

A photograph of an elderly man with a mustache, wearing a traditional Javanese headpiece (blangkon) with a colorful pattern and a dark jacket with red cuffs. He is performing a ritual gesture, with his right hand raised to his forehead and his left hand held in front of him. The background is a wall made of large, rough-hewn stone blocks. The lighting is bright, suggesting an outdoor setting.

# The Meeting Point Between Suprpto's Joged Amerta and Y.B. Mangunwijaya's Ragawidya

by Bobby Steven Octavianus Timmerman

**JOGED AMERTA**, or Amerta Movement, is one of Asia's many philosophical and cultural expressions. It was developed in the 1970s by the Javanese movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo, known as Prapto. Amerta Movement emerged from his exploration of free-form movement, Javanese Theravada Buddhism, and the traditional Javanese Sumarah meditation practice, which emphasizes surrender or "letting go."

"Amerta" is a Javanese word meaning nectar or the elixir of life. Prapto explained that Joged Amerta is rooted in the fundamental movements of daily life—walking, sitting, standing, crawling, lying down, transitioning between these states, and observing children at play.

The core principle of Joged Amerta is moving within nature as part of engaging with both human and non-human beings. It fosters a connection between physical and inner experience, deepening one's understanding of cultural, social, and ecological environments. The

Moving Self is seen as a fluid and evolving identity within an ever-changing world—echoing the wisdom of Heraclitus: *Panta rhei kai ouden menei*—"Everything flows, and nothing remains still."

Practitioners of Amerta Movement study motion through the dynamics of nature—such as waves, forests, horizons, and hilltops—as well as the movements of animals. Additionally, Joged Amerta infuses movement into architecture and sculpture, bringing them to life.

The center of Joged Amerta, Padepokan Lemah Putih, was established in Java in 1986. By 1990, Amerta Movement teachings had expanded beyond Java through the Sharing Movement initiative. Today, Joged Amerta has spread across Europe, Australasia, China, Russia, and the Americas, where it is practiced by dancers, movement artists, musicians, psychotherapists, and educators in various disciplines, including art, music, drama therapy, and film.

### Reflections on Ragawidya by Mangunwijaya

Ragawidya is a book by Y.B. Mangunwijaya (1975) that explores spirituality in everyday life. Father Mangun, as he was known,

approached human embodiment through the deep wisdom of Indonesian philosophy. Like Joged Amerta, Ragawidya discusses movement and daily activities as a form of self-transcendence. In his book, Father Mangun quotes Sang Waicorono from Kuncorokarno: *"True life is nothing more than the fusion of the physical body with the inner soul, like a vessel and its contents. For a good life, both the vessel and its contents are essential"* (Seno Sastroamijo, 1967, p.27). For Mangunwijaya, the perfection of life does not come from rejecting the physical body. This wisdom reflects the unique heritage of Indonesian ancestors, who avoided extreme materialistic or purely spiritual perspectives.

Father Mangun firmly believed that humans are not composed of half-body and half-soul. He wrote: *"A human being is not merely body and soul, matter and spirit. Rather, a human is a complete unity—body, soul, and spirit—fully and entirely human"* (Mangunwijaya, 1975, p.12-13). Quoting J.B. Metz, he emphasized that for the human soul to reach perfection, it must become more embodied, and for the human body to reach perfection, it must become more soulful (Metz, 1963, p.34).

## The Human Body as Language

Mangunwijaya asserted that the human body is the ultimate expression of the whole person. It serves as both word (expression) and symbol (sign), revealing unseen realities. The body is a language that communicates the depths of one's soul.

From birth, a baby expresses itself through movement—smiling, gazing with bright eyes, or embracing its mother. As one grows, the body continues to convey emotions and faith through gestures such as open hands, crossed legs in meditation, or deep prostration before the Divine.

*"The first language a person receives is the language of love—sheltered by a commitment to mutual devotion. The first language of a newborn is a plea for life, for affection, and a complete bodily expression of trust."* (Mangunwijaya, 1986, p. 16)

In Western philosophy, the body is sometimes regarded as a prison for the soul. Christian Irigaray notes that a well-known phrase from Pythagoras and Plato, soma-sema, means "the body is a prison for the soul."

In contrast, Mangunwijaya believed that a balanced life is achieved through the harmony of patiraga (self-discipline) and ngujaraga (physical well-being). True life, he argued, is neither an endless pursuit of physical pleasures (ngujaraga) nor an excessive rejection of the body (patiraga). Instead, he proposed two guiding principles:

- **Widiraga** (guidance from above)—the body must be nurtured in relationship with the Divine.
- **Widyaraga** (wisdom of embodiment)—the body must be cultivated with awareness and wisdom.

Through widiraga and widyaraga, one attains ragawidya—the wisdom of embodiment, in which the human body becomes a sacred entity manifesting the presence of the Divine. Worship of the Divine is thus realized through the daily movements of life.

### **The Connection Between Joged Amerta and Ragawidya**

Joged Amerta and Ragawidya share a common philosophical foundation, both exploring embodiment (*kebertubuhan*) as a pathway

to the Divine. Suprpto's Joged Amerta emphasizes experiencing the world through movement rather than stillness. As he put it: "From the Buddha who walks, rather than the Buddha who sits" (Triarchypress.net, Joged Amerta).

Similarly, Ragawidya examines everyday movements as a spiritual practice. Both traditions recognize simple human

motions—walking, sitting, standing, crawling, and lying down—as meaningful acts, whether performed in nature, temples, marketplaces, museums, or galleries.

Ultimately, both Joged Amerta and Ragawidya reflect the Javanese philosophy of Urip Iku Urup—"Life is to bring light." Those who engage in Joged Amerta and Ragawidya become deeply attuned to themselves, nature, and others. Each movement of the body becomes an act of self-discovery—a journey toward the essence of being, present in every heartbeat and every moment of daily life.

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