



## Transformation and Commodification of the Meras Gandrung Ritual Culture as a Cultural Identity of Banyuwangi

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i3.6671>

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### **Abstract**

Meras Gandrung is a ritual carried out by the Banyuwangi community to mark the readiness to become a Gandrung dancer. Along with the development of the times, the Meras Gandrung ritual has undergone a process of transformation and commodification which has more or less shifted several aspects of the Meras Gandrung ritual. The purpose of this study is to describe the Meras Gandrung ritual, the transformation that occurs in the Meras Gandrung ritual and the commodification that occurs in the Meras Gandrung ritual. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type. Data collection techniques through unstructured interviews, observations and relevant literature reviews. The results of this study indicate that the Meras Gandrung ritual is part of the culture in Banyuwangi as a sign that a Gandrung dancer is ready to become a Gandrung dancer and enter society. Everyone can become a Gandrung dancer but not everyone can become Gandrung. The Meras Gandrung ritual is a sign that someone has gone through various processes and is ready to graduate as a Gandrung dancer. The Meras Gandrung ritual has undergone a transformation along with the development of the times. The transformation process includes the learning process of prospective Gandrung and the shifting function of the Meras Gandrung ritual. Not only undergoing transformation, the Meras Gandrung ritual also undergoes commodification. The commodification process makes the Meras Gandrung ritual a commercial performance. Commodification in the context of the Banyuwangi Meras Gandrung ritual refers to the process in which the cultural practice becomes an object for commercial or marketing purposes.

**Keywords:** *Commodification; Meras Gandrung; Transformation*

### **Introduction**

Traditional rituals in Indonesia are still a wealth that describes the identity of a region and influences the development of art and culture in it. Traditional customs that apply in a community group directly influence a series of performance presentations. Traditional customs in society become a system of values that are obeyed and believed as one of the social rules that apply in society (Panjaitan & Munthe, 2021). Values are said to be valuable traits that are desired in something, including in traditional

customs carried out by community groups. Traditional customs are a form of culture that exists in community groups that go through a process of feeling and will that contain meaning and values that are passed down from generation to generation (Rosa et al., 2020) .

Meras gandrung as one of the traditional customs that is still carried out from generation to generation. Meras gandrung is one of the traditions in the form of traditional rituals in Banyuwangi Regency. Meras Gandrung traditional ritual as a sign that the gandrung dancer is ready as a gandrung dancer (Subari & Widiyanto, 2020) . In other words, the dancer has graduated to become a Gandrung dancer after going through several processes to form himself as a dancer. This procession is very important because through these stages it will later produce professional Gandrung dancers who can be useful for society. The changing times are also followed by changes in the Meras Gandrung ritual and Gandrung dance performances.

The changes are inseparable from the existence of a transformation related to the development of the existing era. Transformation is a complex change to a physical or non-physical that still shows the original form or changes that do not show similarities to the original (Parmadie et al. 2018). The Meras Gandrung ritual is currently undergoing a transformation that causes a shift to the addition of functions. Previously, it was only used as a traditional ritual to prepare Gandrung dancers, but now it has developed into a cultural tourism presentation. This development is also followed by the Gandrung dancers themselves, who previously used the dance as one of the dances for ritual needs to develop into a dance that can be performed in various things, one of which is cultural tourism.

Cultural tourism is a form of tourism that has a unique, beautiful, easy form and has the uniqueness of nature, culture and everything produced by humans which is a tourist destination for people related to the cultural heritage of a place, such as art, architecture, traditions, culinary, and festivals (Hasanah, 2019) . During cultural tourism, visitors can engage in direct interaction with local residents, learn about their history and traditions, and understand the values and beliefs that shape the cultural identity of a place. This not only provides an immersive and memorable experience for tourists, but also supports the preservation and preservation of cultural heritage for future generations. On the other hand, existing cultural forms will change to adapt to market conditions in order to attract many tourists (Azmi et al. 2023). Such conditions will more or less change the existing culture in order to be able to attract tourists to generate economic value (Niko & Atem, 2019) . This leads to a condition of commodification in the cultural field.

Commodification in the field of culture means directing culture into something that can be commercialized. Commodification makes elements in a culture into something of economic value so that the culture is modified (Niko & Atem, 2019) . Modification of a culture is one of the demands for tourism that can increase the existence of the culture itself (Irianto, 2016) . On the other hand, culture that should have sacredness and philosophical meaning must change into something profane. Meras Gandrung is one form of culture that has experienced commodification.

The form of commodification in Meras Gandrung is a ritual that should be carried out with various stages of ritual, must be packaged with other forms for the needs of cultural tourism performances. Based on interviews, Meras Gandrung is usually carried out when a Gandrung is ready to perform Meras, but sometimes the Meras Gandrung ritual must be combined with other performances, such as in the Gandrung Sewu performance. This is indeed a special attraction for the community because it can be a tourist attraction. However, on the other hand, Meras Gandrung which has value, meaning and is sacred must become a profane ritual (Saputra, 2016).

Based on the background in this study, the author tries to examine the form of transformation and commodification of the Meras Gandrung traditional ritual culture. The purpose of this writing is to find

out the transformation of the Meras Gandrung ritual in the form of cultural tourism offerings and the form of commodification of the Meras Gandrung ritual as a form of cultural tourism offerings in Banyuwangi.

## **Methods**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type. This method was chosen because it aims to understand the subjective experiences of the actors and communities involved in the Meras Gandrung ritual, as well as how the transformation and commodification of culture occurs in the context of Banyuwangi cultural identity. In line with Creswell (2017), phenomenological research is research that seeks to explore deep meaning based on the experiences of individuals or groups in certain phenomena.

This research was conducted in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, as the center of Gandrung culture. The subjects of the research consisted of Gandrung dancers and the community who had been involved in the ritual. The data collection techniques used were unstructured interviews, participant observation, and literature studies.

Interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner with relevant key informants, namely Gandrung dancers and local people who had been involved in the ritual. Interview questions focused on personal experiences, changes in the Meras Gandrung ritual, and the impact of commodification on cultural meaning. In addition, researchers conducted direct observations of the implementation of the Meras Gandrung ritual to understand the context and cultural expressions that emerged in the ritual. Literature review was also conducted through a review of various sources such as academic books, scientific journals, and government documents related to cultural transformation and commodification of performing arts.

Data analysis in this study was carried out in stages using a phenomenological approach according to Creswell (2017) which includes: 1) Epoche Description ( *Bracketing* ), which is suspending personal assumptions to understand the subject's experience objectively, 2) Theme Identification, which is data obtained from interviews, observations, and literature studies are coded to find the main theme in the transformation and commodification of the Meras Gandrung ritual culture, 3) Texture and Structure Analysis, which is interpreting the deep meaning of the participant's experience and compiling the relationship between various aspects found in the study, 4) Essential Description Construction, which is compiling the results of the analysis in the form of a narrative that describes the essence of the transformation and commodification of the Meras Gandrung ritual as a Banyuwangi cultural identity. The following is a flowchart of the research conducted in this study.

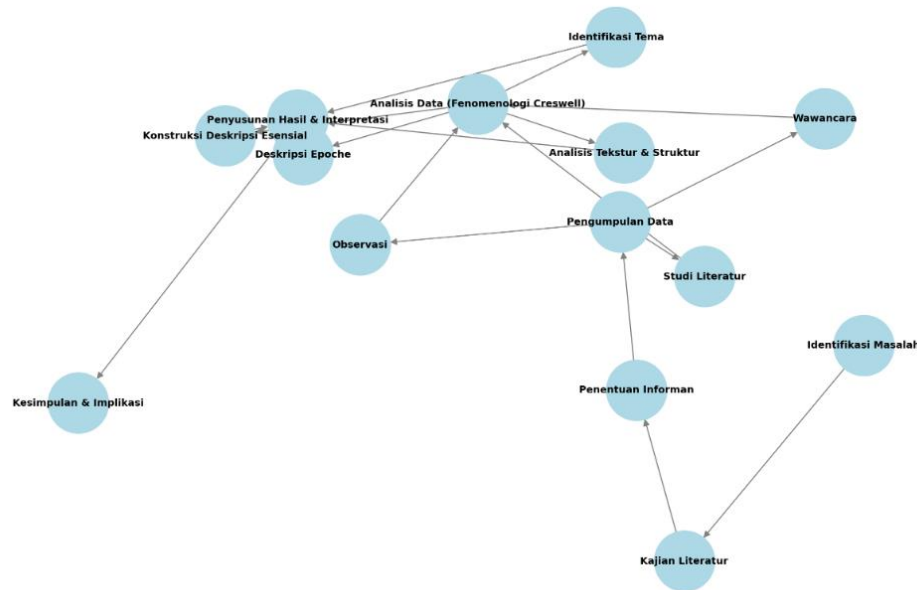


Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram  
Source. Personal source from modification of Creswell

## Results and Discussion

Studies related to the Meras Gandrung ritual have produced several things that explain the Meras Gandrung ritual to the transformation and commodification processes that occur. The following is a discussion of the transformation and commodification of the Meras Gandrung ritual.

## 1.The Meras Gandrung Ritual as a Cultural Identity of Banyuwangi

Meras Gandrung has long been a part of the culture in Banyuwangi Regency. Gandrung Dance itself has become a mascot of Banyuwangi that is known to many people. Gandrung Dance has become a part of every performance at events in Banyuwangi. Gandrung Dance has long been a part of Banyuwangi's art and culture.

Gandrung Dance itself is a Banyuwangi dance that has existed since the colonial era. At first, Gandrung Banyuwangi dance was better known as Gandrung Seblang (Clairine & Wiyono, 2024). Along with its development, it became Gandrung Banyuwangi, because Seblang itself is also a different performance. Gandrung Dance was originally a sacred dance used for offerings of gratitude for the harvest to ancestors, especially to Dewi Sri as the goddess of prosperity and blessings according to the beliefs of the Osing tribe. Currently, Gandrung Dance is a dance that is entertaining and can be danced by anyone, especially young women in Banyuwangi.

Everyone can be a Gandrung dancer, but not everyone can be a Gandrung. Gandrung itself is a term for someone who not only masters dancing but also must master vocals, music and uphold the values and rules of norms that exist in society (Kartika & Puspito, 2016). This is often mistaken in society that not all Gandrung dancers can be called Gandrung. To become a Gandrung, you must be able to be loved or liked by society. Gandrung itself has a philosophy like a bamboo plant. Quoted from Mahfud et al., (2024) explains that a Gandrung is like a bamboo plant that has strong roots. This is the same as Gandrung which must have a strong foundation in pursuing a profession as a Gandrung.



Figure 2. The process of learning Gandrung with mother Temuk  
Source. Youtube Aldhy

Becoming a Gandrung must go through a fairly long process. Someone who becomes a Gandrung must learn from a teacher or usually called *nyantrik* to learn about dancing, vocals, music and values to become a Gandrung. Until finally a Gandrung will graduate as a sign that the person is ready to become a professional Gandrung through the *Meras Gandrung* ritual.



Figure 3. A Gandrung is singing  
Source. Youtube Transmedia

*Meras Gandrung* is a ritual that signifies that a *gandrung* is ready to enter society. The *Meras Gandrung* ritual must be carried out because if not, there will be many obstacles in the life of a Gandrung, even to the point of causing a Gandrung to become ill. *Meras Gandrung* can also be said to be a medium to convey the gratitude of the Gandrung and their families to God Almighty for their success and easy life path.



Figure 4. Meras Gandrung Ritual  
Source. Youtube Transmedia

Quoted from Kholis & Susilo, (2021) states that the Meras Gandrung ritual has a purpose in its implementation, namely, 1). As a form of projection of social life in society. Meras Gandrung involves many people who cannot be done alone. So that in the Meras Gandrung ritual, there is a good reciprocal interaction between the community. This relationship is established especially between Gandrung and the teacher who teaches how to become a Gandrung, 2). Meras Gandrung as a tradition that provides benefits for Gandrung and the community that supports it. As a Gandrung, he becomes the successor of tradition so that the values and norms in society are maintained, especially in the Osing community, 3). Meras Gandrung as a means of providing education for the younger generation. Education in Meras Gandrung is in the form of learning to appreciate and respect a teacher in providing knowledge, in this case knowledge in Gandrung. Respect and devotion to teachers is one of the achievements of glory in life, and 4). Meras Gandrung as a form of oda to ask for safety from God Almighty so that traditions must be carried out as a means of praying and giving thanks to God.

## 2. Transformation of the Meras Gandrung Ritual

Transformation can be briefly said as a change. Transformation can occur in various aspects, one of which is in the cultural aspect. Cultural transformation refers to significant changes in the values, norms, practices, and cultural expressions of a society or group. Cultural transformation is a state in society that occurs due to incompatibility between the elements in a culture (Halimah, 2016). Transformation can also be said as a shift in culture in a group community from all parts of a state to another state with better conditions or vice versa (Nurcahyawati et al., 2022).

The Meras Gandrung ritual is one form of ritual that has changed over time. These changes can be seen from several things such as the learning process of prospective Gandrung before Meras Gandrung is performed and the function of Meras Gandrung. The transformation is not only in the Meras Gandrung ritual but also the Gandrung dance itself.

### a. The learning process of prospective Gandrung

A prospective Gandrung must go through several stages of the process before finally being squeezed or graduated through the Meras Gandrung ritual. The process that must be gone through is practicing Gandrung dance movements, vocal exercises to memorize songs in Gandrung performances and playing gending-gending in Gandrung performances. This process is carried out diligently and for a long time until a prospective Gandrung understands all the learning materials. This process will form a professional and quality Gandrung (Mahfud et al., 2024) . The training process is carried out directly with

a teacher who is usually called Emak. In the past, the training process was carried out using live music with Gamelan as part of the learning process of a prospective Gandrung.

Along with its development, currently the Gandrung learning process is undergoing a transformation. The learning process for prospective Gandrung can now be done easily without the accompaniment of the original Gamelan because it can be done by listening to music recordings and video recordings. This makes it easier for prospective Gandrung because they can practice at any time without waiting for the accompaniment of the original Gamelan. However, the learning process must still be carried out directly and accompanied by the original Gamelan can improve the quality of dancing of prospective Gandrung (Kholis & Susilo, 2021) .

#### b. The Shifting Function of Meras Gandrung

Meras Gandrung, which has a primary function as a graduation ritual to mark someone as a Gandrung, has also undergone several transformations. Meras Gandrung is currently experiencing a shift in function, although it does not completely change its primary function as a graduation ritual for a Gandrung. Meras Gandrung has become one of the cultural tourism attractions that has been developed into a performance. The attraction of the ritual has changed because it has been developed into a short performance related to Meras Gandrung. Usually, the performance after Meras Gandrung is performed for an entire night (starting at 9 pm until early morning).

Currently in Banyuwangi there is a performance that tells about Meras Gandrung in Terakota Park, Banyuwangi. Every month there is an art performance that tells about Meras Gandrung. There is a performance from the Meras Gandrung section that is not shown in its entirety, for example in the final performance after Meras, usually an all-night performance is held by showing the entire Gandrung performance from Jejer to Seblang Subuh, but it is not shown in its entirety. This performance is a special attraction for the community, even though it is not the original Meras Gandrung ritual.

The development has a positive impact on the existence of the Meras Gandrung ritual. The existence of Meras Gandrung will continue to be enjoyed with the form of the performance presented. However, in this development, some people are confused with the original Gandrung ritual because it has been replaced by a form of performance. In its development, the values in the Meras Gandrung ritual must be maintained as a ritual to form a professional Gandrung dance. All forms of the series must be maintained so that the richness of tradition is maintained.

The transformation in the Banyuwangi Gandrung Meras ritual can refer to several things, including:

- 1) Modernization, in an effort to maintain cultural sustainability, the Gandrung meras ritual has undergone a transformation to adapt to the modern era. This can include the use of technology in performances, such as more sophisticated lighting, better audio systems, or documentation through social media to expand reach (Dukut 2020).
- 2) Education, this transformation can include increasing understanding of the meaning and values behind the Gandrung meras ritual. Formal education and local research can help identify the historical, cultural, and spiritual aspects underlying this practice (Yan and Li 2023). This can help communities better understand and appreciate their cultural heritage.
- 3) Community preservation, this transformation may include efforts to better involve younger generations and the community as a whole in these practices. Regular workshops, classes, or arts programs can help strengthen the relationship between older and younger generations, and raise awareness of the importance of preserving these traditions (Karwati et al. 2024).
- 4) Development of creativity, the Gandrung meras ritual can undergo a transformation in terms of developing creativity in the performance. This can include adding new elements in dance or



music, experimenting with costumes and decorations, or collaborating with artists and cultural figures from outside the region to produce a more innovative and interesting performance.

- 5) Tourism enhancement, transformation can also occur in an effort to develop the tourism potential of the Gandrung meras ritual. This can involve broader promotion at both the local, national, and international levels, as well as the development of supporting tourism infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodation, and other supporting facilities.

Such transformations can help maintain the sustainability and relevance of the Banyuwangi Gandrung meras ritual in the modern context, while still respecting and strengthening existing traditional values.

### 3.Commodification of the Meras Gandrung Ritual

Commodification is a process in which something that was previously not considered a commodity or merchandise is transformed into an object that can be bought, sold, and traded in the market (Nurcahyawati et al., 2022). Commodification can be said to be a process of changing goods or services that previously followed non-market social rules into a subject that follows market rules (Febriani and Riyanto 2021). Commodification can occur in various aspects including everything from physical goods such as water and air to cultural aspects such as music, art, and even cultural identity. For example, in a cultural context, when a tradition or aspect of culture is transformed into a product or service that can be sold, such as when a local cultural festival is commercialized into a tourism event that is sold to tourists.

Commodification in the context of the Banyuwangi Meras Gandrung ritual refers to the process by which cultural practices become objects for commercial or marketing purposes. The Meras Gandrung ritual has developed into an object of commodification. Not only as a ritual and performance to be enjoyed but also as a commercial object to generate income. Commodification of the Meras Gandrung ritual is carried out as a form of cultural adaptation to developments and the government's needs to advance and make rituals a regional tourism commodity. This form of commodification can occur in various ways, including tourism promotion, selling related products, or holding events that take advantage of the popularity of the ritual.

Through cultural tourism, it can actually be a means to preserve the culture of ancestral heritage and increase love for existing local wisdom (Parmadie et al. 2018). As a cultural tourism object, the Meras Gandrung ritual will continue to exist in society. society will become more familiar with the eras Gandrung ritual, but there is also a negative side to this, namely the erosion of values, meanings and shifting functions if it is not done by developing alternative solutions.

An alternative solution that occurs in the Meras Gandrung ritual is to perform pseudo traditional art. According to Mqauet in Febriani & Riyanto (2021), pseudo traditional art is a concept in developing traditional arts in the development of art by making imitations of the original form which are developed into imitations of works that are similar to or inspired by the art. The commodification of Meras Gandrung is in the form of development into a performance that is presented in the form of a dance drama. One of the dance drama performances that is often performed is the Meras Gandrung Performance at the Terakota Park, Banyuwangi.

The Meras Gandrung performance in the Terakota park in Banyuwangi is not an original performance ritual, but only a performance that tells the Meras Gandrung ritual. The Meras Gandrung performance in the Terakota park depicts the story behind the Gandrung dance, the function of the Gandrung dance to the Meras Gandrung process as part of the life of a Gandrung dancer to become a



professional Gandrung. This is an alternative to the Meras Gandrung ritual in the commodification process so as not to eliminate its true value, meaning and function.



Figure 5. Meras Gandrung performance in the Terracotta Park  
Source. Youtube Cakni Channel

Commodification can provide economic benefits to local communities and support cultural preservation in some ways. However, it can also present risks such as distortion or loss of original meaning, as well as misuse or exploitation of the culture. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the way in which commodification is carried out so as to respect and strengthen the underlying cultural values.

## Conclusion

Gandrung is a mascot of Banyuwangi Regency that is already known to many people. Gandrung is not only someone who can dance the Gandrung dance, but someone who can dance, sing and play Gandrung music. A Gandrung must go through a long process to become a professional Gandrung until finally marked by the Meras Gandrung ritual. Meras Gandrung is a graduation ritual or a sign for a Gandrung who has completed the process of learning to become a Gandrung. As a traditional ritual that has been carried out since the time of our ancestors, the Meras Gandrung ritual has undergone transformation to commodification. The transformation of the Meras Gandrung ritual can be seen from the learning process of prospective Gandrung and the shift in the function of the Meras Gandrung ritual. Meras Gandrung has also undergone commodification, which was previously only a traditional ritual but has become a cultural tourism object in Banyuwangi Regency. One alternative form so that commodification does not change its value, meaning and function as a whole is the process of creating imitation works inspired by the Meras Gandrung ritual. Currently, there is a Meras Gandrung performance in the Terakota park as one form of performance that tells the process of the Meras Gandrung ritual. Transformation and commodification cannot be avoided by every art and culture that exists, the need for an alternative solution and appropriate policy so that the process of transformation and commodification does not change or eliminate an existing cultural heritage.

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