



Mahardika Dance Creation Process

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Article Info

Article History

Received: 27-07-2023

Accepted: 20-09-2023

Published: 30-11-2023

Keywords:

*Choreography, creativity,
Mahardika Dance*

Abstract

This paper aims to reveal a creative process of the Mahardika dance creation conducted in 2006. This disclosure is important to see how the concept of traditional dance development still maintains the Balinese identity. The Mahardika dance, a new creation form of Balinese dance, comes from the creative process between I Wayan Sutirtha as the dance choreographer and I Nyoman Windha as the musical composer of the dance accompaniment. Mahardika means freedom or release from worldly ties, which refers to the Sutasoma figure as the central character in the Mahardika dance. It is adapted from the main theme of the Bali Arts Festival, namely Swabawaning Idep, meaning the radiance of nobility. The process of creating dance refers to the theory of Alma M. Hawkins in the book *Creating Through Dance*, including exploration, improvisation, and formation. The Mahardika dance consists of four parts. The first part describes the atmosphere of meditation with a silent atmosphere, the second part depicts the meeting of the Sutasoma and Dewi Candrawati with a happy and romantic atmosphere, the third part portrays the war of the Sutasoma and Prabu Purusadha with a tense atmosphere, and the fourth part represents the consciousness of Prabu Purusada and Sutasoma sitting on a lotus flower with a serene atmosphere. In addition, the costumes are adjusted to the characters. Certainly, it does not interfere with the dancer's movements but helps and opens aesthetic spaces in the choreography of the Mahardika dance creation.

INTRODUCTION

The creative process plays a crucial role in choreography development. Creativity is the heart of creating choreography in dance performances. Choreographers must have strong imaginative abilities to develop creativity (Ardiansah 2014). There are many kinds of dance in Bali, which places demands on choreographers to create captivating dance performances that appeal to the audience. Through this creativity, we can delve deeper into the creation process (Alfarez and Putra 2022) of the mahardika dance.

During the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, the choreographer of the mahardika dance had the opportunity to create a dance work for an event of the festival. the choreographer and I Nyoman Windha, whom the Gianyar Regency Government appointed, they worked on a new creative dance work to represent the Gianyar Regency in the Festival Gong Kebyar Dewasa of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, a prestigious event throughout Bali (Roeder and Tenzer 2012). They decided to focus on the character of Sutasoma as the central figure in their creative dance work. Mahardika dance can still be enjoyed for its beauty on Agung Studio's YouTube channel at the following address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIJRJhoPgRA&t=68s>.

The choice of the story of Sutasoma in the creative dance work entitled "mahardika" was made to align with the central theme of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, namely "Swabawaning Idep," meaning the radiance of generosity. The selection of themes for the Bali Arts Festival has answered the hesitation often appearing during its implementation. The rapid growth of tourism often necessitates the preservation of local culture, so the original purpose of the Bali Arts Festival or Pesta Kesenian Bali (PKB) from merely preserving local culture has been proven (Wulandari, Purnami, and Mahagangga 2021). I Nyoman Windha is a Balinese maestro of karawitan (Santosa, Saptono, and Sutirtha 2022).

In light of the presentation, a choreographer must be creative and capable

of turning the insignificant into something beautiful and meaningful to discover new patterns. The essence of creativity lies in finding something new within the existing (Sumardjo 2016:84). Creative Balinese artists, particularly in the field of dance, have produced numerous new works, such as I Wayan Dibia with the manuk rawa dance, N.L.N.Suasti Wijaya Bandem with the cendrawasih dance, I Nyoman Cerita (late) with the satya brastha, I Ketut Rena with the merak angelo dance," and many other dance works rooted in the "aesthetic values of Balinese dance" (Rianta, Santosa, and Sariada 2019).

All those creations of artists have originated from various sources of inspiration. Related to the case, an artist and choreographer are continually motivated to explore creativity in applying and realizing a dance work. During the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, the choreographer had the opportunity to bring dance work for an event of the Bali Arts Festival. Collaborating with I Nyoman Windha, whom the Gianyar Regency Government appointed, they worked on a new creative dance to represent the Gianyar Regency in the Festival Gong Kebyar Dewasa, a prestigious event of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006.

The choreographer and I Nyoman Windha agreed to appoint the character Sutasoma as the central figure in the creative dance work. The choice of Sutasoma's story for "mahardika" aligns with the central theme of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, namely "Swabawaning Idep," meaning the radiance of noble thoughts. Mahardika or freedom, in this context, is interpreted as liberation from the worldly ties, and Sutasoma is the essence of the peaceful-hearted individual who attains this state through yoga. The selection of the Bali Arts Festival's theme (Ruastiti 2010) is from local wisdom, where many "ancient Javanese literary texts containing profound philosophical values used as sources of inspiration for creating performing arts" (Santosa 2021). In this case, the story of Sutasoma was not transferred as is. However, the movements were processed with the principles of dance composition to

create a dance piece that avoids monotony (Nastiti and Malarsih 2021).

Mahardika is a dance work that comes from the Bali Arts Festival in 2006, representing the Gianyar Regency in the Festival Gong Kebyar Dewasa. It is performed by the sekeha of Gong Teruna Mekar Banjar Kebon and involves four male and four female dancers. The performance uses a large lotus flower prop as a symbol of purity and sanctity, in alignment with the character of Sutasoma in the mahardika dance. Dance movements, literature, costume design, staging, theater, and musical elements are all components that shape the performing arts (Suroso 2018). To avoid multiple interpretations of the choreography, it is essential to consider the unification of space and time by limiting the use of the title of the work, music, costumes, props, and dance movements (Susanti 2015).

The figure of Sutasoma was agreed to become the central character of the work entitled "Mahardika" with a duration of 11 minutes. After studying various stories about Sutasoma, the choreographer decided to arrange the story of Sutasoma's successful endeavor by realizing the extremely wicked Prabu Purusadha, who had imprisoned 100 kings in the world. The mahardika dance is performed by a group of eight individuals, consisting of four male and four female dancers. The choice of eight performers is closely related to the choreographic requirements, as it involves various supporting characters alongside Sutasoma, such as Dewi Candrawati (Sutasoma's wife) and Prabu Purusadha as the antagonist. I, Nyoman Windha, as the musical arranger for the dance, utilized a complete ensemble of Gong Kebyar instruments as the dance accompaniment (Yasa 2018). As explained above, this work was created because of the Gong Kebyar festival at that time. The theme appeared firstly in the kakawin literature in Smaradahana, composed in the 13th century in East Java by Mpu Dharmaja, and it is followed by the complicated development of metaphors within the Sutasoma Buddhist kakawin arranged by

Mpu Tantular in the mid-14th century (Hunter 2019).

CREATION METHOD

The Mahadika dance was created using Alma M. Hawkins' method in the book *Creating Through Dance*, namely exploration, improvisation, and formation. Exploration phase is a process of daydreaming, imagining, and thinking about ideas that will be realized. Improvisation is the process of selecting from exploration. In addition, formation is the final process of the artwork that already has a form. The earliest stage passed by a creator is the creation process of the artwork. Before looking for supporters of dance and karawitan, the ideas used were determined to make it easier to convey. The idea to work on the mahardika dance emerged because it followed the theme of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006. The theme offered is Swabawaning Idep, which means the radiance of nobility. Then, the choreographer agreed on a day to meet with I Nyoman Windha to discuss matters relating to the work, such as the theme, rounding, and atmosphere desired in the work. The other thing that is also very important is determining the dance supporters. It is hoped to get reliable and loyal dance supporters to be able to maximize this mahardika work. The decision to use eight dance supporters with a formation of 4 female dancers and four male dancers is due to the need for choreography of the mahardika work that is Sutasoma as the main character, Candrawati and Prabu Purusadha as the supporting characters according to the story being told.

The improvisation phase is the second or follow-up stage after the exploration or investigation phase. This phase is the pouring phase of the concept and several elements supporting the dance, especially the discovery of movements through the body media using sensitivity to space and time (Sal Murgiyanto 1983:22). The experimentation process is essential to be implemented to create new movements.

Although not all movements played during improvisation will be used, there will be a selection process to choose movements based on the work needs. During this stage, the choreographer processed and developed movements from traditional dances. The search for movements was done freely and spontaneously. Experiments were conducted continuously to determine the used movement designs so it could select movements that define the identity of the mahardika dance work. The encountered movements were documented and recorded through video. Therefore, it makes them more easily recalled during subsequent rehearsals. These experiments are conducted collectively with all the dancers to achieve the desired movement designs and the floor patterns group following the agreed-upon schedule.

The formation phase is the final phase of the entire dance creation process. In this phase, the mahardika dance work has been formed according to the dance structures that have been arranged but still require further refinement. Therefore, regular rehearsals are necessary to accomplish the dance work, emphasize and clarify movement designs, and establish cohesion in floor patterns and expression to give each movement a soul. Additionally, the dance music, composed by I Nyoman Windha as the dance accompanist, is synchronized with the dance movements, both the accentuation and agreed-upon timing duration.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mahardika is a new creative dance that, in its implementation, showcases dance movements by processing and developing the existing traditional dance. "New creative dance is a new formation resulting from the choreographer's expressive movement creativity and innovation" (Sukmawati 2016). The mahardika dance is shown in a group format consisting of four scenes that are interconnected and inseparable from the others.



Figure 1. Movements Reconstruction
(Source: Sutirtha, 16 September 2022)

Nevertheless, performing arts offer insights into the cultural and spiritual significance deeply intertwined with the beliefs and practices of Balinese society (Siegel 1991). It is proven that the connection between culture and spirituality constantly exists in the ceremonies of tradition and Hindu religion in Bali. Culture and spirituality walk hand in hand and grow in mutual complementarity.



Figure 2. Sutasoma and Candrawati encounter

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIJRJhoPgRA&t=68s>)

The Mahardika dance comes from the central theme of the 28th Bali Arts Festival in 2006, namely "Swabawaning Idep" meaning the radiance of nobility. It comes from the Sutasoma scripture. Freedom from the world ties, the soul is in the character of Sutasoma as the essence of the Mahardika dance involving eight dancers (four male and four female). In addition, to complement the choreography, the choreographer used a stage and a relatively large lotus flower prop utilized at the beginning and the end of the performance, where the character of Sutasoma sits on the lotus flower. The

final duration of the mahardika dance that is ready to be performed is 11 minutes. In addition, it was shown on the grand stage of Pura Jagatnatha in the Jembrana Regency.

There are four parts with different depictions and atmospheres in the mahardika dance. The structure of the mahardika dance is as follows: Part I portrays Sutasoma meditating in a serene atmosphere. Part II depicts the meeting of Sutasoma and his wife, Candrawati, with a romantic and joyful scene. Part III describes the encounter between Sutasoma and Prabu Purusadha, emerging the battle between them. It creates a tense atmosphere. Part IV portrays Prabu Purusadha's realization of his past mistakes.

The structure of the mahardika dance is in line with its division, namely *pengawit*, *pepeson*, and *kebyar*, reflected in the accompanying music (Partha, 2023). In the *pengawit* section, the dancers sit cross-legged in a yoga posture (Buddha position) with closing eyes on the prepared platform.

Still, with eyes closed, they move their hands in front of the chest with the right hand under the left hand (finger with *ngiting* position), move the right hand up until it touches the forehead, and lower it until it touches the earth.

The right hand touching the earth is raised until it is parallel to the chest. The movement is called *nyalud*. Both hands are brought close to the chest with the fingers facing upwards. The next movements are pushing both hands towards the left corner, turning the palm of the left hand 180 degrees so that the fingers face down, and moving the right hand to the right corner, followed by the head movement and opening the eyes to look towards the right side. Returning to yoga movements combined with variations of hand movements, the four dancers slowly stand up to prepare for lifting the dancer who played the character of Sutasoma. When the Sutasoma dancer is lifted, the movements still originate from yoga and deity symbols.

Then, in the *papeson* part, the male dancers descend from the platform and move towards the center stage with the small running steps or *trigsig* movement. The female dancers also exit, using *trigsig* or quick small steps, and form a formation together with their bodies turned to the right *agem* position, followed by the deity pose, where they arrange their hands as a symbol of divinity reflecting the character of Sutasoma. Furthermore, the female dancers move at a lower level.

Afterward, all dancers perform a series of movements, including the right *agem*, the left *kipek* (looking forward to the left side), *nyerere* to the right side, such as *ulap-ulap*. They stretch their left hand forward, pick up a scarf, and play with it in front of their chests. The dancers spin in place and perform *nyeregseg* movements. The female dancers sit in a kneeling position while the male dancers stand.

The four male dancers perform a series of hands forming the symbol of deity. The transition is fast *ngumbang*. Furthermore, the male and female dancers make a meeting pattern in the middle of the stage, then all the dancers do the right *agem*, the left *kipek*, and the right *nyerere*, such as *ulap-ulap*, stretching their left hand forward and lifting one male dancer and one female dancer, and performing the movement of playing a scarf as a symbol of love between Sutasoma and Candrawati. The formation of the lifted dancers changes positions and continues by lowering the two dancers who are lifted. It continues with the scene of Sutasoma's romance with Putri Candrawati at the lower level with several kinds of movements of *mearas-arasan*.

The final part is *kebyar*. The male dancers stand while the female dancers sit with the kneeling position that is back from the male dancers. They perform the *agem* movements by rapidly moving their eyes (*nguler*) in the rhythm of the gamelan music, following a diagonal floor pattern. This scene is a transition from a romantic story to a battle scene. The male dancers transform into the character of Purusadha with vigorous movements

inspired by the *jauk* dance character. Occasionally, they open their mouths to symbolize giants. The female dancers also change from the *Candrawati* character to the *Sutasoma* character by folding their long fabric into simpler resembling the man's fabric. Then, the female dancers perform the movements of male dances taken from the *baris* dance character.

The next scene is the encounter of the *Sutasoma* and *Purusadha*, depicted with fast movements in contrast to the floor pattern with a rhombus shape. They face each other. In addition, several floor patterns also describe war, including facing each other in groups and individually with opposite movement patterns. The way to show the character of *Purusadha*, who is strict and powerful, is by doing a pose or tableau by lifting one male dancer by three male dancers. The movements of female dancers or *Sutasoma* are more static and calm. The movements tend to remain silent as a depiction of *Sutasoma*'s calm and wise nature. In this battle, *Sutasoma* is depicted by a silent movement with the right palm facing forward, succeeding in conquering *Purusadha*. In addition, at the end of the dance, the *Sutasoma* figure rises on a lotus flower. The *Sutasoma* figure is also surrounded by the other dancers in the yoga position.

CONCLUSION

The creativity of the choreographer's creation process made the *mahardika* dance successfully performed with great appreciation from the audience at that time. Moreover, the judges awarded the *mahardika* creative dance as the best performance for the collaborative work of I Wayan Sutirtha as the choreographer and I Nyoman Windha as the music composer. The message conveyed to the audience through the *mahardika* dance is nobility will always defeat greed, as portrayed through the characters of *Sutasoma* and *Prabu Purusadha*.

The performance of the *mahardika* dance refers to how the artwork is shown to the audience. It is determined by the

audience's perception and perspective on the performers' work.

The media plays a significant role in supporting the performance of an artwork. Related to that case, the *mahardika* dance was performed on the grand open stage at Pura Jagatnatha in the Jembrana Regency. The dance consists of eight dancers. They are four males and four females. It chooses the character of *Sutasoma* with the theme of *Swabawaning Idep*. *Swabawaning Idep* means the radiance of nobility that has been determined in the Bali Arts Festival at the time.

Costumes used in a performance are equally crucial. They can help emphasize and clarify the characters played by the dancers. Well-designed costumes can influence and clarify the space of the dance movements. They also enhance the aesthetic value of the artwork. Therefore, in the *mahardika* dance, the costumes are carefully designed not to bother the dancers' movements but rather enhance the aesthetic value of the performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, through the research grant contract no. 204/E5/PG.02.00.PT/2022.

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