

## **Behind the Shadows: Javanese *Wayang Kulit*, in Ramayana**

### **The Jokers**

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Semar, is said to be the reincarnation of a god or a god himself sent to earth as punishment for a mistake. Depicted simultaneously as male and female, he is seen as a symbol of wholeness - a counsel, teacher and guide for the good characters. Semar's eyes are always looking upwards, acting as a reminder of god and his power. Semar is also portrayed wearing batik clothing.

Gareng, the eldest son of Semar, has been said to either be adopted or created by Semar.

Gareng walks with a limp and has a crippled arm. He is small in physique and cross-eyed. Gareng tends to walk with his head down as a symbol to behave cautiously. Various stories have given explanation to this – one of them tells about Gareng's ambition to conquer other kingdoms. He, however, came to a standstill with an equally powered prince, now known as Petruk. They fought till both sustained injuries. This fight came to a halt with Semar's intervention. They were then transformed from princes to ugly and deformed individuals.

Petruk, the middle son, is known to be a happy character that is highly optimistic. Various stories have also been told of his being. One version states that he was created by Semar while Semar was worshipping, while others say that he was a handsome warrior together with Gareng. Another tells of his kingship of Ngrangcangkencana where defeat was eventually brought upon by Gareng.

Bagong, the youngest of the children, is depicted as short and fat, with a long but flat nose and big eyes. He has childish movements and is honest. It is said that Bagong was Semar's shadow, crafted to life by Sang Hyang Tunggal to accompany Semar on the earth during his banishment. Such is seen from the similarity in Semar and Bagong's movement during the performance.

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