Symbolic Meaning of Tandang Mendet Dance in Ngayu-ayu Ceremony in Nusa Tenggara Barat

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Abstract—Tandang Mendet is a sacred dance that must be performed in Ngayu-ayu ceremony in Sembalun village, Lombok Timur regency, NTB in the month of Rajab. This study aims to describe the symbolic meaning of Tandang Mendet dance in Ngayu-ayu ceremony in Sembalun village, Lombok Timur regency. It used qualitative descriptive method. The result of the study revealed that Tandang Mendet dance contains several symbolic meanings seen from the movement, musical accompaniment, dancer, property, and costume. It can be concluded that the symbolic meaning is a gratitude expression towards God who has granted a feasible life for the community of Sembalun village. In addition, the symbolic meaning of Tandang Mendet dance is employed as a life principle of Sembalun community.

Keywords—symbolic meaning, Tandang Mendet dance, Ngayu-ayu ceremony

I. INTRODUCTION

Dance is a type of performing arts consisted of the expressions and feelings that are turned into beautiful body movements. According to Heriyawati [1], the main form of dance is movement while the instrument is human. She also added that the ideas of an artist are expressed into whole meaningful and structured moves which then are arranged into aesthetic artwork as a dance language. Indonesia is a multicultural country. Each region has its own distinctive culture and traditional arts. This diversity can be seen from traditional clothing, traditional music, cuisine, to many different local languages. One of the regions which is famous for its distinctive cultures is West Nusa Tenggara. Despite its beautiful famous beaches, it is also famous for its various cultures and traditional arts worth to be studied.

West Nusa Tenggara, especially Lombok island, has a different traditional art from puppet, Gendang Beleq music, Cupak gerantang theater, and traditional dances such as Gandurung, Gagak Mandik, Dara Ngindang, Rudat, Presean, and Tandang Mendet. The focus of this study is Tandang Mendet which is probably unfamiliar to common people. Tandang Mendet is a sacred dance which must be performed in Ngayu-ayu ceremony in Sembalun village, Lombok Timur regency, West Nusa Tenggara every three years in the month of Rajab. The ceremony is conducted to respect the Creator and be grateful toward nature which has benefitted human. The Sembalun community believe that everything in this world is related to the Creator, nature, and fellow human being. Tandang Mendet dance is one of the requirements in conducting Ngayu-ayu ceremony in which the ceremony cannot be conducted if the dance is not performed. The Sembalun community believe that Tandang Mendet dance and Ngayu-ayu ceremony are united. The elders in Sembalun village preserve the dance immensely because they believe that Ngayu-ayu is one of the ways to respect and show their loyalty toward God and the ancestors that have provided them with shelter, air, and well-being despite living in simplicity.

Tandang Mendet dance is created as an act of gratitude from Sembalun community because they have successfully fought evil djinn that disturb the community from keeping and fighting for the red rice seeds from pests. This dance is performed by seven to eleven people wearing a set of wardrobes bringing spears, shields, and swords, and accompanied by traditional music and poems that tell stories of courage and struggle. It is also called heritage dance because it was created by ancestors and has to be preserved. Unfortunately, in the present, Tandang Mendet is far from expectation. Many people especially the younger generation do not know this dance even though it has deep meaning about the struggle of their ancestors in ancient times.

Sinarto (48 years), stated that people seem not enthusiastic when watching Tandang Mendet especially the youngster. Sinarto is one of the elders that still strive to preserve this art. He knew very well the turmoil in each performance or his effort to preserve this dance. He also added that the number of audiences in Tandang Mendet dance is decreasing. In addition, the government lacks to support the preservation of this culture. In the past, Tandang Mendet dance was only performed during Ngayu-ayu ceremony, but recently the dance is performed in various occasions, such as guest reception and village events. Consequently, this changes the function of the dance from a sacred ceremonial dance to entertaining purpose. According to Sinarto, the community did this to introduce and encourage young generation to preserve the sacred dance. If the dance is only performed during Ngayu-ayu ceremony which is held three years once, the younger generation is likely less to know about it. It is feared that it will diminish traditional arts that have to be preserved as local heritage especially in Sembalun village. Furthermore, Sembalun community believe that if Tandang Mendet dance is extinct and cannot be a performed in Ngayu-ayu ceremony, bad things will befall upon Sembalun. Although the role of this dance has turned into entertainment, the symbolic meanings in it will never change. Therefore, this paper will discuss the symbolic meaning of Tandang Mendet...
dance so that people know and aware of the importance of preserving it. It is hoped that this study can encourage younger generation, artists, and community to preserve *Tandang Mendet* traditional dance in Sembalun village, Lombok Timur regency, West Nusa Tenggara.

The rest of this paper is organized as follow: Section II presents literature review. Section III describes proposed methodology. Section IV presents the obtained results and following by discussion. Finally, Section V concludes this work.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Symbol

Symbol and meaning are an important element in communication. Etymologically, symbol comes from the Greek word, symbols which means a sign or feature that tells something to someone or someone else [2]. Symbol can be defined as expressions used by human to communicate with each other. Symbols can be interpreted as signs that contain certain meanings, for example white warrants symbolize purity. According to Griffin [3], symbols are arbitrary words and nonverbal signs that do not have natural relationship with the things involved; their meanings are learned in certain cultures. Geertz [4] explained that a symbol created by humans that conventionally and continually used together and is really studied, gives human a framework full of meaning to orient themselves to others, to their environment, and to themselves as well as products and dependence on social interaction. Only human can use symbol to communicate with each other.

B. Tandang Mendet Dance

According to Kuswarsantyo [5], dance is a type of performing arts that involves body language. A dancer is required to master several aspects such as wirasa (the ability to master emotion), wirama (the ability to be a part of music including understanding the rhythm, pitch, and tempo), and wiraga (the ability to master body’s movement) to achieve excellence dancing quality. In addition, Supriyanto [6] stated that dance and its manifestation must always be experienced wholly between imaginative patterns of motion, space and time that can be seen with naked eye. Thus, it can be concluded that dance is a statement of expression, a form of illusion statement, and a form of human statement.

One of dance functions according to Soedarsono [7] is as a means of ritual. Further, he said that the function of performing arts in Indonesia developed widely among community who still adhere to the values of agrarian culture and religious communities who include performing arts in their religious activities. The same case occurred in Sasak tribe who conduct performing arts especially dance as a gratitude expression to God. *Tandang Mendet* dance in Sembalun village is a wealth and cultural heritage. It serves as a traditional ritual and is born as a medium to communicate with God. This traditional ritual is certainly inseparable from the customs that exist in the Sasak tribe community. *Tandang Mendet* dance is one of traditional arts rich with cultural values that born and developed from the past to present.

The custom ceremony of Sasak tribe is a ceremony or celebration that is related to the distinctive features of some beliefs or religions that give rise to respect in the sense of a sacred experience [8]. In communal life, Sasak tribe has several customs and traditions which are inherited from generation to generation such as welcoming birth, marriage, facing death, cultural traditions in preserving and utilizing natural resources, and cultivating agriculture including *Ngayu-ayu* ceremony. *Ngayu-ayu* ceremony is a religious ritual performed by the villagers of Sembalun in expressing gratitude towards the creator and nature who have given them various blessings such as living shelter and bountiful food.

III. PROPOSED METHOD

This study is a qualitative research with descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono [9], qualitative research is often defined as naturalistic research method because the research is conducted in natural setting. This study is conducted in Sembalun village, Sembalun sub-district, Lombok Timur regency, Nusa Tenggara West. The data were obtained through observation, interview, and documentation and analyzed using Miles and Huberman. The data analysis consisted of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Ngayu-ayu Ceremony

*Ngayu-ayu* ceremony is a traditional ritual held by Sembalun villagers, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara every three years in the month of *Rajab*, on the 5th, 15th and 25th. The ceremony has been carried out for hundreds of year by the community of Sembalun village. This ceremony was performed as a gratitude to the Creator of Sembalun Village for being blessed with health, bountiful crops, and being protected from diseases which often infected local people in the past. Additionally, this ceremony is also conducted as a gratitude for the fertile growth of the brown rice plants the community cultivated. It is also held based on the belief that everything on this earth is a product of nature which certainly is inseparable from God, the Creator.

The story behind *Ngayu-ayu* ceremony was told in a book entitled Gumi Sasak Dalam Sejarah written by an artist named H. Sudirman. In ancient times, Sembalun was a village located at the foot of Mount Rinjani surrounded by wilderness and inhabited by seven pairs of husband and wife. The villagers live in primitive. They did not know anything, and even did not know about religion. Then, two people named Raden Harya Pati and Raden Harya Manjukaya came and brought immense changes to their lives. These men taught them how to become decent human beings who worship God as the Creator. They also gave life principles, namely custom, religion, and Al-Quran.

There are several rituals that are performed in *Ngayu-ayu* ceremony starting from fetching water in the seven springs that are commonly used by Sembalun community. The ritual of fetching water in seven springs is a symbol of the community’s gratitude for the abundant harvest in Sembalun Village. The next ritual is visiting the tombs around Sembalun village to honor of the dead spirits which is followed by the ritual of buffalo slaughtering. The buffalo is cooked by women and eaten together by the community, then the head of the buffalo is buried to respect the nature so that
a balance between humans and nature is always exist. Next is the performance of Tandang Mendet dance reminisces the war that occurred in the past. As has been mentioned before, Tandang Mendet dance must be performed in this ceremony because Ngayu-ayu ceremony cannot be held without it.

B. Tandang Mendet Dance

Based on the interview with a Tandang Mendet dancer (Ajie, 32 years old), it is revealed that Tandang Mendet came from the words Tandang and Mendet. Tandang means mighty while Mendet means warrior. So, it can be concluded that Tandang Mendet is a brave and mighty warrior fighting for justice. Tandang Mendet dance is created by people from Sembalun community, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. It is a war dance that must be performed in Ngayu-ayu ceremony. The dance portrays the war against evil djinns that will disturb the peace of Sembalun village. It was created as gratitude for having successfully fighting against evil spirits that would disturb the peace of the village and defend the red rice seeds from various pests.

Tandang Mendet dance has many symbolic meaning that serves as a life guidance which in turn has to be preserved. The following are some symbolic meanings of Tandang Mendet dance from the aspects of movement, music, costume, property, and stage.

1) The Dance Movement: Movement is the main element of a dance. According to Fretisari [10], dance move is the result of a movement process that has undergone stylization or refinement. All the movements of Tandang Mendet dance are simple but contain many meanings that are closely related to nature and the Creator. The purpose of this dance is to express the gratitude towards God and nature that has protected the community and provided a good life. Every movement in this dance implies a harmony between life and human, nature and God. In addition, this dance is an expression of gratitude from Sembalun villagers who have won the war.

Furthermore, the various movements are all related to nature which aims to respect the land, sky, and Mount Rinjani. The symbolic meanings in each movement are as follows:

2) The Shield and Sword Carrier: The shield-carrying dancer enters the show arena first with a sword and shield and plays it up and down as presents in following Figure 1 below:

Fig. 1. The Shield and Sword Carrier

This movement means that Sembalun or Sembalun village used to be an inhabitable area, a wilderness. Then, the sword that is swung upwards means that God is one and only one, not begetteth nor begotten. Swinging sword down means that the human is from earth and will return to the earth.

3) The Spear Carrier: The carrier of spear in Tandang Mendet dance symbolizes how the leaders who have protected the nature and environment of Sembalun village were tightly guarded as presents in following Figure 2 below:

Fig. 2. The Spear Carrier

There are several movements performed by the spear-carrier dancer. First is the triangular movement that symbolizes the seven married couples who lived in a village formerly known as Beleq village in Sembalun. The next move is two straight marching moves which mean a good life in the world and the hereafter. The straight forward move and straight back move means that the island of Lombok remain Lomboq Buaq (from Sasak language) or remain straight, innocent, and honest. The conical movement symbolizes Mount Rinjani as the source of the spring in Lombok and that human life has three realms, namely the womb, the world, and the afterlife. The crosswise step symbolizes the unity of the warriors in maintaining the security and prosperity of the community. The long straight single movement symbolizes that people of Lombok island are innocent, upright, and honest in carrying out the Islamic shari’a. The round movement means unity, peace, patience, one goal, one belief, namely believing in God the Almighty. The moves of the shield-carrier surrounding the warrior means that the leaders are persistence in guiding and protecting the community and its environment.

4) The Dancer: Tandang Mendet is usually performed by seven, nine, or eleven dancers. In other word, it always
consists of odd numbered dancers. This is to symbolize that the former Sembalun village was inhabited by seven pairs of husband and wife who were unknowledgeable until they were finally taught by Raden Harya Pati and Raden Harya Mangujaya.

5) Musical Accompaniment: Music and dance is one whole unit since they both come from human rhythmic instincts. Music does not only serve as accompaniment but also as the partner of the dance. The partner, according to Soedarsono [7] is musical compositions that work together with movement to form dance compositions whether traditional or creative dance. As a traditional dance from Sembalun village, East Lombok regency, Tandang Mendet dance is accompanied by the typical Daalun music namely Gambelan Mujowangi which is the oldest gambelan from Sembalun village. Gambelan Mujowangi consists of several musical instruments such as rincik, petuk, gong and gamelan. The symbolic meaning of the musical instruments above is to show a straight path, a road blessed by Allah SWT. The Sembalun community continue to carry out His commands and stay away from all of His prohibitions. They strictly follow the teachings of religion.

6) Makeup: Makeup is a supporting factor that can support a dance to communicate the intentions and messages contained in it to audience. According to RMA. Harymawan as quoted in his book Hasanah [11], makeup is the art of using cosmetic to create a character, and is seen as a means to beautify oneself. However, Tandang Mendet dancers do not use any makeup to show the agility and persistence of troops in facing war. According to Wahyudi (32 years old), Sembalun villagers have not known beauty tools such as makeup in the ancient times. However, as the time passed, Tandang Mendet dancers slowly use makeup to enhance their expression and to be more attractive in the dance performance. Yet, the use of makeup does not change the original meaning of the dance (see Figure 3).

7) The Property: Property is all the equipment needed in a dance performance. The property of Tandang Mendet dance is spears, shields and swords. All of these properties were used by the people of Sembalun village in fighting against wild animals that would disrupt their lives. Therefore, the role of property is to protect the people from wild animals' attacks.

8) The Costume: Clothing or costume is an essential element in dance in which its roles are to convey the meanings and symbols of life contained in the dance. The costume worn by Tandang Mendet dancers consist of a head gear made from white cloth, typical Lombok clothing tailored like a black suit, a red tie, and pink dodot with a white cloth formed like a horse's crotch inside. All the costumes worn by Tandang Mendet portray the power of a warrior in war, always being careful in making decision and remain calm in various situations and conditions.

V. CONCLUSION

Tandang Mendet dance is a sacred dance originated from Sembalun Village, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. This dance must be performed during ngayu-ayu ceremony in Sembalun Village, a ceremony held to respect the Creator and to express the gratitude toward nature that has benefited human. The symbolic meanings of Tandang Mendet dance are present in every movement, musical accompaniment, property and costume. These symbolic meanings serve as life principles of the community. Sasa people, especially Sembalun village, strictly follow the religious teachings.

REFERENCES