

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF
STAGE DESIGN IN THE 21ST
CENTURY MALAYSIAN
BANGSAWAN**

MUHAMMAD ALHAKEEM BIN HUSAIN

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ABSTRACT

Bangsawan is a traditional theatre form that consists of acting, singing, music, dancing, and has a strong influence from *Wayang Parsi* from India. It was brought to Penang, Malaysia in the 1870s and experienced a period of fame in the 1890s and began its downfall in the early 1940s. The *Semarak Bangsawan* program, launched in 2007, has allowed new *Bangsawan* groups to develop their own works. These groups have started incorporating contemporary and popular elements into their performances. For instance, many groups have replaced the traditional canvas *Latar Tirai* with light-emitting diodes (LED) to project their visual scene elements and technology has become an integral part of most *Bangsawan* performances, challenging traditional norms. This research aims to identify the transformation of stage design in 21st-century *Bangsawan* performances in Malaysia. The focus of the study is to discuss the stage designs of *Bangsawan Tengku Anum* (2002) and *Bangsawan Dendam Laksamana* (2017). It is crucial to examine the 21st-century *Bangsawan* performances, where technology has been incorporated into theatrical productions. A qualitative research approach which involves historical research, content analysis and interviews. This research employs Pamela Howard's (2009) aspects of scenography as a primary tool for analysis which examines the elements of space, research, colors and composition aspects in the set designs. From this research, it reveals that LED and projectors have been utilized as substitutes for traditional canvas and painted backdrops in stage design in *Bangsawan*. The changes of traditional *Latar Tirai* gives a new method that can be usage on the *Bangsawan* performances. It provides an innovation in *Bangsawan* traditional theatre performance. Furthermore, this research highlights that the modifications of the set designs in the 21st-century *Bangsawan*, do not change the conventional *Bangsawan*. It is because the performance's structure and other conventions remained, but has introduced new dimensions mainly to the set design. It is shown that the transformation of *Latar Tirai* in *Bangsawan Tengku Anum* and *Bangsawan Dendam Laksamana* are adapting to the current modern stage technologies and especially in competing with the contemporary theatre today. Therefore, the transformation of 21st-century *Bangsawan* offers a new attractions to the urban audiences and also contributes to the preservation and conservation of dying traditional art form.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Bangsawan theatre is an art form that has undergone distinct phases of development, including an initial phase, a phase of glory, a degradation phase, and a recovery phase. During the recovery and re-invention phases, the performing style of *Bangsawan* Theatre underwent changes. This was prompted by the lack of professional group performances following the degradation phase in 1950. The recovery phase began in 1999 with the opening of Istana Budaya in Kuala Lumpur and gained momentum in 2007 with the introduction of the *Semarak Bangsawan* program by Jabatan Kesenian dan Kebudayaan Negara (JKKN) and Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL).

The recovery of *Bangsawan* performance in Malaysia has been gradual, with productions such as *Bangsawan Tun Perak* (6–20 May 2000), *Bangsawan Siti Zubaidah* (1–11 July 2000), *Bangsawan Tengku Anum* (18–22 December 2002), *Bangsawan Tun Fatimah* (9–18 July 2004), and *Bangsawan Naga Chini* (6–13 June 2006) being staged at Panggung Sari Istana Budaya. Istana Budaya has provided a platform for a new form of *Bangsawan* that incorporates a commercial touch and utilizes the advanced stage technology available at the venue. With its excellent facilities, Istana Budaya has facilitated the creation of new *Bangsawan* performances.

The *Semarak Bangsawan* program, launched in 2007, has allowed new *Bangsawan* groups to develop their own works. These groups have started incorporating contemporary and popular elements into their performances. For instance, many groups have replaced the traditional canvas *latar tirai* (backdrop) with light-emitting diodes (LED) to project their visual scene elements. The use of technology and the available facilities in the auditorium not only save energy and costs but also enable artists to showcase their artistic styles and incorporate diverse elements as they see fit.

This research aims to analyze and understand the transformations that have taken place in 21st-century *Bangsawan* performances. The twenty-first century offers numerous technologies that help artists save time and energy. The technological facilities and equipment available on stage also play a crucial role, as they facilitate the work process. This chapter will discuss the research background, the characteristics of