

# **Tradition & Preservation Dances in Indonesia: Dances at Mangkunegaran Palace, in Surakarta, Central Java**

***By Maria Darmaningsih. M.Ed***

The word 'tradition' comes from the Latin word *traditum*, which means the heritage of the past. Tradition is what past generations transmit to future generations. According to Sal Murgianto, tradition is not something to be discarded or replaced by innovations. Tradition continuously grows and changes. There is no community that only lives on the heritage that has been left by previous generations. Tradition will be sustained if the community still needs it for their life, but tradition will be neglected if the community doesn't hold on to it any longer. (*Sal Murgiyanto,2004:2*)

There are many traditional dances in Indonesia corresponding to the different cultures in each province. Javanese dance is one of the traditional dance forms that is still developing. Javanese traditional dance is native to Central Java and East Java. Yogyakarta and Surakarta are the centers of Javanese traditional dancing. They are the capital cities of two former kingdoms. Two royal palaces still exist in each city. In Yogyakarta there is the Hadiningrat Palace and the Pakualam Palace. In Surakarta there is the Surakarta Palace and Mangkunegaran Palace. Each palace has its own unique dances, such as Wayang Wong from the Yogyakarta Palace, which in Solo was developed further inside as well as outside the Palace. The Palace of Surakarta is known for its Bedhaya Ketawang traditional and sacred dance, which is still performed once a year at the anniversary of the King's coronation. This dance was created by His Highness Sultan Agung in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In this paper, I would like to present an example of a dance tradition that is continuously maintained and sustained, but also continuously developing, as a vehicle of artistic expression. This is what we find at the Mangkunegaran Palace in Surakarta (which is also known as the city of Solo).

The Mangkunegaran Palace was founded in 1757 by Raden Mas Said who was known as Prince Sambernyawa and who became Prince Arya Mangkunegara I. At the Mangkunegaran Palace, traditional dance reached its peak of development at the time of KGPAA Mangkunegara the VII in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One famous genre which was developed at the Mangkunegaran Palace is Langendriyan, a dance drama in which the dialog is sung. Langendriyan is thus a Javanese dance-opera.

There are similarities between the Mangkunegaran and Yogyakarta dance styles. This is the result of a marriage between the two royal families. Mangkunegara VII married Ratu Timur, known as the Eastern Queen, who was one of the daughters of Hamengkubuwono VIII. Ratu Timur brought with her several Yogyakarta Palace dancers to the Mangkunegaran palace, which introduced some Yogyakarta elements into the Mangkunegaran style. As we can see the dance costume uses a fully covered bodice, not *dodot* or *kemben* such as a bustier. The dance movements have also been influenced by Yogyakarta style. Today, the Mangkunegaran palace remains one of the centers of Javanese dance, where lessons are given every day for children in primary school, for older students, and even university students. They often do research, finding dances described in Javanese manuscripts, and reviving or adapting them.

Today we will present 3 kinds of traditional dance: Serimpi Muncar (a female dance), Bedhaya Suryosumirat (a female dance) and Bedhoyo Dirodometo (a male dance) as an example of how tradition is sustained and at the same time also develops to suit the needs of the community.

Serimpi Muncar is performed by four dancers. This unique and attractive dance was created by KGPAA Mangkunegara VII. Two dancers are dressed in Chinese costume and the other two are dressed in the Mangkunegaran style Serimpi costume. Serimpi Muncar is based on the story of two princesses, Adanenggar

and Kelasworo, who are fighting over a prince named Wong Agung Menak. Adanenggar loses the fight. All of the dance movements are Mangkunegaran-style, except the movements of the two Chinese women which are the choreographer's interpretation of Chinese dance, where the head continuously moves. The costume is also an impression of Chinese culture.

Bedhaya Suryosumirat was created around 1990 by Sulistyo Tirtokusumo, and is performed by 9 dancers. The first part depicts female soldiers in Raden Mas Said's war against the colonizers. The costume is similar to the Yogyakarta style costume, and the properties that are used are guns. Bedhaya Suryosumirat has become a ritual dance for the Jumenengan, the annual commemoration of the King's coronation.

Bedhaya Diradameta, was created in 2007 based on a song text found in a manuscript of the Babak Nitik, a daily record of events in the life of KGPAA Mangkunagoro I, which was written by a woman who was his personal assistant. During his war against the colonizers, he organized dance performances including Bedhaya Anglir Mendhung, Bedhaya Sukapratama and Bedhaya Diradometa. Neither the choreography nor the music of Bedhaya Dirodometo have been preserved, only the song text. Based on this, Mangkunagaran dancers and dance teachers at the Indonesian Arts Institute of Surakarta constructed the dance in traditional style. Daryono was responsible for the choreography, and Wahyu Santoso was responsible for the gamelan accompaniment. Since only the song text has survived from 1840, they used their creativity to develop the dance.

The other name of Bedhaya Dirodometo is Bedhaya Kakung ('kakung' means male). This is very unusual, because all other Bedhaya dances are performed by female dancers.

Bedhaya Diradameta is a dance about survival; it depicts the effort to drive away the colonizer who was invading the country. The struggle was not always easy.

The dance illustrates some of the scenes of the war, some heroic, some sad. This dance uses arrows and spears.

The dance movements of Dirodometo are based on existing Mangkunegaran dances, but the choreography has been designed to suit the story and arranged according to current dance standards.

Another example of how the Mankunegaran palace preserves the tradition is its dance notation project. The existing notation is not very specific, as it was written before many of the dance movements were given names. The palace is now re-notating these dances using today's more detailed descriptions.

The Mangkunegaran dances are symbols of the legitimacy of the palace, which nowadays is a center of education and preservation of Javanese culture & art. The palace keeps exploring the dances notated in ancient manuscripts and adapting them to the current era. Preservation in the Mangkunegaran palace doesn't mean being trapped in the old, but interpreting the tradition in light of the needs, values and philosophy of the present day.

*Sal Murgiyanto,*

*2004 : Tradisi dan Inovasi : Beberapa Masalah Tari di Indonesia, Jakarta, Wedatama Widya Sastra.*

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***Maria Darmaningsih M.Ed***

Was born in Jakarta, 1956 and trained in Javanese Classical dance since 6 years old, Then she practiced Bali and Sundanese dance. Graduated from Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Jogjakarta, major in Dance Choreography in 1979. Then graduated from Jakarta Institute of the Arts (IKJ) in Dance Anthropology in 1987, and has been a lecture at IKJ ever since. She did her Master in Dance Education from University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. Now she is Vice Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at IKJ and Director of Indonesian Dance Festival (IDF).

***Rury Avianti***

Was born in Surakarta, 1977 and is trained in Javanese Classical dance since 5 years old in Surakarta. Graduated from Surakarta Arts University, 2000, major in Dance. Has collaborated with Sen Hea Ha (Korea), Maziah Omar (London), etc and has been performed in Asia & Europe. She has been dancing in Mangkunegaran palace since 1987 and then became the core dance of its palace. She is a volunteer for Salihara Community, which engaged in Performing Arts, Literature and Fine Arts in Jakarta ([www.salihara.org](http://www.salihara.org))