

Traditional Zapin Dance at Studio Tengku Buang Asmara, Siak Distruct

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Abstract. Zapin art in the Siak district was originally brought by Arab traders and used as a means of entertainment among students of recitation in the Siak royal environment. After the son of the sultan, Abdul Jalil Alamuddin Syah (1766-1780), married Syarif Uthman bin Syarif Abdul Rahman Syahbuddin, namely the Arabs then entered the palace environment and then acculturated with the local culture and became a means of entertainment among the palace. Then, it grew rapidly to the villages, and Zapin associations were formed based on the names of the villages. Traditional Zapin dance is a dance movement that is more visible in footwork and more subtle in hand movements. Sanggar Tengku Buang Asmara is a place for artistic creativity that plays an important role in efforts to preserve the traditional Zapin dance. Zapin Dance Tradition during the sultanate period had rules and various flowers that must be followed and danced by the dancers. The purpose of this study is to understand the background, the form of presentation, and to analyze the characteristics of the traditional Zapin dance in the Siak district. This research was conducted in order to study, understand, and preserve the Zapin dance tradition of the Siak kingdom. This qualitative research uses a descriptive analytical method, with a discussion of the historical background of the early arrival of Zapin art in the Siak kingdom. The Zapin dance tradition during the imperial era was only danced by 2 (two) male dancers whose positions as the two dancers were parallel to the syaf and accompanied by Malay song music.

Keywords: Characteristics, Choreography, Traditional Dance.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional Zapin dance is one of the classical dances that developed in the Malay Siak region. Historically, Zapin was introduced by Arab merchants and Islamic preachers to Siak Sri Indrapura (Zulkifli Za, 1998), where it evolved from an expression of joy into an integral part of court ceremonies, weddings, circumcisions, and welcoming guests. Over time, the dance has transformed in the number of dancers, floor patterns, and performance contexts, while still maintaining its cultural significance in the identity of Siak Malay society. Today, Zapin continues to thrive through intergenerational transmission and cultural institutions, such as the Tengku Buang Asmara Studio, which actively preserves Siak Malay heritage through music, poetry, martial arts, and Zapin dance.

From a scholarly perspective, dance can be understood as both an artistic and cultural system. Choreography, defined as the structured composition of movement patterns (Sumandiyo Hadi, 1996; 2003), provides an analytical framework to examine floor patterns, movement vocabulary, group coordination, costumes, and properties that shape a performance. Traditional dance, meanwhile, refers to forms passed down through generations, embedding symbolic, philosophical, and religious values that distinguish regional cultures (Djelantik, 1999). In the Indonesian context, traditional dance is often classified into classical, folk, and new creations, each reflecting different social and cultural milieus. Situating Zapin within this

framework allows us to see it not merely as entertainment, but as an embodiment of social values, aesthetics, and identity in Siak Malay culture.

Although numerous studies have examined Zapin in the Malay world as a cultural product rooted in Arabic influence and Islamic values, research focusing specifically on the choreography, movement vocabulary, costumes, and performance conventions of the royal Siak Zapin—particularly within the context of community-based studios—remains limited. This gap is significant because analyzing the artistic structure of Siak Zapin is essential not only for cultural preservation but also for developing educational resources in traditional performing arts and enriching scholarly discussions in dance studies.

Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions: (1) What are the choreographic characteristics of the royal Siak Zapin dance? (2) What meanings are embedded in its movement vocabulary? and (3) How is the traditional Zapin performed and presented in the Siak Malay context? By answering these questions, this research contributes a new perspective to the study of Zapin as a reflection of cultural continuity and adaptation in contemporary society.

METHOD

The research method used in this research is descriptive analysis method with a qualitative approach. Basically this research examines culture which is a reflection of a phenomenon. The participants who were involved in this research were the figures who formed the Tengku Buang Asmara studio, the traditional Zapin dancers and one of the Zapin dance artists who had studied the Zapin Tradition dance. While the research location is in the Mempura sub-district. In obtaining data in the field, researchers carried out data collection techniques by (a) observing the movements, music, clothing, and presentation of the Zapin Tradition dance in the Siak kingdom; (b) Open interviews or unstructured interviews (c) Documentation studies in the form of notes, books, photographs, videos, SK (Decree), and accreditation.

The research instrument is a tool for measuring a social or natural phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2009, p. 102). The main instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself. Likewise with research on the Zapin dance tradition of the Siak kingdom. In the research entitled "Traditional Zapin Dance at the Tengku Buang Asmara Studio, Siak Regency" indicators from the Tengku Buang Asmara studio that will be discussed in this study include: the history of the Tengku Buang Asmara studio, activities and management at the Tengku Buang Asmara studio. The indicators of the Zapin Tradition dance are: background, way of presentation and characteristics.

Table 1. Indicators of Zapin Dance

Variabel	Indicator	
Studio Tengku Buang Asmara	1.	History
	2.	Activities
	3.	Management
Traditional Zapin Dance	1.	Background
	2.	From of presentation
	3.	Characteristics

According to Fossey, cs., (in Muri Yusuf, 2016. P. 400) confirms that qualitative data analysis is a process of reviewing and examining data, synthesizing and interpreting the data collected so that it can describe and explain the phenomenon or social situation under study. The data analysis techniques used in this study are (a) Prior Analysis in the Field (b) Analysis while in the field includes Reduction (summarizing and selecting the necessary data from documents about the Zapin Tradition dance), Data Display (data display form in qualitative research the most frequent are narrative texts and events or events that occurred in the past), Conclusion/Verification The third step in data analysis is drawing conclusions/verification based on data reduction and data display. interpretation of data that is more accurate and credible by using triangulation (triangulation).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In dancing the traditional zapin in Siak district, there are aspects that must be considered, namely the first is the structure of the traditional zapin choreography, the music that accompanies the traditional zapin

dance and the traditional zapin dance clothing. The following will describe the three aspects that must be considered in the presentation of traditional zapin.

1. Zapin Choreography Structure Tradition of the Kingdom of Siak

Four things must be understood to help strip the art works that appear, especially dances that originate from tradition or classics, namely: (a) understanding of philosophy/philosophy in the surrounding environment, (b) understanding of environmental ethical values and norms, (c) legends and myths that are understood by the environment, (d) the prevailing traditions and customs. In traditional dance there are rules and norms that bind, namely: the use of motion motives, the use and application of floor patterns, the use and application of rhythmic or musical patterns that accompany dance, and dance costumes. (Nerosti, 2021, p. 7)

Traditional Zapin dance in Siak district has movements that have been given standard names and are called Zapin flowers. Before dancing the Zapin flower/varieties, the Zapin dancer must start the dance with an opening greeting/worship, followed by an opening Zapin flower starting with Alif Sembah and ending with Tahto or Tahtim. The opening greeting is done when going to face the sultan or exalted guests. When doing a Zapin variety/flower there is a transitional movement when going to start the next flower/variety, this movement is called the usual (basic) step. While the main movement or part of the Zapin dance consists of 3 aspects, (1) starting with the opening greeting/worship, (2) Followed by flowers or a variety of Zapin which is opened with Alif, (3) The end of the dance must be closed with Tahto (Tahtim) . In the following, a variety of traditional zapin dances will be presented based on the results of research conducted at the Tengku Buang Asmara studio:

- a. Usual Steps: This movement is a transition from one variety to another in the zapin dance, namely moving forward and turning backwards. The usual step movement is done 2 times as a transitional movement before entering the Zapin variety/flower.
- b. The opening greeting is a zapin movement that is performed before starting the zapin dance. This movement is done when the dancer is in a position in the middle of the audience in a sitting position kneeling with the sole of the right foot flat.
- c. Alif sembah is a variety of Zapin flowers which is done from a sitting position then standing. The step of motion in the alif worship is that the left foot steps to the left one step then the right foot steps to the left with the position of the right and left feet close together. Then the right foot steps to the right side, the left leg bends back.
- d. Alif 2, this movement is performed while standing after Alif Worships in front three times and in the middle twice. The meaning of this alif 2 movement is where the Koran in Islam begins with the initial letter Alif.
- d. Alif 1, this movement is done forward and backward by moving the point in front twice and in the middle once and then taking another step forward.
- e. Elbow Excess, means the dynamics of life. According to Safrin, Keluang itself is the name of a bat-like animal, this movement can be seen from the movement of the animal or the angle of the Keluang's wings. This movement is carried out in two directions to the right and left of the dancer, namely by the body facing to the left and the right leg making elbows and also done from the right as shown below.
- f. Sut Satu Retreat, has the meaning of being fair and patient. This movement is done when in front or in front with one point then stepping back and forth.
- g. Central Dizziness, means concern for the environment. This movement is done by rotating once while stepping forward and then turning around.
- h. Sut Tigo/Three, means prioritizing fairness and patience. This movement is carried out in front by the dancer by making three point movements and then turning backwards
- i. Stretching means stretching and pulling your hands and body like when you wake up. This variation is almost like the Elbow Exodus movement but there is a half-turn movement
- j. Split eight, means mastery of the eight winds. This movement is done by facing right and left then forward and rubbing the back of the foot on the other leg while stepping forward.
- k. Broken Chicks, has the meaning of unyielding nature. This movement depicts a chick breaking a leg and walking by dragging one leg. This movement is done by dragging the right leg four times
- l. Minta Tahto, means low self-esteem and mutual respect. This movement is done when the dancer is about to end the dance from walking normally to a sitting position and then standing up again, with the body position of the right hand supporting the body when it comes down so it's easy when you stand up again and your knees don't touch the floor.

- m. Tahto, means sincerity and gratitude. This movement is carried out after the dancers perform the Minta Tahto movement and the Gambus players will make a special musical rhythm to close the dance with the Tahto movement, namely the prayer movement which is performed two or three times.

2. Music accompaniment Zapin Dance Tradition of the Kingdom of Siak

According to Atang Supriatna and Rama literature Negara (2010, p. 103), accompaniment music is a basic element that must exist in traditional dance. Accompaniment music depends on the needs of the dance itself. Musical accompaniment to the traditional Zapin dance brought by Arab traders and those in Siak have acculturated with the local culture so that there is little difference from the form of musical instruments such as the gambus and marwas.

The lyrics of the song in the musical accompaniment of the Siak Zapin dance are in the form of rhymes which contain advice, advice, and teaching instructions about Islam. The rhymes in the lyrics of the song are not standard but still adhere to the principles of advice, advice, and teaching instructions. The musical instruments used to accompany the zapin dance are: (1) Gambus, which is a musical instrument that is played by picking, has 7 (seven) strings/strings. accompanying the zapin dance, (2) Marwas is a short small drum used to accompany Gambus in the Zapin dance, the marwas players consist of 3 people, but now there can be 4 or more Marwas players.

3. Traditional Zapin Dance Attire

There are two types of clothes used in the traditional Zapin dance, namely the Cekak Weasel clothes and the Teluk Belanga clothes. The Cekak Weasel shirt has a high collar of about 2 (two) centimeters which is covered in hard cloth inside so that the neck collar looks nice and neat. On the neck are attached 2 buttons along, and 3 more buttons on the front of the collar which is split approximately 22 cm. The number of buttons attached is 5 as a symbol of the Five Cases Islamic Pillars embedded in Malay children. Buttons or buttons may be made of gemstones, diamonds or other synthetic materials. The clothes of Cekak Weasel brackets are a form of men's official dress (O.K. Nizami Jamil et al, 2001, p. 42). The color and material of the Cekak Musang Malay clothes must be the same as the trousers.

While the Teluk Belanga Malay shirt, is worn by ordinary people for work such as farming and fishing, this form of clothing has a collar and buttons (tep buttons, gold buttons or jewel buttons depending on the wearer's level and ability) long sleeves slightly covering the wrists, wide and slightly loose, this shirt is also made of one suit with pants. Nowadays, this Teluk Belanga shirt is rarely found or worn by men in the Siak Malay tribe.

4. How to Present the Siak Tradition Zapin Dance

The traditional Zapin dance is pulled by two men with the dancers positioned in the middle of the area provided. Facing the musicians/people who are glorified politely then sitting to pay respects/worship by arranging ten fingers while being raised parallel to the front of the chest while the head is bowed (Zulkifli ZA, 1998), adding dancers facing the musicians or with people who are respected/exalted and around them are the audience is watching and usually in the form of a circle or it can also be like a hoof, so that the dancer is in the middle.

The presentation of the Zapin dance within the palace area must follow the rules and regulations that apply, such as women are prohibited from watching or sitting together when the male dancer performs the Zapin dance, because they are not muhrim. Then look also at the movements that are more subtle and polite. Not only in the palace, if there is a wedding ceremony, Circumcision of the Apostles and the reception of dignified guests, dancers must be polite and follow the rules as they apply in the palace, because wedding ceremonies, Circumcision of the Apostles and welcoming guests are classified as official ceremonies. However, nowadays it is rare for organizers of these events to invite traditional Zapin dancers.

In dancing Zapin there is a sequence that must be done, namely:

- a. Musicians are ready in place and musical instrument
- b. The Zapin dance is performed facing the audience. Start by sitting in a half-squat, straighten your knees, then when Gambus sounds start standing slowly
- c. The new dancers will start dancing when the Gambus sipemeting starts singing
- d. The dancer starts the dance with Alif motion (there are several kinds of Alif). Then proceed with basic steps

- e. Making Zapin flowers, Zapin flowers are made (done) when going up (facing the audience) and when going down make basic steps (ordinary steps) while negotiating to make the next flower. If interest has not been matched, then the basic step is used to fill in the movement, both up and down.
- f. Minta Tahto, the movement (flower) of asking Tahto is done when the dancer is about to end the dance.
- g. Tahto/Tahtim, after the dancer makes a movement asking for Tahto, the Gambus player will give a special musical rhythm to close the dance (Tahto). Along with Tahto's music and Tahto's movements, the dance is finished. The dancer stands slowly then takes a few steps back, then steps out.

While the behavior in dancing the zapin there are 12 points that must be obeyed by the zapin dancers, as for the 12 points namely;

- 1) Steps are not too wide
 - 2) The position of the jealous hand forms the elbows and is not free to move. Fingers half clasped
 - 3) The right hand is free to move to the rhythm and movement of the body
 - 4) Stepping with a little kick on the body or waist, while the knees are bent Step forward (up), may be slightly inclined.
 - 5) Lift your legs not too high
 - 6) Movement of the head follows the movement of the body, knees and legs
 - 7) The dancers are both side by side with the distance not too tight
 - 8) Musicians and dancers dressed in Malay
 - 9) Dancers can play with their steps and movements in zapin
- Movement/rocking of the body is not excessive Rocking the hips is not justified

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that the Zapin tradition in Siak has its roots in Arabic culture introduced by traders and Islamic scholars, which later became acculturated into the Malay court tradition during the reign of Sultan Abdul Jalil Alamuddin Syah. Within the palace, Zapin performances were regulated by etiquette, structured sequences, and refined manners, while outside the palace the same movement patterns were retained but adapted with local variations in tempo, style, and costume. The choreographic characteristics of Siak Zapin—such as its performance by two male dancers, the use of gambus and syair, and the structured sequence beginning with greetings and ending with tahto (tahtim)—mark it as a distinct cultural identity that continues to embody Islamic values. Beyond documenting these findings, this research contributes to the preservation of Siak's cultural heritage by providing insights that can serve as a reference for art educators, cultural policymakers, and local studios such as the Tengku Buang Asmara studio in strengthening the transmission of traditional Zapin. For the field of dance studies, this research highlights how Zapin represents not only artistic expression but also the negotiation between tradition, religion, and cultural change. Nevertheless, this study has limitations, particularly in terms of the scope of informants and performance contexts observed, which may not fully capture the diversity of Zapin practices across Siak communities. Future research could explore comparative studies of Zapin in other Malay regions, investigate the role of female performers in contemporary adaptations, or analyze how Zapin is being recontextualized in education and tourism. Such studies would enrich the understanding of Zapin as both a living tradition and a dynamic cultural resource.

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