

The Transformation of *Sembah Batin* Dance in the Development of Performing Arts in West Lampung Society

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine innovation in the Sembah Batin Dance as a form of performing arts development within the West Lampung community. The Sembah Batin Dance, created by Nyoman Mulyawan in 2010, now functions as a welcoming dance for guests at various official events, traditional ceremonies, and wedding processions. The uniqueness of this dance lies in its ability to adapt to modern social contexts through innovations in movement forms, accompanying music, and presentation structure, without abandoning noble values such as respect, mutual cooperation, and togetherness. This research employs an ethnocoreological approach to analyze aspects of meaning as well as elements of choreography, costumes, properties, and music. The findings indicate that innovation in the Sembah Batin Dance plays an important role in maintaining the sustainability of tradition and strengthening the existence of regional performing arts amid the social dynamics of West Lampung.

KEYWORDS

Sembah Batin
Innovation
Discovery
West Lampung

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INTRODUCTION

The *Sembah Batin* Dance is a newly created choreographic work that functions as a form of respect and a welcoming gesture for honored guests. The people of West Lampung Regency perform this dance at various official events, traditional ceremonies, and wedding processions. The *Sembah Batin* Dance was created by the choreographer Nyoman Mulyawan and was first performed at the 38th Lampung Provincial Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) in 2010, when West Lampung Regency served as the host.

Although it is relatively new, the *Sembah Batin* Dance has developed rapidly and spread widely across various areas of West Lampung. Its creation was a response to the absence of a distinctive welcoming dance from the region. Through this work, the choreographer sought to present a new form of dance that represents the community's spirit in greeting guests with honor and respect. Over time, the *Sembah Batin* Dance has continued to evolve through innovations in movement, costume design, and performance patterns to remain relevant to changing times and societal needs. This aligns with Sal Murgiyanto's view that creativity is the ability to combine previously separate elements into a new, unified whole in order to solve problems or create artistic works (Murgiyanto, 2004: 51).

The elements within the *Sembah Batin* Dance represent the noble values of the West Lampung community, such as mutual cooperation, hospitality, and togetherness. These values are expressed through sequences of movements that emphasize unity, harmony, and social cohesion among the dancers. The collective movements reflect social relationship patterns that highly value solidarity and cooperation.

The main property used in the *Sembah Batin* Dance is the *pahakh*, a metal container resembling a footed plate, which carries a symbolic meaning of togetherness. Traditionally, the *pahakh* is used in communal dining activities, and its presence in the dance represents the values of sharing and social unity within the community. Meanwhile, the dancers' costumes, inspired by bridal attire, symbolize elegance as well as a form of respect toward the welcomed guests, in line with the original function of the *Sembah Batin* Dance as a welcoming dance.

Terminologically, the term *Nyuncun Pahakh* derives from two words: *nyuncun*, meaning "to place or carry on the head," and *pahakh* (or *pahar*), referring to a household container shaped like a plate or footed tray, typically made of metal such as iron, copper, aluminum, or brass. The *pahakh* has a cylindrical base with a diameter of approximately 30 centimeters. This tradition is called *Nyuncun Pahakh* because, in practice, the *pahakh* is carried on the head as part of a customary procession rich in symbolic meaning (Melinda, 2025: 23).

The musical accompaniment of the *Sembah Batin* Dance was originally performed live by eight musicians using traditional instruments such as the gong, kulintang, rebab, gamelan pekhing, tallak balak, and tallak lunik. However, in recent developments, recorded music is more commonly used for efficiency in time and cost. This shift reflects adaptation to technological advancement, while also presenting challenges in maintaining the authenticity of the performance.

The *Sembah Batin* Dance consists of 16 sequences of movements arranged systematically using a numbering system, rather than traditional naming as found in classical Lampung dances. This indicates a modern choreographic approach combined with local traditional elements. The *pahakh* property is placed at the front of the wedding procession as a symbol of respect, reinforcing the social function of this dance within the customary context of West Lampung society.

From a cultural perspective, the emergence of the *Sembah Batin* Dance can be understood through the concept of cultural change, particularly the stages of discovery and invention. Discovery refers to the finding of a new cultural element created by an individual or small group, while invention occurs when the discovery is accepted and widely adopted by society (Koentjaraningrat, 2009: 210). Initially, the *Sembah Batin* Dance was a discovery—an idea from the choreographer to create a distinctive welcoming dance for West Lampung. However, as it gained acceptance and spread across various traditional and official events, it transformed into an invention, becoming part of the collective culture of the community.

This phenomenon demonstrates how innovation in performing arts can serve as an effective medium for developing regional cultural identity. Through support from local government, communities, and arts education institutions, the *Sembah Batin* Dance continues to be developed through training, festivals, and workshops, strengthening its existence as an innovative product of traditional art rooted in local values. Based on this description, the main problem addressed in this study is how the transformation process of the *Sembah Batin* Dance occurs from discovery to invention, as well as the forms of innovation and preservation efforts amid social change and technological advancement. This study is expected to contribute to understanding the dynamics of developing traditional performing arts as part of the sustainability of local culture in West Lampung.

METHOD

The study of the *Sembah Batin* dance as an innovation in performing arts in West Lampung employs a qualitative method with an ethnokoreological approach. The researcher acts as the primary instrument in observing, interpreting, and understanding the innovation process occurring in the form, function, and presentation of the dance. The ethnokoreological approach is used because it views dance as a cultural phenomenon that is integrated with the social, ritual, and historical contexts of the community. Ethnochoreology is multidisciplinary in nature as it involves aspects of art, culture, and society (Pramutomo, 2007:8). Meanwhile, Slamet emphasizes that dance must be understood as a subject that reflects cultural values and dynamics through its performative form (Slamet, 2016:126).

Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and literature study (Maryono, 2011:82). Participatory observation was conducted in Liwa, West Lampung, where the researcher was directly involved as a dancer and instructor of the *Sembah Batin* dance to gain an in-depth understanding of the creative process, changes in movement forms, music, and presentation patterns. Interviews were conducted with artists and cultural practitioners such as I Nyoman Mulyawan, Zairi, Ricard Sambera, and Riswanda, in order to obtain information regarding the development, innovation, and preservation efforts of the *Sembah Batin* dance within the community.

In addition, a literature review was used to strengthen the theoretical foundation related to performing arts innovation, the concept of ethnochoreology, and qualitative research methodology. Data analysis was conducted inductively, drawing conclusions based on field findings to identify patterns of innovation in the form, function, and presentation of the *Sembah Batin* dance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Discovery: Creation and Early Conceptualization

The emergence of *Sembah Batin* Dance in West Lampung can be understood through the concept of cultural change, particularly in the stages of discovery and invention. In the perspective of cultural anthropology, discovery refers to the process of identifying or creating new cultural elements whether ideas, tools, or art forms developed by individuals or small groups within a society. Meanwhile, invention occurs when these cultural elements are accepted, recognized, and widely adopted by the community, becoming an integral part of the cultural system. Thus, *Sembah Batin* Dance can be viewed as a result of discovery that later underwent a process of invention through social acceptance and its function in various cultural contexts in West Lampung (Koentjaraningrat, 2009:210).

Based on an interview with Nyoman Mulyawan on December 3, 2024, *Sembah Batin* Dance, created by the choreographer in 2010, originated from a process of discovery—namely, the creation of a new dance work driven by the need for a distinctive welcoming dance representing West Lampung. This idea emerged as a response to the absence of a dance form capable of uniquely representing the region's identity. Through an exploration of local cultural values, Mulyawan developed a choreography that combines traditional elements with a modern approach, resulting in a dance form that functions not only as a welcoming performance but also as a symbol of the cultural identity of the West Lampung community.

Over time, *Sembah Batin* Dance has evolved beyond its initial creation. The community and local government of West Lampung have accepted and adopted it as a regional cultural identity. The dance is now regularly performed at official events, festivals, and traditional ceremonies such as weddings. At this stage, *Sembah Batin* Dance has transformed from a

discovery into an invention, as it has been collectively recognized and practiced by the community as a symbol of regional pride.



Figure 1. The first creation of Sembah Batin Dance (Doc. Endang Guntoro, Cangu, February 5, 2010)

This transformation shows that innovation in traditional arts does not necessarily mean abandoning old values; rather, it revitalizes local spirit through new forms that are relevant to social contexts and the development of the times. In this regard, Sembah Batin Dance serves as a concrete example of how a creative dance work can enrich the repertoire of regional performing arts while simultaneously strengthening the cultural identity of West Lampung amid the ongoing currents of modernization.

In line with this, Stuart Hall (1992), as discussed in Chris Barker's work, identifies three different ways of understanding identity: (a) the Enlightenment subject, (b) the sociological subject, and (c) the postmodern subject. The Enlightenment subject is understood as an individual with a single, stable, and rational identity; the sociological subject views identity as the result of interaction between the individual and social structures; while the postmodern subject positions identity as fragmented, fluid, and constantly shifting according to cultural and social contexts.

The discussion in this section aims to expand the conceptualization of identity by tracing how cultural subjects experience shifts, fractures, and even marginalization within contemporary society. In relation to *Sembah Batin* Dance, the processes of transformation and innovation carried out by subsequent generations can be understood as expressions of postmodern identity, in which tradition is not seen as something rigid, but rather as a space for creative negotiation between cultural heritage and present-day social realities. Thus, *Sembah Batin* Dance emerges as a cultural practice that represents a dynamic, adaptive local identity, continuously reshaped by its cultural practitioners.

Originally created for the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) at the Lampung Provincial level in 2010, *Sembah Batin* Dance was initially intended as a welcoming dance. Over time, alongside the social and cultural development of its supporting community, the dance has undergone various innovations encompassing movement, costume, musical accompaniment, props, and staging. These changes reflect an effort to adapt the dance so that it remains relevant and capable of communicating with a broader audience.

In terms of movement, the choreographer explores more varied and expressive bodily dynamics and spatial use, while maintaining its traditional structural foundation. Core movements are preserved as markers of cultural identity, but are enriched through the development of movement quality, tempo, and floor patterns to make the performance more communicative and appealing to contemporary audiences. This innovation reflects a creative

process that seeks to balance the preservation of traditional values with the aesthetic demands of contemporary performance.

2. Invention: Social Acceptance and Transformation

Innovation is also evident in the costumes, which have become more varied and are adapted to the aesthetics of modern performance. Traditional elements such as siger, tapis cloth, and distinctive Lampung accessories are still maintained as markers of cultural identity, but are combined with modern materials and colors to create a fresher stage appearance. The pahakh prop has also undergone transformation in both form and material; originally heavy, it is now made lighter without reducing its symbolic meaning as a gesture of respect.



Figure 2. *Sembah Batin Dance* performed during the welcoming ceremony of the Regent at the Sekala Bekhak Festival (Doc. Nur Sintia, December 5, 2021).

The most striking change can be seen in the musical accompaniment. Previously, the music was performed live using traditional instruments such as gamolan pekking, tallak balak, and rebab. Today, however, many performances use recorded music that has been rearranged. Despite this shift, the distinctive rhythmic patterns and melodies of Lampung are preserved, ensuring that traditional values remain intact even when presented through modern technology.

These innovations reflect a form of dynamic preservation an effort to sustain the existence of traditional arts through the renewal of form and function. The local government, together with art studios such as Sanggar Setiawang, plays an important role in this process by organizing training programs, festivals, and dance competitions to encourage the regeneration of dancers and to expand creative spaces for young artists. Collaboration among artists, traditional leaders, and the government has positioned *Sembah Batin Dance* not merely as a work of art, but also as a medium for strengthening local cultural values.



Figure 3. *Sembah Batin Dance* at the Sekala Bekhak Festival. (Doc. Nur Sintia, December 5, 2021)

From a socio-cultural perspective, the innovations applied to *Sembah Batin Dance* have made it more accessible across generations and contexts. Today, the dance is performed not only in traditional ceremonies or welcoming rituals, but also in art festivals, educational activities, and regional tourism promotions. These innovations expand the living space of the tradition, strengthen the cultural identity of the community, and foster a sense of pride in regional artistic heritage. Thus, innovation in *Sembah Batin Dance* can be understood as a creative process that sustains tradition through adaptation and renewal without losing its underlying cultural values.

Based on interview findings, *Sembah Batin Dance* has been well received by the people of West Lampung (Ricard Sambera, November 25, 2025). This social acceptance has encouraged the increasing practice and performance of the dance in various cultural activities. Nevertheless, in its development, several adjustments have been made by artists in West Lampung, particularly in aspects of costume and musical accompaniment, in order to align with local traditions and cultural contexts.

These changes are not seen as problematic by the choreographer of *Sembah Batin Dance*. According to I Nyoman Mulyawan (December 10, 2024), flexibility in the development of the dance is natural, considering that from the beginning it was created for the people of West Lampung. Therefore, such adaptations actually reinforce the relevance of *Sembah Batin Dance* as a living, dynamic work that remains contextually rooted in the culture of its supporting community.



Figure 4. The transformation of *Sembah Batin Dance* from its initial creation to 2025
(Doc. Nur Sintia, 2025)

3. Innovation in Performance Aspects

Furthermore, to provide a deeper explanation, the researcher employs the concept of form as structure as proposed by Sumandiyo Hadi. According to Hadi (2007:24), form is the manifestation resulting from the integration of various dance elements movement, space, and time which together create aesthetic vitality.

Based on this perspective, *Sembah Batin* Dance is examined through four main aspects: music, movement, costume, and floor patterns. More specifically, the dance is not merely passively accepted by the community, but has undergone various adaptive changes in response to social contexts, aesthetic developments, and performance needs over time. These transformations can be observed through the following four aspects:

a. Costume

At the time of its creation in 2010, the costume of *Sembah Batin* Dance closely followed traditional Lampung attire, dominated by red and gold colors, and complemented by *siger* (crown) and authentic tapis cloth. However, by 2025, innovations have emerged in the use of materials and costume design, making them lighter, more practical, and better suited to modern stage demands. The color variations have also become more diverse, while still preserving traditional Lampung elements as the core cultural identity.



Figure 5. *Sembah Batin* Dance costume in 2015 at the Liwa Fair event, held at the Aj Saka Building, West Lampung (Doc. Nur Sintia, December 5, 2015)

The image above shows that the costume of *Sembah Batin* Dance dancers still strongly maintains a traditional nuance, with maroon as the dominant color, which is characteristic of the bridal attire of women in West Lampung. The costume material appears thick and heavy, reflecting the solidity and richness of traditional clothing. The use of *tapis* with traditional Lampung motifs serves as a key element that emphasizes regional identity. The shawl and *siger* function as essential complements that enhance the visual appearance. The red head accessories with touches of golden ornamentation create a classic and formal impression, while also representing the elegance and cultural dignity upheld by the people of West Lampung.



Figure 6. The costume form of *Sembah Batin Dance* at the West Lampung Literacy Festival 2025
(Doc. Nur Sintia, December 5, 2025)

In contrast, the image above shows clear innovations in both the design and color selection of the costume. The dancers wear outfits dominated by dark blue and gold, combined with *tapis* featuring more varied geometric motifs. The head accessory is now simplified to a bun adorned with gold accents, creating an impression that is both elegant and modern. Overall, the costume appears lighter and more practical, adapting to the demands of contemporary stage performances while still preserving Lampung's cultural identity through the continued use of traditional motifs and symbols.

b. Movement

The movements of *Sembah Batin Dance* have not undergone drastic changes in essence; however, several adjustments have been made to the sequence of movements to support floor formations. The opening movements emphasize sacredness and gentleness as symbols of respect. Over time, the choreography has been modified by incorporating more dynamic and expressive elements to meet the demands of engaging performances. While several traditional movements are preserved, they are now combined with contemporary styles resulting from the exploration of choreographers and younger dancers.

c. Music

In its early period, the musical accompaniment of *Sembah Batin Dance* relied entirely on traditional instruments such as gamelan pekling and drums, characterized by a soft tempo and relatively monotonous rhythm. This pattern supported a sacred and solemn atmosphere, in harmony with the dance's refined and respectful movements. Between 2020 and 2025, modern instruments such as keyboards and violins were incorporated to enrich the musical texture. The accompaniment has become more varied and adaptable to performance themes and contexts, while still maintaining the traditional Lampung melodic structure as its primary musical identity. Traditional musical instruments in Lampung possess distinctive characteristics that reflect both the natural environment and the spirituality of the local community. The gamelan pekling, made from bamboo, demonstrates the community's creativity in utilizing natural resources to produce instruments that are both aesthetic and functional in various traditional ceremonies. Its sound serves not only as a musical element but also carries spiritual resonance, symbolizing the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Other instruments, such as serdam and kulintang, also play important roles in enriching the range of sounds, creating a meaningful musical harmony in every performance of *Sembah Batin Dance* (Khasanah, 2025:29).

d. Dancers

At the time of its creation, *Sembah Batin* Dance was performed by a small group of adult female dancers specifically selected by its creator. However, from 2020 to 2025, the composition of dancers has become more diverse, including teenagers, university students, and even children especially within the context of arts education in schools and studios. This shift indicates an expansion in the function of *Sembah Batin* Dance, from a creative welcoming dance for honored guests to an educational medium and a means of cultural preservation.

The development and innovation of *Sembah Batin* Dance open significant opportunities for creative artists to produce new works or choreographic arrangements that remain rooted in traditional values. These changes are influenced by various factors, including artistic creativity, economic considerations, the commodification of art, and market preferences. In addition, the role of media through imaging, promotion, and dissemination has contributed to sustaining and enhancing the popularity of performing arts within society (Rustiyanti, 2018:117).

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence and development of *Sembah Batin* Dance in West Lampung reflect the dynamics of cultural change occurring through the stages of discovery and invention. In the discovery stage, the dance was created by the choreographer Nyoman Mulyawan in 2010 as a response to the need for a distinctive regional performing arts identity. Through the exploration of local cultural values and a modern choreographic approach, *Sembah Batin* Dance emerged as an innovation that combines elements of tradition and modernity.

The invention stage occurred when the dance was accepted, recognized, and internalized by both the community and the local government of West Lampung. It subsequently developed into an integral part of local culture, performed in various official events, traditional ceremonies, festivals, as well as educational and tourism activities. The changes that have taken place up to 2025 demonstrate an ongoing and creative process of cultural adaptation.

Innovation is evident in four main aspects costume, movement, music, and dancers all of which have been adjusted to accommodate contemporary aesthetic developments and performance needs without losing their traditional values. Thus, *Sembah Batin* Dance serves as a concrete example of how innovation in traditional arts functions as a strategy of dynamic preservation, sustaining cultural heritage through the renewal of form and function. Its existence not only enriches the repertoire of performing arts in West Lampung but also strengthens regional cultural identity amid the forces of globalization and modernization.

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