

Trance Phenomenon “*Kesurupan*” in the Tarawangsa Art of Rancakalong Sumedang

Firman Adi Saputra¹, Samsul Rizal², Anggha N. Sefurridjal³, Aris Ardiansyah, Muhamad Ilyas

{adikahong.08@gmail.com¹, samsulrizall154@gmail.com², anggansr@gmail.com³}

Institute Art and Culture Indonesia Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

Abstract. This article explores the phenomenon of trance known as "kesurupan" in the traditional art of Tarawangsa in Rancakalong, Sumedang. Tarawangsa, originating from the agrarian community of Sumedang, is a unique cultural expression deeply rooted in local traditions. The study delves into the etymology, historical context, and other essential components of Tarawangsa performances in Rancakalong, Sumedang. Specifically, the article focuses on the occurrence of trance states during the Nyumpingkeun phase and examines the relationship between entrainment, biomusic phenomena, and the trance experienced by participants in this art form.

Keywords: Entrainment; Tarawangsa Art; Ritual Ceremonies; *Kesurupan*; Biomusic

1 Introduction

Tarawangsa is a traditional art form unique to the agrarian community in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang, West Java. Etymologically, *Tarawangsa* originates from three words: *ta*, *ra*, and *wangsa*. *Ta* means movement or motion, *ra* means great or sun, while *wangsa* means nation. Thus, *Tarawangsa* can be interpreted as the epic of the great/sun nation's life [1]. This traditional art has existed since the era of agrarian societies engaged in farming and was typically performed during the harvest season. It is even mentioned in the Sewaka Darma manuscript, published before the 15th century, indicating that *Tarawangsa* is an expression of gratitude to the giver of the harvest, namely Dewi Sri or Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Dangdayang Asri [2]. To this day, this sense of gratitude is directed toward the Almighty [2].

Generally, *Tarawangsa* is an ensemble consisting of two chordophone instruments: one called *tarawangsa*, played by bowing, and the other called *jentreng*, played by plucking [3]. Therefore, *Tarawangsa* can refer to both a traditional art form in West Java and a bowed musical instrument [3]. The performance of *Tarawangsa* using only these two musical instruments is unique to Rancakalong, Sumedang.

During the performance, there is a male leader known as *Saehu*, accompanied by seven women called *Peribuan*. The *Tarawangsa* art form in Rancakalong consists of three core parts: *Ngalungsurkeun*, the opening ceremony where the seven *Peribuan* lower various makeup tools and

grains (*pengkonan*); followed by *Nyumpingkeun*, the welcoming of *Nyi Pohaci (Goddess Sri)*; and finally, *Nginebkeun*, the process of returning *pengkonan* to its original place [4]. Throughout these three stages, particularly during *Nyumpingkeun*, the phenomenon of trance or possession is frequently observed. A preliminary assumption is that possession or entering a transcendental state is triggered by exposure to the music played during the *Tarawangsa* procession. In the field of biomusicology, this phenomenon is referred to as *entrainment* [5].

2 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to explore the phenomenon of trance within the *Tarawangsa* art of Rancakalong, Sumedang. The qualitative approach is chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the intricate relationship between traditional music and the altered states of consciousness experienced by participants during performances. The research was conducted in Rancakalong Village, Sumedang Regency, a region renowned for its preservation of the *Tarawangsa* tradition. The participants in this study include Saehu, the art leader, and Peribuan, the female dancers who play a central role in the performance. Additionally, local community members who observe or participate in the *Tarawangsa* rituals were engaged to enrich the data collection process.

The data were gathered through a combination of techniques designed to capture both the experiential and contextual dimensions of the trance phenomenon. Participant observation was a primary method, allowing the researcher to witness *Tarawangsa* performances firsthand, particularly during the *Nyumpingkeun* phase, where trance states were most prevalent. This involved detailed documentation through photographs, videos, and field notes. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with the Saehu, Peribuan dancers, and local observers to gain insights into their personal experiences of trance, their perceptions of entrainment, and the cultural values embedded in the performance. The study also incorporated an extensive review of historical manuscripts, such as the *Sewaka Darma*, and scientific literature on biomusicology and entrainment, providing a theoretical foundation and contextual depth.

The analysis of data was carried out using a descriptive-interpretive approach. Initially, the data were categorized into themes, such as musical patterns, dance movements, and experiences of trance. A detailed examination of these themes was conducted to identify the phenomenon of entrainment, focusing on how the rhythms of *Tarawangsa* music influence the biological synchronization of participants' bodies and their progression into altered states of consciousness. Additionally, the study compared the trance observed in *Tarawangsa* performances with established concepts, such as Dissociative Trance Disorder (DTD), to highlight its unique characteristics.

To ensure the validity of the findings, a triangulation of methods was employed. This involved cross-referencing the observations, interview data, and document analysis. Feedback from local practitioners was also sought to verify the authenticity and accuracy of the interpretations. Ethical

considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Participants were provided with detailed information about the research objectives and their consent was obtained prior to their involvement. Measures were also taken to safeguard the confidentiality of participants and to respect the cultural and traditional values of the community. Through these methodological steps, the research aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the trance phenomenon in the Tarawangsa art of Rancakalong, highlighting its cultural, musical, and physiological dimensions.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Entrainment Phenomenon

Entrainment, or the phenomenon of entrainment, was initially used as a term in meteorology. This condition is characterized by a turbulent flow capturing a non-turbulent flow, as observed in tropical cyclones when moist air captures drier air to follow the same flow and mix [6]. In biomusicology, the term *entrainment* refers to the process of biological synchronization between the external rhythms of music and dance with an organism's body [7].

Entrainment is not exclusive to humans. Research, such as that conducted by Patel [8], demonstrates that animals, including sea lions and parrots, can also experience this phenomenon. When exposed to external music, humans perceive it auditorily, which activates isochronous pulses within the body. This process causes humans to move in synchrony with external music [7]. According to Patel [8], this inductive process is a beat-based rhythmic mechanism, explaining why humans naturally move, sway, or dance when listening to music. In essence, there is a biological synchronization between external music and the body's internal biorhythms.

However, entrainment conditions that reach a transcendental state are not solely influenced by music. While music serves as the initial stimulus, individuals are also affected by collective psychological factors such as fear, belief in supernatural elements, loss of self-identity, and other influences that contribute to an Altered State of Consciousness (ASC). This state arises from cognitive conflicts within one's consciousness, leading to a shift in perception and awareness [9].

3.2 Difference between Entrainment and DTD

In certain conditions, entrainment is often associated with Dissociative Trance Disorder (DTD) or a condition where someone enters a transcendental phase unconsciously. The possession condition is often linked to DTD, although fundamentally, entrainment conditions and DTD are two very different things. DTD is a type of behavioral disorder involving changes in mental status related to memory and identity. This condition is grouped with DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder), DA (Dissociative Amnesia), DPDRD (Depersonalization/Derealization Disorder), OSDD (Other Specified Dissociative Disorder), and UDD (Unspecified Dissociative Disorder) [10]. As reported by Ginting and Effendy [11], it is a type of mental illness caused by various factors, such as hallucinations, illusions, delusions, and so on. However, in one case in Tiga Binanga, North

Sumatra, a young woman with no history of mental disorders had to be taken to medical care for DTD, caused by the Nini Pagar traditional culture in the area. In DTD conditions, a sufferer needs psychotherapeutic and pharmacotherapeutic assistance before it adversely affects their life.

Entrainment conditions are different from DTD. Entrainment is temporary and gradually disappears when the synchronization between the body's biorhythms and external rhythms ceases. DTD, on the other hand, is a type of illness that requires further treatment, as it endangers the psychological condition of the sufferer. Moreover, entrainment involves other influences such as beliefs, fears, loss of self-confidence, and so on. However, the main stimulus is music. DTD is a psychological disorder condition influenced by other factors, not music.

3.3 Tarawangsa as an Independent Performing Art

The commonality in both cases is the alteration of consciousness due to responses to environmental stimuli. In the most extreme conditions, both situations result in a loss of the ability to perceive and respond to the surrounding reality normally [12]. In the case of Tarawangsa, participants who dance (*Peribuan*) often enter an extreme entrainment condition. The dancers move randomly following the music of Tarawangsa and Jentreng, adapting to its tempo and beat. The continuously increasing tempo makes the movements of the dancers faster. Based on observations at a Tarawangsa ceremony, extreme entrainment conditions occur most frequently when the tempo is very high.

A fundamental difference in Tarawangsa today, at least since the 20s, is that Tarawangsa is more often presented as a performance. Previously, Tarawangsa was part of post-harvest ceremonies, following a series of rituals and being sacred. However, after becoming an independent performing art due to the high demand to witness Tarawangsa as a performing art, Tarawangsa transformed from a ritual art into a secular art.

Although losing its dignity as a ritual art, Tarawangsa presented as an independent performing art (apart from ceremonies) still induces trance conditions due to entrainment in the dancers, especially *Peribuan*. The sequence of events remains the same, and the point with the highest occurrence of entrainment peaks is at the highest point of the Tarawangsa music tempo. This proves that the trance occurring in Tarawangsa is not related to rituals, sacredness, or ceremonies. The trance is also not associated with supernatural beings or similar entities often discussed in the context of trance events in Tarawangsa. Based on the theses presented by the author, these trance cases also do not fall under the category of Dissociative Trance Disorder (DTD). The condition is temporary and will improve shortly after the Tarawangsa activity is halted. Considering the observable characteristics, it can be concluded that the trance process in Tarawangsa is an entrainment phenomenon.

Entrainment phenomena also occur in several traditional arts in Indonesia, such as "kuda lumping," "bambu gila," and various traditional arts involving music and dance. In fact, reported cases related to the emergence of trance phenomena in traditional arts are all linked to music and beat. Music and beat are the two most associated elements with this entrainment process.

The body's biorhythms are influenced and attracted by external music that emanates from outside the body. This makes the body's biorhythms and external music become one complete wave. However, in the phenomenon of entrainment, the body's biorhythms will follow the flow or wave

of external music. Clayton's research [13] indicates that beats and tempo are the two most related elements to the occurrence of this entrainment, not the melody or notes of the intended music.

4 Conclusion

The phenomenon of trance in the Tarawangsa art of Rancakalong reflects a unique blend of the cultural traditions of agrarian communities, music, and entrainment. Despite the transformation from ritual practices to secular performances, Tarawangsa art continues to evoke trance conditions, vividly illustrating the profound impact of music on human consciousness. Further research is needed to explore the intricate relationship between cultural practices, music, and changes in states of consciousness during Tarawangsa performances. Certainly, this would represent a new advancement for the field of education in the context of Indonesian cultural arts.

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