



# The influence of the Panji Tales on the lyrics of *bedhaya ketawang*



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## ABSTRACT

The lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* have been interpreted too much in line with the romance of Ratu Kidul and a Mataram king, with a view that the written words convey the meaning of the dance performance. On the contrary, the meaning is often made up by later interpretation. If written words are examined without preconception, it is difficult to say the dance depicts romance. From the fact that Jayengsekar, another name of Prince Panji, appears in the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, as well as that the lyrics resemble the texts of two different *Panji Tales*, it can be considered that the first section of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was taken from the *Panji Tales*. The *Panji Tales* were favoured by court people, and a script was prepared in case of the performance in the court, by which lyrics of the *Panji Tales* may have been collected in the court. Prince Panji and his wife had been the symbol of love since before the Mataram period; therefore, the lyrics of the *Panji Tales* may have been chosen to create the love-themed dance, which was later named *Bedhaya Ketawang*.

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## 1. Introduction

*Bedhaya Ketawang* is the heirloom dance of the Surakarta court, which is only performed for the coronation of the king and its anniversary. According to the survey of Soeratman, *Timboel* reported that regular performances began with the coronation of Paku Buwono X (1893-1939) [1, p. 173], [2]. It is said that the dance describes the romance between Ratu Kidul, the goddess of the South Sea, and the founder of the Mataram Kingdom [3], as is told in *Babad Tanah Jawi*, the official chronicle of Mataram Kingdom. The dance was first introduced outside the Surakarta court by the speech of P.A. Hadiwidjojo (later K.G.P.H. Hadiwidjojo, one of the sons of Paku Buwono X) in Java Institut, in 1919 [3], [4]. Because of its sacredness, the dance and the ceremony in which it was performed were not investigated until the 1960s, when Anderson did diachronic field research on the ceremony [5], Tirtaamidjaja did field research to reveal the details of the execution of the performance and dance rehearsals including the dance formation and costume [6]. In the 1990s, the Indonesian College of the Arts Surakarta did group research to reveal the music and choreography of the dance [7], and Kustantina did field research on the offerings and ritualistic aspects [7], [8]. These studies cited the lyrics but did not discuss them.

Literature research or philological research on the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was done by Florida [9] and Brakel [10]. Florida clarified the whole meaning of the lyrics by translating them into English, whereas Brakel clarified the characteristics of songs for *bedhaya* dances of the Surakarta court as well as the Yogyakarta court and translated the first section of the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* into English [10]. The lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* are divided into three sections as are the musical accompaniment and the choreography. The first section is composed in macapat metres, while the second and third sections are in the Kawi meters [9], [10]. The second section is almost entirely written in the form of *wangsalan* [10], which consists of riddles

and the answering riddles; accordingly, the meaning is complex and difficult. The third section in Kawi *salisir* [10] is almost full of calls and praises to the king. In short, each section has a different form and poetry technique. In addition, the word *Susuhunan* often appears in the second and third sections; meanwhile, it does not appear in the first section at all. These imply that each section of the lyrics was composed or collected separately and then combined into one. In other words, each section may have been first created at different times. Brakel states that “the early *pesindhen bedhaya* is composed of a number of different textual fragments, part of which were probably selected from existing works of poetry, while other sections are made up of groups of *wangsalan* [10]. Compared to Brakel, who discussed the influence of prior literature on *Bedhaya Ketawang* text based on Robson’s study [10], [11], Florida interpreted the lyrics too much in line with the story of Ratu Kidul and a Mataram king, probably because Florida followed the note of Tirtaamidjaja, who did that “although the dance itself has no plot or story to tell, the litany sung by the female choir conveys the essential meaning of the whole ritual [6, p. 34], [9].

However, the essential meaning of a certain performance is not always conveyed by written words. On the contrary, meaning or discourse is often made up or added through interpretation over time, as shown below. According to Paku Buwono X, *Bedhaya Ketawang* describes the passionate love of Ratu Kidul and the founder of Mataram Kingdom [3], which is reliable judging by the fact that he began the regular performances. According to *Serat Wedha Pradangga* authored in 1943 by Warsadiningrat, a court musician, the music of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was created in 1643 by Sultan Agung, the third king of Mataram, based on the king’s inspiration that heavenly nymphs danced *bedhaya* in the age of the gods, and then Ratu Kidul appeared to teach dance to the *bedhaya* dancers [12]. The description of the king’s inspiration was derived from *Pustaka Raja*, a Javanese history composed by a great court poet, Ranggawarsita, in the second half of the 19th century [10]. Hadiwidjojo stated, based on Warsadiningrat’s opinion [12], that the dance was created by *Bathara Guru* (an avatar of Shiva) in 167 [3], [4], although he said on the other hand that the dance was generally considered to be the work of Ratu Kidul [4, p. 16]. In this way, the role of Ratu Kidul has been changed from a figure depicted in the dance to its creator or a dance teacher. It should be noted that the interpretation of court people did not rely on the lyrics; accordingly, the interpretation of lyrics which was passed down from them may be far removed from the original meaning. This paper aims to examine the interpretation of Florida as well as of Brakel on the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, mainly the first section, in order to reconsider the character of the lyrics, their source and the background in which the lyrics were taken for the creation of the dance

## 2. Method

This study was literature research. The method of this study was the critical examination of previous research on literary works not using the philological or linguistic approach but using the historical approach. This study focused on what previous studies have missed and eliminated the preconceptions and stakeholder views that influenced previous research. Materials were not only the original Javanese text but also the English translation. This is because similarities in the structure or ideas between several lyrics may be more important than a rigorous linguistic analysis in the analysis of song texts for performing arts. The author examined the composition of the lyrics based on the English translation, checked the correspondence between the English translation and its original text, and then compared some lyrics mainly in English

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Characters in the Lyrics

In Florida’s translation, she considers the man in the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* as the king of Mataram and the woman as Ratu Kidul. However, if the entire lyrics are surveyed, this is necessarily the case for the following four reasons. The first reason is that not only the actual name of the goddess, namely Ratu Kidul, but also the words for her attributes, such as the South Sea or spirit, do not appear in the lyrics at all. Even if the court people were afraid to mention

her actual name directly, her attributes should be read into the lyrics instead. Florida speculates that the word *dhangur* in the last verse of the second section refers to Ratu Kidul [9] but provides no evidence for this either. The glossary of two lyric collections: *13 macam Sindenan Badaya* and *Syair-Syair Gending Badhaya, Pakubuwana VII digubah pada hari Senin Pon tanggal 1 Zukaidah, wuku Sinta, tahun Ehe, 1764 atau 1837* only state that *dhangur* or *nibok dahangur* means a woman. Both do not identify the woman as Ratu Kidul [13]. Although the year of each transcription is unknown, the former was supposedly composed in 1832, written next to the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, and the latter in 1837, as written in the title. This suggests the lyrics were not related to the story of *Ratu Kidul* in the 1830s, that is before the regular performances of *Bedhaya Ketawang* began.

In the case of the song text of *Behaya Sumreg*, specific place and the king's name are read into the song text, such as "setting out from Semarang (*bubare sangking Samarang*)", "setting out to fight a furious battle to attack Kartasura (*nglalana andon prang pupuh anglurugi Kartasura*)", and "the name of the king is Susuhunan Paku Buwana (*Bisikanira narpati Susuhunan Paku Buwana*)," accordingly Brakel points out that this *bedhaya* dance refers to the march of Paku Buwono I to Kartosuro in August 1707, which was described in *Babad Kartosuro* [10]. On the other hand, *Bedhaya Ketawang* does not contain any proper names that can be identified as the story of *Babad Tana Jawi*.

The second reason is that the usage of *wong agung* Susuhunan, Susuhunan, *wong agung*, *panumbahan*, and *kiyahi* is not limited to the king of Mataram from a broader perspective. Susuhunan is now a title that refers specifically to the king of Surakarta, but *susuhunan* or its root *sunan*, is an honorific title meaning a noble person and is also used for Islamic saints. The same is true for *kiyahi*. *Panumbahan* is not a title restricted to the Kingdom of Mataram but is a widely used term. Moreover, these words seem to be inserted or added later for the invocation to the king during the performance. The two glossaries mentioned above also reinforce this hypothesis by saying these words are words for praise to fill up the time of the music (*kata-kata pematut atau pemanis, untuk isian balungan gending*) [13].

The third reason is that the scenes of the lyrics are not suitable for the story told in *Babad Tanah Jawi*. Senopati meditated on the beach before coming across the goddess, according to the chronicle. As is customary, the meditator must not have worn adornments. However, the man appearing in the first section of the lyrics is dressed in a luxurious costume. Thus, it is hard to believe he is Senopati. Besides, the sad scene of the woman parting from the man in bed in the second and third sections is not appropriate to describe Senopati acquiring the legitimacy of kingship through marriage with the goddess.

The fourth and most powerful reason is that the name Jayengsekar appearing in the first stanza of the first section of the lyrics is an appellation of Prince Panji, as Florida pointed out [9], but she did not consider the possibility that the first section of the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was quoted from the *Panji Tales*. Florida attempts to interpret this point by explaining that the name Jayengsekar can also be read as "victor of flowers", that is "one who has gained a woman [9]." Even if the interpretation is correct, this does not mean he is the king of Mataram. Based on the above discussion, it is difficult to identify the characters in the lyrics as Ratu Kidul and the king of Mataram from the written words. The only person mentioned in the lyrics except invocation is Prince Panji; therefore, it can be assumed this part of the story may have been taken from the *Panji Tales*.

### 3.2. Description of the Male Costume

The second and third stanzas of the first section of *Bedhaya Ketawang* describe a man in his splendid costume, see Table 1. A description similar to the above can be found in the *History of Java*, in which "the dresses worn on a nuptial day are thus described in the Romance of Panji"; Klana Jayeng Sari wore on occasion a *dodot* of silk stamped with flowers of gold; his chelana were of the green chindi ornamented with golden lace round the button, and studded with *kunang-kunang* (golden ornaments made to represent the fire-fly); his sumping (ornaments at the back of the ear) was of golden flowers studded with diamonds. On the third finger of each hand, he wore two diamond rings. His waistband or belt was a painted cloth of the pattern *gringsing sang'u-pati*; his kris of the *kaprabon*; his *jamang*, or head ornament, of gold, set with

diamonds, and scented with all kinds of sweet-scented oils [14, p. 326]. Klana Jayeng Sari is one of the names of Prince Panji [14]. He as well as the man in the text of *Bedhaya Ketawang* wear *kampuh* or *dodot*, although the motifs are different. Klana Jayeng Sari wears a *dodot* of silk stamped with flowers of gold.

**Table 1.** Bedhaya Ketawang

| A Javanese Text   | A translation   |
|---|---|
| <i>Raka pakenira sampun atengara<br/>sira puniki kari<br/>angling Jayengsekar<br/>lah bapa tengoroaha<br/>tumulya tengara nitir<br/>sumreg atata<br/>saparannya ngajap sih</i>                        | Your brother has sounded the signal<br>You are left behind<br>Jayengsekar spoke<br>O Father, give the sign<br>Then the signal sounded<br>In ever clashing clamor<br>All along the way mad with love   |
| <i>Alancingan pethak alus kampuh jingga<br/>sabuk pathola wilis<br/>akris cinitreng mas<br/>sengkang maniking toya<br/>binapang ing mas angrawit<br/>sekar cempaka<br/>gegonda amrik minging</i>      | Clad in fine white trousers, in skirts of deep red hue<br>With a dark green silken belt<br>With gold-encrusted keris<br>Brilliant diamond earrings<br>Set in fine gold filagree<br>Frangipani blossoms<br>Of redolent fragrance sweet   |
| <i>Akekace cindhe binggel mas rinengga<br/>ya urap-urap sari<br/>jamang mas tinatrap<br/>ing retina adikara<br/>asumping swarna lar rumbing<br/>sumarsana-bra<br/>sumer gandanya amrik [9, p. 28]</i> | With a flowing sash of cindhe silk adorned with golden bracelets<br>Yea anointed with fragrant balms<br>[His] golden diadem studded<br>With the rarest precious jewels<br>And gracing his ears, gossamer wings of gold<br>Frangipani blossoms bright<br>So redolent of fragrance sweet [9, pp. 29–30] |

*Dodot* and *kampuh* are the same, and they are worn only by noblemen for a wedding or to attend court ceremonies. They also wear *chelana*(*celana*) /trousers. In *Bedhaya Ketawang* text, green *pathola* cloth is used for *sabuk*/the sash belt, and incidentally, green *chindi* (or *cindhe*) cloth is also used for the trousers of Klana Jayeng Sari's costume. *Pathola* and *cindhe* are the same kinds of cloth of Indian origin and a symbol of royalty in Java, as is obvious from the fact that king Paku Buwono IV (1788-1820) banned the use of *cindhe* patterned trousers or covering the palanquin with *cindhe* cloth [15, p. 289]. Klana Jayeng Sari and the man in the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* hold kris and wear *jamang*/head ornament as well as *sumping*/earrings which are made of gold and diamonds. Their bodies are covered in fragrant balm/oil. Both texts express a man of noble birth in ceremonial dress with a number of accessories. Similarities in the portrayal of these two men described above suggest that the passage from *Bedhaya Ketawang* also depicts Prince Panji, whose name appears as Jaengsekar in the first stanza of the lyrics. Regarding the same part of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, Robson noted that "it is not difficult to find a very similar passage in the Middle Javanese *kidung Wangbang Wideya*" [11, p. 196]:

*'akampuh udaraga atumpal gagadhungan ndan asabuk peremas wilis duhungira alandeyan manik/*

*asuweng manik ing toya rinajaseng mas asekar kanaka tiningkah rabayut ahurap -urap mrik minging//'*

which is translated by Brakel as follows:

*He wore a kampuh of udaraga with a gagadhungan tumpal motif; he wore a green sash painted with gold, and his kris had a jewelled handle*

*He wore ear-studs of water -jewels soldered (?) with gold and with golden flowers arranged in the form of the rabuyut flower; he wore a fragrant unguent' [10, p. 170].*

*Wangbang Wideya* is a Middle Javanese *Panji tale*, and this part describes the appearance of Raden Singhamatra, son-in-law of the king of Daha, for a court ceremony [10]. Unlike the two men compared above, Raden Singhamatra does not wear trousers or *jamang*, but is otherwise

similar. He wears golden flower-shaped earrings, as does Klana Jayeng Sari. It is clear from the analysis of these three texts that each hero is represented by similar formulaic sentences, obviously two of which are from the *Panji Tales*. It can be almost said that the other one, namely the first section of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was taken from the *Panji Tales*, and that Jayengsekar in *Bedhaya Ketawang* is Prince Panji himself, not, as Florida noted, a "victor of flowers" [9].

### 3.3. Interpretation of Colors

Florida made an annotation on the green *pathola* belt worn by Jayengsekar that "dark green is the colour most associated with Kangjeng Ratu Kidul [9]." She may be based on Hadiwidjojo's writing that people in Pacitan on the south coast believe it is forbidden to wear green (*gadhung*) because the colour is closely related to Nyai Rara Kidul (another name of Ratu Kidul) [3], [4]. However, green is also worn by the other characters from the *Panji Tales*: trousers of green *cindhe* worn by Klana Jayeng Sari and the green belt worn by Raden Singhamatra. This shows that green would have no special meaning for the characters of the *Panji Tales* but that it may be common for the costume of noblemen because green is usually regarded as elegant.

To add more, green is not limited to the colour of Ratu Kidul. According to Adam's writing in 1930 [16, p. 374], "*Gadhung* is the well-known green motif which may not be worn either on Mount Lawu or on the south coast" [16, p. 269]. In the Surakarta court, Mount Lawu is the dwelling of Sunan Lawu, that is, Raden Guntur, a descendant of Majapait who fled there during the fall of Majapait [3], while in the Yogyakarta court, it is the dwelling of Sunan Lawu who is considered to be a son of the last Majapahit king called Brawijaja [3]. Whichever it is, Mount Lawu is the dwelling of the spirit of the ancestors of Majapahit that preceded Mataram. The green cloth is also prohibited in the Mataram royal mausoleum in Imogiri, according to Mrs Mak Tal in Jakarta, a master of traditional dressing whose mother-in-law was a daughter of King Paku Buwono X (personal communication, December 25, 2011). These suggest that green is associated with spirits. Jayengsekar is not a spiritual being; accordingly, no special meaning should be read into it.

Jayengsekar wears *kampung jingga*, on which Florida added annotation that "to wear the *kampung jingga* (dark red *kampung*) means to be prepared for battle. Perhaps here it signifies erection, readiness for the "battle" of sexual intercourse. K.R.T. Hardjonagoro, personal communication (1984)." Brakel guesses that the outfit of Jayengsekar may be worn for battle [10] for an ambiguous reason. Four song books in *Serat Pesinden Bedhaya: 13 macam Sindenan Badaya*, *Serat Pasindhen Badhaya 17 macam*, *Shinden Badhaya*, and *Syair-Syair Gending Badhaya* (Indonesian translation) only mention that *jingga* means dark red [10], [13].

Dark red *kampung* does not really exist, and to wear *kampung jingga* (*mirong kampung jingga*) is a Javanese idiom which means rebellion, according to K.P. Sulistyو Tirtokusumo, a former dancer of the Surakarta Court (personal communication, March, 2022). In other words, the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* describe how Jayengsekar has the aspiration of rebellion and how he hides it under the beautiful costume. As he is dressed in ceremonial dress with a number of accessories, it is unlikely he is setting out for the battlefield, where he is probably attending a ceremony. For this reason, the description of the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* seems more theatrical, compared to the portrait of Klana Jayeng Sari in *dodot* of flower motif or the portrait of Raden Singhamatra in *kampung* of *tumpal* (geometric triangle) motif. This interpretation seems more probable if judged only in the context given in the lyrics. K.R.T. Hardjonagoro considered that to wear *kampung jingga* meant to be prepared for battle, perhaps because "battle" is the most important metaphor in Javanese dance as well as it is often interpreted as sexual intercourse. However, such preconceptions could hinder possible interpretations of original lyrics. These two examples show people tend to interpret things in accordance with their preconceptions. The meaning of costume colour could vary depending on a character's social class, costume preference, emotion and so on, and it could be used as a metaphor. Applying preconceptions or the current interpretation to a past literary work would obscure information about the original work.

### 3.4. Influence of the Popularity of the *Panji Tales*

The *Panji Tales* from the 13th century became extremely popular during the Majapahit empire (14th-15th centuries) and spread out from Java to abroad to become one of the most popular literature in Southeast Asia during the 17th-18th centuries [17]. The *History of Java* (1817), the ethnography written based on field research in Java during 1811-1816, reports it had been very popular before the regular performances of *Bedhaya Ketawang* began in 1893.

What Raffles called national dramas are the *topeng* (mask play) and the *wayang* (shadow puppet play), and “the subject of the *topeng* is invariably taken from the adventures of Panji, the favourite hero of Javanese story” [14, p. 335]. A party of the *topeng* generally consists of four gamelan musicians and six mask players besides the *dalang* (narrator) [14]. When they perform before the Sovereign, they play without masks, and “the *dalang* or manager of the entertainment recites the speech” [14], for which “they previously study their characters from written compositions expressly prepared for the purpose” [14], on the other hand, the *dalang* furnishes the dialogue between the actors extempore [14].

Depictions mentioned above show the *Panji Tales* were so popular that even a king and court people favoured the folk theatre played by a small group and that the *topeng* group made script for the court performance based on previously written works against their usual habit. This would be to avoid any disrespect to the nobles. Because they relied on older written works, the portrayal of heroes in the *Panji Tales* would be similar and formulaic. Court people may have enjoyed the performance also from the literary point of view with the well-prepared script. It can be assumed that such scripts were collected and cited in subsequent literature in the court.

The *History of Java* also reports that some traditional rituals were likened to Prince Panji and his beloved wife. For example, the book's author is told that *paningset* became a custom among the Javanese because it is described in the story as being sent by Panji Kerta Pati to the Princess Chandra Kirana of Daha [14]. For another example, a young coconut is prepared as an offering in the ritual of the seventh month of pregnancy, and the resemblance of Panji Kerta Pati and his wife Chandra Kirana of Daha is engraved on the coconut [14]. In the *Panji Tales*, “love and war are the constant themes” [14], and Prince Panji and his wife may have been regarded as a symbol of love in the Javanese society; therefore, people wanted to imitate them. It can be assumed that a part of the *Panji Tales* was considered appropriate for the love-themed dance to be created, one of which would be later named *Bedhaya Ketawang*

## 4. Conclusion

*Bedhaya Ketawang* dance describes the romance between Ratu Kidul and a Mataram king. Florida interpreted the lyrics too much in line with the romance based on the information given by court people. If written words are examined literally without preconception, it is impossible to identify the man and the woman in the lyrics as Ratu Kidul and the Mataram king. The lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang* resemble the texts of two different *Panji Tales* in the details of description as well as their formulaic sentences. It is quite possible that the first section of *Bedhaya Ketawang* was taken from the *Panji Tales*. The *Panji Tales* were favoured in Java before the Mataram period. Court people also loved the theatre of the story, and a script was prepared for the performance in the court, for which texts of the *Panji Tales* may have been collected in the court. Prince Panji and his wife were the symbols of love in Java; hence, the *Panji Tales* could be quoted to create the lyrics of the love-themed dance, later named *Bedhaya Ketawang*. Song texts are usually paid little attention to the choreography of traditional dance in Java. This research shows the influence of the *Panji Tales* on the first section of the lyrics of *Bedhaya Ketawang*, however, it does not discuss the lyrics of the second and third sections. If each source of each section is clarified, it will be clearer when and how *Bedhaya Ketawang* was choreographed, as well as how the artistic environment of the court was at that time

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