

## THE ROLE OF AESTHETIC AUTHORITY IN THE SURAKARTA STYLE SERIMPI DANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*The Serimpi dance is a Javanese court dance that has been in existence since the Mataram era and is governed by various rules in both its function and performance. The dance, which is regarded as the property of the king, is traditionally performed inside the palace and has a duration of one hour. In order to preserve the existence of this dance outside the palace and offer the general public an opportunity to enjoy its performance, in the early 1970s, Pusat Kebudayaan Jawa Tengah (the cultural center for Central Java) used its authority to revitalize this dance in a different form. The artists involved in the process needed both courage and a clear concept to create a new form of Serimpi dance with a duration of fifteen minutes.*

*In order to discuss the process of creating the new Serimpi dance, a qualitative research method is used. A social approach with a theory of authority is used to analyze the background of the artists carrying out the revitalization, and an art approach with a creative concept is used to analyze the work process of the artists.*

*From the discussion, it can be seen how important it was for artists with authority to create a new Serimpi dance that could be enjoyed by the community outside the palace. The ideas and work methods employed by the artists to create this new form is usually referred to as pematatan (compaction or contraction).*

**Keywords:** Serimpi dance, Surakarta, aesthetic authority.

### INTRODUCTION

Surakarta is the name of a cultural city which has the status of a second level municipality and is situated in the province of Central Java. The city of Surakarta, which is also known as Solo, has two main cultural centres originating from the Mataram era, namely the Keraton Surakarta Hadiningrat and Kadipaten Mangkunegaran (both of which are royal courts). The Giyanti treaty in 1755 led to the Mataram Court Kingdom being divided into two courts – the Kasunanan Surakarta and Kasultanan Ngayogyakarta. As the main cultural centres of these two cities, Surakarta and Yogyakarta, the royal courts established their own different styles in several branches of the arts, including the art of dance.

When the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta was at the height of power, the arts flourished. Court employees, known as *abdi dalem*, were assigned special duties, such as *abdi dalem Langentaya*, who were employed as dancers or dance teachers in the palace. The names of these *abdi dalem* included Lurah Pamarditaya, Wigya Hambeksa, Kusuma Kesawa, Atmohutaya, Wirobratana, Sindhohardiman, and Wiryopradata, and they played a significant

role in the life of traditional Surakarta style dance (Rustopo, 1990: 149). The generation below them included dancers such as S. Ngaliman, S. Maridi, and Djoko Suhardjo, who also played an active role outside the palace walls in promoting and preserving the life of traditional arts, in particular traditional Surakarta style dance. As SD. Humardani once said, at an art seminar in Surakarta, traditional arts will only continue to exist and flourish throughout history at the hands of creative traditional maestros (1972:7). This statement implied that artists such as Ngaliman and Maridi, who had great charisma in their own field, would gain a positive response from their supporting community. They had the ability and authority to carry out creative acts in response to the needs of the arts during their own era. They possessed the aesthetic authority to respond to the needs of the arts at that time.

Surakarta style dance, which is also known as Javanese dance in Surakarta style, is usually referred to as traditional dance since it adheres closely to the various rules or principles that prevail. The starting point for traditional arts is related to rules (*waton*) such as the treatment of a medium or technique of implementation. Traditional dances such as the Serimpi were originally the property of the king and could only be witnessed by those involved in the performance and/or guests at the palace. In the book of *Wedhapradangga*, it is written that the first Serimpi dance was created by Paku Buwana V as the property of the king, as follows:

*Lajeng kagungan karsa amiwiti iyasa lelangen dalem beksa wanita; mirib beksa laguning badhaya, kawewahan wileding ukelipun. Katindakaken para kenya cacah sekawan; pinilihan ingkang dedeg pangadegipun sami pasariran ngronje, parigel ing solah. Inggih punika ingkang lajeng winasthan lelangen dalem sarimpi (Pra-djapangrawit, 1990: 110-111).*

In general, people outside the palace walls did not have access to the Serimpi dance. In the 1970s, using his authority as the King of Surakarta, Sinuhun Paku Buwono XII allowed the Bedhaya and Serimpi dances to be learned outside the palace walls. In their subsequent development outside the palace, these dances began to be performed for a variety of purposes, such as at weddings and other celebrations, for welcoming guests at various events, and as educational material. Although there were a number of differences in form, the treatment and performance of the dances still adhered to the existing rules. The Serimpi dance, which originally had a duration of one hour, was eventually shortened to a duration of only fifteen minutes. In this process, the role of aesthetic authority was extremely important and it was necessary to involve a number of dance experts or maestros in the creative process of repackaging this traditional dance form. Authority is the power or right of control of a person to act according to his or her role. Weber defines authority as an act of domination of a person to issue a command that will be obeyed by a group of people. He mentions three kinds of authority: legal rational, traditional, and charismatic (in George Ritzer, 2014: 140).

Serimpi is a group dance performed by four female dancers with a soft, gentle, or refined (*luruh*) character (Edi Sedyawati, 1981: 8). The book *Serat Pasindhen Badhaya* states that there were originally 11 Serimpi dances in the Keraton Surakarta. The names and dates when these dances were composed are as follows: Serimpi Gending Bondhan, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII; Serimpi Tamenggita, during the reign of Paku Buwana IX; Serimpi Gendhiyeng during the reign of Paku Buwana IX; Serimpi Glondongpring, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII; Serimpi Gambirsawit, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII; Serimpi Anglirmendung, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII; Serimpi Sangupati, during the reign of Paku Buwana IX; Serimpi Ludira Madura, during the reign of Paku Buwana V; Serimpi Lagu Dempel, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII; Serimpi Gandakusumo, during the

reign of Paku Buwana VIII; and Serimpi Lobong, during the reign of Paku Buwana VIII (Pradjapangrawit, 1990: 111, 124-128, 131, 138, 140).

As a court dance, the Serimpi uses the concept of tradition, which means that it is governed by certain predetermined rules that must be adhered to by all those involved. All the performers must abide by aesthetic domination. In terms of its concept and form, the Serimpi dance may not ignore any of these prevailing rules. In order to view the characteristics of the Surakarta style Serimpi dance, the following components should be observed: the dancers, dance structure, dance movements, floor patterns, *karawitan* or music, costume and make-up, and properties.

The Serimpi dance is performed by four teenage girls. From the point of view of its form, the Serimpi dance is a group dance that does not tell a particular story but depicts the beauty and skills exercised in the art of battle. The order of a performance consists of three sections: *maju beksan*, *beksan*, and *mundur beksan*. The quality of the movements displays a gentle character (*luruh*). The spatial patterns are framed by the concept of four, known as *paju pat lima pancer* (the pattern of a cube), and this forms the space and line of movement on the floor for the four dancers. The costumes worn by the dancers consist of long pieces of batik cloth wrapped around the lower part of the body and a sleeveless or strapless bodice (*mekak*). On the head they wear a headdress called *sanggul kadal menek* or *jamang*. Properties include a *cundrik* or small keris, a pistol, and a bow (*gendewa*). The dance music or *karawitan* uses a musical composition or *gending* in the form *ketuk loro kerep* or *ketuk papat kerep* continuing into a *ketawang* or *ladrang*, accompanied by a vocal melody.

## RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative research method was used to investigate the cultural phenomenon of the Surakarta style Serimpi dance. In order to observe the background and charisma of the artists, a social approach with a theory of authority was used. An art approach with a creative concept was used to explain the work methods of the artists in exploring and interpreting their ideas to create a new form of dance.

The field data was obtained using techniques of participant observation, interviews, and a literature study. A descriptive analysis was used to explain the form and components of the dance, and an interpretative analysis was used to explain the ideas and work process of the artists who created the new dance form.

## PUSAT KEBUDAYAAN JAWA TENGAH (PKJT)

The existence of the Serimpi dance as a form of traditional court dance has been adapted to meet the demands of the current era. The Serimpi dance that exists today outside the palace walls of the Keraton Surakarta has undergone a change in form but in principle it continues to follow the existing rules that govern its performance. The changes that were made to the Serimpi dance were the result of a creative work process carried out by a number of artists and described as *pemadatan* (compaction or contraction). The word *pemadatan* or *padat* (compact/contracted) means that the duration of the dance is shorter but it still retains the essence of the original form. This concept was implemented by reducing the duration of the performance from one hour to around ten or fifteen minutes. The way in which the duration was reduced was by eliminating the repetition of certain movements while ensuring that the basic movements that characterize the dance are still present. These movements include *sekarang laras*, *sekarang sekar suwun*, and *sekarang pistolan*. The musical accompaniment was also adapted to suit the shorter duration of the dance. The contracted form of the Serimpi dance is essentially a new version with a shorter duration (reduced from one hour to fifteen

minutes) which retains the essential content of the original dance. Visually, this means a reduction in the repetition of the particular *sekarán* (vocabulary of movement) used in each Serimpi dance. For example, *sekarán sekar suwun*, which is normally repeated twice, is only performed one time. In principle, care must be taken when reducing the number of *sekarán* so that the *sekarán* that remain are still sufficient to make up a complete dance. Several Serimpi dances have been treated with the concept of *pemadatan*, amongst others: Serimpi Sangupati, Serimpi Gondokusumo, Serimpi Ludiramadu, Serimpi Anglirmendung, and Serimpi Dempel.

The process of *pemadatan* began after the establishment of the Central Java Arts Center or Pusat Kebudayaan Jawa Tengah (PKJT) in Surakarta in 1970, as a government institution that was to be responsible for preserving the Indonesian culture. PKJT was located inside the palace walls and has a strong connection with the figure of Gendon Humardani. The youngest of four children of Humardani Djojosedarmo and Soenarti, Gendon was born in Solo, Central Java, on 30 June 1923. His birth name was Sedyono Djojokartika but as a child, he was given the nickname Gendon. His father was a wealthy businessman and his mother was the daughter of an *abdi dalem* from the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta. When Gendon was 15 years old, his mother died and he went to live with his father's younger brother, Mangkukartika.

In 1943, Gendon moved to Yogyakarta but a year later he moved again, this time to Jakarta, to study at the medical college Ika Dai Gaku. In December 1948, he went back to live in the home of Mangkukartika. In 1952, he married Berta. After the second war for independence, he returned to medical school, this time at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, and earned the degree of *doktorandus medicus* in 1959. From 1960-1961, he had the opportunity to study anatomy in England but failed to complete his studies. At that time, he was becoming more interested in the arts and subsequently went to study dance in the United States of America from 1961-1962. He was in fact no stranger to the arts and had first learned to dance at the age of 11. While he was at college in Jakarta, he joined a dance organization called Kridha Beksa Wirama, and in 1952, with a group of friends, he also formed a Students Cultural Community called Himpunan Siswa Budaya (HSB).

From 1970-1971, he was appointed head of PKJT and in 1975, he was appointed head of the arts academy Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia (ASKI) Surakarta, which is now known as Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta. At PKJT and ASKI, Gendon was constantly coming up with new ideas to develop the traditional arts. His students regarded him as a teacher who was strict and highly disciplined but also like to have fun. He had a strong charisma and was feared, respected, and at the same time adored by his students because of his firm yet affectionate nature towards them. Gendon, who was known to prefer a more casual appearance, died on 7 August 1983 and his remains are buried in the Astana Janti Cemetery in Klaten, Central Java.

The first shortened form of the Serimpi dance was created in the 1970s at PKJT on the initiative of Gendon Humardani, with the assistance of a number of his protégés, including Agus Tasman Ronoatmojo, Rusini, and Nora Kustantina Dewi. Some of these shortened Serimpi dances are still used today as teaching material for traditional Surakarta style dance classes at Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Surakarta. The legal authority that Gendon gave to his protégés to create a shorter, contracted form of the Serimpi dance was the authority he possessed as the head of PKJT and ASKI Surakarta. In carrying out their duty to create a new, shorter form of the Serimpi dance, his protégés were implementing their aesthetic authority while still paying attention to the prevailing traditions that adhered to the Serimpi dance.

## SERIMPI MANGGALA RETNA BY S. NGALIMAN

After the birth of the new compacted form of Serimpi during the era of Pusat Kebudayaan Jawa Tengah, another shortened form of the Serimpi dance was created by S. Ngaliman, a highly charismatic dance artist. This dance, Serimpi Manggala Retna, was created in 1973 and revised and perfected in 1983. Supadi Ngaliman was born in Sragen, a town in the province of Central Java, on 12 March 1919. He spent his entire life living in the kampong of Kemlayan in the city of Surakarta, which is only about 500 meters away from the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta. His primary education was gained at a Standard School in Surakarta, and he then continued his studies at the Karawitan Conservatory (Konservatori Karawitan, KOKAR), graduating in 1953. Since 1932, he had already been working at the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta as an *abdi dalem niyogo* (a court employee whose job is to play the gamelan). In 1943 he was promoted to *abdi dalem pengeprak* (the musician responsible for regulating the tempo) for the Bedhaya and Serimpi dances. In 1953, he was appointed to the position of *abdi dalem niyogo* once again, but this time was responsible for playing the *kendang* (drum), and given the position of Lurah Miji Pengendang, and awarded the title (*kekancingan*) of Tjondropangrawit from the palace.

S. Ngaliman learned to dance from the age of 10, at first with his older brother, Sutejo Tejopangrawit, and later with the teachers Suropto and Hardiman. When the Surakarta Cultural Association (Himpunan Budaya Surakarta, HBS) was established in 1950, he began to learn female dance styles, as well as the refined male *wireng* style, from the dance teacher at the Keraton Surakarta, KRT. Kusuma Kesawa. Another teacher, Wignyohambekso, taught him the Wireng Karno Tinanding and Panji Sepuh dances. In 1954, S. Ngaliman created his first dance, Prawiroguno, which was a solo male dance in a strong masculine style and with a military theme. At PKJT he learned 10 different Serimpi dances and 2 Bedhaya dances from the female teachers Nyi Sulomo and Nyi Darsosaputro. His artistic background and the environment in which he had grown up were important assets for S. Ngaliman's creative work in the field of dance and karawitan. His artistic experience as a dancer, gamelan musician (*pangrawit*), dance teacher, and karawitan teacher led him to become a maestro of dance who displayed great charisma in his work, his artistry as a dancer, and his fatherly manner as a dance teacher.

His treatment of the Manggala Retna dance was an action through which he was implementing his authority in the field of dance, or his aesthetic authority. His aesthetic authority was based on his belief that the Serimpi dance deserved to be more widely known by the general public outside the palace walls. He understood who had the authority to create a Serimpi dance and for this reason, he paid great attention to the dance patterns of existing Serimpi dances. With regard to his authority to create a Serimpi dance, this is in line with Wahyu Santoso Prabowo's thesis, which states that in the life of the palace, a high quality work of art, including dance, was usually created by a skilled artist from the palace, a maestro from the palace, or the king himself (1990: 50). In the book *Seni Tari Jawa*, it also states that there are two kinds of female group dance, namely Bedhaya and Serimpi, which are performed on important ceremonial occasions in the palace. These dances were created by dance experts at the command of the king (Papenhuyzen, C.B., 1989: 46).

Through Manggala Retna, S. Ngaliman wished to present the performance of a group of female dancers who were skilled in the art of battle. The duration of the dance is 15 minutes and the structure of performance retains the traditional form of *maju beksan*, *beksan*, and *mundur beksan*. The medium for the dance movements is based on the vocabulary of movement of existing Serimpi dances, using the *laras* of Serimpi Dempel. To create the impression of skill and agility in the art of battle, the movements used include *srisig*, *kengser*

*cepat*, as well as stabbing and dodging movements. The floor patterns for the spatial movement continue to be dominated by the pattern *paju papat*.

The properties used in this dance are *cundrik* and *dadap*, which are weapons for stabbing and dodging. The make-up and costumes for Manggala Retna use the *mekak* style of strapless bodices and *sanggul kadal menek* or *jamang* on the heads of the dancers.

The musical accompaniment does not use *pocapan*, or words uttered by the *pengeprak*. The accompaniment for the *beksan* section does not use a *gending* in the form *ketuk loro kerep* as was commonly used in other Serimpi dances. Instead, the music for the *beksan* is a *gending* in the form of a *ladrang*, namely *Ladrang Kembang Tanjung*, laras slendro *patet sanga*, continuing to a *gending* in the form of *ketawang*, namely *Ketawang Sumedang* laras slendro *patet sanga*. For the dancers' entrance and exit of the stage, another *gending* in the form of *ladrang* is used, namely *Ladrang Kagok Madura*, laras slendro *patet sanga* in *irama lancar*.

Observing the process through which the dance Manggala Retna was created, the aesthetic authority used by S. Ngaliman can be seen in the use of the *cundrik* and *dadap* as properties for the dance. The dance music, meanwhile, does not use a *gending* in the form *ketuk loro kerep*, as in the existing tradition, but instead uses *gending* in the form of *ladrang* and *ketawang* which are much shorter.

### SERIMPI JAYANINGSIH BY SUNARNO PURWOLELONO

Sunarno was born in Boyolali on 14 May 1955 and attended primary school in the village of Semono Sambu in the district of Boyolali. He was the eldest of three children and his father's name was Singodimejo. Sunarno began to learn dance at the age of 11 with one of his uncles in the district of Pati, Central Java. After finishing Junior High School in 1969, he continued his studies at the Karawitan Conservatory (KOKAR) in Surakarta. In 1973 he entered ASKI Surakarta where at first he studied in the Karawitan Department, graduating in 1979, and then continued in the Dance Department, earning his second degree in 1981. He completed his master's degree at ISI Surakarta in 2009 and not long afterwards, in 2011, he passed away. Sunarno was a lecturer at ISI Surakarta from the time it was still known as ASKI.

From 1977, Sunarno specialized as a performer in the strong masculine style of dance at Pusat Kebudayaan Jawa Tengah. At PKJT he was also well known for his dance skills, especially in his role as Menakjinggo. His artistry enabled him to travel widely to perform on various arts missions with a group from PKJT. In addition to performing, he was also a talented choreographer, creating his first work, Sidopakso, in 1973. His experience and achievements in the field of dance gave him great charisma which was recognized by friends, students, and audiences.

Serimpi Jayaningsih was created by Sunarno in 1992 and is coloured by Yogyakarta style dance. The source of the idea for this work was the figure of Banowati. It is a tale of her unrequited love for Harjuna. Banowati agrees to marry Duryudana out of respect for her parents. The feeling portrayed in this dance is one of Banowati's inner conflict and her love for Harjuna. The name Jayaningsih itself come from the words *jaya* and *sih*, with the infix *ing*. *Jaya* means victory, while *sih*, or *asih*, means love. Hence, Jayaningsih means the victory of love.

In terms of its shape or form, Serimpi Jayaningsih is a group dance performed by five female dancers. The spatial patterns and line of movement of the dancers are still based on the traditional *pajupat/paju papat* pattern. Sunarno's courage to use five dancers instead of four is an example of his aesthetic authority as a choreographer.

In his treatment of the dance, Sunarno remains oriented to the structure of *patrap*. One example of this is the use of *mucang kanginan* as is used in soft style female dance forms such as Bedhaya and Serimpi (Sastra Kartika 1979: 38). The motifs of movement used in this dance include *laras Anglir Mendung* and *laras Sukarsih*, which are taken from the vocabulary of the Surakarta style Serimpi Anglir Mendung and Sukarsaih dances. In addition to the vocabulary of Surakarta style, Sunarno also uses movements from Yogyakarta style dance, including *laras nggroda* and *lampah semang*. These movements are arranged according to the traditional performance structure of the Serimpi dance, namely *maju beksan*, *beksan*, and *mundur beksan*.

The *beksan* section is the main part of the dance and contains the main *sekaran*, in this case *laras Sukarsih* and *Anglir Mendung*, and from Yogyakarta style *laras nggroda* and *ridong enjer*. In this section, it is clear that Sunarno uses his artistry to implement his aesthetic authority in the interpretation of movement to present a clear form. The inclusion of Yogyakarta style vocabulary aims to create a sense of movement that is stronger and more dynamic.

The musical accompaniment for Jayaningsih is *gending Jayaningrum ketuk loro kerep minggah ketuk papat kerep* continuing to *Ketawang Jayaningrum laras pelog patet barang*. This *gending* was composed by Rahayu Supanggah, an internationally renowned composer and professor at ISI Surakarta. In the final section, *mundur beksa*, when the dancers are leaving the stage, the gamelan plays *Ladrang Winangun*. The concept for the musical accompaniment is still based on the traditional accompaniment of the Serimpi dance from the palace.

Four of the dancers wear black bodices while the other dancer wears red, and all five also wear a *jamang* headdress.

It can be seen from the various elements of the dance how Sunarno is interpreting the theme of Banowati's unrequited love and inner conflict through the movements and floor patterns. Sunarno has the courage to add to the traditional pattern of *paju pat* a pattern of *lima pancer* through the inclusion of a fifth dancer. He also uses a number of Yogyakarta style dance movements to present a stronger and more dynamic feel to the aesthetic of the Surakarta style dance.

## CONCLUSION

The existence of the Serimpi dance as a traditional dance form is determined by a number of predetermined rules that should be adhered to by the dance artists. Although implicitly this means that the dance it should not be altered, it has been necessary to make changes to its form in order to adapt to the conditions of the present day. If we look at the journey of the Surakarta style Serimpi dance from its creation inside the palace to its existence outside the palace walls, it has undergone a number of changes in terms of form.

When the Serimpi dance existed only inside the palace, it was the role of the king, as the one holding supreme authority, to determine the function and form of the dance in connection with its aesthetic beauty. After the dance started to develop outside the palace, it was artists who held a good reputation as choreographers that had the aesthetic authority to interpret the sense of beauty that was recognized in their own era. These artists has the aesthetic authority to determine the form of dance to be performed. From the time the Serimpi dance first appeared outside the palace walls, a number of cultural experts played a part in implementing their aesthetic authority. Gendon Humardani not only had the legal authority of being the head of PKJT in the 1970s; in addition he was also deemed to have great charisma by his fellow artists and students. As a child born into the environment of the court tradition, he also

had an inherent traditional authority. With this authority, he was able to implement his aesthetic authority, with the assistance of his protégés, to create a new shorter, compacted form of the Serimpi dance.

S. Ngaliman was at one time an *abdi dalem* in the Keraton Surakarta, and as a traditional artist he earned the title of maestro. He also had a strong charisma that was recognized by all those around him. As an *abdi dalem* who worked as a musician, he adhered strictly to the rules that governed his tradition. He used his experience or traditional authority to interpret the aesthetic feel he wished to present in his work, Serimpi Manggala Retna. By using properties that were not commonly used in the Serimpi dance, namely *cundik* and *dadap*, he was able to treat the military theme as a symbol for overcoming the complexities of human life, which was an innovation in the treatment of the Serimpi dance.

Likewise, as a young artist, Sunarno Purwolelono already displayed a strong charisma, and he developed this through his academic education to create a new form of Serimpi that was given the name Serimpi Jayaningsih. In this work, he applied his aesthetic authority by including elements of Yogyakarta style dance movements to achieve a strong, agile, and dynamic feel. Sunarno's courage should also be noted in his use of a fifth dancer in his work, to create a pattern of *lima pancer* within the spatial pattern of *paju papat*.

The role of aesthetic authority as implemented by various stakeholders, including officials and charismatic artists or choreographers, has ensured that the Serimpi dance is still recognized today as a traditional dance form and its presence is still eagerly awaited by its proponents in each new era.



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