

# RASA: THE AESTHETIC OF SURAKARTA CLASSICAL DANCE

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Surakarta Classical Dance is a dance that lives and grows inside and around of the Surakarta Palace. Classical dance genres that had been lived up to now are *bedhaya-srimpi*, *wireng* dance, *pethilan* (a single dance and a couple dance themed a soldier or romance). The existence of classical dance of Surakarta is the continuation of the royal dances that have ever been existed in the time of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom (the influence of the India people) on the island of Java. Related to that the form and concept of aesthetic that is inherent in Surakarta classical dances has continuity with dance in the past. There is one term related to the concept of aesthetic in Surakarta classical dance, namely *rasa*. The term *rasa* in dance, also found in India dances.

Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala stated in the article entitled The Mirror Of Gesture Being The Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara, as follows.

*The sages speak of Nâtya, Nrtta, and Nrtya. Nâtya is dancing used in a drama (nataka) combined with the original plot. Nrtta is that form of dance which is void of flavor (rasa) and mood (bhava). Nrtya is that form of dance which possesses flavor, mood, and suggestion (rasa, bhâva, vyanjana, etc), and the like. Nrtya at coronations, celebrations, processions of men or Gods, marriages, reunions of friends, entry into towns or houses, the birth of children, and all auspicious occasions, by those who desire fortune.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala (translator). *The Mirror Of Gesture Being The Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikesvara* (London: Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, 1917), 14

Related to this statement it can be assumed that dances in ritual and ceremonial life in the Javanese kingdom are a continuation of the traditions of the previous times. The dance used for rituals and ceremonials is included in the category of dance that has a sense, mood, and impression, (*rasa, bhava, vyanjana*), which is danced in a calm, beautiful, and smooth manner with a little dramatic content, which intended for ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> As a dance that originates in the tradition of dance creation from within the palace, classical dance in Surakarta can be categorized as *Nrtya*, as a form that have of *rasa*.

A general understanding of *rasa* may could reffered on the definition of *rasa* as the vibration of the heart or soul that appears as a response to the mind and heart or the feeling of stimulus from everything absorbed through the senses, resulting in certain interpretations or perceptions in accordance with the results of that thoughts and feelings.

In Javanese culture, *rasa* is a concept that can be understood through its statement in language, meaning inner depth, such as inspiration, sensitivity to everything, such as: *rasa njéro* (inner) expressions for deep meanings, *rasa ménéb* (*ténang, agung*), *sémélèh* (as an expression for someone who already has the maturity of the soul).<sup>3</sup>

*Rasa* in dance is a substantial aesthetic or core of beauty in classical dance, which touches the deepest inner soul. The aesthetic of *rasa* in Surakarta classical dance was appeared through of the concept of *rasa* that is understood in Javanese culture, among them, *agung, rēgu, mrabu, wingit, alus, meneb, semeleh, mbanyumili, gagah, bregas, tregel, sumyak, ngglece, nges, sem*, and so forth. So in this regard, classical dance is as an art form that represents or describe a *rasa* of Javanese

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Holt. *Melacak Jejak Perkembangan Seni di Indonesia*. Terjemahan Prof. Dr. RM. Soedarsono (Bandung: Artline, 2000), 151-152.

<sup>3</sup> W.J.S. Poerwadarminta, *Baesastra Djawa* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1985), 521, bandingkan dengan S. Prawiroatmojo, *Bausastra Jawa* (Jakarya: Haji Mas Agung, 1989), 132 dan lihat juga dari P.J. Zoetmulder, *Kamus Jawa Kuna-Indonesia* (Jakarya: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1982), 926

culture. In another words, that classical dance is a form that is through its elements re-displays or represents the idea of meaning or value that lives in javanesse culture, namely the *rasa*.

Rasa in classical dance of Surakarta could be categorize in four, is that rasa of dance could be appeared from a **characterisation of dances**, for example, *gagah, alus, luruh, and lanyap*. Rasa of Surakarta classical dance could appeared from the **character of dance movement**, as *meneb, anteb, semeleh, banyumili, bergas, cakrak, tregel, ngglece, lanyap and luruh*. Rasa also appeared from **impresso or nuances** that formed within a whole of dance performance (including music of dance/karawitan-gendhing) such as *rêgu-mrabu, wingit, tintrim, sumyak, guyub, and so on*. Rasa so appeared as well as an **emotion** (mood) like for example; *seneng, nggrantes -susah or sedih, greget, sem, and so on*. Rasa that appeared in Surakarta classic dance also could mention in combination among chategorize like as *gagah anteb, gagah mrabu, alus lanyap, alus luruh, and so on*.

As a form that represents the *rasa* of Javanese culture, classical dance Surakarta is a form of dance that is serious (standard), and is contemplative (inward contemplation). As a form that represents the *rasa* of Javanese culture, classical dance Surakarta is a form of dance that is serious (there are any rule, have special pattern, have a filosofi meaning), and is contemplative (reflextion inward). In connection with all of that, the rasa of Javanese culture became a foothold, as well as an orientation in realizing the aesthetic of Surakarta classical dance.

In realizing dance work, it is necessary to emphasize the deepening of the feeling, through reflection of aesthetic concepts, internalization of sense or feeling, in a dancer, the audience and in the process making of its dance.<sup>4</sup> The deepening of the feeling by the choreographer is needed to bring

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<sup>4</sup> Mudji Sutrisno dan Christ Verhaak. *Estetika Filsafat Keindahan* (Yogakarta: Kanisius, 1993), 102, 103.

to life ideas, ideals, views, themes, or stories in the form of dance works. Deepening the feeling of the dancer, it is very important to live the dance work through the body and all elements of dance so that the feeling can be projected to the audience or its audience. The deepening of the feeling for the ruler is needed in order to be able to connect with dance work, so as to be able to live the dance, which leads to inner satisfaction or aesthetic experience. *Rasa* is an aesthetic of Surakarta classical dance, that could be understood as a quality that could appear from dancer who dancing with totality, with a body intelligent that can make all elements of dance lived.

Totality in dancing is related to intelligence of the body that depend on technical harmony (ability of motion techniques and ability to feel motion), ability to feel the soul of a dance, understanding concepts in dance and mastery of social cultural knowledge, power of interpretation, power of imagination, sensibility, and comprehension knowledge about dance. Related to that one thing that is important in realizing the aesthetic of *rasa* in Surakarta classical dance is the concept of *kasarira*.

The concept of *kasarira* is a concept that is related to body (*sarira-salira*), or embodied (*nyarira*). *Kasarira* means that it has been implanted which means ingrained (mbalung sungsum). The condition of the *kasarira* is achieved through a long process so that the body becomes intelligent. All elements in the movements and elements in dance, as well as all the dancers' bodily experiences in the dance have become a conscious awareness, so that in carrying the dance no longer involves memory, everything flows by itself.

All elements in a body and elements in dance have integrated with the muscles, with the bloodstream, with the rhythm of the heartbeat and even it have penetrated in the psychic that is into the soul, the feeling of the dancer. *Kasarira* is an important requirement in realizing the aesthetic of *rasa* in Surakarta classical dance.

The attainment of the *kasarira* condition requires a long process, and high intensity in dancing. The else important step to realize the aesthetic of dance can also through an

understanding of the specific provisions in to embodied of an aesthetic of *rasa*, as became a code for measuring the beauty of classical Surakarta dance, is the concepts of *Hasta Sawanda* and 'Tri Wira' (a concept adopted from the Prince Suryodiningrat - Yogyakarta), as well as other concepts such as *Sengguh*, *Mungguh*, *Lungguh*, *Mathis*, *Manis*, *Damis*, etc., as provisions for realizing the beauty of dance work.

*Hasta Sawanda* is a rule or instruction for dancers (also dance / choreographer) for the sake of a dancers truly be able to perform dance well, as a ways to displaying the aesthica of *rasa* in Javanese clasic dance of Surakarta. The concept of *Hasta Sawanda* is eight important provisions which become a whole unit to realize the aesthetica of *rasa* in dance, namely *pacak*, *pancat*, *ulat*, *lulut*, *luwês*, *wilêd*, *rhythm*, and *gêndhing*. Likewise, the concept of 'Tri Wira' as three important provisions in presenting the aesthetic of *rasa* in dance is about *wiraga*, *wirama* and *wirasa*.

The explanation of eight provisions in *Hasta Sawanda* are: *pacak*, *pancat*, *ulat*, *lulut*, *luwês*, *wilêd*, *irama*, and *gêndhing* are as follow.

1. *Pacak*, refers to the physical form, that is, the body is related to its style or action (such as the meaning of the word: *solah*, *tingkah laku kang digawé*). In this case *pacak* is also related to body shape. *Pacak* also meaning emphasizes the suitability of the body in dancing, body skills related to technical in performing dance moves. Body suitability is intended to be appropriate in performing dance characters.
2. *Pancat*, refers to the purpose of the basis or foothold. In this case it is intended as a starting point in starting the movement and its relationship with the implementation of the movement in the dance. The transition of dance movements (Javanese) is very carefully calculated because it is related to the concept of motion of *semêlêh*, *banyumili*, *anteb*, etc. If the transition of motion is not keep properly, it will disturb the harmonization of the dance motion with the other elements of dance. In the *pancat* emphasized the existence of the body's skills in transitioning each

movement (part of dance motion or sêkaran in dance) in a flowing manner so as to be able to carry out a dance movement in a unified of wholes element.

3. *Ulat*: in Javanese means *gêbyaring pandêlêng*; *polatan sêmuning praen*; *ditamataké*, *disawang*; *mulat*.<sup>5</sup> In line with the meaning of the word *ulat* refers to the eye view associated with facial expressions to be adapted to the shape, quality, character of the roles performed and the atmosphere that will be displayed in dance. Eye view or *polatan* in Javanese (Surakarta) dance refers to certain types of characters. As can be exemplified for *polatan* or eye view on the character of *luruh* in dance (fine) is limited to the diagonal line down and the *putri lanyap* (firmly) straight eye view. *Ulat* in this case also include *pasêmon*, namely facial expressions that are visible from their shape. *Polatan* and *pasêmon* are small elements in dance, but becoming an important part in building the beauty- sublimity of dance.
4. *Lulut* means laras, salaras. *Lulut* in terms of dance is defined as the harmony of the body in performing dance movements, which refers to the body's high skills in carrying out the motion (dancing), so that the dance movement feels in harmony, the body has been integrated with the dance, in Javanese is called the *kasarira* ( united in the body). In this condition the dancer did not thought about the problem of motion techniques, so that it is presented no longer only performing the motion or the body movement , but something value inside the dance, is *rasa* ( the results of accumulation from the motion with the whole element in dance).
5. *Luwês* means "ora kaku (wagu)", in this case pointing to the condition of the dancer to be able to bring dance movements neatly, harmoniously and not rigidly. The ability to move fluently means being able to carry out the dancing

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<sup>5</sup> WJS. Poerwadarminta, 1939, 439

movement appropriately, in accordance with the provisions that apply technically as well as the flow of motion that feels harmonious and pleasant. Thus, it flexibly points to the quality of the implementation of dance movements. In line with the concept of *luwes* is *wijang* (clear, clean) that is, in carrying out the movement carefully, carried out in a detailed and controlled manner. Dancers can be said to be charming if they can bring dance movements naturally, smoothly, flow according to the rhythm, there is no impression of being forced, the motion flows smoothly so that it is pleasant to see.

6. *Wilêd* in Javanesse word means *wasis*, *ubêd*, *nyênenêgake*, *sarwa laras* (*tumrap gêndhing*); *wirama antaraning thuthukane panabuh*.<sup>6</sup> *Wilêd* in the case of dance is meant as a dancer's ability to perform motion in accordance with personal creativity in giving color or variation in dance movements, without leaving conventional provisions on dance movements. Carrying out established motion techniques then carried out with high creativity will bring up a typical motion technique from the dancer. The *Wilêd* by the dancer will create a sense of its own. Therefore, in a group dance such as *bêdhaya*, it is very important to disguise the *wilêd* of each dancer, through a deal of the execution of the dance moves. Therefore, in a group dance such as *bêdhaya*, it is very important to disguise the *wilêd* of each dancer, through a deal of the execution of the dance moves. In this aspect the dancer has reached the provisions *pacak*, *pancat*, *ulat* also *lulut*, and the dancer already has adequate skills, supported by the ability to interpret motion, and strong improvisation. At this level indicates the dancer's body intelligence.
7. *Irama*: refers to the ability to organize the rhythm of body movements that are harmonized with the rhythm of the dance, and the music of dance. Related to that, the dancer must really master the rhythm of the body while under-

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<sup>6</sup> WJS. Poerwadarminta, 1939, 664

standing dance. A thorough understanding of the rhythm of *gendhing* (music of dance) will build the aesthetic of rasa in dance. The relationship between the rhythm of the body and the rhythms it self is the rhythm gives rise to the pattern of the relationship of motion with the beat of the dance, so that the technique of implementing the combination of the two elements must also be understood. Some terms that appear in the rhythm (music of dance) in relation with the dance and gestures is *midak*, *nujah*, *nggandul*, *mungkus*, contrast, parallel, and others.

8. *Gêndhing*: in this case refers to the mastery of music of dance; of which are related to understanding the forms of *gendhing* as a music of a Javanese dance, that is about *pola tabuhan*, *rasa lagu*, *irama*, *laya (tempo)*, *rasa sèlèh irama*, *kalimat lagu*, and also mastery of Javanese song (tembang) and vocal (including antawacana).

It is important for dancers to understand *gendhing*, because of the Javanese dance and *gêndhing* is a unity that can builds mutual sense and cannot be released and eliminated from one another. *Gêndhing* as a music of dance has a rasa, so *gendhing* is very important for dancers and as be a foundation in giving nuances of rasa in dance, as a source of interpretation of the sense of movement, and one of the guides in the implementation of motion, and training the soul to be more sensitive. As stated by Soeryobrongto as follows.

*Menarikar tarian klasik dimaksudkan untuk membantu dalam mengembangkan kehalusan jiwa [rasa], .. penari harus melatih diri, sehingga jiwanya bisa menerima dan menyerap semua rangsang dari luar yang ada hubungannya peranannya di dalam tarian, sehingga dengan demikian jiwanya dapat mengisi ekspresi gerak-geriknya dengan rangsang-rangsang itu. Rangsang rangsang itu dibentuk oleh suara gamelan, narasi, melodi, nyanyian dialog, dan cerita (dalam hal ini di dalam pertunjukan tarian wayang).<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Brakel Papenhuyzen, Clara. *Tari Jawa Klasik*. Surakarta: STSI Press, 1990: 34.

Dancing classical dance is intended to help in developing the subtlety of the soul, the dancer must train himself, so that his soul can receive and absorb all external stimuli that have a role to play in the dance, so that his soul can fill the expression of his movements with the stimuli. The stimulation is formed by the sound of gamelan, narration, melody, dialogue song, and story (in this case in the puppet dance performance).

*Gêndhing* in Javanese dance is a very important in achieving the quality of aesthetic of rasa in Surakarta classical dance. In classical dance of Surakarta known the term 'nggendhingi', that mean a dancer who had a hight quality, so they already mastery the harmonization rithm of his body and rithm of dance, they could carry out a dance with deep sense. The mastery of harmonization of the rithm of the body, soul and dance music is greatly influences the quality of aesthetic in dance.

In addition to the *Hasta Sawanda* concept, which is a eight provisions in achieving the aesthetic of rasa in dance, there is else a concept that is known in Surakarta, namely 'Tri Wira' that was stated by Pangeran Suryodiningrat from Yogyakarta. The concept of 'Tri Wira' includes the main aspects of dance, from the basic level to the highest, that is wiraga, wirama, and wirasa. Judging from the meaning of the word, wiraga means "solah-bawa lagu sing nêngsêmaké (*digawé-gawé*)".<sup>8</sup> *Wirama* as "ukuran kêndho kêngcênging panabuhing gamêlan (*gêndhing*); 2 andhégging napasan ing têmbang macapat; gilir-gumantining swara (*pratingkah*) sing mawa laras"<sup>9</sup>; and wirasa are surasa, têgês (*karêp*), wêturning pangrasa; disurasa, digoleki têgêssé (*karêpé*).<sup>10</sup>

1. *Wiraga* is a concept related to physical form, namely body and motion. *Wiraga* encompasses the entire implementation of dance movements which include gestures, adeg,

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<sup>8</sup> WJS. Poerwadarminta, *Baoesastra Djawa* (Groningen Batavia: J.B Wolter, 1939), 665.

<sup>9</sup> WJS. Poerwadarminta, 1939, 665.

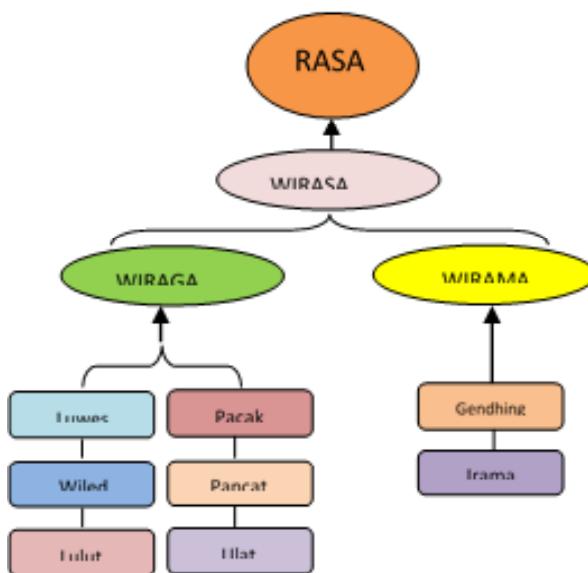
<sup>10</sup> WJS. Poerwadarminta, 1939, 666

use and regulation of energy in moving in a dance. Wiraga, designates an outward form or physical form (body) and skills in carrying out dance movements. Wiraga is related with some that is concept in Sawanda Hasta about unity of pacak, pancat, lulut, and wilêd, luwês.

2. *Wirama* is related to the rhythm, including the rhythm of dance movements, the rhythm of gêndhing, in the rhythm of gendhig used in music of dance. Wirama, can be interpreted as kêndho kêncênging panabuhing gamêlan (gênding) or pratingkah kang mawa laras). The concept of wirama in this case includes the rhythm of dance movements, the beat of the instrument music and the body of the dancer. In the provisions of wirama, the rhythm of the dancer's movements must be harmonized with the rhythm of gendhing to build the quality of rasa or atmosphere. In the rhythm of dance, it is also known as a rhythm (the accuracy of the dance movements with the rhythm), in connection with that it is also known as the term rhythm in dance in its integration with the beat of music of dance , such as the rhythm of nujah, rhythm midak, and rhythm of Gandhul. The rhythm in gêndhing will affect the rhythm of dance movements, because the rhythm of gêndhing is one of the sources that can stimulate rasa, and become a reference in living the dance movements. In short, wirama includes the rhythm of dance movements, the rhythm of gêndhing used in dance accompaniment. A dancer must be able to understand the form (pattern) of dance accompaniment and can show the whole dance work and know very well about the relationship and harmonization between the rhythm of motion and rhythm of the *gêndhing* that it uses.
3. *Wirasa* is related to the rasa of movement, sense of feeling and the whole sense of dance that manifests itself from the appreciation of all its elements. Wirasa is as a whole meaning of sense in dance, as *surasaning tari* (as taste of appeared from dance) that formed from accumulated of all elements of dance. Wirasa is related to something that is in the soul or feeling. Means "suroso utowo karêp utowo

ing pangroso, utowo digoléki têgêsé". Feeling in this case means the meaning or substance of being. Also related to the harmonization of the rhythm of the motion with the music rhythm that builds the taste of dance. In connection with that the dancer's movements must be in accordance with the *rasa* of the dance. Achievement of the sense of motion by the dancer is done through this provisions, dancers do not think technically, have been able to knowing deeply the rhythm of the dance movements and the rhythm of gêndhing in their dance music and have comprehended dance thoroughly with all its elements.

*Hasta Sawanda* and 'Tri Wira' are concepts in principle a guide to achievement the substance of dance is *rasa*, as the culmination of the beauty of dance. There are kind of relate among of *Hasta Sawanda* concept and the 'Tri Wira' concept, that *Hasta Sawanda* and 'Tri Wira' are completely each other, could a depicted as follows.



Interwoven Concepts of *Hasta Sawanda* and 'Tri Wira' (by Katarina Indah Sulastuti)

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