamed STSI (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia). Through STSI, he was sent on his first overseas tour as a dhalang in 1990, with performances in London.

In 1992, due to his rising popularity and need for a consistent group he could depend upon, Purbo Asmoro formed his own performance troupe, known to this day as Mayangkara (*Mangèsthi Wayang Kagungan Rahayu*, "Dedicated to Wayang as a Source of Wellbeing"). The famed Mujoko Joko Raharjo had passed away suddenly in February 1992, and Mayangkara was made up of about half of his musicians, who previous to playing for Mujoko had been members of Nartosabdo's troupe. The other half were STSI studio musicians, colleagues of Purbo's on campus each day. His second son, Kukuh Indrasmara, had been born on 25 March of 1991, and Purbo had also moved into the first home that he owned.

At age 30, two years after the radical debut at Rebo Legèn, Purbo Asmoro had toured overseas, won first place in a major, region-wide *pedhalangan* competition, become a favorite of the government-sponsored *wayang hura-hura* trend, and formed his own gamelan troupe made up of highly knowledgeable musicians. He was positioned to move only one place, and that was up. But so were Crazy Djoko and a

number of other young dhalang. The question for this work is: when did he return to developing the style that became his trademark?

### *Wayang PANTAP*

In 1993, Muhammad Ismail had completed two terms as governor of Central Java and Suwardi took office. Sudjadi and his colleagues, still in charge of Ganasidi, and still representing the Golkar ruling party, maintained their interest in increasing the scale and influence of government-sponsored wayang. The Governor's office, together with other influential figures, created a funding organization known as PANTAP (*Panitia Tetap Apresiasi dan Pengembangan Seni Pedalangan*, The Committee for the Appreciation and Development of the Art of Pedalangan). They continued the large-scale monthly wayang events through ever-stronger sponsorship. Governor Suwardi chose to hold the events not on his monthly birthday but rather on the monthly Independence Day Eve, the 16<sup>th</sup> of each month. He also decided to hold them in the courtyard outside the Governor's Office in Semarang rather than at the radio station. Because there was an extensive commemoration of Indonesian Independence every 17<sup>th</sup>, the events had to end at 2:00 AM in order to give facilities teams time to set up for the 6:00 AM patriotic ceremonies. So wayang were truncated to approximately five hours: one hour of *Limbukan*, one hour or more of *Gara-gara*, one full hour involving flashy battle scenes with light, sound, and visual effects, and two hours remaining for the dramatic unfolding of the lakon.

The PANTAP wayang started on 16 September 1993, and they continued for five years, every single month except during Ramadan. Purbo Asmoro estimates that in the five years of PANTAP (covering 55 wayang, once a month for 11 months each year) he was asked to perform some 20 times or more, or about 36% of the time, with countless related engagements also coming his way via PANTAP connections. At the time, as a young dhalang with a wife and two children to support and an interest in a rising career, there is no question that the opportunity was unparalleled. But Purbo reflected in an interview at his home in 2010:

PANTAP equals the age of *wayang hura-hura*. Those performances had very little lakon development and basically were a series of attractions mixed with the government agenda. PANTAP started during, and ended with, the New Order. I

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knew it at the time. I kept my integrity in tact as best I could though. I was compromising between an opportunity and what my heart was telling me. This was not the art of wayang as I saw it. This was not my vision. But it was there before me.<sup>37</sup>

History has not been kind to the memory of PANTAP, with many commentators bemoaning its effect on wayang throughout the 1990s and beyond. Supanggah had this to say (Kuwato 2001, 215):

It is a shame that something with such potential, done at such a great financial cost, would produce a product that is not of a serious nature and has such little artistic value—something that can even be said to deteriorate the meaning of an artform that was once intended to develop spiritual values but now has moved into the arena of cheap entertainment. ... all in the name of “creativity,” in the name of building a market and an audience, without regard for the true essence of creativity or even the true meaning of “market value.”

Bambang Murtiyoso expressed his opinion as below (Kuwato 2001, 214):

Unfortunately, Ganasidi’s program to create “wayang fever” among the young has succeeded; while the aspect of the program intended to create something of quality centered around first-class dhalang can be judged a failure. Dhalang raised in the PANTAP model of performance have turned in the direction of vulgar entertainment. This only widens the discrepancy between what is appreciated by the youth and the potential aesthetic depth of wayang.

While Sudjadi himself countered (Kuwato 2001, 217):

I am quite certain that the large majority of wayang fans are looking for entertainment, not philosophy. I’d be willing to bet on it. It has long been a fact that audiences wait for *Gara-gara* and what does this say? Don’t force all audiences to be like those who really understand wayang. Sure, messages and philosophy are important but it depends on the dhalang and his abilities, too.

The final PANTAP wayang was held on 16 August 1998, featuring four female dhalang, Suharni Sabdowati, Suparsih, Isti Sabdarini, and Sudarmi, after which, as abruptly as the New Order ended in May 1998, PANTAP events also were

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<sup>37</sup> In 2013, Purbo Asmoro was performing in Pati on the north coast of Java. I was on stage sitting with Mayangkara while some local bands played before the wayang started. Purbo Asmoro was in one of the plush seats up front with the sponsors, awaiting the speeches. An elderly, well-dressed man walked on stage, grabbed one of the singer’s microphones, and joined in with a *campursari* song during the pre-show, to the applause of the seated officials. I received a text message from Purbo a few minutes later: “That’s Sudjadi standing there on stage. If you’re looking for what ruined wayang in the 1990s, look no further. There he is in front of you.”

over. But because PANTAP performances had been televised on local stations and broadcast nationally on radio, they had become a kind of standard for wealthy people planning to put on a wayang. Although multi-screen and multi-dhalang events were rare outside of PANTAP, many of the other *spektakulèr* elements caught on. It became the norm for high-profile wayang performances throughout the 1990s and early 2000s<sup>38</sup> to feature 60 to 90-minute *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara* scenes, a plethora of guest stars on a separate platform (generic comedians, *wayang orang* comedians, *dhangdhut* singers and dancers, *campursari* bands, rock bands), and extended battle scenes with special effects. These PANTAP-esque wayang, sponsored by officials or those wealthy enough to afford the *kolosal*, took place in massive venues similar to Sudjadi's events. While traditional wayang performances were still to be found in villages across Central and East Java, *wayang hura-hura* became the trend in the 1990s for those able to afford it. Even for those unable to afford something of this scale, elements of *wayang hura-hura* that could be integrated for no extra budget, such as encouraging dhalang to extend *Limbukan* and *Gara-gara* interludes and hiring a few local, stand-up *kroncong* or *campursari* singers and bands, found their way more and more into even the modest village performances (personal observation, 1995 to about 2000).<sup>39</sup>

### Purbo Asmoro Makes a Career Choice

As of the formation of Mayangkara in 1992, Purbo Asmoro returned to his experiments with all-night *garapan*. Strengthened and supported by his group of experienced musicians, and wishing to separate himself from what was happening

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<sup>38</sup>Many of these *hura-hura* elements are in fact the norm through the writing of this work (2015) but the post-2000 era is more complicated and involves Purbo Asmoro's all-night *garapan* influence, which is described in the following chapters. NOTE: This is also the era during which audiences came to sit exclusively on the dhalang-gamelan-color side of the screen, as the nature of the attractions and the "superstar dhalang" phenomenon encouraged this perspective.

<sup>39</sup> For an extensive account in English of the *hura-hura* style of wayang performance in the 1990s, see Mrázek (2005, 359–536). He even includes excerpts from newspaper accounts reporting on that first wayang *spektakulèr* of 10 March 1990 (463–466). Mrázek and I were both living in Solo during this period, in fact for some of the time even in the same boarding house. While I was intent on avoiding *hura-hura* performances (as described on page 6), he was fascinated with documenting them. The accounts, observations, and conclusions in his chapter entitled "Gara-gara! Or wayang in the times of comedy," are strikingly accurate. In this work I have centered my brief account on the specifics of Sudjadi, Governor Ismail, and the formation of PANTAP because this is the connection between *wayang hura-hura* and Purbo Asmoro.

with PANTAP, Purbo used his newly found platform of popularity to try elements of all-night *garapan* in his performances (interview, June 2010).

You know, I don't even really remember how it began exactly—after Rebo Legèn and winning the competition in Semarang for sure, and after forming Mayangkara. It was slow, gradual, and not on purpose or all at once. But as I started to get more engagements, in fancier venues, with bigger audiences and higher fees—which gave me the room to fund rehearsals—I found myself gravitating toward the all-night *garapan* model. And I didn't want to just use an *atraksi* at the beginning, like *kiprah*, and then revert back to a traditional performance. I truly thought about how to reconceptualize each scene, up through the very end. I thought about how to craft each important moment in the lakon. I thought about what I wanted to say—what my main themes or messages would be. Basically, I found myself thinking like a *padat* practitioner. It was just what suited me. It was not only my training, but also what I came to think of as the best practice. And most certainly it was my chance to offer something in contrast to what I was involved with in PANTAP. But it wasn't always possible, practical, or well-received. So it started slowly, when I could get away with it, and kind of built from there. It depended on the venue, the lakon, the sponsors, the situation, the budget, and also whether I had Mayangkara with me or not. Sometimes I would have one plan upon leaving for the performance, but after sizing up the audience, venue, and sponsors would end up doing something more traditional, or sometimes something a bit more *néka-néka*.

As mentioned, author Umar Kayam's *Kelir Tanpa Batas (A Screen without Limits)* describes in detail the situation in wayang performance practice from 1993 to 1995. He focused his observations in Central Java on five dhalang: Anom Soeroto, Manteb Soedharsono, Crazy Djoko Hadiwidjoyo, Purbo Asmoro, and Warseno "Slenk" (Anom Soeroto's younger brother, and a popular *hura-hura* dhalang to this day, see Chapter 9). He describes how Purbo Asmoro approached PANTAP-like requests when faced with an engagement in which he had more control of the situation (Kayam 2001, 125):

Purbo spoke with me in an interview about a performance in Prambanan for which he was asked to bring a band and singers because, according to the sponsor, the audiences in that region liked that sort of thing. Purbo was reluctant to fulfill this request, because he was not accustomed to using these elements in his own [non-PANTAP] performances. He did not see how his performance would be enhanced with these added attractions, but he went ahead and fulfilled the request for the band and singers. However, he delayed use of the band as long as he could, trying to prove to the audience that his performance would be interesting enough without these external elements. Finally, when it was truly time for the band and singers to be showcased, the audience rejected them and

requested that the performance continue as it was progressing.<sup>40</sup> But because he felt obligated to his friends in the band who had rehearsed for the opportunity, he gave them a short chance to perform.

Then, after mentioning the Rebo Legèn debut, he shares his observations of Purbo Asmoro's performance style from 1993 to 1995 (Kayam 2001, 212-213):

Purbo has been consistent in his application of *padat* principles to all-night performances, at least through the time of this research. He consistently focuses on a clear theme or message, then crafts the lakon in an efficient and effective way, and discards cliché forms and expressions that could be regarded as meaningless and without purpose—even though this requires considerable rehearsal and preparation beforehand. Although most dhalang during this period from 1993 to 1995 were trying all sorts of gimmicks to become popular, Purbo has held on to his principles. This does not mean, however, that he is not looking for popularity and a large market base. He sticks to his principles consistently because he is certain that performances in this style will garner their own segment of the market.

Purbo Asmoro often comments that he experienced his busiest schedule around 1995. My own observation is that there is usually a time in any superstar dhalang's career during which the hunger of audiences for the newness of his performances is not hindered yet by out-of-reach fees. During this intersection of growing fame with fees that are significantly lower than the established superstars', these young talents' schedules fill up. For Purbo Asmoro, the mid-1990s was this time, and he describes often being too exhausted to even think, due to the number of engagements. But he also reports attempting all-night *garapan* more and more often, regardless of his fatigue.

From 1994 to 2000 Purbo Asmoro received at least four especially notable opportunities, free of all external market pressures, to create "all-out" *garapan* pieces rivaling the opportunity he had with his Rebo Legèn debut. The first was through the television station Indosiar, where in 1995 he was asked to perform for a live broadcast, and he chose the lakon *Ramabargawa*. This is a pre-*Ramayana* story relating the tragedy and subsequent disillusionment that befalls a young prince, causing him

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<sup>40</sup> Audiences will boo, shout out, and generally pass on their reaction in a number of ways that the dhalang can read, even though his back is to them. I once attended a performance by Jungkung Darmoyo in Klaten, where he had brought *campursari* singers for *Limbukan*. After two *campursari* selections, a segment of wayang-savvy spectators starting loudly singing fragments from a specific *ada-ada* ("kukusing dupa kumelun") that often is used to start the scene after *Limbukan*. As their numbers increased and some heckling and shouting even started (*Wis!* meaning "Enough!") finally the dhalang took the hint and told the singers they were finished.

to retreat to the forest and become the angry yet wise hermit, Ramabargawa.<sup>41</sup> Purbo described the importance of this broadcast to his career in an interview (Jan 2013):

I went all out. All-out *garapan*. More than *Kunthi Pilih*, the *Ramabargawa* treatment was truly all mine. And that performance was replayed countless times on television. I would say it was what really launched my career in some ways, because the Rebo Legèn audience was an elite and defined one. The Indosiar broadcast threw my performance [of this style] into the mass public and mass media's attention.

The second opportunity was soon after, in July of 1995. Ganasidi, the same organization that was organizing the monthly PANTAP wayang, put together 50 nights of wayang to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indonesia's independence. This "Festival Greget Dalang" was held in Solo, and the performances were in the grand, open gathering hall of the Kraton Solo, known as Pagelaran. Purbo Asmoro was invited to perform on the fourth night of the 50-night series, on Tuesday, 18 July 1995. The lakon were assigned, with episodes selected chronologically in order from the *Arjunasasrabau* through the *Ramayana* and finally the *Mahabharata* story cycles. Purbo Asmoro was assigned *Sumantri Ngèngèr* (*Sumantri Apprentices*) from the *Arjunasasrabau* cycle. This lakon tells of the tests the hermitage-born Sumantri must go through in order to apprentice under the revered King Arjunasasrabau of Maèspati Kingdom.

In a new move, Purbo went to Tristuti Rahmadi Suryasaputra for consultation and ended up asking him to write the all-night script. Tristuti, writing regularly for Manteb Soedharsono at the time, had authority and prestige. It seems that Purbo was trying out the idea of following in the footsteps of Anom Soeroto and Manteb Soedharsono during this busy time in his career. Although he ended up using much of the themes, debate, and dialogue from the resulting script, he revised the scene structure, arranged the *iringan* entirely on his own, and inserted expressive movement techniques from his *padat* training, creating another all-night *garapan* masterpiece. In the closing ceremony for the festival, Purbo Asmoro received the honor of being officially named one of the top five performers out of 50.

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<sup>41</sup> He repeated his performance of *Ramabargawa* at Rebo Legèn on 11 April 1995.



Ten days before the Pagelaran performance, Hari D. Utomo, reporter from the newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakyat* made this commentary as Purbo was preparing to perform for the Yogya Performing Arts Festival (8 July 1995):

At a glance one would never guess that this particular young man holds within him such extraordinary talent and potential. His everyday demeanor is unassuming and introspective. Yet this man of few words undergoes a complete transformation once on stage, sitting behind a shadow-puppet screen. Aside from the poetic language that suddenly flows with clarity and grace, his talented hands manipulate battle scenes with virtuosic skill and entertainment scenes display clever humor without venturing into the lewd, cheap jokes currently popular. This particular figure, popular on the scene today, is often pointed out as being singularly capable of one day taking over the status of the two kings of shadow puppetry, Ki Anom Suroto Lebdocarito and Ki Manteb Sudarsono. Most would agree it is no exaggeration that this man, born December 17, 1961 in Pacitan surpasses others in his field in a myriad of ways. His dialogue and drama are outstanding, his movements accomplished, and the messages and philosophy he espouses in his performances effective without being condescending.

In 1998, Purbo Asmoro received yet another Rebo Legèn invitation from Anom Soeroto for which he chose to perform the philosophically complex story of Dasamuka's birth, commonly known as *Alap-alapan Sukèsi* (*Sukèsi's Hand in Marriage Contested*). Once again, he explored the idea of starting with a *padat* script, in this case the celebrated 1977 Soemanto version from the early days of *padat* work at ASKI. Although this script inspired him in some ways, he did not end up basing his all-night performance on it in the same way that he did with Sukardi's *Kunthi Pilih* in 1989. This was partially because by now he was more experienced at creating all-night *garapan* without a *padat* script as a starting point, but also simply because the 1977 work was not as globally innovative as Sukardi's 1986 script had been (interview, Jan 2013).

On this occasion, Purbo again approached Tristuti to write the all-night script for him. After receiving the finished work, however, he found himself straying from it at every turn, and finally discarded it completely to create his own. While there must have been places in which the Tristuti script influenced Purbo, the finished product shows little to no resemblance.<sup>42</sup> In the end, Purbo Asmoro gave the lakon a

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<sup>42</sup> I feel fortunate to have had access to many of the artifacts in this case: Soemanto's *padat* script, Tristuti's all-night script from 1995, and an audio of the Rebo Legèn performance. I am therefore able to confirm Purbo Asmoro's report of the development of his version. The audio recording came to me courtesy of Sri Joko Raharjo, Purbo Asmoro's nephew, who tracked it down from radio stations in Solo. Purbo Asmoro commissioned Tristuti

new title: *Mélik Nggéndhong Lali* (*Yearning Carries with it Misjudgment*). He developed an intensive all-night *garapan* version, which has since become one of his landmark creations.

In 2000, Anom Soeroto moved from Notodiningratan to a new home in Timasan, Pajang, Sukoharjo, on the southwestern outskirts of Solo proper. For the opening of his new home and arts complex, he asked Purbo Asmoro to perform for a fourth, and it turns out final, to date, Rebo Legèn. After the single-lakon *garapan* milestones of *Kunthi Pilih* (1989), *Ramabargawa* (1995), *Sumantri Ngèngèr* (1995), and *Mélik Nggéndhong Lali* (1998), Purbo Asmoro tried a new concept by combining three lakon into one. This compilation told the story of the fall of the Astina Kingdom during the Baratayuda War through the birth of Parikesit, heir to a new era. He wove together *Duryudana Gugur* (*The Death of Duryudana*), *Pandhawa Boyong* (*The Pandhawa are Brought to Astina*), and *Aswatama Nglandhak* (*Aswatama Digs a Tunnel*) and entitled the work *Sumilaking Pedhut Astina* (*The Dark Cloud Over Astina Lifts*). This was, by all reports, a breath-taking masterpiece of all-night *garapan* (see more details in Chapter 8). Prapto Panuju, Jakarta wayang critic and commentator, once said during an evening of chatting between friends at my home in Kemang, South Jakarta (February 2009):

There isn't a soul in the community who doesn't remember that amazing piece of work, either from attending, listening to rebroadcasts, or somehow getting ahold of the recording. And there isn't a soul in the community who doesn't have every scene emblazoned in their memory—dramatically, viscerally, musically. It was dynamic beyond imagine. And so new in every way. So new, yet so deeply classic. A quilter. That's what Mas Purbo is, an ingenious quilt-maker. The new. The old. This little piece from here. That little piece from there. Vignettes of *garap*. But seamless. Absolutely seamless. And the end result is not new, old, here, there, *garap* this, *garap* that. The result is Ki Purbo Asmoro.<sup>43</sup>

As of this debut, there was little question as to Purbo Asmoro's position in the world of *pedhalangan* as a pioneer, and so far the only practitioner of a new style

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to write scripts for him on a total of four occasions: for the lakon *Anggada Balik* (*Anggada Switches Loyalties*) in 1994, *Sumantri Ngèngèr* in 1995 discussed earlier, *Wahyu Darma* (*The Boon of Enlightened Conduct*) in 1997 for a performance at Pondok Tingal in Borobudur, and this final one for Rebo Legèn.

<sup>43</sup> A small group of friends had gathered at my house that night to discuss an upcoming performance by Purbo Asmoro, in which we had control over the choice of lakon. Interestingly enough, Panuju made this comment to support his argument against choosing *Sumilaking Pedhut Astina*, because he felt it was untouchable and somehow not possible to replicate the magic or historic nature of that Rebo Legi performance in 2000.

being referred to more and more as *garapan*. He continued to develop and hone the style in the years to come. Between 1998 and 2004 Purbo was hired frequently by the wayang philanthropist Kondang Sutrisno (who in 2015 was elected the head of PEPADI) in venues throughout Jakarta, for both mass and elite audiences. From 2004 to 2007 he performed in the Rejoso, Nganjuk area of East Java over 50 times, almost always on a Saturday night and before village audiences in the thousands, under the sponsorship of wayang enthusiast Joko Suprpto. From 2004 through to this writing he has performed half a dozen times per year in artistic-community venues in Solo such as the palaces, ISI, SMKI, and TBS (Taman Budaya Surakarta), under either my own sponsorship or with various overseas or publication-related projects. All of these bouts of frequently performing in one location, for the same sponsor, over a long period have challenged Purbo Asmoro to vary his *garapan*, and constantly be on the search for new lakon, new ways to perform standard lakon, and new content and commentary to insert into any lakon. Purbo commented on the contribution to his thinking this type of long-term, routine contract has had (Sanggar Suket, Oct 2010):

I once faced a test from a friend from Nganjuk in which I performed almost every Saturday night in the same place before the same audience. For some 50 wayang performances or more.<sup>44</sup> In the same place—like some sort of *kethoprak* troupe in residence. If that doesn't challenge your brain. Think about it. Hard, right? But, thank goodness, I was able to come up with, for example, a complex treatment of the story *Lairé Semar* (*The Birth of Semar*) because of that. I was at a loss, as the audience was the same over and over again, and such a massive audience at that. And they didn't change, just the same audience showing up for each wayang. I had to face the challenge.

In early 2006, Purbo was approached by the Lontar Foundation to document the all-night *garapan* style that he had made his trademark. The next three chapters use illustrations from the resulting recordings, to explore the specifics of Purbo Asmoro's style from 2005 to 2015 with regard to three aspects: the new vocabulary of *iringan* that supports every dramatic moment in his work (Chapter 5), the function and shape of Purbo Asmoro's prologues (Chapter 6), the way in which traditional, *padat*, and *hura-hura* material is woven into his all-night *garapan* performances to

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<sup>44</sup> The data I mentioned previously—about 50 times between 2004 and 2007 and almost always on a Saturday night—is from my detailed records. Purbo had estimated the correct total in his spontaneous comment (50 times) but was a little off on the “every Saturday night,” although there were times where he performed for two or three Saturday nights a month and then not the next month.

highlight poignant moments and a new kind of dramatic hierarchy (Chapter 7). This chapter has traced the development of Purbo Asmoro's contemporary-interpretive style (*pakeliran garapan sedalu*), which arose from his work with condensed style (*pakeliran padat*) during his time at ASKI. We will end here with Purbo's summary of this phenomenon (Balai Soedjatmoko, May 2013, Figure 4-8):

As my teacher Pak Bambang described earlier [concerning Rebo Legèn], we took *Kunthi Pilih* by Bapak Kardi, in *padat* form, and made it all-night. *Disewengèkaké*. I am quite certain that all-night *garapan* style started there, with my performance as the first one ever. Although there had perhaps been some uses of contemporary *garapan* before, these were placed in the opening of a wayang, the beginning. But as for going all the way to *tancep kayon*, my performance that night was the first. After the days of Pak Gendhon, as the concepts of *pakeliran padat* were being explored, we never paid much attention to what it could all be used for. But it turns out, even though we are in a very different era, and even though perhaps *pakeliran padat* never became popular in society, implementation of its concepts has been very effective. No denying it. Basically—and you should believe me here, no question—the concepts of *padat* have turned out to be highly effective when used in today's performances. In fact, truly extraordinary.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 4-8: A seminar held on all-night *garapan* style at Balai Soedjatmoko, Solo, May 2013. From left to right: Purbo Asmoro, Sigid Ariyanto, Setyaji, Bambang Suwarno.

<sup>45</sup> The original reads: *Sudah ta. Pokoké penjenengan kudu percaya teng kula, pun, konsep pakeliran padat itu jitu dilakukan sekarang. Memang luar biasa.*