

Ritual and Struggle: Movement of Banyuwangi Gandrung Dance from the Colonial Era to the Reformation

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the Gandrung dance from a historical perspective from the Colonial to Reformation period in Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia. The origins of the Gandrung dance cannot be separated from the historical roots of dance in Indonesia. The birth of the Gandrung dance was intended to clean the village by worshiping Dewi Sri or the Goddess of Rice as an expression of gratitude for the Using ethnic group for abundant harvests and for bringing prosperity to the community. Village clean ritual activities initially used male Gandrung dancers. The process of changing a Gandrung dancer from male to female contains metaphysical elements that are closely related to spiritual values. In the colonial period until the Reformation, Gandrung dance was no longer focused on as a dance art that contained mere ritual values but also contained political values and commercial entertainment. Gandrung Dance is not only involved in political activities but also tourism performances. The various changes that have occurred in the Gandrung dance show mean that the movement of the Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi has taken advantage of changes to be able to continue to survive amidst global cultural flows.

Keywords: Gandrung Dance, Using Ethnicity, Banyuwangi, Change

INTRODUCTION

Research on dance is very interesting to do because, through dance, we can see the strongest threads of continuity in Indonesian culture. Dance is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression for humans. It could even be said that no history of human civilization has passed without dancing. The origins of the Gandrung dance cannot be separated from the historical roots of dance in Indonesia. Through historical documents, it can be traced how the art of dance grew and developed in Indonesia. These documents are in the form of dance scenes on temple reliefs or other sacred buildings. On the wall reliefs of Borobudur Temple, several very distinctive dance scenes can be seen and continuity in the form and function of dance is found. Likewise, royal inscriptions mention the art of dance in the 11th century. Currently, it is estimated that there are more than 200 different dance styles in Indonesia (Holt, 2000: 115-135), one of which is the Gandrung Banyuwangi dance belonging to the Used ethnic group.

The ethnic group is spread across several sub-districts in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, namely: Srono District, Singojuruh District, Cluring District, Songgon District, Kabat District, Giri District, Glagah

District, Rogojampi District, Banyuwangi District, and Temuguruh District. According to Sutarto in Parlindungan (2007), there are 32 cultural events held by the Used ethnic group, 18 of which are arts, including dance. The emergence of dance in Used culture is part of Used ethnic rituals that are used to accompany these rituals. The resulting dances are believed to have magical powers. The influx of Hindu/Buddhist, Islamic, and Western cultural influences brought cultural acculturation to the diversity of dances and elements of creativity in them. Dance performing arts for the Using ethnic groups have different roles and functions, for example, the Gandrung dance is often performed as a dance to welcome guests.

Research on Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi Regency has attracted the interest of researchers, for example, the work of Rochmadhani (2015) entitled “Gandrung Dance in Banyuwangi 1950-1976”, although Rochmadhani examines the existence of Gandrung dance from a historical perspective, the explanation is only from 1950 to 1976. Furthermore, research from Mahadewi (2019) entitled “Representation of Eroticism in Banyuwangi Gandrung Dance (Roland Barthes’ Semiotic Analysis of Banyuwangi Gandrung Dance)”, examines the aspect of eroticism in Gandrung dance from society’s perspective. Mahadewi’s research is not from a historical perspective.

Previous research shows that writings about Gandrung dance have attracted the attention of researchers, but no one has specifically discussed Gandrung dance from a historical perspective over a long period from the Colonial period to the Reformation period. Comprehensive research is urgent because the emergence of Gandrung dance has undergone many changes, not only for ritual activities but has become a commercial performing art for tourism purposes, for example, the Gandrung Sewu Festival. As one of the icons of the Using tribe, the Gandrung dance cannot be separated from its history, so it would be a shame if information related to the Gandrung dance would one day be lost and become a story of the past without historical records. In this way, research on Gandrung dance from the Colonial to Reformation periods can fill the scarcity of publications and become documentation for writing cultural history.

This research uses a historical method that includes four stages, namely source collection, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Storey, 2011). Research sources were obtained from official publications, relevant journal articles, books, and so on. This research will examine the following questions: how is the construction of the Using ethnic group as a community of creators of Gandrung dance, what is the process of the emergence of Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi, and how has Gandrung Dance developed from the Colonial era to the Reformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using Ethnic Construction

Understanding the Gandrung dance cannot be done without comprehensively understanding the construction of the Using ethnic identity as a community that created the Gandrung dance. Using in the context of ethnicity includes Javanese sub-ethnicity, so that at a macro level their culture is parallel to Javanese culture. The existence of the Using ethnic group is closely related to the history of the Blambangan Kingdom (now called Banyuwangi Regency). In the 1700s, the Blambangan Kingdom was controlled by the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), giving rise to resistance from the Blambangan people known as the Puputan Bayu War on December 18, 1771. The Puputan Bayu War was led by Mas Rempek (who later became known as Pangeran Jagapati or incarnation of Wong Agung Wilis) and lasted until 1772. The Puputan Bayu War killed a VOC commander named Lieutenant Kornet Tiene (Soegianto, et al: 1997) and devastated Blambangan until many of its residents fled to Bali. There is a small portion of the Blambangan population from the lower strata who did not participate (sing) evacuate. This is what uses terminology, which comes from the word sing. Interpreted as people who “did not” take refuge during the Puputan Bayu War, known as the Using people as heirs of Blambangan culture and traditions (Saputra, 2001: 261).

The prominent characteristic of Blambangan culture and traditions is that it is syncretic, that is, it can absorb and accept the culture of other communities which is re-produced into the culture of the Using ethnic group. Apart from that, it is also accommodating to supernatural, supernatural, and magical powers. The syncretism of the Islamic religion with the belief in *danyang* (spirits) is seen in ritual ceremonies, for example, *seblang*, *kebo-keboan*, while the syncretism in art is seen in art, for example: *gandrung*, *jinggoan*, and *kendang kempul* (Saputra, 2001: 261). Using ethnicity is physically identical to Javanese people in general, including skin color, face, hair, height, and other physical characteristics. In its development, the Using ethnic group built its identity construction, as follows.

First, the Using ethnic group uses Using language in daily interactions. According to Beatty (1999), the Using people are descendants of the remnants of the population in 1768. The term Using Tribe was given by immigrants from Central Java in South Banyuwangi around the 18th century to refer to the Banyuwangi people because they used the word “using” to refer to the word “no”, which is different from the word “*óra*” in Javanese. Another characteristic of Using language is the insertion of “y” in its pronunciation (Suprpta, 1993: 2-3). Thus, the initial construction of Using’s identity is the same as the construction of Javanese ethnic identity. One historical proof of this similarity of identity can be traced from the similarity of the genealogical roots of the Using language with the Javanese language which originates from Old Javanese. In 1163, Using language and Javanese language underwent development. In some Using language vocabularies, there is still use of Old Javanese vocabulary, thus confirming that Using language is closer to Old Javanese than (new) Javanese to Old Javanese (Basri, 2008: 230).

Second, Using ethnicity has dynamic and open characteristics. The dynamic and open nature of the Using ethnic group can be seen from the syncretic characteristics of the Blambangan culture, namely being able to accept and absorb the culture of other communities so that it can be reproduced into the culture of the Using ethnic group (Sutarto, 2008: 131). Thus, the acculturation of original cultural elements with elements of foreign culture has demonstrated an assimilative process, so that the culture belonging to the Using ethnic group becomes more creative, one of which is the *Gandrung* dance which includes elements of modern music in the form of the violin, so that the music accompanying the *Gandrung* dance is distinctive and unique.

Third, the Using ethnic group has the characteristics of being careless, sloppy, arrogant, and lacking in manners (Saputra, 2004: 1). Using’s identity building, namely *aclak* (pretentious), *jasak* (arrogant), *bingkak* (indifferent), and lack of manners are negative constructions attached to the Javanese ethnic group. This building is thought to have emerged as a result of the involvement of Using Artists in the People’s Cultural Institute (Lekra), a left-leaning organization of artists and cultural figures which was founded on August 17, 1950.

The emergence of the Gandrung Dance

Gandrung Dance is one of the typical arts belonging to the Using ethnic group and has been recognized as an icon of Banyuwangi Regency. The *Gandrung* dance first appeared when people cleared forests on the eastern tip of Java Island to make way for settlements. The area was named Blambangan (the name before it became Banyuwangi). *Gandrung* dance is spread in several villages including *Kemiren* Village, *Oleh Sari* Village, *Cungking* Village, and other villages in Rogojampi District, Banyuwangi Regency which is home to the Using community (Wiyata, 2013:20). The word *Gandrung* comes from the Javanese *Kawi* language which means “to love, be in love, longing.” The core meaning of the word *Gandrung* is love. The appearance of the *Gandrung* dance is intended to clean the village by worshiping *Dewi Sri* or the Goddess of Rice as an expression of gratitude for the Using ethnic group for the abundant harvest and for bringing prosperity to the Using community. Thus, *Gandrung* dance has religious content and animist dynamism, so mystification and ritual values are attached to *Gandrung* dance (Sauri, 2022).



Map of Blambangan (now called Banyuwangi)

(<https://vebiola2105.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/peta-banyuwangi.jpg>)

The ritual activity in the form of cleaning the village uses male Gandrung dancers aged between 7 and 14 years. Men who become Gandrung dancers generally wear clothes that are assumed to represent women's feminine values, with a long cloth made into a shawl (sampur) and a breast covering (jaret) made of batik cloth. The head covering is in the form of a crown (omprok) plus jewelry behind the ears, as well as bracelets and rings on the hands. Gandrung dancers also use a fan when dancing the Gandrung dance (Scholte, 1927: 149). During the reign of the 2nd regent of Banyuwangi named Tumenggung Mas Wiraguna II in 1780, the Gandrung dance reached its existence at the same time as the Podo Nonton poem appeared, as the standard Gandrung dance song (Anoegrajekti, 2010:176-179). The procedure for performing the Gandrung dance at this time was carried out by four men who performed together by dancing and singing four lines of poetry to each other in turn (Pigeaud, 1938). The last and quite famous male Gandrung dancer is named Marsan. Before Marsan died, Gandrung men's performances began to fade, the cause was the arrival of Islam, which forbade men from dancing. The dominance of the male Gandrung dance tradition lasted until 1890 before their role was replaced by women. The process of changing Gandrung dancers from male to female contains metaphysical elements that are closely related to spiritual values.

In 1895, the first female gandrung dancer named Semi appeared, who was still ten years old at that time. According to the story believed by the people of Banyuwangi, Semi suffered from a serious illness that was difficult to cure, even though his mother, Mak Midah, had taken him everywhere for treatment. Amid Mak Midah's despair, she made a nadar (promise) to make Semi a dancer (seblang) if she recovered from her illness. By the power of God, Semi was able to recover after Mak Midah's nadar was pronounced, so Semi became a seblang, as well as the beginning of a female Gandrung dancer. The gandrung tradition carried out by Semi was then followed by his younger sisters by using the first name Gandrung as the stage name for their performances. At that time, the Gandrung dance could only be danced by Mak Midah's descendants. Semi dances to the rhythm, melody, and poetry of Gandrung Men, although he also sings songs composed by his mother. The piece made by Mak Midah was sung by Semi in line with Semi's acceptance as a Gandrung dancer by the people of Chungking Village (Sauri: 2022).

Development of Gandrung Dance

The Gandrung Dance is one of the cultural heritages of the Blambangan Kingdom, which since its inception was intended as a ritual to clean the village as a form of community gratitude to Dewi Sri, or the Goddess of Rice for the abundant harvest. In its development, the function of Gandrung dance has developed into a performing dance art. During the Dutch colonial period, the Gandrung dance, apart from being a performance, was also used by warriors to convey moral messages to society through the poetry they performed to maintain their enthusiasm to fight against Dutch colonialism. One of the poems that is full of moral messages about the struggle against Dutch colonialism is the poem Podo Nonton. The meaning of raising the spirit of resistance against colonialism is contained in the lyrics which are cryptic or satirical (Endrayadi, 2019). Syair Podo Nonton is a standard song to accompany the Gandrung dance. Thus, ontologically, every Gandrung dance performance always fights against colonialism.

Since male Gandrung dancers have been replaced by female Gandrung dancers, standards have emerged (conditions that must be met) regarding the age and status of female Gandrung dancers. Initially, the standard for female Gandrung dancers was that they had to be young, unmarried, and still descendants of Mak Midah. However, in 1926 it was discovered that female Gandrung dancers were married and were no longer considered to be violating the norms that apply in the Using Banyuwangi ethnic group. This means that Gandrung dance is no longer focused on as a dance art that contains mere ritual values but also contains commercial values. The various changes that occurred in Gandrung show meaning that Gandrung dance art utilizes changes to develop and survive (Sauri: 2022). The Gandrung dance performance at that time was divided into three parts: jejer, paju, and seblang-seblang. The opening scene of the show or Jejer lasts about an hour without involving the audience. Jejer is intended as a dance of respect for the host and all the guests present, as well as so that the celebration runs smoothly. In the paju scene, the duration is around 5 hours involving the audience dancing in pairs, while the seblang-seblang lasts around 2 hours as the closing of the Gandrung dance performance without involving the audience.



Banyuwangi Gandrung Dance Performance 1910-1930(<https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl>, Inventory number : TM-10026816)

In the era of the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence until the 1950s, many cultural organizations were established, one of which was the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra) which was founded on August 17, 1950. Lekra is a wing organization (undertow) of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as a concrete

manifestation of efforts to expand understanding. socialist realism among artists, cultural figures, and the people. (Wijaya, 2011: 2-4). At this time, many Gandrung Banyuwangi artists became members of Lekra and often held performances at the invitation of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

In his journey, Lekra has mixed art and practical politics. It is difficult to separate a clear line between the people who want to be fought for by true artists and the people who want to be fought for by activist artists and PKI participants. This closeness is more than just a relationship in terms of performance invitations. Gandrung studios in Banyuwangi at that time received a lot of help from Lekra. Generally, this assistance takes the form of equipment maintenance and purchasing new equipment. Many Gandrung artists participated in Lekra and PKI events, both at local and national levels. (Raharjo, 2016). On September 30, 1965 (G 30 S) a national tragedy occurred which was allegedly carried out by the Indonesian Communist Party, so that as a result of the G 30 S incident, Gandrung artists became isolated because they were considered PKI and remained silent until 1970 as a result of the New Order regime's environmentally clean political policies (Anoegrajekti: 2007: 22).

Many of the Gandrung artists were "lost", kidnapped, or fled for fear of being accused of being involved in the G30 S incident. As a result, Gandrung dance experienced a period of decline. Gandrung dance performances were limited and supervised by the New Order government through the Indonesian Armed Forces (ABRI). As time went by, the Gandrung dance was taken over by ABRI, so this art began to come back to life. The Regent of Banyuwangi, Lt. Col. Joko Supaat, in July 1974 held the Banyuwangi Gandrung Festival for the first time to develop the Gandrung dance. From 1974 until the end of the New Order in 1998, gandrung dance was again used as entertainment and a tool of political propaganda for the government through the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar). In the Gandrung performances at that time, many political messages were included, for example, development messages or programs being implemented by the government. The government is also trying to package the Gandrung show for tourism purposes. It was during this period that more than one role of sinden (singer) and dancer emerged. If previously Gandrung dancers also sang (sinden), during the New Order era many Gandrung dancers could not sing. (Raharjo, 2016).

On May 21, 1998, the Reform Order was born to replace the New Order. Since the Reformation era, the orientation of Gandrung dance has increasingly been directed towards tourism interests. This was marked by the issuance of Banyuwangi Regent's Decree No. 173 dated 31 December 2002 concerning Gandrung art as the Banyuwangi Tourism Mascot. Various activities are carried out by the Banyuwangi Regency Government to increase tourist visits, including the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival, Banyuwangi Jazz Festival, and Tour de Ijen, as well as including Gandrung dance as local content in the school curriculum in Banyuwangi Regency. The Banyuwangi Regency Government also continues to strive to develop supporting facilities and infrastructure, starting from building an international airport, developing hotels, and various other supporting aspects in the Banyuwangi tourism sector.

CONCLUSION

Dance is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression for humans. The origins of the Gandrung dance cannot be separated from the historical roots of dance in Indonesia. The Gandrung dance is one of the symbols of the remaining development of the use of ethnic arts and culture in Banyuwangi Regency. The Gandrung dance, which first appeared as a ritual to clean the village or show gratitude for the ethnic group Dewi Sri or Dewi Padi, has experienced many developments. Since Semi's appearance as the first female Gandrung dancer, the Gandrung dance, which was originally danced by male dancers, has had its role replaced. From the colonial period to the Reformation, Gandrung dance was also used as a political commodity. In the colonial era, the Gandrung dance was used by fighters to raise the moral message of the fighters against colonialism through the Podo Nonton poetry. Furthermore, from the beginning of

independence until the New Order, Gandrung dance was also used by political parties to gain sympathizers. The involvement of Gandrung artists in the Lekra organization to the point that they were considered to be involved in the events of the 30 September 1965 Movement (G 30 S), gave Gandrung art a vacuum in its activities. Since the leadership of the Regent of Banyuwangi, Lt. Col. Joko Supaat, the Gandrung dance revived with the holding of the Banyuwangi Gandrung Festival in 1974. From the Joko Supaat era until the end of the New Order in 1998, Gandrung dance was used as entertainment and political propaganda for the government through the Golongan Karya Party (Golkar). The orientation of Gandrung dance towards entertainment and tourism interests occurred in the Reformation era in 1998. At its peak, Gandrung dance appeared in various activities, including the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival (BEC) and Gandrung Sewu. The various changes that occur in Gandrung show meaning that Gandrung dance art utilizes changes to develop and survive amidst the onslaught of global culture.

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