

# *Sintren* and Javanese Rural Community in Change

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**Abstract** - Modernization in Java has to be paid handsomely at the expense of traditional art displaced by pop culture from the West. The initial analysis resulted in the community's orientation of art or cultural products being switched. The aim of this article is to describe *Sintren*, a traditional art whose existence is eroded by modernity in the field of culture. The phenomenon raised are in Pekalongan and Tegal. The research method used is critical discourse analysis. The data sources of this research are cultural activists and their activities as well as the communities in the research sites. The results of this study are (i) currently *Sintren* is no longer in demand by society and its role is replaced by pop culture; (ii) *Sintren* is an art that contains history and values that reflect the life of maritime communities in the North Coast of Java; (iii) the values contained in *Sintren*'s art are religious, social, caring, entertainment, and economic values. The implication of this research is that it takes a model or idea to do conservation of local culture whose existence is threatened by modernization.

**Keywords** - Art; Javanese Rural Community; *Sintren*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the traditional arts loved by the people of the north coast of Java in the medium 1990s was *Sintren* [1]. *Sintren* art is currently at a worrying point. Researchers detected the problem through a process of observation showing that in three research cities, *Sintren* was very difficult to find. This was supported by preliminary study data carried out during the two months between (January-March 2017) in the three study locations showing the presence of strange social symptoms. *Sintren* as a symbol of the life of the north coast of Java fishing communities is very difficult to find. Sukamulya Arts Studio as an activist in Javanese Traditional Arts in the Village of Wiradesa, Pekalongan considers *Sintren* Art to be devoid of enthusiasts. This is evidenced by the fact that *Sintren* art is rarely seen or performed at the request of people who are celebrating or at other events [2]. Signs of the existence of *Sintren* Art have faded can be witnessed from the interactions conducted by the Researcher with the people who own the Art [3].

*Sintren* on the North Coast of Java has been very difficult to find, a handful of dance images that reflect the life of Javanese people who also have maritime culture have disappeared. The social impact arising from the loss of cultural influence is the weakening of the identities of the people coupled with the erosion of the values that develop in the community [4]. All ways to maintain cultural wealth that are almost complete need to be done. This is done in order that the new generation also know the richness and wisdom of their grandmother. Therefore, a model of cultural conservation is needed to prevent the disappearance of the wealth of resources possessed by the archipelago.

## II. THE EXISTENCE OF *SINTREN* IN TWO CITIES

### A. *What is Sintren?*

Currently *Sintren* is a traditional dance performance art that grows and develops in the North Coast of Java Island and around western Central Java and eastern West Java. According to Sumarno, "*Sintren* is an art that has a sacred value, so that its first appearance in society can be estimated as a religious procession. Over time, *Sintren* underwent a change and tried to survive in the midst of other artistic life, both traditional and modern (Informant II, interview April 7, 2018).

Culturally, *Sintren*'s art is classified as the people's welfare. Wardo said that folk dance has the characteristics such as its movements are not difficult and often repeated, the floor pattern is simple. The motions danced by *Sintren* dancers is flexible, gentle and portrays the beauty of a holy girl (Informant III, interview on April 8, 2018). *Sintren* dancers use corrective make up that has the dancers' assertive nature, making *Sintren* dancers look prettier [5]. *Sintren* dancers' performance is supported by attractive clothing that is mekak (body cover) with velvety material given a motif of tendrils leaves, and decorated with mite to make it look ripe. The macaque used by the black *Sintren* dancer has a wisdom symbol and the maturity of a dancer's soul that can enchant the feelings of the audience [6].

The emergence of *Sintren* in the North Coast and parts of eastern Central Java and western West Java cannot be separated from the history of these regions. This historical journey creates a comfort that is within the

boundaries of Sundanese and Javanese culture [1]. There are three opinions regarding the origin of the name *Sintren*, namely:

First, the word *Sintren* comes from the Dutch language, namely *sinyo trenen*, *sinyo* means young, while *trenen* is practicing. So, *Sintren* is the art where young people go. Secondly, the synthesis comes from the word *syntrian*. The word *sinatrian* or *synatria* or knight is a representation of all elements in this show, from dance, fashion, song, to the meaning of this show. The meaning at that time was the attitude of a knight in dealing with his enemies. Third, the *Sintren*'s sound is related to the word *tranta* which means tantric singing [3]. This tantra is often practiced in both Hinduism and Buddhism [6]. In this ritual, the basic purpose is the same as *Sintren*, which is the unification between humans and the worshiped energy of the gods. Unification occurs during trance or subconscious (Informant IV, interview, 15 April 2018).

According to Sugeng Riyadi, in terms of the origin of language (etymology), *Sintren* is a combination of two syllables "*Si*" and "*Tren*". *Si* in Javanese means "She" and *Tren* means "tri" or a call of the word princess. *Sintren* is the main character in *Sintren*'s traditional arts. *Sintren* is a traditional dance art of the people of Central Java in the north coast region, especially in Pemalang. This art is famous in the north coast of Central Java and West Java [7], including in Pemalang, Pekalongan, Brebes, Banyumas, Kuningan, Cirebon, Indramayu, and Jatibarang. *Sintren* art is known as a dance with mystical / magical scents which comes from the story of Sulasih's love with Sulandono. Herusatoto argued that *Sintren* is a performance art of the Javanese-Sundanese people; a mystical dance art that has a certain traditional astonishing magical rite (Informant V, interview, April 16, 2018).

Further, Suyatno explained that *Sintren* art begins with folklore / legend which is trusted by the community and has two versions, First, it is based on the legend of the love story of Sulasih and R. Sulandono, a son of the Regent in Mataram named Joko Bahu or known as Bahurekso and Rr. Rantamsari. Sulasih and R. Sulandono's romance was not approved by R. Sulandono's parents. R. Sulandono was then ordered by his mother to meditate and was given a piece of cloth (handkerchief) as a means to meet Sulasih after the completion period. While Sulasih was ordered to become a dancer at every village clean event held as a condition to meet R. Sulandono (Informant I, interview on May 5, 2018).

Just when the full moon came, the village clean ceremony was held with various shows. At that time Sulasih danced as part of the show, and R. Sulandono went down from his hermitage in secret with his mother's handkerchief (Informant VII, interview on 5 May 2018)

Sulasih who was dancing was possessed by the spirit of Rr. Rantamsari and experienced a "trance". At that time, R. Sulandono threw his handkerchief so that Sulasih fainted. The "trance" is called "*Sintren*", and

when R. Sulandono throws a handkerchief it is called "balangan". With the knowledge that R. Sulandono has, Sulasih can finally be taken away and both of them can realize their desire to unite in the household relationship (Informant VIII, interview on May 19, 2018).

#### B. Form of *Sintren* Performance

*Sintren* art is presented communicatively between the artist and the audience in a performance arena. But there are also those who say that the origin of *Sintren* is the calling ceremony of spirits [8]. This is when viewed from the songs that still have religious magical traits with the existence of trance scenes experienced by an inner player [9]. It is also seen from the nature of the toy which is still led by a handler like a shaman [10].

The uniqueness of the *Sintren* show is that the dancer is initially dressed in daily costume, but then they are able to transform while being placed in a rooster cage in which various makeup tools such as mirrors, powder, *gincu*, dance clothes and sunglasses. She becomes a beautiful girl in a good clothes with a perfect face decoration and wearing sunglasses [11]. The process of transformation takes about 20 minutes to 60 minutes. Black glasses are intended to cover the position of the eye when the dancer is in trance.

Balangan according to Sukir is "when the *Sintren* dancers were dancing, from the direction of the audience there was a throw (Javanese: *mbalang*) of something towards the *Sintren* dancers", (Informant IV, interview, 15 April 2018). Each dancer is hit by a throw, the *Sintren* will fall unconscious (if it hits the head) [12]. At that time, the handler chants certain spells, and the hands of the *Sintren*'s dancers smoked with frankincense. The hands are rubbed to the face of the *Sintren* dancers with the aim that the angel's spirit would come again so that *Sintren* dancers could continue dancing again [9]. While the theme is the *Sintren* dancer by using a tray approaching the audience to ask for a modest receipt of money.

The songs sung in the *Sintren* art show are generally called angelic [13]. The spirit is believed to bring certain strengths, as reflected in the song "Turun *Sintren*", whose lyrics are as follows:

The Version of Java Language:

*Turun-turun Sintren, turune widodari  
nemu kembang neng ayunan, kembang wijaya  
endah  
podho temuruno neng sukmo, ono Sintren jejogetan  
bul-bul kemenyan, widodari kang sukmo, podho  
temuruno  
podho sinuyudhan, podho lenggak-lenggok surake  
keprok rame-rame  
sing nonton podho mbalang lendang karo  
Sintrenne, njaluk bayar saweran sa lilane.*

In English:

*Sintren*'s descent, the angel's descent  
finding flowers in front of the house, the beautiful  
wijaya flowers

all down to the soul, there is *Sintren* dancing  
the smoke of incense soars, the angel that  
penetrates into the soul, all come down  
all work together, all dance together, applaud  
together with great fanfare  
all who watch throw scarves at *Sintren*, *Sintren* asks  
to be paid sincerely.

*Sintren* dance is very unique because many said that their movements are beyond the awareness of common sense, accompanied by songs and some simple musical instruments, namely *buyung*, *lodong bambu*, *kecrek* (made from *sapulidi*), and *hihid* (fan) [1]. Now *hihid* is replaced with rubber *sandal*, but it is tempting to continue dancing. The young and old watch the show enthusiastically, all eyes fixed on a movement that symbolizes simplicity [14].

Previously the *Sintren* show was often performed by the rice traders shortly after harvest, as an expression of gratitude for the success of the farm or during the dry season to ask for rain, so in the performance, the song or the poem are used to beg for rain (Informant V, interview on April 16, 2018). But now the *Sintren* show is very rare. The author recalled that when he was a child, in the period of 1975-1990, he often found *Sintren* show in the neighboring villages [8] [15] [16], now it is very difficult to find it. *Sintren* performance is now carried out around from one place to another by the artists of *Sintren* [17] [18] [19].

Based on the author's knowledge, there is currently only one village that has *Sintren* art group that still exists, that is, Paduraksa Village in Pematang District. The name of the *Sintren* group is *Sintren* Lintang Kemukus and *Sintren* Slamet Rahayu headed by Radin Anom with a total of 15 people. *Sintren* art can also be found in Banjarmasin Village, Pematang Subdistrict, but unfortunately the community lately has been inactive and the owner now works as an overseas trader [5] [20].

### III. HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF A COMMUNITY

An art is born not without a cause. There must be an origin that covers the social, cultural, political, and even economic spheres which is not spared from the perspective of cultural observers (Informant VI, interview on April 17, 2018). *Sintren* as an art, according to Suyatno, is a part of culture that is affected by the flow of modernity, which is not strictly filtered causing cultural process run smoothly. Forms of modernity, such as modern entertainment venues among which are cinemas, cafes, karaoke, malls, and so on displace the existence of art, especially traditional arts, as an entertainment alternative that contains elements of education and enlightenment (Informant VI, interview on April 17, 2018).

Modernity in the form of entertainment technology [17] [15] has a big influence on traditional arts. Traditional arts require a long process in understanding and displaying, in contrast to modern entertainment

technology that is instant. This is where there will be a cultural lag related to the existence of traditional arts [21] [22]. According to Wartyo, cultural lag is the difference between the level of progress of various parts of a society's culture. The meaning is to miss the culture, which is the time interval between the time the object was first introduced and when the object was received in general until the public can adjust to the object (Informant III, interview, April 8, 2018).

The social construction of the Pematang, Pematang, and Tegal communities for *Sintren* art can be classified into at least three categories that represent various opinions that develop in the community. First, community groups that explicitly (uncompromisingly) reject the existence of *Sintren* art because they assume that *Sintren* art is not in line with religious reasoning (full of mystical nuances). Secondly, groups that recognize the existence of *Sintren* art and try to preserve it. These groups are represented by artists and audience of ethnic arts. Third, groups that are ignorant and don't bother about *Sintren* and its future. Factors that make *Sintren* art lose its prestige include the people themselves who don't care about *Sintren* art. They assume that the performance of *Sintren* art is not relevant to the times [3] [23].

In addition, there is no place (studio) where *Sintren* artists meet their audience. Weak management of the *Sintren* group is also suspected to have influenced *Sintren* art image (Informant X, interview on May 19, 2018). In the past, *Sintren* art was only seasonally managed and only held if there were performances or festivals, but now the *Sintren* show is carried out from one place to another (Informant IX, interview interview, 12 May 2018). In the view of the people who perform traditional arts, being a *Sintren* artist is nothing more than a "dedication" to preserve the culture of the ancestral heritage, or just want to maintain the values of wisdom stored in it. It is stated by members of Art Community of Sukamulya. So, maintaining the cultural values of the arts seems to be taken into consideration [20] [9].

Deciding to become a *Sintren* dancer is probably a courage and morally worthy of being a form of sincerity in keeping the values of holiness. In *Sintren* staging procession, there is a specific requirement, that is, the dancer must be truly virgin (holy) physically and mentally, in the sense that she is still a girl (virgin) and is not yet hegemonized by the influence of modernity (still innocent) [24] [7]. Because of that, *Sintren* dancers generally come from young girls of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> graders of elementary schools. Another requirement is only related to technical thing, that is, they should be able to dance. Now *Sintren* in Pematang as a tradition is under the pressure of modernity and might become a piece of historical memory. Although there are still parties who are trying to preserve it, such as the village that still has a *Sintren* group that appears around [25] [2].

As a narrative based on history, *Sintren* needs to be understood from a historical point of view. The community cannot understand an art only in terms of its

visuals. There is a metaphysical element that cannot be witnessed. The history of art reflects the beauty and majesty of coastal communities in the past. This is in line with what Sukir said, "Sulasih-Sulandono is a legend as well as a history that forms the mindset of coastal communities about cultural life [23]. The legend that gave birth to *Sintren* and the arts is now abandoned along with the historical narrative of Sulasih-Sulandono which is blurred by the fog of modernity (Informant IV, interview on April 15, 2018). Another argument from Sutanto stating that north coast fishermen who are very familiar with the sea make *Sintren* a symbol of longing as well as the struggle of wives who are never tired of waiting for their husband to sail into the middle of the ocean (Informant IX, interview interview, May 12, 2018). On the north coast of Java, the tendency to forget history is a new feature in seeing the context of *Sintren*. Wanto argued that the community currently does not know the education values of *Sintren* because they have never been introduced to what *Sintren* is. The impact is quite broad. As a maritime society, now a social identity that grows is different, unlike coastal communities who should have their own peculiarities (Informant III, interview dated April 8, 2018). *Sintren* is a cultural product of coastal communities that reflects the wisdom of living by the sea such as love for water and the reluctance to damage the ocean created by God [1],[2],[12].

#### IV. THE MEANING OF *SINTREN* FOR RURAL COMMUNITY

The art of *Sintren* contains the following values. First, religious values. *Sintren* performance is a pre-Islamic culture that still uses spells and invites spirits to be carried out by Pekalongan people to clean the village or ask for rain [16] [8]. With full trust, they are convinced that the rain will immediately come down. They believe that their application to God Almighty through the performance of *Sintren* will come true. Religious values appear in the rituals and poems. The bismillah pronunciation in starting the *Sintren* performance is as concrete evidence of the recognition of the existence of the Almighty God, Allah SWT.

Second, social value. *Sintren* can provide positive activities in the form of exercises such as dance, accompaniment, poetry and so on. By holding training, there will be a strong sense of family and mutual cooperation. If this is the case, the passion for building the region will grow and make a good and pleasant live. Badoran or bodoran scenes in *Sintren* can also be used to convey social messages comfortably. The messages will be more effectively and more easily digested by the audience. Not only in bodoran, songs may also be created to contain social messages without losing the spirit of the art of *Sintren*.

Third, security value. In the life of Blimbing Hamlet, even though electricity has been active, when it is dusk the atmosphere becomes quiet. A *Sintren* performance will change the condition to become more alive. Many

people come to watch the show, thus, make them go to sleep late and security has increased.

Fourth, artistic value. *Sintren* contains the value of literary, dance, cosmetology, fashion, and decoration arts. These five things are explained as follows.

Literary art. In the songs sung during a *Sintren* performance, almost every region has its own peculiarities. This condition make opportunities for the clerk to diligently practice and carry out expressions of spontaneity, be able to compose more beautiful new words and sentences in the form of rhymes. The pekalongan *Sintren* language will have its own literary form which is different from the literary forms used in daily life. With new creations and innovations in the poem, it is not impossible that the art of *Sintren* will become an interesting entertainment that attracts the audience.

Dance. *Sintren* is an arable in which the element of dance is even more important. This is evident in the arrangement and pattern of dance that have been designed in such a way as to pay attention to the movements, costumes, and also the storyline that is described. As in the rural scene, a *Sintren* named Sulasih comes in a simple costume / outfit accompanied by bedaya dancers from heaven. After that, through the various stages, *Sintren* wears beautiful clothes like an angel. The dance in a *Sintren* is very prominent because it is prepared and patterned according to the scene and storyline.

Cosmetic. To emphasize the artistic value, make up is a very important element. Make up can disguise some weaknesses of the performance.

Fashion Art. Different dancers wear different clothings. Bodor clothing can add to their bravery, but it is hoped that there will be humor. The kawiyang is dressed in kebaya and cloth, while the male gamers are dressed in headbands, *komprang* clothes and pants. In *Sintren*, art in the fashion has a very important role as well.

Decoration art. After the *Sintren* arises, the decoration element is present. It can be seen from the poperties used, the various stages or floor trinkets used as the arena for the show. As an example, in a *Sintren*, the work is visualized by rubbish or leaves spread in the arena of the show to bring out the impression of the village. The lighting system also visualizes the background of the story.

Fifth, entertainment value. *Sintren* art has its own entertainment value which is quite high amidst many other more modern entertainments. *Sintren* also adds to the repertoire of intellectual performance, an entertaining art. New elements in *Sintren* art have beauty values which are entertaining, such as a clear storyline, dance movements, stage performances, background, and pop dancers.

Sixth, economic value. When the *Sintren* art in the city of Pekalongan experienced glory, there were so



many *Sintren* groups popping up, but after a quiet show invitation, their existence is now almost extinct. In the past, *Sintren* group earn money from the show invitation cost and tips from the audience, but now with a quiet invitation, money is often obtained only from invitation cost.

*Sintren* as art is a local knowledge that contains various values. The existence of *Sintren* art in the three research cities is currently very concerning [26]. The art of *Sintren* which used to reach glory and became an icon of the city, is slowly starting to decline and even go extinct if there are no preservation steps [17]. Some actions can be done as preservation steps, namely by (1) maintaining the existence of the culture, (2) developing the existing culture, and (3) then utilizing the culture. The preservation of *Sintren* should involve the government as the external party and the community itself as the internal party.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Social changes in society have affected the cultural orientation of the community. Currently Indonesia has been infected with Pop Culture chronically. It has an impact on local culture whose existence has faded. Concrete efforts from the government have not fully given a positive impact on local culture. In addition, the historical awareness of the depleted community also has a big influence on the erosion of the existence of local culture. *Sintren* is one of the arts affected. In the North Coast of Central Java, *Sintren* has not been considered an aesthetic art. In fact, *Sintren* contains many values that are important to be maintained as the identity of a society. These values are social values, security values, artistic values, entertainment values, and economic values. One cultural strategy that can be used as an effort to preserve *Sintren's* art is; (1) maintain the existence of the culture, (2) develop the existing culture, and (3) utilize the culture. There are several efforts made by the government which involve the community (internal) and the government (external).

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