



The Sanghyang Dance : from its prehistoric origin to conservation effort

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ABSTRACT

As a part of the sacred *Wali* dance, Sanghyang dance loaded with prehistoric spiritual values intended for worship on religious occasions. The sanghyang dance was well-known in most parts of the island. however, it has well-developed in several areas such as in Bangli, Gianyar, Karangasem, Buleleng, Jembrana, Tabanan, and Klungkung. The art's existence showed that the Balinese people believe that spirit can help human life. There are commonly three important elements in typical sanghyang dance, namely *Nusdus* (medium purification), *Gending Sanghyang* (the melody) and the medium (people or dolls). The Sanghyang Dedari Sacred Dance at Geriana Kauh is the only Sanghyang dance routinely performed

yearly. UNESCO recognized The Sanghyang Dedari sacred dance as an almost extinct world cultural heritage. However, the Sanghyang Dedari dance is only held once a year, with a long ritual preparation. A researcher from Indonesia University, Saraswati Putri took a long journey to reconstruct the indigenous dance. She interviewed many traditional village heads, checked Balinese manuscripts in Leiden, and then arranged them into Old Balinese or Sanskrit. Reconstructing from zero, connecting the scattered mosaic requires tenacity and determination. As a result of the hard work, The *Sanghyang Dedari Giri Amertha* Museum was built to preserve this dance

Keyword: Sanghyang Dance, prehistoric, conservation

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BACKGROUND

Bali's prehistoric people believed that "spirit" could provide safety and well-being.¹ Human subjects depend on symbolic objects in their religious activities or teachings. Thus the abstract spirit could be referred to as the foundation of prehistoric human civilization.² According to the belief, ancient people, expressed their socio-religious activities as a symbol of worship, respect, and appreciation of the spirit's power. It was incomprehensible culture, complicated structure, complex, consisted of art, morals, customs, and beliefs accepted by the community.³

The ancient Balinese had a typical dance called the Sanghyang Dance. As a part of the *Wali* dance, the dance is a sacred dance loaded with prehistoric spiritual values then encapsulated in art forms. The art was intended for worship on religious occasions. The sanghyang dance was well-known in most parts of the island. however, it has well-developed in several areas such as in Bangli, Gianyar, Karangasem, Buleleng, Jembrana, Tabanan, and Klungkung. The art's existence showed that the Balinese people believe that spirit can help human life.⁴ They thought that there was a good spirit and a bad spirit. When Hinduism came to Bali, it added a new term called 'God.' Together with good spirits, the society started to worship God as objects to fulfill their request when difficulties or catastrophe

appeared.

Geographical, customary, social and cultural environmental conditions influenced the dance theme and characteristics. The reason why sanghyang is considered a sacred dance is that the dancers perform in a trance state. Their attitude, behavior, and choreography would be irrational; however, they can communicate to their environment verbally. In this state, the dancer was controlled by the power of the "spirit" outside his body. There is sign communication or language in an unconscious state or trance dance.⁵ Since the Sanghyang Dance was part of the prehistoric heritage of the Balinese societies. They only perform sanghyang dance in temples or other sacred places to liberate the community from the evil forces' influence.⁶

THE SANGHYANG DANCE VARIETIES

Sanghyang is a traditional performance in Bali presented as a religious dance. Thus, it is only staged as a series of ceremonies on the temple's anniversary, not daily. Its function is to ward off plagues or disease outbreaks. The concept of art, where the process begins with meditation and religious rituals so that an aesthetic sense appears as in the sanghyang dance.¹⁰ This type of dance is danced to drive away disease caused by evil spirits. To stop the calamity, the dancer would dance in a

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Figure 1. The Sanghyang Dedari⁷



Figure 2. The Sang Hyang Jaran Dance⁸



Figure 3. The Sang Hyang Penyalin Dance⁹



Figure 4. The sacred dance consists of three phases. The first phase is called *Nusdus* or *Ngukup*. This ritual aims to purify the medium by smoke/fire.¹⁵

possessed state by spirits, celestial beings, animals, or sacred artifacts with destructive powers. The dance was Pre-Hindu cultural heritage. Through dance, ancient civilization opened spiritual communication to other beings. Male and female dancers usually enter their trance state after listening to *gending sanghyang*, a typical hymn to invite foreign beings.

Experts estimated the sacred dance originated from the Bona village, Gianyar. There once was a smallpox outbreak that nearly wiped out the community. Accompanied by the *palegongan* instrument, *Selendro* and *pelog* scales hymn, the trance dancer unconsciously began performing to stop the disease outbreak that befell the village. According to several community leaders, there was a temple anniversary. In the temple's courtyard, adolescent girls were suddenly possessed. They began dancing while giving hints or *mebaosan* to instruct the community on overcoming their difficulties. Once the communication ended, the dancer's body would collapse, indicating the spirit had left their body. Then, the temple's priest

sprinkled *tirtha*, holy water, to help the dancers regain their consciousness. Commonly, the sanghyang dancer is young girls, men, or women with less experience dancing skills. Having a pretty face was not a requirement. However, the dancer should be free from evil deeds.

In a trance situation, the dancer would dance above scorching flames, trampling on embers, climbing high bamboo sticks, eating glass, jumping around, even neighing imitating animal behaviors. However, they are immune to any burnt or injuries. Their behavior follows the spiritual characteristics that possess them. In Bali there are several types of sanghyang dance including: *Tari sanghyang dangkluk*, *sanghyang memedi*, *sanghyang bumbung*, *sanghyang kidang*, *sanghyang jenger*, *sanghyang sengkrong*, *Sanghyang Dedari*, *Sanghyang Sampat*, *Sanghyang Lingga*, *Sanghyang Jagad*, *Sanghyang Jaran*, *Sanghyang Menjangan*, *Sanghyang Deling*, *Sanghyang Kebo*, *Sanghyang Bangau*, *Sanghyang Barong*, *Selanjutnya Sanghyang Tujo*, *Sanghyang Prahu*, *Sanghyang Kelor*, *Sanghyang Bunga*, *Sanghyang Lelipi*, *Sanghyang Celeng*, *Sanghyang*

*Kuluk, Sanghyang Bojog, Sanghyang Sampat, Sanghyang Jaran Gading, Sanghyang Jaran Putih, Sanghyang Dongkang (katak), Sanghyang Penyuh, Sanghyang Sembe, and Sanghyang Penyalin.*¹¹

There are commonly three important elements in typical sanghyang dance, namely *Nusdus* (medium purification), *Gending Sanghyang* (the melody) and the medium (people or dolls). The costume is particularly different from common staged dances *Bebali* or *Balih-Balihan* dance.¹² The clothes' color is basic white and yellow, unlike other popular dances with multicolor dresses. Further, some sanghyang dance even wears dried banana leaves, palm fiber or other nature-based woven material according to the theme of the dance. For the head accessory, the Sanghyang dancer avoids wearing gold-made accessories. In particular, the costumes used are adapted to the type of sanghyang dance.

The sacred dance consists of three phases. The first phase is called *Nusdus* or *Ngukup*. This ritual aims to purify the medium by smoke/fire. Before dancing, the dancers would sit in front of smoking sandalwood embers. Then they make a scooping movement to take the smoke from the coals to their face and body.

Then, the dancers would be directed to the intended location where they would perform in the next phase. The singers sing rhymes to invite the spirit to enter the purified dancer's medium. When the medium has been in a trance, they will start dancing with their eyes closed and move according to the song's lyrics during the ritual. The medium no longer internalizes mastery values since they willingly subordinate under the spiritual being's control, referred to as "hegemony." In this dance, there is a hegemony towards humans.^{13,14}

The community is hegemonized with all orders; all members approve instructions of the surrounding community (stakeholders, customary heads). In addition to functioning to ward off disease outbreaks and the power of magic, human conducts dialogue or spiritual communication in the supernatural. This dialogue is called spiritual communication. In dance and humans, including the sanghyang dance, verbal communication is said to be mass hegemony. After the ritual is complete, the *ngelinggihang* ceremony aims to restore the medium's consciousness and release the spirit to return to its origin. The priest would sprinkle holy water as a symbol to cast out the spirits to their origin and awaken the dancers.

CONSERVATION EFFORT BY ACADEMIC

The Sanghyang Dedari Sacred Dance at Geriana Kauh is the only Sanghyang dance routinely performed yearly. UNESCO recognized The

Sanghyang Dedari sacred dance as an almost extinct world cultural heritage. However, the Sanghyang Dedari dance is only held once a year, with a long ritual preparation. This sacred dance is performed before the *Embud Padi Mase* (rice grain planted once a year without being preceded by any plants). The dance would be performed at night, with six to seven adolescent girl dancers. They would move in a state of being possessed by the spirit of Sanghyang Dedari, with one of the commonly failed to finish the performance. In the 8th century, sacred dance was common in every village in Bali as a symbol to worship the mother earth. However, today it is a rare occasion to witness and slowly on the brink of extinction due to the orally taught method. As a result, the ritual fails when the hymn narration is wrong.

The Sanghyang Dedari tradition appears in a village hit by a plague. The villagers who were hit by the epidemic were confused and desperate. Banging gongs and rattan expressed confusion and despair. Then the residents said sentences. The beating of the bamboo drum and the rattan then becomes a tone, and the sentences spoken by the villagers become a mantra. When the locals were banging the rattan and rattan while chanting the mantra, two girls who had not yet reached puberty suddenly became confused and danced with their eyes closed, possessed by spiritual beings called *Widiadara Widiadari*. According to Hindu myth, The Widiadara Widiadari itself emerged due to the union between Dewi Uma and the Shepherd in the lontar story of the Tantu Performance. Sanghyang Dedari dance functions as a village cleaner, helping ward off misfortune and calamity that befell a village.^{16,17}

A researcher from Indonesia University, Saraswati Putri took a long journey to reconstruct the indigenous dance. She interviewed many traditional village heads, checked Balinese manuscripts in Leiden, and then arranged them into Old Balinese or Sanskrit. Reconstructing from zero, connecting the scattered mosaic requires tenacity and determination. As a result of the hard work, The *Sanghyang Dedari Giri Amertha* Museum was built to preserve this dance, which cost IDR 441 million. With the help of the University of Indonesia and non-governmental organizations. On November 12, the Sanghyang Dedari Giri Amertha Museum was officially published through a soft launch.

With a building area of 100 square meters, this community-based Museum stands in the middle of the beautiful, green and culturally rich Geriana Kauh Traditional Village. The local village is known as a village with charming organic rice fields. With a magnificent view of Mount Agung. Sanghyang Dedari dance can not be seen all the time or

published easily. This Museum gives a clear picture of this rare dance.

The Museum is the center for the documentation of the Sanghyang Dedari Dance, photos, writings, audio-visual shows, and a papyrus containing the singing of the Sanghyang Dedari Dance. The Museum establishment project began on October 30, 2016, then was completed at the end of November 2018. The building stood, displaying diorama show the Sanghyang Dedari Dance.

The building was dedicated and belonged to the community. In the future, the villager may run the site for the benefit of the villagers. FIB UI directed the local indigenous people to maintain their traditions so that in the future, it is expected that Geriana Kauh Traditional Village can become a village ecotourism center.^{18 19}

CONCLUSION

Sanghyang is a traditional performance in Bali presented as a religious dance. Thus, it is only staged as a series of ceremonies on the temple's anniversary, not daily. Its function is to ward off plagues or disease outbreaks. Through dance, ancient civilization opened spiritual communication to other beings. Male and female dancers usually enter their trance state after listening to *gending sanghyang*, a typical hymn to invite foreign beings. In Bali there are several types of sanghyang dance including: Tari *sanghyang dangkluk*, *sanghyang memedi*, *sanghyang bumbung*, *sanghyang kidang*, *sanghyang jenger*, *sanghyang sengkron*, *Sanghyang Dedari*, *Sanghyang Sampat*, *Sanghyang Lingga*, *Sanghyang Jagad*, *Sanghyang Jaran*, *Sanghyang Menjangan*, *Sanghyang Deling*, *Sanghyang Kebo*, *Sanghyang Bangau*, *Sanghyang Barong*. Selanjutnya *Sanghyang Tujo*, *Sanghyang Prah*, *Sanghyang Kelor*, *Sanghyang Bunga*, *Sanghyang Lelipi*, *Sanghyang Celeng*, *Sanghyang Kuluk*, *Sanghyang Bojog*, *Sanghyang Sampat*, *Sanghyang Jaran Gading*, *Sanghyang Jaran Putih*, *Sanghyang Dongkang (katak)*, *Sanghyang Penyu*, *Sanghyang Sembe*, and *Sanghyang Penyalin*. A researcher from Indonesia University, Saraswati Putri took a long journey to reconstruct the Sanghyang Dedari, an indigenous dance of Geriana Village. She interviewed many traditional village heads, checked Balinese manuscripts in Leiden, and then arranged them into Old Balinese or Sanskrit. As a result of the hard work, The *Sanghyang Dedari Giri Amertha* Museum was built to preserve this dance, which cost IDR 441 million.

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