

## **Sintren as a Traditional Performing Art in Mirat Village**

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Sintren art is a traditional art that developed in almost all coastal areas of the island of Java. In Majalengka, sintren art developed in Mirat Village, Leuwimunding District. Sintren as a traditional art grew among rural communities that were becoming modern so sintren then survived as a traditional performing art that had an influence on the social life of the community. This research was carried out using qualitative research methods which are believed to be a scalpel in research so as to help explain the research object factually. Data collection techniques were carried out by direct observation and interviewing sources. The results of this research show that sintren in Mirat Village is not only a traditional art that was initially performed in ceremonies or rituals, but also a traditional performing art that can be performed during circumcision celebrations, weddings, and welcoming guests who come to the village. There has been a shift in sintren performances, currently sintren can be performed anytime and anywhere depending on the enthusiasm and demand of the community, because currently the values contained in this sintren performing art are no longer closely tied to a ceremony or ritual alone. Sintren art absorbs the cultural values of the community so Sintren performing arts have become part of the culture of the Mirat community.

*Keywords: Sintren, a traditional art, a traditional performing art*

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Ganjar Kurnia and Arthur S. Nalan (2003), the word “sintren” comes from the syllable Sin which means satire, and Tetaren which means questions through poetry that need to be thought about and searched for answers. A scene that appears in the sintren performance is a person who is in a trance; because of the scene, the word “sintren” is used (Pariwisata, 2005; Subagyo, 2015).

Nurlelasari et al. and Kasim (Supriatin, 2019) explain that sintren has more or less three meanings. First, the word “sintren” comes from Dutch, namely *sinyo trenen*. The word *sinyo* means “young” whereas the word *trenen* means “practice”. Sintren means “art where the youth practice”. If developed, the first meaning refers to sintren artists or sintren dancers who are generally immature girls who are still very young. Second, sintren comes from the word *sinatria* [knight], represented through all elements in the performance such as dance moves, costumes, songs, and performance functions. Third, from its sound, sintren is related to tantra which comes from the word *stuti tantra* which means “singing”. Regarding the third meaning, the performance is usually associated with a ritual that aims to unite human energy with gods or spirits (Supriatin, 2019). In sintren, such ritual is known as “trance”. It is when the sintren dancers are in their subconscious state and it is believed that they are being possessed by a spirit or god.

Sintren is a term for the girl who is the main character in the performance. Juju in Supriatin (Supriatin, 2019) explains that sintren became known in the 1940s. Sintren was originally a habit of mothers and sons waiting for their husbands or fathers to come home after fishing in the sea. It is believed that a sintren performance is not just a dance, but it contains stories of the past or myths about young people's love during the reign of Sultan Agung, the King of Mataram. Nurlelasari explains that the emergence of sintren is based on oral traditions circulating in the Indramayu community (Supriatin, 2019).

According to Rohidi (Devi, 2017), traditional art or local art is a type of art that lives within certain ethnic groups and often becomes part of the life of fellow community members. Traditional art can also absorb the values of other cultures through contact with people who have different cultures so that it later becomes part of their artistic habits. It is then passed down from generation to generation (Abdullah, 2017).

This cultural inheritance is related to cultural preservation. Preservation is interpreted as the protection, maintenance, and continuity of traditional art forms (Thiagarajan, 2017). Conservation efforts can be carried out in two ways, namely continuing and revitalizing (Dana & Artini, 2022). Continuing traditional arts is a form of activity most often found during society. Efforts to continue it are carried out following their interests so that it continues to exist (Quintero & Md Nor, 2016). Meanwhile, revitalizing is an effort to revive art forms or activities that have been existing, but have experienced stagnation and decline, which has led to extinction (Dana & Artini, 2022).

Based on the interpretation of the explanation above, sintren art in Mirat Village is part of traditional arts. Meanwhile, Kayam (Devi, 2017) further describes that traditional arts have several characteristics. First, the scope is limited only to the cultural environment that can support it. Second, it is a reflection of a culture that develops slowly, influenced by the dynamics of the supporting community. Third, it is part of a unified cosmos and is not divided into compartmentalization or specialization. Fourth, it is not individual creativity, but it is created anonymously along with the collectivistic nature of the community that supports it.

In line with this explanation, sintren in Mirat Village belongs to traditional arts that grow and develop in the community. However, along with its development, sintren as a traditional art has now become part of the traditional performing arts because its values are no longer tied to a ceremony or ritual alone (Pamuji, 2022). This can be seen in Sintren art, which was originally full of sacred ceremonies through special rituals in determining performance times, but now this art can be performed at any time without any special timing rituals. Therefore, this discussion aims to enrich the knowledge of the current sintren tradition as a performing art.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. The research results are presented in the form of descriptive analysis. Qualitative research methods are also used in research related to phenomena, events, thoughts, and social activities of a group or individual (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2016). The approach used is grounded theory with the aim of producing a theory using construct-oriented (Satori & Komariah, 2014). The data in this study were collected through a study of

literature regarding the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2016). In addition, the researchers also made direct observations at Mirat Village, as well as conducted documentation and interviews.

Initially, the researchers conducted a literature study in several libraries and government agencies to gather basic information about Mirat Village and the condition of the local community (Sumiarsa, Kiky Yustikasari, & Evi Novianti, 2022). The data on sintren art were also collected as a basis for developing research. Then, the researchers carried out a field study to shed light on the factual conditions of the community and compiled a list of questions to be asked to the resource persons.

After observing the surrounding environment and briefly describing the condition of the community and the development of sintren art, the researchers conducted interviews with several resource persons. They were believed to have the capacity to answer all questions for research purposes (Nurlelasari, Herlina, & Sofianto, 2017). Afterward, the researchers made a transcription of the interview for further analysis and development in writing. In this stage, the researchers conducted source criticism to avoid subjectivity so that the data obtained tended to be factual.

When experiencing a lack of data, the researchers conducted several additional interviews to strengthen the description and explanation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Satori & Komariah, 2014; Sugiyono, 2016). After all the data had been collected and analyzed, the writer synthesized the data to be described in writing. The results of the research were expected to enrich the literature related to sintren in Mirat Village. In addition, the information in the article was also expected to provide a factual description of sintren performing art in Mirat Village.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Sintren as a Traditional Performing Art in Mirat Village

There are several versions of the story of the origin of sintren which developed through folklore in society (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2015). First, sintren is based on the love story of Sulasih and R. Sulandono, the son of the regent in Mataram. Second, it is based on the love story of Ki Joko Bahu (Bahurekso) and Rantamsari, the father and the mother of R. Sulandono, whose relationship was not approved by Sultan Agung the King of Mataram. Sintren developed in various areas of Java and

Sunda; due to the cultural differences, sintren is interpreted and actualized in accordance with the norms and values that exist in the community that owns it. The differences are also influenced by cultural developments in the respective regions (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2015). Likewise, sintren that developed in Mirat Village, although in general have similarities with sintren in other areas, have differences in spirit and social values according to the community (Musadad, Brata, & Budiman, 2023).

Traditional performing arts with various types and forms can be related to various occasions (Kartika, Dienaputra, Machdalena, & Nugraha, 2022). Performing arts appear as an expression of interests that are different from the values of art as a work. Bahardur (Supriatin, 2019), explains that traditional performing art was originally a religious ritual ceremony that was magical, then delivered in the form of spells that were repeatable, over and over again. In subsequent developments, the ritual ceremony becomes a performing art when there are elements of movement and music that follow it. In its presentation, sintren is accompanied by traditional music and fulfills the elements of motion in the dance presented (Rohmah, 2015).

Meanwhile, dance as a performance aims to provide an aesthetic experience to the audience (W., 2001). Dance is presented to get a response or appreciation as a work of art that can give satisfaction to the eyes and hearts of the audience (Gunawan, Qodariah, & Jumardi, 2020). Therefore, dance as a performing art requires more serious attention than just entertainment. Dance, which is classified as a performing art, prioritizes artistic values over other purposes. However, in this regard, sintren in Mirat Village is traditional performing art, which is entertainment in nature but still fulfills magical and sacred elements in each performance.

Symbolically the sacredness still maintained in sintren can be seen through its various complementing elements, such as costumes, performance equipment, accompanying songs, and movements. In addition to the magical and sacred impression, sintren, which is dominated by women throughout the whole performance, also contains various values of women's dignity (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2015). It can also be used as a model for good sex education for women.

Umar, or what the locals call Pak Umar, is the leader of a sintren dancer group in Mirat Village. Pak Umar has continued the legacy of sintren art for the last five years, to be precise since 2017. Meanwhile, in

the previous decade, sintren art in Mirat Village was led by his father, Carim. This art was introduced to the people of Mirat Village around 1960 (Umar, 2022). His father's talent was not only in sintren art, but Carim was also good at using the lute instruments. It is no wonder that Carim's talent and artistic blood have also passed on to his children. However, compared to other children, Umar's artistic blood is arguably the strongest. It is because apart from performing sintren art, Pak Umar is also good at making musical instruments such as flutes and drums. Sintren art activists in Mirat Village are generally part of Umar's extended family. Currently, the number of artists in Umar's group of sintren is approximately 15 people. Rehearsal activities are carried out once a week and can be done more often when there is a request for a performance in a celebration event (Umar, 2022).

The existence of an art always requires supporting components around it that interrelate with each other. Thus, to make an art performance, it is very necessary to have work management in the process. It is termed today as performance production management. The processing of this work has occurred either individually or in groups of art production (Bisri, 2000). In this regard, Pak Umar is an important component in the implementation of the traditional performing art of sintren in Mirat Village.

### **Supporting Elements of Sintren Performing Art in Mirat Village Sintren Dancers**

As well as in various regions, sintren dancers in Mirat Village are women. The difference is in the selection category of the sintren dancers themselves. Of course, not any woman can become a sintren dancer. Ismah (Lestari, Iryanti, & Barus, 2022) states that traditionally, to become a sintren dancer, they must fulfill certain ritual requirements. The prospective dancer must be a young unmarried girl. Then, the prospective dancer must be in good health, pure or not menstruating. During the performance, sintren dancers are accompanied by a handler to control various procedures so that the performance can run well.

There are differences between the selection of dancers in Mirat Village and several other areas. Unlike sintren in Indramayu which requires young girls who have not yet experienced menstruation to be sintren dancers, in some other areas, sometimes it is permitted for the dancers to be teenage girls who have experienced menstruation (M., 2019). Even in Mirat Village, married women are allowed to be sintren dancers. The thing that differentiates it is the trance. According to Umar's statement (2022),

married women generally experience a delay in trance, while unmarried girls are generally able to trance more quickly. This is also in line with what is said (Supriatin, 2019), that sintren dancers in Indramayu must be girls who have not yet menstruated. While in other areas, sintren dancers are sometimes teenage girls who have experienced menstruation. However, during the performance, sometimes girls who have experienced menstruation experience a delay in trance compared to girls who have not yet menstruated.

Apart from that, sintren art places women as the main characters. In other words, women are also empowered as economic actors in an art association. During the staging, the role of women dominates the entire plot. Meanwhile, the nyawer or saweran procession, namely the activity of throwing money at the dancers by the audience, can generate profits for the art groups or performers (Lestari et al., 2022).

### **Equipment of Sintren Art Performance**

The process of performing sintren art along the northern coast of Java is generally carried out in the same way (Udin, 2017). Another supporting component besides gamelan in the sintren performance is a cage. The cage as the main property is used to cover sintren dancers at the beginning of the performance.

A cage used in sintren art is commonly a chicken cage made of bamboo. The bamboo used is generally tali [rope] bamboo, because of its well-known quality. In addition, old bamboo is usually used, which is believed by the community to have strong resistance, so it tends to be more durable (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2015). The cage in each area generally has different sizes. It is made using woven techniques. In the use, it is covered using black cloth. Generally, the width of the cage diameter ranges from 70 cm to 100 cm, while the height exceeds the existing diameter.

Ismah (Lestari et al., 2022) also explains that apart from the cage, other properties that must be provided are offerings (in Javanese culture they are called sajen) which consist of at least three types of flowers, namely roses, jasmine, and kanthil [michelia] flowers, various snacks, various kinds of drinks such as tea, coffee, to young coconut water (degan), some fruit, and other agricultural products. Kemenyan [incense] is also needed in the sintren art performance, the purpose of which is to give off a magical aroma during the performance.

The burning of incense is needed as the sintren's introduction to the gods, through the smoke and

odors emitted by ignition. Generally, the incense used is white incense, this white incense is believed to have a pungent fragrance which is a sign of good quality (Asmara & Kusumaningrum, 2015). As in other areas, the sintren performance in Mirat Village also uses incense which is always brought by the handler.

During the performance, sintren art is also accompanied by gamelan music. In Mirat Village, the gamelan is commonly called degung. The name is the same as Sundanese gamelan in other areas. The gamelan consists of gong, saron, suling, kendang, kecek, simbal, and several other additional musical instruments such as violins. In some other areas, such as Indramayu, some of the songs accompanying sintren use tarling. It is influenced by the demands and social developments of the community so that there is a demitology and commodification in the performance.



Figure 1. Some of the gamelan used in the performance, the gamelan is in Umar's house

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

### Sintren Art Performance in Mirat Village

Sintren art is usually performed at community celebrations, both weddings and circumcisions, and it is common for sintren art to be performed together with other arts such as the renggong horse or jaipongan depending on the request of those who hold the event (Umar, 2022). In a year, at least Umar's sintren art group performs four times, and at most it can be up to ten times a year depending on the number of celebrations and the enthusiasm of the residents.

Economically, being a sintren artist is not the main job of sintren artists in Mirat Village. In general, they already have a main source of income so that art becomes their side job. Besides being able to help financially, performing the art is a special satisfaction for these artists because of their love for culture and art. Apart from economic benefits, sintren performing arts are also a tourist attraction in Mirat Village. This is in line with the development of the tourism sector as an important factor in

building conservation decisions and recognizing cultural heritage, because it has an important role in so that many efforts are made for conservation (Widari, 2003: 372).

The sintren performance begins with the flashing of the outboard lamp or oncor, followed by the sound of gamelan. After burning the incense, a dancer in black sunglasses, but in plain clothes with her hands tied behind her back, enters the circle of performance. Meanwhile, the singers sing worship songs in the Indramayu language repeatedly (Pariwisata, 2005).

Meanwhile, in more detail, based on his research on the sintren art performance conducted by Kudo Bekso Utomo in 2018 ago in Pekalongan, the sintren art performance can be divided into three stages (Asmarani, 2020). The first stage is where gamelan music begins to be played. Gamelan music is usually placed on a higher show stage. The goal is to invite the audience so that they begin to gather; the audience will usually make a circle when sintren is performed in an open field (Asmarani, 2020). It is not much different from the sintren art performance in Mirat Village, which is generally for celebration entertainment. A separate show stage is usually provided for the sintren personnel who are performing the show.

The second is the preparatory stage where the dukun [shaman] or handler in sintren begins to prepare for the performance by lighting incense that has been burned on pottery near the cage covered with a simple yellowish orange cloth. The apparent simplicity describes the economic situation of the sintren group performing the show. Slightly different from the cloth used in Pekalongan, the cloth covering the cage used in Mirat Village is a thin black cloth that is very simple (Asmarani, 2020).



Figure 2. The handler or shaman (Umar) carries incense while reciting spells around the cage

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

After the dancer enter the cage, the accompanying dancers begin to circle the cage. The accompanying dancers in the sintren performance are generally four people (Asmarani, 2020). This number has a certain meaning, which refers to the forty nymphs mentioned in Javanese folklore who come down to earth at certain times. In this regard, the sintren art performance in Mirat Village also has differences, because there are only three accompanying dancers flanking the main sintren dancer. This is adjusted to the resources of sintren performers in each region. However, as recorded in one of the sintren art performances in Mirat Village, besides reading mantras and blowing incense smoke around the cage, the shaman or handler dances around the cage as long as the main sintren dancer has not come out yet. Meanwhile, the third stage is the main show where the dancer comes out of the cage in a trance.

Usually, before being put in the cage, the main sintren dancer is tied with a rope (Soleh, Sulaiman, & Casta, 2020). This is also what distinguishes sintren in Mirat Village and sintren art in several regions. According to Umar, there are several ways used to tie the dancer. Umar usually calls it lancar. There are four lancar that Umar usually performs in the sintren performance in Mirat Village. First, the sintren dancer only tied her hands using a rope. Second, the sintren dancer is tied all over her body using a rope. Third, the sintren dancer is tied using a chain and then locked. Fourth, the sintren dancer is tied up and then put in a sack. Then, the dancer is put back into the cage and comes out in a trance state (Umar, 2022).

The sintren dancer who is bound by a rope becomes unconscious when the handler recites the mantras. She lies down and is put in ranggap [cage]. The handler carries incense while reciting mantras, and walks around the cage, accompanied by gamelan music and songs that are being sung continuously (Pariwisata, 2005).



Figure 3. The sintren dancer is tied hands and the whole body using a rope

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)



Figure 4. The handler goes around reciting spells and spreading smoke around the cage.

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

During these various processes, in addition to gamelan music, accompanying songs are being played in the show. One of the well-known songs in sintren art is *Turun Sintren*, some of the verses of which read as follows:

*Turun-turun sintren*

*Sintrene widhadhari*

*Widhadhari tumuruno*

*Aja suwen mindho dalem*

*Dalam sampun kangelan* (Pariwisata, 2005).

The song *Turun Sintren* is sung when the sintren dancer is tied and is about to be put into a cage, as shown in the figure. The song *Turun Sintren* has high magical power. It is because apart from being an introductory song, it is a 'mantra' song which will greatly affect the performance of sintren. Since one of the waditra used is buyung, the sintren is also called *Ronggeng Buyung*, but this term is not as popular as the name sintren (Pariwisata, 2005).

Other songs sung in the sintren performance are *Kidung*, *Kembang Terate*, *Gulung-gulung Klasa*, *Simbar Pati*, *Kilar Blatar*, and others. As mentioned earlier, these accompaniment songs have magical powers. This is because there are several songs used as a means of worship. Some songs are also new, such as dangdut songs, which are used as a request from the audience who will join the dance (Pariwisata, 2005).

It is time for the cage to be opened, and it turned out that the sintren princess has changed. Now she wears

beautiful clothes with her hands untied and then starts dancing.



Figure 5. The sintren dancer has changed their appearance.

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

When a sintren dancer dances, the audience usually throws saweran [given money voluntarily] (Asmarani, 2020). There is a fairly strict rule in this saweran that money is given by throwing it around the dancing sintren. However, the money thrown cannot touch the sintren dancer (Irmawati, 2020). Apart from that, the audience is also not allowed to approach and touch the sintren dancer while doing the saweran. If it is done, the sintren dancer will usually lose consciousness or will be faint because they are free from the trance. In other words, the spirit inside the dancer's body will suddenly leave her. On the other hand, there is a noble moral value in that rule. By not approaching or touching the sintren dancer, it can prevent immoral acts or intentional harassment by irresponsible parties, so that the purity of the sintren dancer can be maintained (Asmarani, 2020).

It is also in line with what is explained by Nalan that if the princess's body is hit by a sawer throw, her body will limp and fall; "that's why when the sintren dancer dances, she is always surrounded by the juru kawih assistant, and if she falls, she will be recited mantras to make her fresh again" (Pariwisata, 2005).

This rule also applies to sintren performing art in Mirat Village. The saweran money thrown by the audience must not touch the body of the sintren dancer directly. Meanwhile, the song sung at the time of saweran is the song Ayo Ngewer-ngewer Putren. When there is no more audience who give sawer, the sintren dancer crouches down and she is covered again by the cage, accompanied by the song Orok-orok.



Figure 6. The sintren dancer is put back into the cage

Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

As shown the picture above, at this stage, the sintren dancer is again tied to her hands and put into a cage. Then the handler starts carrying incense and goes around the cage and spreads smoke around the cage. Not long after, the cage seems to sway, a sign that the dancer is no longer in a trance.

When the *ranggap* [cage] is opened, it appears that the sintren dancer is already dressed as before, wearing normal clothes with plain white shirts. The dancer is apparently not wearing sunglasses. Meanwhile, she is unconscious. After the handler recited the mantra, the dancer regained consciousness.



Figure 7. The sintren dancer comes out in an unconscious state

Source: Umar's Documentation (Umar, 2022)

During the closing performance, the gamelan music and songs are still played. Usually the song sung during the closing performance is the song Ulung-ulung.

Prominent commodification occurs in the following ways; First, in terms of time, currently sintren performances can be held at any time according to orders from residents who need the performance. This performance can be held apart from celebrations held by residents and can also be held

to welcome guests who come to Mirat Village. Sintren performances have become a mainstay performance for leaders, both village heads and sub-district heads. They treat guests with sintren shows. Second, the songs sung by the accompanists are shorter and not as long as the original performance. The singers who sing the song to call sintren sing it casually, not as formally as in the original performance, they can sing while laughing a little among themselves. Third, the incense burning ceremony continues and the leader of the performance, after burning the incense, then goes around the chicken cage in which there are sintren dancers whose arms and legs have been tied. This leader recites mantras to summon spirits. In a short time the atam brackets were opened and the sintren dancers were dancing accompanied by songs. Fourth, when the audience is entertained by the performance, the sintren dancer will receive a "saweran" from the audience, guests, and people watching the performance.

Sintren as a traditional performing art unfortunately has not received more attention from the government so the gamelan instruments used to support the performance can be said to be incomplete (Jody & Mayangsari, 2019). Currently sintren is growing rapidly so that the accompanying music is not only gamelan, but also sometimes single organs and drums. It creates a competition between sintren art groups (Umar, 2022). Sintren as a performing art has experienced commodification to face the challenges of the times. The phenomenon of commodification and creative industries is interesting to study critically using a cultural studies approach to determine tourism desires (Mudana and Pande Ketut Ribek, 2017: 68).

### CONCLUSION

Sintren in Mirat Village is classified as a traditional performing art, because apart from a sacred and magical ceremony, it can now be enjoyed at every opportunity. Sintren in Mirat Village also has a limited reach because it can only be enjoyed in the community that supports it. So far, sintren art in Mirat Village has only been performed around the Majalengka area. This art also has similarities with sintren art in various areas along the North Coast of Java, although of course it has some differences, such as in the selection of sintren dancers.

Sintren as a traditional performing art is not an individual work but it is created anonymously and passed down from generation to generation, including the sintren in Mirat Village. This is similar to Umar's description as the fourth generation who

inherited sintren art from his father, Carim. According to him, the inheritance of a sintren art group can only be done when the leader dies. Thus, in other words, sintren art in Mirat Village, which is led by Umar, will also be passed on to one of his children later.

Although it has not received more attention from the local government, sintren art in Mirat Village still exists today. It is performed on various occasions such as community celebrations. It is hoped that one day sintren art in Mirat Village as a legacy of traditional performing art can be given more attention. Therefore, sintren artists can develop according to the demands of the times without losing their cultural values so that they can reach various areas outside Majalengka.

Sintren Performing Arts, led by Umar as the heir to Sintren Arts, has taken several steps to adjust to entering the profane realm. This is done by commodifying performance times, simplifying singing, and modifying old musical instruments so that they are still played well. Apart from that, rituals such as fasting which are carried out before sintren arts at certain times have begun to shift to implementation that can be carried out at any time according to orders.

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