

# Internalization of *Wirasa* in the Body Processing for Role-playing in the Yogyakarta-style Dance

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Abstract: The quality of one's being a dancer is said to be good if all three of the aspects here termed *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa* are able to be internalized in the person of the dancer concerned. The *wirasa* aspect that has as its source *Joged Mataram* and, therefore, consists of four elements, namely, *sawiji* (implying concentration), *greded* (implying spiritedness), *sungguh* (implying self-confidence), and *ora mingkuh* (implying never giving up). The method called *mejed*, which is for correcting the positioning of body parts by touching is very much required. Improvement in *wirasa* quality could not be done instantly. Sincerity is needed in exercises related to the *wiraga* and *wirama* aspects. The reason is that improvement in *wirasa* quality is highly related to the process of improvement in quality of both *wiraga* and *wirama*. Integrated mastery and application of the various rules could improve *wirasa* quality. Improvement in bodily quality is done through three forms of processing the body, namely, the one using as guide the traditional dance techniques, the one whose purpose is to improve stamina and elasticity, and the one whose purpose is to improve sensitivity in body and feeling with the process of exercise in the open in nature.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

A dancer has a power of captivating spectators when able to internalize the aspects here termed *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa* so that the aspects become embodied in the dancer's person. The internalization is an effort of selecting, unearthing, and mastering various dance rules and norms in order that they become inseparable from the dancer's behavior at dance time. The internalization of *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa* requires a continuous process done not only independently but also under the guidance of a competent teacher in order to result in a dancer of quality. The internalization requires strong dedication and determination. Non-occurrence of the exercise process to maintain the dancer's competence would result in a lowering of the dancer's quality. The reason is that at the time a dancer is dancing as someone or something else, the dancer is no longer in the position of one in the process of becoming because the position is already of one in finished, ready, and active condition as subject of action. It means that, at that time, the dancer is role-playing, dancing as someone or something else, and is no longer one who is conscious of one's natural

condition for the dancer is already entering the territory of artistic expression. Therefore, one who is a dancer not dancing as oneself is to have the responsibility of serious role comprehension of the character that one is dancing as by involving all the potential in one's body and spirit.

The improvement of the *wiraga* aspect which is technique-related in nature is done by means of exercises in body processing as effort of exploring the body in order that each body part could be explored functionally and esthetically. Body processing exercises are useful for training of bodily sensitivity in exploring the body as infinite dance instrument. The quality of the body is as such if the dancer concerned is able to do any technique of movement and able to articulately manifest the dance wish. In traditional dance, improvement in the quality of the movement technique aspect is done by means of exercises based on the basic rules of traditional movement techniques. In improving the students' quality in the dance movement techniques of the Yogyakarta-style classical dance, some dance studios give training in dance movement elements of Rengga Mataya and Tayungan to male dancers while female dancers are given training in doing the dance named Sari Tunggal which presents the basic dance

movements, accompanied with eighteen dance varieties, for female dancers.

The *wirama* aspect shows the position of musical rhythm as accompaniment and frame for the dance in order that the dancer could feel the rhythm of the *gending* (i.e., the traditional Javanese musical structure), movement, and distance. Mastery of the *gending* rhythm is required to enable each dancer to know whether the rhythm is with slow or fast tempo, the rhythm of movement being related to the degree of coordination between one movement and another and the rhythm of distance being related to the maintenance of position and condition of body parts when doing a dance movement. To condition students in all that, the dance training held at the Yogyakarta royal palace is always done with the accompaniment of *gamelan* music (i.e., traditional Javanese music) directly played live by those serving the royal house of Kridha Mardawa at the royal palace. Meanwhile, dance studios use accompaniment in the form of played recording. Serious comprehension of the *gamelan* rhythm would be beneficial for training in sensitivity and improving the mastery of the *wirama* aspect.

*Wirasa* is the aspect related to the dancer's ability in expressing the role character whom the dancer is dancing as. The learning of the *wirasa* aspect has all this time still not yet had a method which is integrated in the process of dance learning. The dance learning process has tended to focus on matters that have the nature of being related to technique and form. Moreover, the teacher has seldom been one involved in dance performances so that the transformation of dance learning has not sufficiently entered the *wirasa* aspect. Besides, many training activities at dance studios have not yet been oriented to *wirasa* training, either.

In the past, to attain the *wirasa* quality, dancers use various ways often referred to as *laku*. The reason is that the dance teacher of the past did not always teach various matters concerning *wirasa* clearly to their students. The student had to seek it by themselves in various ways or *laku*. The efforts made by the students would at one time be shown to their teacher. There were many kinds of *laku* or act that a student had to creatively seek. The art studied as state of expression is very rarely presented in a state of description or a state of analysis. There are many instances of lack in clarity that arise and surely cause considerable doubt in selecting the values offered by the teacher (Widaryanto, 2015). Likewise, to become dancers of quality, dancers in Bali do various *laku* to get *taksu*. The word *taksu* is well known among the people of Bali. In its first sense, *taksu* is a sacred

power originating in God that could be obtained through a ritual ceremony and spiritual work. In its second sense, *taksu* is a material object known fully as *sanggah taksu*, which is a place for worship with certain physical structure and form (Dibia, 2012).

Some problems could happen to the quality of being a dancer in a performance when, for example, the dancer does not apply the rules that should be obeyed concerning dance techniques. Obedience in applying rules of the techniques of movement (as part of the *wiraga* aspect) would make the muscle system conditioned to having a body attitude (or *deg*) ready for movement making. In addition, the maintenance of *deg* would exert influence on the quality of the technique of movement that could lead to *wirasa* quality. These various matters are highly related to the quality of serious role comprehension in relation with *wirasa* as manifestation of the dancer's self-integration with the role being played. The learning having the nature of being technique-related (as part of the *wiraga* and *wirama* aspects) has already been considerably conducted but teachers of the classical dance of the Yogyakarta style do not all already enable an understanding that their pupils could do of the *wirasa* aspect according to *Kawruh Jaged Mataram*, a writing concerning knowledge of how to do the Mataram-style dance. The reason is that their understanding is still limited to the mastery which is cognitive in nature or restricted to understanding it as science.

## 2 NATURE OF *WIRASA* IN THE DANCE

The research concerned here was to investigate human experience in the essentials of awareness and the experience of dance experts, dance *empus* (or 'masters'), dance teachers, choreographers, dance directors, and dancers. The research was focused on subjective human experiences and their interpretations. With that reasoning as basis, the research, as one type of qualitative research, used the phenomenological approach. The research data were collected by applying several ways in order that the data obtained could be in fitting with the research problem and the research objective. The data were collected by means of observation, interview, and documentary study.

*Wirasa* in the dance is an important aspect related to serious comprehension and good character expression in role playing. A dance becomes alive due to being very much influenced by the dancer's

ability in expressing the character of the role being played. Substantially, every dancer should be able to express whatever role is played with all the ability of the body and spirit. When a dancer moves steadily with full serious comprehension, a strong burst of energy or dynamism would radiate in the dancer's self. The energy and the feeling brought about and focused through the dance movement are also experienced by the spectators as aesthetic emotion (Marianto, 2012). The interaction in aesthetic emotion between the dancer and the spectators could happen if the dancer has a body with the quality of a good dance instrument, a good expression ability, and sensitivity of feeling for good serious comprehension of character. It is not enough for art to only be a matter of correct material and technique presentation for it should also be presented with feeling (Astuti in Zuchdi, 2011). Deep and emotion-filled serious comprehension in artistic expression, hopefully, gets the spectators' sympathy and empathy. Therefore, skills in technique and expression ability are, for a dancer, matters of importance to always be given continuous study and practice sessions. Having high skill in technique without being accompanied with expression ability makes one dance without power. So sensitivity is required to feel each movement activity done in order to integrate it with the expression. The ability to express the dance desire is very much related to serious comprehension which involves feeling.

Feeling is the core, essence, or nature of something (Marianto, 2017). The gladness, upsetness, sadness, happiness, satisfaction, disappointment, courage, fear, fury, hate, love, and so on could only be felt through a process of accumulation until it causes one to weep because of sadness, laugh because of happiness, and so on. The perception concerning feeling and the importance of feeling, concerning what the relation between feeling and thought is like, and concerning the principle of sensing feeling in the world of artistic creation needs to be understood well. The understanding concerning the reciprocal relation of the aspects could enrich vision and creative power (Marianto, 2017). The principle of sensing feeling in art is a continuous effort to cause to grow and develop feeling as an important aspect in art. One requires sensitivity in interacting with various situations in order to be able to feel life events that could support activities of artistic expression.

Ki Ageng Suryamentaram's view recommending that human individuals could prove their own *raos* (or 'feeling') themselves by means of experiencing or practicing (Sugiarto, 2015). Acquiring knowledge by

means of thinking is very much different from acquiring it through feeling (or by sensing). Knowledge of Type 1 is acquired without or preceding experience because the acquisition only requires the power of the ratio that runs very logically while knowledge of Type 2 should be acquired through experiences via the senses because they should be able to be felt by the body, which is physical in nature (Sugiarto, 2015). *Ngelmu iku kelakone kanthi laku* is a Javanese saying more or less agreeing that knowledge is acquired through experience. In the dance world, in relation with the dancer's ability in expressing a character role, experience in doing various character roles is very much required. The more varied the roles carried, the richer the experience in exploring various character. The process of character exploration is an activity for getting comprehensive information of the character that the dancer is playing as. Getting an intact form of information of the character role would enable a dancer to become one with the role being played. The ability to internalize a role into oneself would open the way to the occurrence of active interaction between the object being observed and the subject doing the observing.

Empathy is required in enjoying a dance performance in order that continuous interaction occurs as long as the performance is in progress. The reason is that the dance world is an art for one moment which could not be repeated with exactly the same movement and expression. A dance movement is a string of events in situations and conditions occurring in space, time, and energy woven into one unity. The situations and conditions in space, time, and energy would exert influence on the output of the dancer's expression. Therefore, it is hoped that dancers could pour out all their physical and mental ability to do their job as dancer. Meanwhile, it is hoped that the spectators continuously attend to the performance process. The reason is that, to get the sense or feeling (which is the core or essence) of art, the observer should be willing to feel and experience and not to merely analyze critically. *Taksu* should be approached with empathy and felt in a synesthetic way with the senses fully allowed to be active. It is done in order that spectators could weave feeling to get the meaning in the performance that they are watching.

The effort to enable the body and the spirit become media of expression in the dance is not necessarily limited to a specific type of role character. The choreographer and dancer Sardono W. Kusumo has undergone not only serious comprehension of the movement technique in relation with one character

(as in the character specialization that occurred in the process of dance education at the royal palace in the past) but also the tracing of various characters (Widaryanto, 2015). A dancer who is experienced in playing the role of various kinds of characters would become increasingly richer and riper in seriously comprehending a role. It is in line with the demand that a dancer is to be a totality of body and spirit in being able to play the assigned role as an intact whole. The dancer is to be able to make himself or herself become another self (Sarjiwo, 2004). The dancer's self is to be in the totality of the character being played. Only then the ability of the body as instrument in the dance would be ready for use in playing any role. There is a demand that one who is a dancer, with the totality of one's body and soul, is to be able to perform well the role of the character that one is dancing as. In that case, all the potential in one's possession is to be poured for the role that one plays. The dancer should comprehend and be really aware of the details and various qualities of movement and the understanding of the feeling of movement (Prabowo, 2015). For that purpose, abilities concerning various technique-related matters and abilities in matters of character expression are required. The union of the spirit with the body or with feeling becomes one of the determinants of dance quality. Many dance presentations fail to hypnotize their spectators because they are performed by dancers that are not yet able to unify their body and spirit. One who is skilled in body processing but insufficiently able to give soul and vibrations of life to the movements done on stage would only present soulless or lifeless movements (Dibia, 2013). The unification process requires continuous efforts or exercises and sincere willingness is needed in undergoing the process fully responsibly. Therefore, substantially, *wirasa* in the dance is required in order to give the strength of life power to the dance. The life power could hopefully give spiritual food to those who accept it. Therefore, the body as instrument and the spirit as power of expression in the dance should be emptied to be refilled with whatever character whose role is played. Dance masters often refer to it by mentioning the concept of *kothong nanging kebak*, the Javanese term meaning 'empty but filled full'.

## 2.1 Quality of *Wirasa* in Dance

A Balinese dance artist named I Wayan Geria emphasizes that students should be active to catch up with their teacher's mastery of knowledge and artistic ability could not be learned by just being taught. Students should train themselves in digging up the

ability from within themselves independently. The teacher has more the role of giving guidance in solving problems related to techniques that include sensing, the body, and eye work (Rahayuning, 2010). Geria's statement above has been to his students because the background of his becoming a famous dance artist in Bali has been based on the results of his being a student of art teachers that are esteemed and superior in Bali. Such independent exercising is related to the phenomenon that teachers in the past never gave instructions clearly and plainly. Such behavior is felt to become important because the students are then to seek by themselves, to explore their own body without reserve, and to later find and interpret various social constructs and body constructs for themselves (Widaryanto, 2015). The independently-done seeking process would result in a style and feeling of movement that, hopefully, could *nyalira* (i.e., become embodied).

The *wirasa* aspect with *Kawruh Jaged Mataram*, a writing concerning knowledge of how to do the Mataram-style dance, as its source consists of four elements expressed as follows, (1) *sawiji* (implying concentration), (2) *greged* (implying spiritedness), (3) *sungguh* (implying self-confidence), and (4) *ora mingkuh* (implying never giving up) (Dewan Ahli Yayasan Siswo Among Beksa, 1981). *Sawiji* implies concentration on the ability to unite all will by exerting all power of the spirit and the mind towards clear thought and doing it continuously (Suryobrongto, 1982). *Greged* implies spirit, which encourages determination to chase one's hope and realize it by working hard. *Sungguh* implies self-confidence, which, according to Javanese ethics, should be based on *ngesthi pribadi*, which means not putting in front one's ego and not being conceited. *Ora mingkuh* implies never giving up, which is an expression of the responsible attitude. In this case, it leans more towards the idea that one should have the nature of being *teteg* (meaning 'steady'), *tatag* (meaning 'looking forward'), and *jejeg* (meaning 'firm') in opinion (Sunaryadi, 2013). These four sub-aspects could be understood only if one has made an exploration to attain that quality. In dance education, the sub-aspects *sawiji*, *greged*, *sungguh*, and *ora mingkuh* are regarded as belonging to the scientific domain. Because then the aspect concerned is considered such a domain, it has not come yet to the process of internalization into the learning process.

## 2.2 Concept of *Kothong Nanging Kebak* in Role-playing

The expression *kothong nanging kebak* is a term said by the teacher to the students to make them able to empty themselves as person being a subject and then able to integrate themselves with the character role played. In order to be able to play a role accurately and meticulously, the spirit should be *kothong* (meaning 'empty') *ananging kebak* (meaning 'but full'). Briefly, the words could be interpreted to mean that if a dancer is not yet able to empty his or her spirit from all personal traits like quickly becoming satisfied, not sufficiently having a sense of responsibility because of already feeling able, being fond of being praised, and so on, he or she would surely be unable to fill his or her spirit with the character demanded by the role that he or she plays. One who is dancing should empty one's spirit and fully fill it with the character whose role one plays (Suryobrongto in Wibowo, 1981). *Kothong* implies an attitude of self-surrender which places the body and the spirit as media of expression which are *dikebaki* (meaning 'filled full') with the role which has become one with the body and the spirit.

*Kothong nanging kebak* is a Javanese saying that is possibly not unfamiliar to art practitioners as what is used to describe oneself's willingness to become another self. It is to imply that one, when being a dancer, should provide and prepare the self in the totality of oneself to be filled by another self so that the other self fully filled the totality within oneself. That statement is quite relevant with the need to condition behavior before role playing into the behavior of the character in the role played. Therefore, the concept of *kothong nanging kebak* is a way to enter the space of character totality. The effort to enter the space, according to *Kawruh Joged Mataram* consisting of the components termed *sawiji*, *greged*, *sungguh*, and *ora mingkuh*, could be used as foundation in *ngebaki* (meaning 'filling fully') the body and spirit already *ngothong* (meaning 'becoming empty'). Thus, a process of the crystallization of the Mataram-style dance in the form of self-discipline as physical and mental self-mastery and a state of *kepanjangan* (meaning 'being possessed, obsessed, or taken control of') would occur (Suryobrongto in Dewan Ahli Yayasan Siswo Among Beksa, 1981). The self-mastery is based upon an awareness of the self-ability of one as human subject. The awareness is required to prevent loss of control when *kepanjangan* by the character of the role played occurs. It is unlike the *jathilan* dancer who is *ndadi* (meaning 'in a trance'); such a dancer is said to

be under the control of some energy form outside the dancer's self-consciousness.

A dancer as actor should be able to integrate oneself into the role played. In the integration process, awareness is required to make the body willing to perform the role played. Grotowski calls the process *via negative*, which implies returning to Point Zero. *Via negative* is a technique of going into a trance and making a unification of all the actor's psychic and physical power. Further, Schechner has a concept concerning improving human behavior called restoration of behavior, stating as follows: Restored behavior is the key process of every kind of performing, in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play, and in the arts. Restored behavior is "out there", separate from "me." To put it in personal terms, restored behavior is "me" behaving "as if I were someone else," or "as I am told to do," or "as I have learned." Even if I feel myself wholly to be myself, acting independently, only a little investigating reveals that the units of behavior that comprise "me" were not invented by "me." Or, quite the opposite, I may experience being "beside myself," "not myself" or "taken over" as in trance (2002: 28). These statements make one realize that when dancing, a dancer should be able to fuse and become one with the role being played and all the dancer potential is exerted to the optimum for the role.

## 3 WIRASA IN THE BODY PROCESSING

In the process of dance education at the Yogyakarta royal palace, there is insufficient active interaction between the students and *pemucal* (or the teacher). There are seats for *pemucals* gathered into one group and there are seats for the students gathered into another group and such grouping of the seats creates a distance separating the two different groups of people from each other and causing insufficient interaction to occur between them. Though spatially the seats are still physically in the same place but freedom in interacting could not sufficiently occur. However, active relation occurs during the training or exercise process, in which each teacher concerned directly corrects any defect in students' body attitudes (or *deg*), techniques of movement, and obedience to prescribed rules. In the dance training, the correction process is called *mejed* and it is a method of correcting body attitudes by holding, moving, pressing, or doing something else with the hand to the body part which is incorrectly or not sufficiently correctly positioned. The *mejed* method is applied on the Yogyakarta dance learning process.

By means of the *mejed* method of directly making the hand touch the dancer's body to correct the incorrect or insufficiently correct body attitudes, students hopefully could directly sense the feeling of the corrected movement. Thus, errors would not be repeated. Male dancers who are bare-chested during training give teacher more ease in correcting and fixing students' defects. However, bare-chested exercises as those done when exercising at the royal palace are not done outside the palace. Exercises outside the palace (e.g., at dance studios) are generally done with male dancers wearing an undershirt. In addition, they do not put on wraparound batik cloth, unlike male dancers training at the palace.

Exercise in body processing as means of improving the quality of the body as dance instrument is a process which is action-filled in nature. The body processing is done for the purpose of making students of the university level or lower have the body quality enabling the body to become an instrument for expression in a dance. From results of observation, it is found that there are three models of body processing differing in objective and process characteristics. Of the first model is the body processing based on traditional dance movements, of the second model is the body processing oriented to the purpose of improvement in stamina and elasticity, and of the third model is the body processing whose purpose is to improve bodily sensitivity and sensitivity to feeling.

At the royal palace of Yogyakarta, the exercise in body improvement (as part of the *wiraga* aspect) for male dancers is based on the exercise called *Tayungan* while that for female dancers is based on the exercise called *Sari Tunggal*. *Tayungan* is the exercise of the basic or initial level for male dancer candidates. In *Tayungan*, students are taught the technique of walking and varieties of dance movements which exist in the Yogyakarta classical dance. The male dance movements which are already character-oriented give students freedom in going in depth, in which the movement varieties are done repeatedly. Students could repeat the same variety or differing varieties, depending on their wish concerning what variety of dance movement that they would like to deepen themselves in. Male dance movement varieties of both the *alus* (meaning 'gentle') nature and the *gagah* (meaning 'heroic') nature already lean towards certain role characters. However, their deepening themselves in the movement varieties is sometimes not accompanied with awareness of in-depth character study. They deepen themselves more in the aspect of the movement techniques. The reason is their ignorance

of the relation between a dance movement variety that they do with the role character associated with the variety.

Female students do their exercise of the initial level using as material what is called *Sari Tunggal*, which is a choreography constructed of female dance movement varieties. While male dance movement varieties are already directed towards certain characters, the female ones are not specifically for certain characters. The female dance movement varieties could be used for different types of female character called *luruh*, *lanyap*, and *mbranyak* and in both *Srimpi* and *Bedaya* dance performances. Because female dance movement varieties are not specifically for certain role characters, in the exercise process the teacher makes corrections on the movement technique performed. Therefore, the teacher's role when using the *mejed* method is quite important in enabling students to feel the movement being done.



Figure 1: Female *Pemucal* or teacher correcting a student's body position and stance with *mejed* in an exercise session at Yogyakarta palace



Figure 2: Male *pemucal* or teacher correcting students' body position and stance by applying *mejed* on the incorrect or insufficiently correct body part in an exercise session at Yogyakarta palce

In the process of dance learning, the body processing to exercise bodily sensitivity could be done both indoors in a closed room or studio and outdoors in the open space by directly interacting with nature. The exercise process in the latter case is emphasized more on each individual's sensitivity in interacting with nature. In the interaction, sensitivity of the senses is required to become the basis in doing movement activities. In the exercise process, patience and keikhlasan are needed to enable the movement process to be based on stimuli from outside oneself. The ability to feel the stimuli from outside oneself would become the basis in making a movement. That responsive ability would give a chance to acquire a way of moving which differs from person to person. Thus, the individuals would differ in making a movement. Such body processing would lead each individual to serious comprehension of the feeling of a movement. Further, the enjoyment of feeling the touch from nature could be used as means of improving the quality of *wirasa* in a dance.



Figure 3: Process of exploration to exercise bodily sensitivity whose purpose is improving sensitivity to feeling

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

The process of improvement in quality of the *wiraga* and *wirama* aspects has been already considerably made by referring to rules that have been standardized. However, the *wirasa* aspect according to the Mataram-style dance principles of *sawiji*, *greded*, *sungguh*, and *ora mingkuh* as its sub-aspects has not yet been integrated into the learning process conducted. The reason is that the understanding facilitated has been limited to cognitive-natured mastery or restricted to scientific understanding. With the various matters previously discussed used as basis, it is considered that the process of internalizing the *wirasa* aspect into role-playing in the dance art is required to improve the quality of being a dancer.

In the world of dance education, improvement in *wirasa* quality is methodologically not yet part of the learning process conducted. The *wirasa* aspect as an inseparable part of a dance ought to be part of the learning material. Dance education is oriented more to the technique and form aspects. Moreover, not all dance teachers already have adequate role-playing experience. Such experience is quite helpful in enabling understanding of the *wirasa* aspect. Because not every teacher knows the science related to the matter, most of the students do not know it, either. Therefore, not many dancers understand the said aspect. The process of *wirasa* knowledge transfer from the teacher to the student happens if the student is active in asking the teacher questions. With that as factual basis, it becomes quite necessary and urgent to conduct research on the quality of the *wirasa* aspect in the dance in order to be able to reveal the aspect more comprehensively.

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