The Symbolic Meaning of the Wirèng Dance Choreography at the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to find out the specifications of the choreographic form and the symbolic meaning of wirèng in the Kasunanan Palace. A qualitative descriptive research design with form-matching techniques was employed; meanwhile, the data collection techniques employed observation, interviews, and literature study. The data analysis includes the form of the wirèng choreography and its symbolic meaning. From the results of the study, it was found that the choreographic form of wirèng in Kasunanan was used for pair dances and had a soldier’s theme, while in Mangkunagaran wirèng was used to denote the term dance because wirèng is synonymous with the word beksan which means dance. The pattern of the wirèng choreography in Kasunanan has specifications, namely: (1) it is performed by male and female dancers in an even number, (2) it consists of three parts, namely the initial part (maju beksan), the main part (beksan), and the final part (mundur beksan), (3) in the main part of the dance there are variations of the dance scenes and variations of war scenes, such as madras wars or gending wars, referring to a typical war dance which is accompanied by slow (lamba) and constant (steady) rhythmic gendhing or music, and ruket wars which are accompanied by fast-rhythmic pieces of music (mipil-lancaran), (4) changes and differences always follow every change of part in the composition of the accompaniment pieces. Wirèng’s symbolic meaning reflects the value system prevailing in the palace environment, symbolized by the numbers zero, two, and three, movement characteristics, and movement patterns (gawang) in the choreography.

Keywords: wirèng, choreography, symbolic meaning


INTRODUCTION

The existence of dance in the palace (palace, kingdom) environment is not just a beautiful rhythmic movement and is shown to be watched. In the beginning, dance was a human need to find harmony with the environment. Therefore, dance is often associated with the sociocultural and religious activities of the nobility. Talking about the form of court dance choreography feels incomplete without involving the symbolic meaning behind the form of the choreography itself (Reason & Reynolds, 2010; Sunarmi, Sri, 2019; Kinder, 2021). This is relevant to the statement that to be able to understand a dance; one needs to know the cultural background of the dance itself and how it was formed. The rationale was based on the understan-
ding that dance is a cultural product as a result of the creative process of its supporting community through the symbols used (Kaeppler, 1977; 1992; Jazuli, 2014; Jazuli & Alam, 2020). In his experimental study called Choreomatics, Alan Lomax proved that artistic style is determined by a nation’s honor, culture, and society (Haberman and Meisel, 1970; Jazuli and Paranti, 2020; Jazuli. 2021). The perspective of Kaeppler and Lomax shows that in the context of sociocultural values, it is closely related to the way of understanding a work of art (dance) as a symbolic representation.

In Surakarta there are two palaces, namely the Kasunanan Palace which a king leads with the title Ingkang Sinuhun Kanjeng Susuhunan (ISKS) Paku Buwana and the Mangkunagaran Palace which was led by an adipati or Duke who is also famous as Raja Kecil or the ‘minor’ king whose title is Kanjeng Gusti Prince Adipati Arya (KG-PAA) Mangkunagara. The signing of the Salatiga Agreement between Sunan Pakubuwono III and Raden Mas Said marked the two kingdoms. This agreement was made on March 17, 1757 (Ricklefs, 1956; 1995; 2019; Santoso, 2011; Suharji, 2009). The life activities of the two kingdoms are still ongoing even though their authority is no more than part of the center for the development of Javanese culture. In the view of Robert Redfield, in his field of study includes canon culture and folk culture. The canon culture or tradition for elite society was seen as the tradition of the literate and educated elite (court aristocrats) who were able to analyze, interpret and reflect cultural knowledge. Folk culture or populist traditions, on the other hand, relies on passing information, beliefs, and customs by way of oral tradition from one generation to the next.

The two palaces have different dance forms, both in terms of choreography and dance style, giving rise to the terms Kasunanan style and Mangkunagaran style (Hadi Subagyo 2010). Even though both of them have the same dance genre (related to the form, type, and character), such as the bedhaya, srimpi, beksan, and wirèng genres. This is confirmed by the results of research on “Spiritualitas budaya Jawa dalam seni tari klasik gaya Surakarta” or Spirituality of Javanese culture in the art of classical dance of the Surakarta style, that the classical dance of the Surakarta style or called the Surakarta Kasunan style is a tradition that lives and develops within the ‘great tradition’ environment and has noble values. The Surakarta style dance represents a symbol of power, the authority of the king, and at the same time, a barometer of the advancement of Javanese civilization (Heine & Von, 1982); Daryono, 2010; Jazuli, 2021). For this reason, palace dancers are required to have insight, knowledge, and appreciation of Javanese cultural norms with all the values contained therein. This aspect differentiates artists from rural areas who live in a ‘small tradition’ cultural atmosphere (Pamardi et al., 2014). In the Surakarta palace or Kasunan, there are still various dance genres, namely bedhaya, srimpi, beksan, and wirèng, and the fragmen (drama dance) genre. Suharji’s research (2009) informs that at Mangkunagaran Surakarta Palace, a dance has been born and developed which has become a flagship, namely the Bedhaya Suryasumirat and Bedhaya Anglirmendung dances. Suryasumirat means the radiance of the sun, which gives life to the universe and everything in it (Wahyu Santosa Prabowo. et al., 2007; Rimasari Pramesthi Putri, Wahyu Lestari, 2015). This dance is a combination of the previous traditional bedhaya dance and contemporary dance. The Śūrya Sumirat bedhaya dance was co-created between Mangkunegara IX and a Mangkunegaran relative named Sulistyo Tirtokusumo. In this dance moves, Bedhaya Suryasumirat develops some of the dance moves from previous bedhaya dances, such as Bedhaya Anglirmendung, Bedhaya Dirathamerta, Bedhaya Pulung, Bedhaya Bedhah Madhun, then combines them with movements according to the interpretations of the performers according to contemporary style. Bedhaya Suryasumirat as a soldier’s dance uses a gun as an accessory tucked
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into the Slepe which is wrapped around the stomach of nine female dancers. The accompaniment uses a set of Slendro and Pelog gamelan compiled with drums.

Based on this phenomenon, this writing is more focused on the study of the wirèng genre, especially on the form of dance choreography and its symbolic meaning. The argument is that previous studies seem fragmentary (separate), so they have not been analyzed as a whole (compare Jazuli’s research, 1986; Prabowo et al., 2007; Hadi Subagyo, 2010). Besides that, the wirèng genre has its own specifications or uniqueness. The analysis strategy used is by placing two components: knowledge of cultural value systems and dance choreography. A cultural value system is a number of concepts about what lives in the minds of most members of society (palace society) and about things that are considered valuable and influential in their lives (Koentjaraningrat, 1980; 1984). The value system is reflected through symbols that function as a guide and gives direction and orientation in the life of the community concerned. The perspective of dance choreography includes aspects of presentation, treatment, and disclosure.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study whose aim is to describe and explain the form and symbolic meaning of the choreography of the wireng dance from Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta.

In analyzing the form and symbolic meaning of the choreography of the wireng dance, a multidisciplinary approach is used (Ahimsa-Putra, 2007; Soedarsono, 2002; Supanggah, 2005). This is because wireng as a genre of performing arts is multi-layered, and each of its components can be discussed, such as movement patterns, accompaniment patterns, costumes, and venues. Structural-functional theory and social action (value system) are used to examine contextual phenomena (Jazuli, 2014), while textual approaches are used with choreography and symbolic meaning to analyze the presentation, treatment, and expression patterns of the wireng dance (M. Jazuli, 1994; Jazuli, 2008; Hadi, 2016).

The research procedures and stages in this study include: (1) data collection through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and literature study; (2) the organization and identification of the results of data collection is carried out by a triangulation focus group discussion (FGD) to determine the validity of the data; (3) data analysis includes dance choreography patterns and their symbolic meanings.

Data collection using direct observation techniques was carried out by observing art-cultural events in Surakarta during 2021, especially those featuring the wireng dance, such as the meeting of four Javanese palaces called Catur Sadjoto, commemoration of the 90th anniversary of Paguyuban Kawula Surakarta (PAKASA, December 3, 2021), and Surakarta arts and culture performance during the Jumenengan Paku Buwana XIII commemoration at the Surakarta Kasunanan Palace Exhibition on April 20, 2021. Surakarta dance figures which were used as informants were Wahyu Santoso Prabowo, Daryono, and S. Pamardi. Data collection is carried out simultaneously in order to obtain valid, valid data. The validity of the data is determined based on the credibility and accountability of the data that has been obtained. Interactive analysis was chosen to analyze data about choreographic patterns and symbolic meanings (value systems), including data presentation, data reduction, verification, and drawing conclusions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; M. & Huberman, 1992).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Wireng Surakarta Dance Choreography

The dance choreography at the Kasunanan Surakarta palace can be broadly stated as follows. According to its type, there are two, namely female dances and male dances, each of which is divided into several characters. The female dance consists of the characters luruh (soft) and lanyap
(galant); the male dance too has the character of alusan (soft) and agalan/gagahan (strong). In defining characters, there are still more complicated details. For example, in the male Alusan dance, there is a distinction between bryanyak and luruh, and there is also the type of dance known as putera agalan which characters are gagahan bergas and gagahan dugangan. In the movement and attitude of dance, there is a normative provision called “Hasta Sawanda”, which consists of pacak (standardization of attitude and movement); pancat (pattern of continuity); pancat (harmonious pattern); wirèng, bedhaya, srimpi, beksan, frahmen, and wirèng genres are different because of the form and meaning of the choreography.

The term wirèng, according to Chronicle Il a ila (Soemahatmaka, 1928; 1930; Jazuli, 1986), is taken from the name of a Patih of the Kingdom of Jenggala Kediri, namely Patih Wirènggati. The duke was clever and skilled at war, so he often taught his soldiers (his men) his skills. So, it is inevitable that the real function of the wirèng is to train soldiers in battle and/or as a way to show off their strength before the king. Besides functioning as entertainment, this dance is also a vehicle for demonstrating the power of a kingdom. However, there are some experts (Poerbatjara, 1964) who argue that wirèng was inspired by ritual ceremonies that took place in the royal square, namely when there were horseback riding exercises carrying spear weapons (sodoran, watang), arrows, swords, and/or when there is a show of tiger fight in the more ancient kingdom. Based on this event, it was later appointed to become a war-themed dance genre and function as entertainment, especially entertainment for entertaining guests of royal palaces. During the Mataram era in Surakarta, wirèng was used to refer to special soldiers (Kopasus) who served as the king’s bodyguard. This continued until the reign of Sunan Pakubuwana X (Jazuli, 1986; Jazuli, 2021).

Several dance figures in Surakarta
Wirèng is a kind of soldier’s dance performed by dancers in pairs with the theme of war (Interview with S. Pamardi, June 24, 2021). Daryono said that according to the Chronicle book in the Reksapustaka Pura Mangkunagaran, apart from the bedhaya dance, the mention of a Mangkunagaran style dance is wirèng. However, in development, the mention of it is identified with the word ‘beksan’ (dance), both dance in pairs and solo dance (Interview on June 23, 2021).

The statement by the dance figures is the same as what the author has received from several dance masters from the Kasunanan Palace and Mangkunagaran Temple around 1985 who were deceased, namely RT. Jagamanta, RM. Joko Suwarja, R. Ng. S. Ngaliiman, RT. Sena Suryasumasta, R.Ng. Rana Suripto.

When wirèng developed outside the Kasunanan Palace, the term wirèng was used to refer to dances with warrior or heroic themes and were performed by dancers in pairs, such as wirèng Bandayuda or Bandabaya, Gelo Ganjret, Bugis Twins, Lawung, and so on. This is different from what developed in the Mangkunegaran Surakarta Temple. Based on the manuscripts in the Mangkunagaran library, the term wirèng tends to be used to refer to almost all forms and types of dance in the Mangkunagaran, such as wirèng Mandrarini, wirèng Lambangsari, wirèng Golek Montro, wirèng Kelana Topeng, and so on (compare with (Malarsih, 2007b);( Suwarja, 2009)).

Based on the specifics of the choreography, the wirèng dance is performed/danced by an even number of dancers, meaning that there can be two, four, six, or eight dancers in pairs. With the number of dancers and the position of the pair, the wirèng at the Kasunanan Palace includes a pair dance with a soldier’s theme and functions as entertainment and spectacle. The presentation of wirèng is divided into two, namely wirèng, which tells a story and does not tell a story. The wirèng who tells the story is the wirèng who uses storytelling or picking (Javanese: methil) from a story originating from the Chronicle of Panji, Mahabara and Ramayana which is then called wirèng pethilan - depicting a battle between two characters who have different characters, such as good-bad, fine-tune characters, rude, and totally wrong. For example, wirèng pethilan Kelana Jayengsari, Karna Tinanding, Prawiratama, Gatutkaca-Antasena, Srikandi-Mustakaweni, Anila-Prahasta, and so on (Jazuli, 1986); Hadawiyah & Maryani, 2019). The Wirèng that doesn’t tell a story depicts two soldiers practicing war, such as the Wirèng Bandayuda, Bugis Twins, Lawung. The uniqueness of the wirèng choreography is that no one ever loses or wins in war. However, in the wirèng pethilan at the end of the war, characters who are considered to have good, refined, and true characteristics are symbolically superior.

The movement patterns of the wirèng seem simpler than other court dance genres, such as bedhaya and srimpi. However, in its development, the wirèng’s movement patterns are increasingly varied. This development also occurs in the form of the accompaniment, from the mild form to the ketawang and ladrang pieces and their displacements, as well as the variations in fast and slow rhythms. The place where it was originally performed was in a pendhapa (a typical Javanese building with four pillars as the main support) now it can be staged on any stage, such as the proscenium stage and others. In the war scene of the main part of the dance (the beksan part), the movement variation pattern, which was originally accompanied by two small drums and a large drum develop accompanied by a bar/chiblon drum. An example is the presentation of the Bandayuda wirèng as a type of wirèng that does not use stories, performed by two male dancers in the same attire, and carrying shields and short sticks. The structure of the dance consists of: (1) the initial part (maju beksan) is at the gawang sopana (dancer’s position, the place/room where the dance begins). With the motive of the worship movement and the movement of walking forward to-
wards the essence of the dance (beksan); (2) the main part of the dance is that the dancers are in the main gate (middle room/pendhapa center) doing dances, madas wars, ruket wars, and more dancing. The following is an example of a storytelling wirèng (pethilan wirèng) and a non-telling wirèng (See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

**Figure 1.** Wirèng “Bandayuda” (non-telling wirèng) (romadecade.org/tari-beksan-wireng 2021)

**Figure 2.** Wirèng pethilan “Bambangan-Cakil” (the telling wirèng)

In sub-sections or war scenes, there are variations in a spatial formation called gawang prapatan (crossroad spaces), gawang jeblos (opponent space/places), and gawang pojok (pendhapa rectangular corner spaces). After the war scene is finished, they dance again, then it is continued with the final part of the dance (mundur beksan); (3) the final part of the dance is the same as the initial part of the dance, namely, the dancer returns to the starting position, gawang sopana. The difference lies in the intended direction, namely the movement in the early part of the dance from the gawang sopana to gawang pokok, while the movement in the final part of the dance is from the gawang pokok to the gawang sopana. Based on this description, it can be said that the form of the choreography of the wirèng dance presented on stage is the form of the pendhapa by making the most of the space but remaining consistent at its center, namely the midpoint of the pendhapa between the two dancers. This kind of development also occurred in other court dance genres that developed outside the palace.

The following is a description of the position of the wirèng dancers occupying the Sopana, Pokok, Corner, and Prapatan movement patterns (goals) on the Pendhapa Keraton (the Palace’s pendhapa) stage (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Types of Gawang Kasunanan Surakarta Palace’s Value System

The cultural value system in a society is often general in nature and has a fairly broad scope. Kluckhohn distinguishes the cultural value system in five variations, namely about the nature of human life, human work, human position in space-time, human relations with the natural surroundings, and human relations with each other (Koentjaraningrat, 1980). In simple terms, Kluckhohn’s framework concerns human life as a person and socially. Such a
universal framework for Javanese society, especially court society (nobility), is not surprising; it has even become part of their outlook on life.

Culture from the perspective of the Javanese people is the result of processing “mind and power” - including things related to the potential for reasoning (rational), psychological (sense-ethical) and beauty (aesthetic) strengths. Within “mind” there is a refinement so that the processing method is called alusan which means kasutapan, pasemedèn or pamesu budi, namely actions related to concentration of creativity, taste and intention. Rationally, budi is a spirit of action based on the nuances of divinity which has a holy, compassionate, and primal nature, so it is inevitable that the Palace also has the position and function as the place of the king as the leader of government, relatives of the Palace (family) who carried out the king’s orders (Geertz, 1960) and were the physical and spiritual protectors - a great tradition (Redfield, 1956). The culture of the Surakarta palace, as a source of Javanese culture, always strives to achieve a noble character and soul that is capable of being self-guided and self-controlled. This is because this noble character and soul is seen as capable of radiating authority or inner strength called prabawa-wibawa, and emits an external power that can be recognized through feeling, smelling, hearing, seeing, and creating (Yosodipuro, 1982; Gesick, 1989). As said by Sapardi Yosodipuro, that: “Amargi budi punika golongan ‘alus’ Pramila pangolahinip ungi sinartan “ke-alusan” tegesipun kasutapan, pasemeden utawi pamesu budi. Mungging hing tata lahir, budi punika tegesipun pakarti ingkang awewaton sunar, kadostra suci, asih, adil, rahayu, utama lan sasaminipun’ (1982). (“Considering that the mind belongs to the mystical class, the processing is also called mystical meaning that it is through asceticism, meditation or to awaken the power of the mind. In its embodiment, the mind means an act based on the holy light, love, fair, safe, sublime, and so on that is equivalent).

In the Tripama and Wedhatama chronicle book by KGPAA, Mangkunagara IV (1811 - 1881), it is clearly stated that the existence of Javanese human life was based on three problems, namely: 1) the problem of life in relation to God, relations with oneself and one another, and relations with the universe and the world around it (Mangkoenagoro IV, 1931; Wibawa, 2010; Mulyoto, 1992). In summary, these three problems can be explained that God for the Javanese is dat tan kena kina-ya ngapa (that cannot be described), cedhak tanpa sénggolan, adoh tanpa wangenan (too close to touch, too far and is not limited). Therefore, the Javanese in their lives are always looking for knowledge of perfection as a provision for traveling to cyberspace. Human existence consists of physical and spiritual. The body is the unity between the elements of flesh, skin, blood; amniotic fluid and placenta (after the placenta); nine holes (breathable air); and the five senses. Spiritual is formed from sadutar papat kali-ma pancer which is incarnated in a person’s attitude and behavior that comes from the function of lust, “I” (ego), person, soul. The order of the universe is formed from a hierarchical arrangement that is considered to have things in common with human beings. So the awareness of the Javanese towards the order of the universe is often called the macrocosm (jagat gedhé), which is identical to self-awareness as the microcosm (little universe).

The brief description above indicates that the life orientation of the Javanese always leads to a state of complete harmony, harmony, and balance, in achieving the highest ideals, namely manunggaling kawila gusti. In the life of the Javanese nobility (aristocrats, noblemen, especially in the Palace), it is believed that people who have a noble spirit will be able to achieve their goals. A virtuous person is a person who is able to control himself in attitudes and behavior for life and always makes other people happy or Amemangun karyenak ty-asing sasama (Pujasworo, 1982; Prasetyo and Poniman, 2019). Therefore, it is natural for the Javanese to think that soft and
calm people become idols and are simultaneously the opposite of those who are rude or arrogant. Such is depicted in dance, wayang, and other art forms. Soft and rough, right and left, and good and bad are natural dichotomies (binary opposition) that need to be kept in balance.

Therefore, the process of creating palace dances and their accessories is always based on efforts to cultivate the mind physically and spiritually. The rhythm of the gendhing that accompanies the dance must unite with the (action) of the dancer, the expressions of the dancing soul united with the audience’s vitality, and united in a feeling that penetrates the heart. Dance in the palace environment (Kraton Kasunanan and Pura Mangkunagaran) Surakarta represents the progress of Javanese civilization that lives and develops in an environment of ‘great traditions’ with noble values. The existence of dance in the Palace has an important meaning because it is a symbol of the authority of the king. Palace dancers are required to have insight, knowledge, and appreciation of Javanese culture with all the values contained therein. It is this aspect that distinguishes artists outside the Palace (people, rural areas) who are in a ‘little tradition’ cultural atmosphere. Thus, the art and culture of the Palace can become a source of life and development of the arts outside it, although it functions more as a means of entertainment and traditional ceremonies in the countryside (Pamardi et al., 2014). In this context, an example can be the wirèng petihan dance genre which depicts the dichotomy of smooth-coarse, good-bad, right-left, fine-coarse characters, male-female; while the wirèng without a story describes the balance of a dichotomy that should exist in the universe (a picture of binary opposition). If a fine and good character is won over a rough and bad one it is a purely symbolic choice because there is no such victory that does not last long (lasting) for the balance of the cosmos.

Viscosity to the cultural value system is reflected in the form of works of art (dance), then giving rise to the notion that good works of art are works of art that are symbolic in nature. This situation shows that cultural values are very essential in the life of the Javanese, especially among the Palace, even though this has experienced decadence in the present era. Therefore, in analyzing Javanese art (wirèng dance), it is appropriate to always consider things beyond what appears, namely the symbolic meaning.

The Symbolic Meaning of Wirèng’s Choreography

The discussion of wirèng choreography is inseparable from form and content, although the form and content can be relatively different. From a structural-functional perspective, the form in question includes elements or parts that are organized in a unified whole, while content relates to what lies behind the form, which symbolically has certain values and meanings. Because, it is impossible to limit the contents of works of art to mere (forms of) beauty. Therefore, the contents of works of art need to be assessed and appreciated as a whole, concrete and intact (Herasatoto, 1983). This understanding indicates that any value can be represented, connoted, and given a form that the senses can perceive.

The basic thing in Javanese court dances is the concept of soft-hard movement. This concept has been applied to the presentation, treatment, and disclosure aspects. In a more detailed division, subtle-coarse occurs in the form, nature, character, and type of dance, so it can be said that fine-coarse is the ‘ideology’ of Javanese cultural art. For example, the disclosure and treatment in the alus or smooth dance, if the dancer is unable to animate or convey according to the situation (character) being played, can be said to be ‘rough’; conversely, a dancer can be said to be ‘good’ if he is able to play a role/character (even though he has a rough character) in accordance with the character of the character being played. However, all the normative values or rules of dance has functioned more as guidelines that direct the freedom of the
‘wilet’ or the creativity of the dancers so that they are not rigid to interpret. Every dancer has a life capacity (rasa) that is not always the same, so every belief and interpretation of a dance teacher often varies from one another. This difference is caused by a sense of appreciation (personal style), sect (a smaller level division of style and then successive schools) that a dancer adheres to. Phenomena like this can be compared with the Javanese expression ‘copy the teacher, copy the song (different teachers, different teaching styles)’.

From the perspective of presentation, Wirèng includes supporting aspects of the dance performance, such as staging, dress, accompaniment, and other accessories. The supporting aspect of the dance itself is inseparable from the intent and purpose of why the dance is performed. Suppose the performance of the dance is meant to legitimize power or show the greatness of the state (king of a kingdom). In that case, the performance can appear glamorous, sophisticated, and neatly arranged so that the goal of legitimizing the people’s beliefs can be obtained. If dance at the Palace is used for entertainment, ritual, and educational purposes, such as to instill norms, attitudes, ethics, aesthetics, and soul enlightenment, then all the rules in court dance are very important to support that goal. Regarding the place for performing dances in the palace environment, a king always provided a place that could be used for dance performances, such as a pendhapa (a rectangular room with four pillars), bangsal-tratag (similar to a proscenium stage), or other places. The place for dance performances is always rectangular in shape, as is the concept of the pendhapa. The place has an important role because it also determines the authority of the dance. It seems that the concept of the pendhapa stage was deliberately used as a reference for the concept of dance with a specific purpose. This is because the four pendhapa pillars have a certain meaning in the Javanese cultural concept, namely the symbol of the four cardinal points (east, west, south and north) with a central point in the middle of the four pillars as a symbol of ‘I’ (human self or dancer) commonly called ‘keblat papat limo pancer’. Besides that, ‘keblat papat limo pancer’ can also be interpreted as a symbol of the four passions in humans, namely Mutmainah, Amarah, Lauamah, and Supiah. The four passions are also considered brothers because they function as guides for the fifth brother, namely ‘I,’ in living life.

Likewise, the dance costume will refer to interests that show the greatness of the king. The splendor of the implementation of dance performances at the Palace and all the equipment presented became a reference for the palace people and ordinary people. The function of dance accompaniment is not solely to accompany the dance but often also determines the structure of the dance movement. For example, a series of dance movements consisting of several motion motifs is always bound by the form of the piece, the sense of pangkat-dawah movement (the beginning and end of the movement process) is also determined by the rhythm of the gendhing.

Understanding the treatment perspective is related to the attitude and movement that a dancer must demonstrate. Even though in the previous description, it has been said that the Surakarta style dance already has normative provisions, namely Hasta Sawanda, the eight normative guidelines for a dancer in the Kasunanan palace. However, this is only a dancer’s starting point (guideline). So far, no dancer has ever been able to fully achieve Hasta Sawanda. Does this mean Hasta Sawanda is an ideological requirement, even utopian? It is possible, but Hasta Sawanda is still needed as a reference material in the effort to create quality dancers (Wahyu Santosa Prabowo. et al., 2007).

The wirèng choreography is performed by an even number of dancers (two, four, eight) viewed from the disclosure perspective. The even number is symbolically related to philosophy in human life. Two identical dancers with a value of two means dichotomous or binary opposition, such as right-left, male-female,
good-bad, subtle-coarse, and so on. The four dancers symbolize the four cardinal directions (east, west, north, south, with a central point as a symbol of ‘I’ - ‘keblat pat pat limo pancer’ within (‘I’) human beings. If the wirèng dance is performed by eight dancers, then the value of eight is a symbolic representation of Hasta Sawanda (eight guidelines for the quality of a palace dancer). Although there are also those who relate it to the teachings of Hasta Brata, namely the eight characteristics and behaviors that must be possessed by a leader who functions as self-control, especially in every action of his leadership (Suhari, 2014). Shouldn’t a good (quality) dancer be able to lead himself by controlling his creativity, taste, and intention when expressing his dance? As said and discussed by the Javanese dancers of the Surakarta style Daryono, Wahyu Santoso, and Pamardi:

a Javanese dancer must be able to nge-mong rasa lan sumeleh (controlling one’s own emotions and uniting feelings with their role) (Interview 23-24 June 2021).

The structure of the disclosure of the wirèng dance consists of three parts (maju beksan, beksan, mundur beksan) symbolically related to the journey of the purwa, middle, wasana (beginning, middle, end) life which are represented by three values, namely birth, life, and death. Revealing the war scene in the beksan (principal dance) section, the dancers form a circular floor (space) pattern which is revealed in the process of moving from the main goal to the Prapatran, corner goal, broken goal, and corner goal. In that battle scene, no one wins or loses, meaning that the strength of the two (characters) of the wirèng dancers are equally strong so that the result of the war is zero - a symbol of the state of emptiness (Sanskrit). The state of nil or emptiness is interpreted as nothingness, a circle pattern with a value of zero symbolizes emptiness. This is related to the teachings of Kejawen that to be able to mulih mulanira dumadi (return to the origin, namely God Almighty) leads to sangkan paraning dumadi (return to the origin of life) through nothingness or emptiness. Therefore, the end of the battle scene of the wirèng dance is nil as a symbolic representation of the state of emptiness which is revealed through the dance floor pattern in the form of a circle, which is interpreted as having a zero value. This is relevant to the statement contained in Wirid Hidayat Jati’s chronicle book, which many teachers of mysticism or Kejawèn refer to, especially the section on understanding the teachings about God, which reads as follows:

Wisikan Ananing Dat: Sejatiné ora ana apa-apa, awit duk maksih awanguwung durung ana sawiiji-wiiji, kang ana dhingin iku Ingsun. Ora ana Pangéran among Ingsun sejatinat Dat kang Maha Suci, anglimputi ing sipat Ingsun, amartani ing asmaning-Sun, am ratandhani ing afngal Ingsun.

(In fact, when it was empty there was nothing, what existed before was I. The word “I” in this case means God, the Creator of all. -Me signifies My will. God “exists” without being, and God creates everything that is His will. Everything that exists is by His Power. God’s power encompasses all forms, enlivens all names of His creation, and marks His creations’ attitudes and behavior (Suyanto, 2018).

Starting from the zero value, value two, and value three, philosophically represent human life which is symbolized through cultural artwork activities in the form of wirèng choreography.

The value of two as a description of the contents of the world which is always dichotomous (binary opposition), such as good and bad, right and left, and so on, must be in a balance of harmony. Wirèng, as a warrior-themed dance depicting war without winners and losers, is a reflection of a symbolic expression of the necessity of that dichotomy, which always ‘exists,’ taken for granted. The even number of dancers who are at war and succumb to each other to achieve real victory is just relativity because the target is not found, just circling or empty, or has zero value. This symbolizes the meaning of oneness between the small and big universe, or ‘manunggaling kawula gusti.’ This analysis is more relevant when connected with the
meaning of the three values. In the wirèng dance, three values (maju beksan, beksan, mundur beksan) as a symbol of human existence (purwa, madya, wasana) in living life are bound by three practices, namely behavior in external life, practice in inner life, and practice in natural life. The values two and three are actually framed by a circle (zero value, empty) which can be interpreted as eternal life, a symbol of a rotating world. The central point in the circle is abstract but still `existing and eternal`. Therefore, at the beginning of the wirèng dance, it always begins with the posture of sitting cross-legged and the movement of worship in place as a symbol that humans must know themselves personally and with decency. Because in worship, it has the meaning of being one, so beksan is also one, from sitting to standing, usually followed by a dance movement called laras. The movement of the laras is a symbol of the essence of life in harmony between body and soul. This unity is capable of controlling human thoughts and feelings. Thus, a true dance can become a symbol of teaching about norms, ethics, and belief in God for the Javanese people, especially for the royal family.

CONCLUSION

The existence of Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta dance is inseparable from the cultural conception of its environment which is always based on ethical-aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural norms (value systems) with divine nuances. The form of dance occurs because there is a unified symbol embodied in the function and structure of its presentation. In terms of the choreographic pattern, the wirèng dance appears simpler and uncomplicated when compared to the Bedaya and Srimpi genres. However, behind its simplicity, it contains a description of the symbols to be communicated, namely (expressive) symbols in the order of human life personally, socially, and human relations with the environment and God.

The pattern or form of wirèng choreography that lives and develops in the Kasunanan Palace has specifications with certain characteristics, namely: (1) performed by male and female dancers in an even number which symbolically means the achievement of balance and order, (2) consists of three parts, namely the initial part (maju beksan), the main part (beksan), and the final part (mundur beksan) related to the symbolization of the nature of human life, (3) in the main part of the dance there are variations of dancing scenes and variations of war scenes as symbols of a struggle for human life in the world, (4) every change of part is always followed by an adjustment of the composition of the accompaniment music, which means that joys and sorrows, ups and downs, as well as strengths and weaknesses, take place one after another as it happens in the course of life. Such symbolic meanings have been presented and confirmed in wirèng’s choreography through movement-space-time patterns and the symbolization of zero, two, and three values.

The implication of studying the choreography and symbolic meaning of the wirèng dance is that dance values and their meanings can cultivate conscious human attitudes and behavior to create peace.

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