

COSMOLOGY AND AESTHETICS OF THE JAVANESE DANCE

BY BEN SUHARTO

This paper will explore the cosmology of Javanese dance and will focus on analysing Yogyanese dance from the court city of Yogyakarta. By expanding the meaning of the word taya (dance) and mataya (to dance) into another level of meaning, this paper will examine the relationship of the dance performer as microcosmos, with the Supreme Being, the macrocosmos. The unification of microcosmos (human being) and macrocosmos (Supreme Being) is known in Java as the concept of 'Manunggaling kawala-Gusti'.

The discussion of the cosmology of the Javanese dance will lead to the theoretical conceptualization of a cosmic relationship. The following analysis will focus on the conceptualization of the cosmic relationship with reference to practice. Interpreting this holistically requires a certain way of thinking. (Kaeppler said that the ways of thinking about the arts, which includes the pattern of rules by which they are judged, are mostly determined by the cultural tradition of which "they are a part." She also said that aesthetics could be defined as ways of thinking about such forms of art including the dance [Kaeppler 1971: 175]). Most of the exploration in this paper is based on my personal intuitive experience which gradually develops into reasoning. In other words, it is a process from feeling to the finding of ways of thinking.

The following discussion consists of several points which include: Javanese terminology for dance; the significance of the lack of a term synonymous with 'dancer'; transformation, the shifting of different levels of consciousness; the mandalas of *sastra mataya* (the knowledge of dance), *sastra wirasa munggend joged mataram* (the knowledge of *wirasa* in the *joged mataram*), *sastra srimpi wiragadadi* (the knowledge of four cardinal points in developed movement), *sastra srimpi wirage tanpa wargenan* (the knowledge of four cardinal points in the movements without limitation).

JAVANESE TERMINOLOGY FOR DANCE

Several words such as *joged* (*ngoko*, low Javanese), *beksa* (*krama*, high

Javanese), *igel* (*Kawi*, old Javanese), and *taya* (*Kawi*) exist in the Javanese language which refer to dance. Among those terms, *taya* has another meaning which refers to Supreme Being. This meaning of *taya* as *Shiva* is found in references to writing attributed to Sultan Agung (1620-1645):

"...Pratandhane Manikmaya, wus kanyatan kawruh arah sayekti, iku wusakiring tuduh, Manikmaya an Taya, kumpuling tyas alam arwah pambilipun iku witing ana akal, akire, Hyang Maha Manik..." (Sri Mulyono in Darmanto Yatman 1985:81-82).

("....The symbol of Manikmaya is shown to be the science of true destiny and that is the end of the symbol. Manikmaya is Shiva. Manikmaya is *Taya* or emptiness. That is the unification of the heart and mind. The ancestors' world is the entrance to the rational world. It marks the end of the great god, Manik....")

This definition of *taya* is more concisely stated as:

"... Sang Hyang Taya nama lain/ gelar Buda" (Mardiwasito 1978:350) [*Taya* is another name for Buddha].

In this definition of *taya*, *mataya* as a verb can mean to worship and to unify with the Supreme Being.

Taya can also mean a state of emptiness (*kosong*) or nothingness (Prawiroatmodjo 1981:243). In this meaning it signifies that unification

with Shiva or Supreme Being is the same as the achievement of emptiness or the unification with Buddha as the Supreme Buddha.

In the story of *Sutasoma*, it is said that in the deepest essence, Buddha and Shiva are one. *Sutasoma* is the Javanese poem (*kakawin*) written by Tantular in the 14th century during the reign of Rajasanagara from the Majapahit Kingdom (Zoetmulder 1974:341-342).

Taya, which is the term for dance and *mataya*, to dance, has another level of meaning in the spiritual dimension. This means that dance not only functions as entertainment but can also function as individual ritual, although the dance performer may never recognize this. The ritual aspect of the dance is not always determined functionally, as the dance is performed for ritual ceremony, but can be determined by placement in the unification between the individual dance performer (microcosmos) and the Supreme Being (macrocosmos).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LACK OF A TERM SYNONYMOUS WITH DANCER

Despite the terms *igel*, *beksa*, *joged*, *taya* which mean 'dance', the Javanese language in the Yogyakarta tradition does not have a noun to name the person who is dancing. The Javanese words referring to the word 'dance' *joged*, *igel*, *beksa*, could be transformed to mean 'dancer' by adding to those words the prefix *pe-* (for example, *penjoged*, *penigel*, *pembeksa* and *petaya*). But the fact remains that these word forms do not exist. It is

significant that there is no term naming the dancer, only a way of naming the performer by describing the person who performs the dance, or the 'doer' of the dance.

This notion could be more easily understood by realizing the important tradition among performers in Yogyanese dance in relation to spectators. According to tradition as has been passed down through generations, the dancer should maintain an attitude to avoid showing his individual self. The performer should remember that the spectators will not look at how one is dancing, but rather look at his dance. The Javanese expression is: "*Aja kok tonton anggonku njoged, nanging tontonan jogedku*," which means: "Don't look at how I am dancing, but look at my dance," (Hardjosebroto: personal communication 1962). The notion mentioned above is also found in another area away from Yogyakarta. One time during his research in East Java, Geertz had been warned by his informant that he should look at the dance while watching a dance performance, rather than at the dancer (Geertz 1960:286).

TRANSFORMATION, THE SHIFTING OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The concept of transformation as defined by Allegra Snyder is helpful in understanding the kind of trance that was described by Prince Suryobrongto of Yogyakarta. She defines transformation as:

"...the sense of experiencing a break from one level of reality

to another, a transformational device, shifting levels of consciousness..." (Snyder 1974: 220)

Prince Suryobrongto emphasized the importance of maintaining consciousness during the dance, though he described this as the state between consciousness (*sadar*) and subconsciousness (*tak sadar*). In this state the dancer is transformed into someone else. This is the shifting of consciousness defined by Allegra Snyder.

Although her definition is meant to explore the distinction between non-dance and dance movement, it is also helpful to understand the concept in relation to the spiritual dimension in dance. I want to suggest that the idea of shifting levels of consciousness explains why the dance performer should deny himself and let the spectator look at the dance. It seems that if the dance performer still thinks he himself is dancing and expects the spectators to look at him, then possibly no transformation has occurred. Referring back to the statement of Sultan Hamengkubuwana VIII of Yogyakarta, if one still shows his personality or individual self in his dancing, he will never be a good dancer in the wayang wong (Suryobrongto 1981:81).

Based on the discussion of the concept of dance performer, the idea of transformation, and the concept of *mataya*, I propose a mandala entitled *sastra mataya* (the knowledge of dance) to formulate the outer and inner relationship of Yogyakarta dance (outer) and *joged mataram*

(inner) which leads to understanding of the unification of microcosmos (dance performer) and the macrocosmos (Supreme Being).

SASTRA WIRASA MUNGGENG JOGED MATARAM (THE KNOWLEDGE OF WIRASA IN JOGED MATARAM)

Prince Suryobrongto said that *joged mataram* is the content and the Yogyakarta style of dance is the container. He described *joged Mataram* as four principles:

1. *sawiji*: focus, concentration without mental disorder
2. *greget*: inner dynamics without being coarse
3. *sungguh*: self-confidence without being arrogant
4. *ora mingkuh*: discipline, without retreat in facing difficulty.

The concept of *joged Mataram* can be condensed into two opposing elements. These elements are: 1. self-control (*pengendalian diri*) and 2. ecstasy (*kepanjangan*) (Suryobrongto 1970:13; Suryobrongto in Bambang Pujasworo 1987:2). Both elements should exist within a person so that it becomes clear that the transformation which occurs in the dancer is still within the state of consciousness. No matter how much one expresses the feeling of ecstasy, it should be balanced by the sense of self-control. Both are pulling each other resulting in the kind of tension which builds strength and power in the dance.

Prince Tejakusuma used the phrase "...*jumbuhing rasa lan pikire...*" or the unification of feeling and thinking (Kussudiardjo 1981:14) to describe this same concept. The unification of feeling and thinking can be the manifestation of the two opposite states of self-control and ecstasy. Both components should co-exist in one, pulling each other, not interfering with one another.

The balance within one, in the basic principles of 'ecstasy and self-control' could be and should be measured using the four components of *joged Mataram* as parameters. These two opposite elements create tension and harmony when unified within one person. Buckminster Fuller used a new term 'tensegrity' to describe nature's strength relationships in the universe, that is the tension and integrity or contractional integrity (Fuller 1975:372). In Yogyanese dance there is a technical term similar to that of tensegrity which is 'ngenceng' (tautness) that is the concept of tension yet harmony within the dance performer.

SASTRA SRIMPI WIRAGADADI (THE KNOWLEDGE OF FOUR CRADINAL POINTS IN DEVELOPED MOVEMENT)

The *sastra mataya* should be seen as the conceptualization of the theory of unification of microcosmos and macrocosmos, *sastra srimpi wiragadadi* should be perceived as the conceptualization of the practice of it. I propose a conceptual framework in the form of a mandala to be used as an instrument for examining the

relationship between the dance itself and the concept of universal duality. One example of the concept of universal duality and the concept of the Absolute One that led me to form the concept of *srimpi wiragadadi* is *gula jawa* or *gula klapa* (Javanese sugar or brown coconut sugar) bought at the *pasar* (market). *Gula jawa* is formed into a shape called *lirang*. A *lirang* is half of a sphere with one flat side. If two *lirangs* are matched on their flat sides, they form a spherical shape called *tangkep*.

A *lirang* is never thought of as half a *tangkep* but has the integrity of wholeness in itself. One can ask for *selirang* (one *lirang*) or *rong lirang* (two *lirangs*) of *gula jawa* when purchasing it. Further, as the manifestation of Absolute One, one *lirang* when unified and joined with another *lirang* is one *tangkep*.

Srimpi is a dance performed by two pairs of females. If we equate one pair of dancers with one *lirang*, a single pair of dancers can be thought of as a whole in itself. With the addition of the other pair, it becomes one *tangkep*.

Srimpi is commonly known as a symbol of the balance of the universe. The Javanese believe that this dance is an expression of the balance between good and evil, dark and light, or earth and sky. This explains why the four dancers wear the same costume while engaging in a symbolic conflict in which no one wins, because all have equal power and strength.

The word *wiragadadi* is derived

from two words, *wiraga* and *dadi*. The former is associated with the physical aspect of dance; it is about body movement itself. The latter means 'done,' 'ready,' or 'successfully completed.' This term is often applied to the mature dance performer. Dance teachers commonly use the term *dadi* to label a dancer who has accomplished a certain role in *wayang wong* dance drama as 'wayang wadi' (mature *wayang wong* performer). This signifies that the guru feels that the dancer has achieved the ability to independently develop his individual style. But since there is no dance performer who is expected to have reached the state of perfection in dance, the individual style sometimes emerges without the full awareness of the dance performer.

The concept of *srimpi wiragadadi* explores what a dance performer can continuously gain in his dance as an unlimited accomplishment. In the context of dance, the term *srimpi* implies that the dance performer uses the idea of balance as the source of strength or power, rather than satisfaction with only the accomplishment of dancing. In other words, the aim of dancing is not to achieve virtuosity, nor to be better than one's fellow dancers, but rather having become a competent dancer to continue deepening one's personal expression.

The definition of dance as stated by Prince Suryaininrat is as follows:

"Ingang dipun wastani djoged inggih punika, ebahing sedaja

*saranduning badan, kasarengan
ungelig gangsa, katata pikantuk
wiramaning gending,
djumbuhing pasemon lan
pikadjenging djoged
(Soerjadiningrat 1934:3)*

(What is called dance is whole body movements, accomplished by the sound of gamelan music, choreographed to match the rhythm of gamelan music, the harmony of facial expression or symbol and the meaning of the dance).

At first, this definition seems unclear, especially because it ends up with the word dance which is the very word being defined. However, by considering *joged* in relation to the two-dimensional shape of the mandala, it seems that Sryadininrat's definition is a cyclical-circular definition. In a sense the repetition of the word dance is cyclical in its arguments; defining dance by using the word dance.

The definition of dance by Suryaningrat has been formulated into three basic principles which are:

1. *wiraga*: whole body movements;
2. *wirama*: accompaniment of dance by the sound of gamelan music, choreographed to match with the rhythm of gamelan music; and
3. *wirasa*: the harmony of facial expression or symbol and the meaning of the dance.

In this definition, *wiraga* implies

the need to learn Yogyanese dance step by step.

The definition of dance by Suryaningrat and the formulation of it into three basic principles led me to examine the concept of duality for further understanding of this universality of dance. This definition shows that the concept of duality can be described in such a way that it represents the universal duality, that is, harmony between the microcosmos and macrocosmos. Further, the relationship between microcosmos and macrocosmos can also be illustrated in the kind of relationship created by the tension of pulling each other which results in strength or power. It is important to note that the concept of duality is more easily understood if the macrocosmos has an unlimited meaning, while the microcosmos is labelled the limited.

The points on the mandala represent the second element of Prince Suryaningrat's definition of dance, *wirama*. The two points are: the sound of gamelan and the rhythm of gamelan. At first these two terms might give the impression of redundancy, but these are the points that symbolise the universal duality. I label them as *ungel* or sound (unlimited) and *wirama* or rhythm (limited).

In the third element of *wirasa*, another duality can be found, the harmony of *pasemon* or symbol and *pikajeng* or the meaning of the dance. Based on this duality, I would suggest that the former represents the limited, and the latter represents the unlimited. Sometimes

the *pasemon* is interpreted as the facial expression which in Yogyanese dance should be limited considering that the dance performers are not allowed to express the inner with their faces. The idea is that a strong inner feeling will naturally give expression to the face without further effort.

Of the two pairs in contrast and harmony, the first pair is 'sound' and 'rhythm,' and the second pair is 'symbol' and 'meaning.' I place both pairs in a square so that the first aspect, *wiraga* which does not have duality implicit in Suryaningrat's definition could be placed in the middle. Placing the *wiraga* in the middle means that the *wiraga* and the circle become a pair. It is important to place the other pairs in such a way that if they are placed at the end points of the square, they represent the contrasting duality between limited and unlimited. Following the form of the mandala in which a circle often contains a square, I place this square of *srimpi wiragadadi* within the circle. The *wiraga* (body movement; doer of the dance) should be able to maintain the midpoint between all contrasting elements of the square. Only by achieving those midpoints one would be granted to unify with macrocosmos that is diagrammatically shown as the circle in the mandalic form.

The midpoints of four different directions is called the cardinal point. The *srimpi* dance is said to be the symbol of the four cardinal points (north, south, east and west)

or four universal elements (fire, air, water and earth) (Brongtodiningrat in Soedarsono 1984:82). The four cardinal points each with four directions could only be found in all of the midpoints of every four directions as the result of harmony of the two contrasting elements of the square and the harmony of *wiraga* and the circle.

The state of dynamic balance of the *sastra srimpi wragadadi* could create four smaller circles. The cardinal point of the bigger circle forms the cardinal point of the smaller circles. This involuting formation of circles leads to the concept of the infinited circle; the circle can become smaller or in reversing the involuting process, it can become bigger. One can thus see these circles as representing the state of emptiness and fulness at the same time.

On the other hand, this state of emptiness can also be thought of as the state of fulness in that every circle has four elements of two pairs which contains the universal duality within it and is binded into the state of *ngenceng* or tensegrity. The teachers of Yogyanese dance in the court of Yogyakarta often give the lesson by saying that in order to become a good dancer one should be able to understand what is the meaning of the phrase: "*Kokthong nanging kebak*" (empty but full or emptiness and fulness at the same time). What this means is

never explicitly stated. I wish to suggest that the mandalas in the discussion of this paper would be an alternative answer to the notion of "*kothong nanging kebak*."

CONCLUSION

The term *mataya* refers to the state in which the dance performer becomes unified with the Supreme Being. Inclusive within this state of *mataya* is the concept of duality between:

general	the macrocosmos	and	the microcosmos
	theory	and	practice
	content	and	the container
	joged Mataram	and	Yogyakarta dance
specific	the Supreme Being	and	the dance performer

In the *mandala sastra srimpi wragadadi* and *sastra wiraga tanpa wangenan* the resultant harmony between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos is dependant on the midpoint of balance between the two, by maintaining the midpoint between all of the opposite elements of the square in the circle/circles.

REFERENCES CITED

Darmanto, Jatman. 1985. "Beberapa Jonsep Dalam Ilmu Jiwa Jawa." Soedarsono, Djoko Soekiman and Retna Astuti (editors), pendidikan, Moral, dan Ilmu Jiwa Jawa, 57-83. (Yogyakarta); proyek penelitian dan pengkajian

Kebudayaan nusantara (Javanologi) Direktorat Jendral Kebudayaan departemen pendidikan dan kebudayaan.

Fuller, R. Buckminster. 1975. *Synergetics: Exploration in the Geometry of Thinking*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Geertz, Clifford. 1960. *The Religion of Java*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.

Kaeppeler, Adrienne L. 1971. "Aesthetics of Tongan Dance." *Ethnomusicology*, Volume XV, No. 2.

Jussudiardjo, Bagong. 1981. *Tentang Tari*. Yogyakarta: C.V. Nur Cahaya.

Prawiroatmojo, S. 1981 (1957). *Bausastra Jawa-Indonesia* (Volumes 1 and 2).

Jakarta: P.T. Gunung Agung.

Pudjasworo, Bambang. 1982. "Studi Analisis Konsep Estetis Koreografis Tari Bedhaya lambangsari," an unpublished thesis for the degree of Seniman Seni Tari, Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, Yogyakarta. 1987. "Joged mataram, sebuah renungan estetis." (Yogyakarta: Indonesia Institute of the Arts).

Snyder, Allegra Fuller. 1974. "The Dance Symbol." Tamara Comstock (editor) *New Dimension Dance Research; Anthropology and Dance—the American Indian*. *CORD Research Annual* 6:213-224. New York: Comm ittee (Congress) on Research in Dance. (Proceedings of the third conference on research in dance, 1972).

- Soedarsono. 1984. *Wayang Wong. The State Ritual Dance Drama in the Court of Yogyakarta*. Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Soerijadiningrat, P.A. 1934. *Babad lan Mekaring Djoged Dijawi*. Jogijakarta: Kolf Buning.
- Suharto, Benedictus. 1990. "Dance Power: The Concept of Mataya in Yogyakarta Dance." An unpublished thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Dance, University of California , Los Angeles.
- Surybrongto, G.B.P.H. 1981. "Cara Berlatih Tari Klasik Gaya Yogyakarta." Fred Wibowo (editor), *Mengenal Tari Klasik Gaya Yogyakarta*, 94-109. Yogyakarta: Dewan Kesenian Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. "Penjelasan Tentang pathokan Baku dan penyesuaian Diri." Fred Wibowo (editor), *mengenal Tari Klasik Gaya Yogyakarta*, 60-87. Yogyakarta: Dewan Kesenian Proinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. "Penjiwaan Tari Klasik Gaya Yogyakarta, 88-93. Yogyakarta: Dewan Kesenian Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta.
- Zoetmulder, P.J. 1974. *Kalangwan: A Survey of Old Javanese Literature*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.