

# GANDRUNG DANCE AS THE ICON OF *RITUAL* ARTS OF THE SOCIETY BANJAR NYUH NUSA PENIDA BALI

I Gusti Ayu Ananta Wijyantri

Program Studi Pendidikan Seni Budaya, Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Surabaya,  
Ketintang Steet, Surabaya, Indonesia,  
[igananta15@gmail.com](mailto:igananta15@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Gandrung Dance in *Banjar* (Citizens Association) Nyuh, Traditional Village of Nyuh Kukuh, Nusa Penida Sub District, Klungkung Regency, Bali is a compulsory art of ritual that is performed in every religious ceremony and tradition conducted by the society in *Banjar* Nyuh. Gandrung Dance was made as a symbol of protection, considered as a sacred dance by the surrounding community, highly valued, and preserved. The existence of Gandrung Dance in various occasions related to traditional ceremony makes this dance is well known as the icon of the art of ritual in *Banjar* Nyuh. The term *icon* in Greek means *image*. Thus, the Gandrung dance as the icon of ritual arts can definitely play a role as “the identity’ or a distinction for the culture of its Banjar Nyuh. Therefore, the focus of this study comprises of: (1) The distinctive feature of Gandrung dance; (2) Gandrung dance in the cultural rites of the society of Banjar Nyuh; and (3) The role of Gandrung dance in strengthening the image of local culture. This qualitative study with phenomenology approach is aimed to reveal phenomena of Gandrung dance in detail, as well as in depth pursuant to the focus of this study. The result of this research shows that Gandrung Dance is a product of culture of Banjar Nyuh and it is also known as the ritual-art icon of the society.

Key word: Gandrung dance, icon, Banjar Nyuh.

## ABSTRAK

Tari Gandrung di Banjar Nyuh Desa Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh Kecamatan Nusa Penida Kabupaten Klungkung Bali merupakan seni ritual yang wajib dipertunjukkan dalam setiap upacara religi dan tradisi yang diadakan oleh masyarakat Banjar Nyuh. Tari Gandrung lahir sebagai simbol penolakbala, disakralkan oleh masyarakat setempat, bermutu nilai tinggi, dan dilindungi. Kehadiran Tari Gandrung yang eksis dalam berbagai perayaan upacara bersaji menjadikannya dikenal sebagai ikon seni ritual di Banjar Nyuh. Istilah ikon dalam bahasa Yunani berarti citra. Maka, Tari Gandrung sebagai ikon seni ritual dapat amat jelas

berperan sebagai semacam “tanda pengenal” atau penanda bagi kebudayaan Banjar Nyuh. Jadi fokus penelitian ini meliputi: (1) kekhasan Tari Gandrung; (2) Tari Gandrung dalam budaya ritus masyarakat Banjar Nyuh; dan (3) peran Tari Gandrung dalam memperkuat citra budaya setempat. Penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan fenomena Tari Gandrung di Banjar Nyuh secara rinci dan mendalam sesuai dengan fokus penelitian. Demikian, hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Tari Gandrung tersebut merupakan hasil kebudayaan masyarakat Banjar Nyuh dan dapat dikenali sebagai ikon seni ritual masyarakat setempat.

Kata kunci: Tari Gandrung, ikon, Banjar Nyuh.

## INTRODUCTION

It is commonly known that Gandrung dance is a product of Banyuwangi culture. However, Gandrung dance is a traditional archipelago dance that can be found in other regions of Indonesia, for example in Lombok it is known as Gandrung Sasak dance; in Bali it is available in several varieties according to its origin, such as Gandrung Denpasar, Gianyar and also Banjar Nyuh Nusa Penida.

In Banyuwangi, Gandrung dance is performed by a group of female dancers wearing local costume. In Lombok, it is an adaptation from Gandrung Banyuwangi that was developed in Bali and had absorbed some local practice or characteristics (Yaningsih, 1994: 15). Bandem dan Fredrik (2014: 137) proposed that in Bali, Gandrung is a social performance performed by a male and symbolizes love and a yearning desire. On the other hand, Gandrung dance in Banjar Nyuh was born out of spiritual forces and performed as a medium of asking god for people recovery. Since then Gandrung dance is closely related to numerous oblation ceremonies. It serves as a symbol of disaster-repellent as well as an expression of gratitude to god.

A Gandrung dance performance in several religious or traditional ceremonies is the core and it is as significant as offering. It is aimed to safeguard the ease of ceremony proceedings. As it generally appear in most ceremonies, especially in Banjar Nyuh and its neighborhood, it is well known as the performance of local *wali* (a virtuous person). Compare to other arts available in Banjar Nyuh such as Pendet Poleng, Rejang, and other dances, its particularities lie on dancer, costume, and choreography that tend to show relation to cosmos. As a ceremonial dance, it is norm-bound, related to either religion or local belief. Religious norm is universal while local belief depends on values upheld by ethnic group, such as tradition or custom. It is evident that Gandrung dance is reflecting Banjar Nyuh people's belief including many concepts like *tri hitakarana*, *rwa bineda*, *tri angga*, and Hindu aesthetic concepts. Local belief displays people's faith in god's manifestation as a guardian named *bethara* and His presence in countless traditional ceremonies. Gandrung dance is performed by two male dancers since *bethara* worshipped in Pura Banjar (a temple or worship place specifically intended for Banjar Nyuh inhabitants) is a personification of male and the two male dancers, called a pair, are a symbol of balance.

The two *Gandrung* dancers dressed in costumes commonly worn by *Legong* female dancers. The local people do not consider such visual concept as merely at variance with that of other dances. Instead, they grasp the concept of both male and female as a binary opposition such as vice and virtue, right and wrong, dirty and clean, etc. The binary concept contained in Gandrung dance is a lesson given by predecessors that *all of things or beings in the universe had been created in pairs. Life goes on within temporality*. In their life, people will keep on experiencing good times and bad times. Banjar Nyuh inhabitants are aware of that. Therefore, they frequently perform Gandrung dance as a medium of escaping disasters. In that case, Gandrung dance shows its peculiarity and a manifestation of belief upheld by its society.

Gandrung dance plays a greater role than merely a supplement to a ceremony. Its existence gives impact on societal life in terms of spiritual and sociocultural aspects. It also gives a different tone in ritual cultures of Banjar Nyuh so that they are different from those of other societies from different regions.

The uniqueness of Gandrung dance in Banjar Nyuh is interesting to be investigated further within the scope of the dance as the ritual art icon of Banjar Nyuh inhabitants. This study is aimed to reveal the distinctive features of Gandrung dance and several phenomena related to impacts of its presence to give and enhance the cultural image of Banjar Nyuh ritual arts. Then the results of this study are expected to be a source or reference for further studies investigating on undiscussed aspects as well as to contribute to the field of research on Indonesian culture and arts. In addition, this study may enrich the reading repertoire of art education and tolerance, from which the readers can find out some variants of Gandrung dance present in other regions in Indonesia and acknowledge them as cultural diversity. Consequently, the readers may develop tolerant attitudes and strengthen the unity of the nation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research on gandrung dance as the icon of ritual arts in Banjar Nyuh society is a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach attempts to grasp meanings from numerous events and human interactions within particular situations (Sutopo, 2002:25). Therefore, the approach is suitable for this research.

The research was conducted in Banjar Nyuh in Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh village, Nusa Penida district, Klungkung regency, Bali province. Data collecting techniques, following Rohodi (2011), included observation, interview, recording, documentation study and literature study. Then the collected data were sorted, structured and classified into meaningful categories.

Some concepts or theories used in this study are: (1) dance elements (Hadi, 20017); (2) concepts of ritual art (Sumardjo, 2014); (3) dance concepts in Balinese culture (Dibia, 2008); and (4) theory of cultural identity (Sedyawati, 2014). Those concepts and theories were used as a tool to dissect the problem of the study.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research on Gandrung dance as an icon of ritual art in Banjar Nyuh society cover: (1) Distinctive features of Gandrung dance; (2) Gandrung dance in Banjar Nyuh society's ritual culture; (3) The role of gandrung dance in reinforcing Banjar Nyuh's cultural image.

### 1. Distinctive features of Gandrung dance

The peculiarities of Gandrung dance can be seen from its composite elements or aspects, such as movement, dancer, costume, property, accompaniment, etc. All elements or aspects constitute the characters and distinct tone of Gandrung dance that will be elaborated in the following.

#### a. Dance Movement

The variant of Gandrung dance movement is commonly found in all kinds of Balinese female dance. Yet, each variant has its own repertoire of structure. Its distinctive features can be determined by examining the movement construction from head to leg position.



Image 1 – A distinctive feature of Gandrung dance: *agem ngeliput*.  
(Source: Private documentation, 2017)

The distinctive features of Gandrung dance are resulted from norms or rules that bind it. Therefore, its pattern of movement may reflect the ritual culture of Banjar Nyuh society.

The distinctive features of Gandrung dance lie on dance movements based on *tri angga* concepts. The movement position are divided according to three segments of human body: lower, middle and upper parts or leg, body and head. The lower part of a body is from waist to leg. The movement position of the lower part must not and never exceed the spatial position of the upper part or the head.

The middle part of a body starts from shoulder to waist. The movement of middle part is dominated by hand movement. Hands have more flexibility to move but a dancer should be careful as to not let the head move in the lower position than the waist position, or the waist or leg move in a higher position than the head position. Considering this, the concept of Gandrung dance movement only covers *nyalud*, *agem*, *ngeliput* and *nekes*. On the whole, its dance movements were composed according to *tri angga* and thus there is no movement that violates the rule.

## b. Dance Costume

Gandrung dance costume in Banjar Nyuh society of Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh village is a typical female dancer costume combined with the elements of male dancer costume. On the lower bodily part, the dancers wear clothes similar to Legong dance costume, yet on the middle bodily part they wear costume ornaments commonly worn by male dancers. Apparently, the costume reflects the manifestation of soul balance of its society member as both spiritual and worldly person.

Costume worn by a Gandrung dancer consists of white long-sleeve clothing, *gelangkana*; *gelungan* Gandrung; and a fan. All kinds of ornament are combined into an ensemble.

Color characteristics applied into Gandrung dance costume are a mixture of sacred colors such as yellow, gold, orange and white; color symbolizing prosperity such as green with floral carving; other decorative elements are in red, blue, and purple.

Furthermore, a fan as a hand-property of Gandrung dance is a distinctive feature in *ngeliput* and *nekes* moves. The fan is a symbol of butterfly accompanying the arrival of *Hyang Bethara* in a ritual ceremony.

## c. Dancer

It consists of four dancers divided into two groups that perform in two shifts. The selected dancers must be purified in a *mewinten saraswati* (a purification ceremony) and asked permission (*matur piuning*) to *Ida Sesuunan* by presenting oblation of *banten pajati*. It is an offering symbolizing a determination of doing something. This ceremony implies that the dancers accept the assignment as Gandrung dancers and will carry it with responsibility.

The dancers who have gone through this purification ceremony are sacred. "Related to sacred is forbidden things, having a sublime connotation" (Sudira, 2010: 158). Gandrung dancers, as their souls have been purified, have restrictions that should not be violated. For instance, they are not allowed to take a bath by using a pail formerly used for washing or water that has been used to wash something because both the pail and the water are considered *nista* or dirty. Therefore, after going through a purification ceremony, the dancers are given lecture as to avoid the restrictions. If a Gandrung dancer violates the rule, he must redo the purification ceremony.

#### d. Accompaniment

Dance karawitan or dance accompaniment is an element that accentuates the performance atmosphere. Karawitan dance that is used to accompany Gandrung dance in Banjar Nyuh society in Pekraan Nyuh Kukuh village is a set of Gong Kebyar gamelan instruments or Balinese musical instruments. "Balinese Gamelan is a set of gamelan oriented on divine values and meanings" (Yudabakti and Watra, 2007: 116). Similarly, Gandrung dance karawitan is an accompaniment that emphasizes on dance rhythmic and accentuation to give transcendental nuance.

Gong Kebyar instruments are basically similar to Gandrung dance karawitan. Its difference lies on the number of each instrument that match the intended tones and needs. For example, it may use two suling (bamboo flute) and one kantil or two kantil, two *suling* and one *pemade*, etc. The scale of Gong Kebyar is within the range of *pelog* (seven-tone) system. *Gending* (song) performed by *gong kebyar* to accompany a dance will be given a name according to the name of the dance it accompanies. For example, when gong kebyar accompanies a Gandrung dance, the name of the song or *gending* will be *gending gandrung*.

#### e. Time and Venue of the Performance

According to a concept of *desa kala patra*, Gandrung dance in Banjar Nyuh, Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh village can only be performed in a *kalangan* (court) where *pujawali* ceremony is held by the inhabitants. *Pujawali* means worshipping God's greatness in His manifestation (*prabawa*) as *Ida Bhatara*. *Pujawali* is frequently held in certain times that have been agreed upon in terms of *iksa* (societal view), *sakti* (societal ability), *desa* (space), *kala* (time), *patra* (condition), dan *tatwa* (the essential truth of Weda, absolute in nature). The presence and involvement of Gandrung dance in a *pujawali pura* ritual in Banjar Nyuh and *pura desa* (temple village) Pekraman Nyuh Kuku show that the dance is rich of religious and customary elements of its supporting society.

### 1. Gandrung dance in a Ritual Culture of Banjar Nyuh Inhabitants

Banjar Nyuh inhabitants belong to people who embrace Hindu-Bali religions. Local society believe the directional concept of *kaja kelod*. Mountain area (*kaja*) is considered as a sacred and holy region, as large pura like Pura Pulaki, Pura Batukau and Pura Besakih are situated at the foot of Mount Agung. Whereas coastal area (*kelod*) is considered as an ordinary region. Such binary concept of direction also binds Gandrung dance performance as to always face in the direction of sacred landmarks and worshipping like mountain and sunrise.

Gandrung dance performance in numerous ceremonies of *odalan pura* in Banjar Nyuh Desa Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh is very significant. The presence of Gandrung dance in a ceremony of preventing disasters is *important* to ensure that the ceremony will run smoothly. Banjar Nyuh Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh village inhabitants realize that they should do their obligations as Hindu believers, preserve traditional beliefs and perform traditional rituals that have been done from generation to generation. Banjar Nyuh villagers have *pangkonan* and *majauman majauman* traditions. These traditions are the

expression of societal gratitude to god for the blessing and harvest as most inhabitants earn their living by working as seaweed cultivators or farmers on the hill.

*Gandrung* dance is always performed in *pangkonan* or *majauman* traditions. This dance is the first and primary performance. Its presence is not served as an opening, instead it is a symbol of preventing disasters. It is an oblation to God and a request for God's favour and protection. It is a distinctive feature resulted from the unity of religion and tradition systems.

## 2. Gandrung dance in Reinforcing Cultural Image of Banjar Nyuh

Cultural substances easily differentiate an ethnic group from another are traditional dance and custome. In terms of dance, its distinctive feature can be also shown by its accompaniment. Altogether, both traditional dance and its costume can be identified as a cultural product of Banjar Nyuh ethnic society.

The distinctive feature of Gandrung dance can be an identity marker of Banjar Nyuh society's local culture. The dominant feature does not lie on the physical appearance of the dance, yet it is hidden in several elements that composed it, a series of intangible values contained in Gandrung dance. Thus, its constituent elements form the identity of Gandrung dance. "Identity is a quality that we know from its quantities" (Sumardjo, 2014: 59).

The identity of Gandrung dance can form and reinforce the image of local culture because if Gandrung dance does not exist anymore, local culture will gradually extinct. The presence of Gandrung dance in every ritual held by local society has made it widely known as an icon of Banjar Nyuh's ritual arts. Therefore, preserving the existence of Gandrung dance can mean to reserve cultural images (religion and custom). In summary, Gandrung dance is a basis for image or identity of local culture in Banjar Nyuh, Pekraman Nyuh Kukuh village.

## CONCLUSION

Gandrung dance is a ritual art that plays a role in forming an image of ritual arts in Banjar Nyuh society. Its role is so significant that its existence and its constituent elements must be preserved. Art preservation can be done through education and mass media. The coverage of education and mass media can be used as a cultivation of cultural values (spiritual, moral, aesthetic values) that support the existence of Gandrung dance as a traditional art aiming at "students" and "consumers" of mass media.

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