

Symbolism of Movement in Widya Prakrti Dance: A Phenomenological Analysis of Cultural and Spiritual Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

Artistic and cultural degradation has recently emerged amidst the rapid spread of digitised information. This research aims to anticipate the degradation of the understanding of the art of cultural identity by finding historical records, symbols and meanings in the Widya Prakrti Dance owned by the maestro of the island of Bali. It is essential to conduct an in-depth study that has an impact on the millennial generation in the digital era not to leave the tradition of meaning symbols in their cultural identity. The method used in this research is qualitative phenomenology. Data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, documentation and literature studies and studied using George Herbert Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism. The participants are divided into 2 groups, namely key informants of 2 people and companion informants of 13 people who will complete the data presentation. The findings of this study examine the history, meaning and symbols of the Widya Prakrti dance. The sacredness of this dance is a manifestation of love for God and Lord Vishnu as the strength and balance of life.

KEYWORDS

Widya Prakrti Dance
Phenomenological
Performing Art
Symbolism
Cultural

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INTRODUCTION

Arts and culture are important expressions of human creativity and identity, reflecting social values and individual experiences (Fagence, 2023). The scope of art and culture is marked starting from the visual arts, be it dance, music or even literary arts developed in a performance or a film in which the meaning of the activity patterns of the surrounding community is implied (Haliza et al., 2023), (Komander & König, 2024). The transformation of dance in the present era has brought about changes in human civilisation (Portalés et al., 2018), (Bandem & I Made Bandem, 2014). This development is characterised by the modification of dances whose sacred essence is a question for artists (I Wayan Gede Lamopia, 2018). Moreover, the younger generation currently understands a context only because of fomo (fear of missing out) or follows along in other languages so as not to feel left behind (Brailovskaia & Jurgen Margraf, 2024). It is ironic to see young people who only enjoy dancing, but do not feel the essence of the meaning of dance, where dance should be a form of ethnic encyclopaedia that holds meaning, social and moral in communication representation (Anastasia, 2021).

As the most popular area for tourists because of its art and culture, the island of Bali has produced many works that amaze the public (Muhamad et al., 2021). The rich culture of the island of the gods is reflected in the art of dance (Hidajat, 2008). In Hinduism, dance has a very basic interpretation that cannot be separated (Covarrubias, 1986) from all activities such

as religious ceremonies, community activities, government activities or other activities that present Balinese dance as a visitor attraction (Goodlander, 2022). Koentjaraningrat also said that there are 7 elements in culture, one of which is art, so it is imperative for the next generation of the nation to have a survival strategy amidst the growing flow of modernisation (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Regarding the numerous dance creations on the island of Bali (Ako, 2024), there is one dance that has a sacredness called the Widya Prakrti Dance. This dance is specifically an opening ritual at a major university event in Bali, namely ITB STIKOM Bali (Pudjasworo et al., 2017). This dance art is a form of representation of the majesty of God Almighty in his manifestation as Lord Vishnu, showing the greatness of the universe and its contents. According to (interactive multimedia), the name Widya Prakrti dance comes from Sanskrit, namely Widya which means science including technology and art, while Prakrti is taken from the basic material elements that have Triguna, namely Satwam (nature of enlightenment), Rajas (active and dynamic nature) and Tamas (bad nature).

The beauty of this dance is that it is only performed during major events that are important to the founder and originator of the Widya Prakrti dance movement. The sacredness of this Widya Prakrti dance is part of the preservation of an undifferentiated cultural heritage that must be maintained by the millennial generation, especially students and the ITB STIKOM Bali community. In practice, however, only a few millennials at ITB STIKOM Bali know about the cultural identity of Widya Prakrti Dance. The problem is that rapid globalisation has a great influence on the digital generation, who have a superficial understanding of the art of Widya Prakrti Dance. It is feared that the local arts, which should be strengthened in value, may lose their love for their own culture due to the flow of modernisation. Therefore, as a forum for strengthening Widya Prakrti dance, it is important for all aspects of the actors in it, both from the academic community and students, to fully understand the history, meaning and symbols of the sacredness of Widya Prakrti dance. Faced with the challenges of cultural degradation, it can be overcome by using the right technology when introducing digital literacy so that the information received can be well understood by the millennial generation (Sugita et al., 2021). Given that the millennial generation is a generation that is very close to the digital world. This generation grew up after the rapid development of the Internet (Pichler et al., 2021). The digital world is like being in the palm of your hand, with personal access to all forms of information you want to find (Fadel et al., 2020).

Due to the lack of scientific knowledge about the creation of Widya Prakrti Dance, researchers are interested in investigating more about this dance. Previous research was conducted by Putu Noveliana Putri (2021), which was about the design of multimedia learning Widya Prakrti Dance (Putri, 2021). Unfortunately, this research did not produce any feasibility that could be shared with other arts activists. In addition, the scientific narrative built is limited only to information about the founder and dance demonstrations without including historical elements of the meaning and symbols contained in each movement of the Widya Prakrti Dance. In the book of performing arts copyright by Bambang Pudjasworo, et al, describes a little about the track record of ITB STIKOM Bali's great dance [15]. The novelty of this research lies in the complexity of data on the history, meaning and symbols of the Widya Prakrti dance, which presents its rituals and sacredness. In addition, Fitriani also confirmed that education should be the most appropriate vehicle to build awareness of multiculturalism [20].

The problem-solving approach to the lack of cultural awareness of the younger generation in their own local arts will be addressed by conducting an in-depth study of the

history of meaning and symbols in each Widya Prakrti dance movement, which will then be presented in the form of digitalisation. This research is in line with the policy direction of the National Development Plan 2025-2045 on the mission of socio-cultural and ecological resilience, which prioritises advanced culture (Sekretariat RPJPN, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design, aiming to understand and interpret the lived experiences, meanings, and symbolic practices embedded in the Widya Prakrti Dance. Phenomenological research is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to reveal how cultural actors experience, perceive, and construct meaning from artistic and spiritual practices within specific socio-cultural contexts (Gill, 2020; Khanal, 2024). In the context of performing arts, phenomenology allows researchers to explore dance not merely as a visual form, but as an experiential and symbolic medium that embodies cultural values, spirituality, and collective identity.

Qualitative research is characterised by its emphasis on naturalistic inquiry, contextual depth, and interpretive understanding. As noted by Mardalis (2014), qualitative research prioritises exploration of social phenomena in the form of processes, events, interactions, individuals, and social groups, with data primarily presented in narrative and descriptive forms. In this study, the qualitative phenomenological approach is used to explore the historical background, symbolic meanings, and cultural significance of movements in the Widya Prakrti Dance, particularly as they are understood and experienced by creators, performers, educators, and the younger generation within the ITB STIKOM Bali environment.

The primary data collection techniques applied in this research consist of in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature review. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture the subjective experiences, interpretations, and reflections of informants regarding the creation, performance, and meaning of Widya Prakrti Dance. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility for informants to elaborate on their personal experiences while still maintaining alignment with the research objectives. Documentation included photographs, video recordings of performances, institutional archives, and written records related to the creation and performance history of the dance. Meanwhile, the literature review was conducted to contextualise the findings within existing scholarly discussions on symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and Balinese performing arts.

The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge, experience, and involvement with the Widya Prakrti Dance, in accordance with the research focus (Barlian, 2016). Informants were categorised into key informants and supporting informants. Key informants consisted of two creators of the Widya Prakrti Dance, who provided authoritative insights into the historical background, philosophical foundation, and symbolic construction of the dance. Supporting informants included two cultural arts teachers, ten students enrolled in cultural arts courses, and one dancer from the general public. This diversity of informants enabled the researcher to obtain multiple perspectives, ranging from conceptual creation to pedagogical practice and experiential performance.

The research was conducted over a period of eight months in 2024, allowing sufficient time for repeated data collection, observation, and reflection. Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying interview transcripts and documentation to identify key themes related to history, symbols,

and meanings of dance movements. Data presentation was conducted through narrative descriptions and tables to systematically organise the findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous interpretation and verification of emerging patterns.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing data obtained from different informants and data collection techniques (Wulandari et al., 2022). This process strengthened the reliability of interpretations and ensured that the meanings and symbols identified in the Widya Prakrti Dance were grounded in consistent and corroborated empirical evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Track Record of Widya Prakrti Dance

In recent years, the development of artistic creation has shown a significant increase, both in terms of quantity and diversity of media. Works of art are no longer limited to conventional forms such as painting, sculpture, or stage performance, but have expanded into photography, digital art, multimedia installations, and hybrid performing arts. This phenomenon is closely related to the rapid advancement of technology, the accessibility of social media platforms as spaces for artistic dissemination, and the growing awareness of creative expression as an essential aspect of cultural identity. Within this context, performing arts—particularly dance—remain a vital medium for articulating values, beliefs, and collective meanings that are deeply rooted in local traditions.

Dance as a form of performing art is not merely a sequence of aesthetic movements but a cultural text that embodies historical narratives, symbolic meanings, and philosophical reflections of the society that produces it. In many communities, schools, and higher education institutions, dance is often created and presented as a “Greatness Dance” or ceremonial performance, functioning as a symbolic representation of institutional identity. Such dances are usually performed at formal events and are accompanied by traditional music, particularly gamelan, reinforcing their cultural legitimacy and ceremonial function. The choreography, musical composition, and performance structure are commonly designed to reflect the vision, mission, and values of the institution or community that owns the dance.

ITB STIKOM Bali represents one of the higher education institutions that consciously integrates cultural and artistic elements into its institutional identity, despite its primary focus on information technology and digital innovation. This integration reflects an awareness that technological advancement and cultural preservation should not be positioned as opposing forces, but rather as complementary domains. The embodiment of this awareness can be seen in the development and performance of institutional dances that involve students and members of the academic community, particularly within student organizational activities. Through these performances, students are not only trained in artistic skills but are also encouraged to internalize cultural values and philosophical meanings embedded in traditional Balinese dance.

One of the most significant artistic works owned by ITB STIKOM Bali is the Great Dance entitled Widya Prakrti. This dance was specifically created as an institutional ceremonial dance and has become an integral part of important academic events, such as graduation ceremonies and anniversary celebrations. As a ceremonial performance, Widya Prakrti Dance functions as a symbolic opening that marks the sacredness, dignity, and philosophical orientation of the institution. Its consistent performance in formal academic rituals indicates that Widya Prakrti Dance has transcended its role as mere entertainment and has become a cultural emblem of ITB STIKOM Bali.

Based on an in-depth interview with Mrs. Bandem, the creator of Widya Prakrti Dance,

it was revealed that the dance was created in 2012 and first performed during the ITB STIKOM Bali Anniversary at the Aston Denpasar Hotel Ballroom on August 10, 2012. The creation of Widya Prakrti Dance was not an arbitrary artistic endeavor but was grounded in a clear philosophical foundation that integrates Balinese Hindu cosmology, institutional values, and artistic creativity. The naming of the dance itself reflects this philosophical depth. Derived from Sanskrit, the word Widya refers to knowledge, encompassing science, technology, and art, while Prakrti denotes the basic material elements of existence that are governed by the qualities of Tri Guna: Satwam (illumination and wisdom), Rajas (activity and dynamism), and Tamas (darkness or inertia).

The concept of Tri Guna is central to understanding the symbolic framework of Widya Prakrti Dance. Human beings, endowed with knowledge and consciousness, are expected to cultivate and control these three qualities in order to achieve balance and wisdom in life. Knowledge, in this sense, is not merely intellectual accumulation but a moral and spiritual responsibility. Through creativity and imagination, humans are encouraged to transform knowledge into cultural expressions that contribute to the welfare of humanity. This philosophical orientation aligns with the Balinese concept of taksu, which refers to spiritual charisma or inner power that emerges when artistic creation is grounded in sincerity, devotion, and cultural authenticity.

Within this conceptual framework, Widya Prakrti Dance is designed to depict the majesty of God Almighty in His manifestation as Lord Vishnu, who is understood in Balinese Hindu belief as the preserver and maintainer of cosmic balance. The dance visualizes the universe and its contents as an interconnected system composed of five fundamental material elements known as Panca Maha Bhuta: earth (prthivi), water (apah), fire (teja), air (bayu), and ether (akasa). These elements form the basis of all existence and are symbolically represented through movement, spatial patterns, and choreographic structure within the dance.

Each element of Panca Maha Bhuta carries specific characteristics and sensory qualities. The earth element is associated with solidity, coldness, and the stimulation of the sense of smell, symbolizing stability and grounding. Water represents fluidity, softness, and taste, reflecting adaptability and continuity of life. Fire embodies heat, brightness, and transformation, signifying energy and purification. Air is characterized by lightness and movement, symbolizing life force and dynamism. Ether, as the subtlest element, represents space, sensitivity, and connectivity, serving as the medium through which all other elements interact. Together, these elements form the macrocosm, the universal structure that sustains existence.

In Widya Prakrti Dance, the unity of Panca Maha Bhuta as the macrocosm is juxtaposed with the concept of the microcosm, represented by human beings. Humans are positioned as conscious agents who possess the capacity to understand, manage, and harmonize the elements within themselves. This relationship between macrocosm and microcosm reflects a fundamental principle of Balinese cosmology, emphasizing balance, harmony, and interconnectedness. Through disciplined movement, controlled energy, and expressive gestures, the dance conveys the ideal of human beings striving to align themselves with cosmic order.

The track record of Widya Prakrti Dance, therefore, is not limited to its historical chronology as an institutional creation. Rather, it encompasses a broader narrative of cultural articulation, philosophical embodiment, and educational function. Since its inception, the dance has served as a medium through which ITB STIKOM Bali communicates its commitment to integrating technological advancement with cultural wisdom. By

continuously performing Widya Prakrti Dance in academic rituals, the institution reinforces the relevance of traditional values in contemporary educational settings and ensures that cultural heritage remains a living practice rather than a static artifact.

In this sense, Widya Prakrti Dance stands as an example of how traditional performing arts can be recontextualized within modern institutions without losing their sacred and philosophical essence. Its track record demonstrates the potential of dance as a cultural strategy for maintaining identity, transmitting values, and fostering a holistic understanding of knowledge that encompasses science, art, and spirituality.

Symbols and Attributes: From Movement to Meaning

This traditional WIDYA PRAKRTI dance is performed by 9 (nine) female dancers. Where in this dance has 1 (one) main character, namely Lord Vishnu, who has a strong and authoritative nature, while the other 8 dancers as dancers (Panca Maha Butha) who describe the elegant character, reinforcing the majesty of Lord Vishnu. WIDYA PRAKRTI dance was specially created for ITB STIKOM Bali's Grand Dance, which must be performed at every graduation ceremony and anniversary celebration. The character of the movement in WIDYA PRAKRTI dance has distinctive features that highlight the beauty, harmony and philosophy of life inspired by nature, namely:

Table 3. Typical Characteristics of Widya Prakrti

Character	Meaning
Flexible and Dynamic	This dance movement prioritises body flexibility, but remains dynamic. Each movement has a deep meaning, both through the hands (sabetan) and footsteps, so it looks graceful and structured.
Expression	In addition to body movements, this dance also features dancers' facial expressions that are in tune with the theme and feel of the dance. Facial expressions and movement expressions play an important role in conveying the message of the philosophy of nature and life.
Symbolisation of Nature	The meaning behind the name Widya Prakrti (which is often translated as "knowledge and nature") is that the dance movements take inspiration from natural elements such as the wind blowing, water flowing, or plants growing.
Movement Balance	These dances often harmoniously combine fast and slow movements to reflect the dynamic yet harmonised rhythms of life

However, in a dance, movement is the main ingredient in the formation of the dance and the main element in the dance, where movement is the medium that is first used as a means of expression and seen by the audience. Variety of movement is a form and type of movement performed in dance that has meaning and characteristics to be understood by others. In WIDYA PRAKRTI dance, there is a character in the movement, namely the Vishnu character with flexible, supple but powerful movements and other movements which are the movements of 8 dancers as elements of Panca Maha Butha. The following are the main movements of the Vishnu dancer in this dance:

Table 4. Principal Movements of Wisnu Widya Prakrti Dancer

<i>Vishnu Movement</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Agem Kanan</i>	The main stance is performed with the left foot positioned slightly oblique forward. The right hand is sirang mata and the left hand is sirang susu.
<i>Agem Kiri</i>	The main stance is performed with the right foot positioned slightly oblique forward. The left hand is sirang mata and the right hand is sirang susu.
<i>Manganjali</i>	Position includes hands in front of the chest (hands in worship)
<i>Ngeteg Pinggel</i>	The ngeteg pinggel movement is part of the agem. Where the left hand is directed to the right, the right hand sirang susu and vice versa.
<i>Mentang barrel</i>	The movement of looking up with the left hand mentang barrel (straight) up with the ngagem position
<i>Sightings</i>	Handstands with the right foot in motion. And vice versa
<i>Nyuling</i>	Movement like flute with the right foot on tiptoe
<i>Nyangkil</i>	The body moves down to the left, the left foot is positioned obliquely to the front, the right hand is sirang susu and the left hand is directed to the right.
<i>Timpah Tanjek</i>	Movement of the timpah foot then tanjek with the position of the right hand agem slightly widened and the left hand sirang susu where the fingers face downwards
<i>Nabdab Gelung</i>	The left hand gestures with the coil and the right hand with the milk.
<i>Nabdab hip</i>	A movement like fingering a bracelet, where the hands cross in front of the chest.
<i>Mudr Hands</i>	Movement with the whole body vibrated and mudra hand position. Where this movement illustrates the process of the rotation of the <u>world</u>

In addition to the Wisnu figure in this dance, there are 8 accompanying dancers in the Widya Prakrti dance. These eight dancers have different movements to the Vishnu figure. Below is an explanation of the movements of the accompanying dancers:

Table 5. The Movement and Meaning of Vishnu's Companion Dancer

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Srigsig</i>	The main stance is performed with the left foot positioned slightly oblique forward. The right hand crosses the eyes, and the left hand crosses the chest.
<i>Agem</i>	The main stance is performed with the right foot positioned slightly oblique forward. The right hand crosses the eyes, and the left hand crosses the chest.
<i>Sledet</i>	Position includes hands in front of the chest (hands in worship)
<i>Nyangkil</i>	The body moves to the left, the left foot is positioned obliquely to the front, the right hand is crossing the chest and the left hand is directed to the right.
<i>Milpil</i>	Fast-paced footwork with one hand in one hand position and one hand in the other hand position.

Ngeteb

stomp the feet 2 times with the hands in the *agem* position and moved 2 times.

The Widya Prakrti dance performance is inseparable from the meaning and symbols of the manifestation of divinity embodied in a dance. In the performance, interactions arise from the actors of dancers with dancers and actors with ancestors [27]. Traditional dance is a form of relational communication and manifestation of the sacred values of the Creator.

This context presents subjective perceptions and interpretations of how the audience interprets the beauty of the values that are visible symbols in what is presented. In addition to the presentation of the story, which is the focus of this Widya Prakrti Dance performance, there is the figure of Vishnu as the centre of balance in life. The theory of symbolic interactionism holds that individual behaviour is based on the process of subjective interpretation of the objects around them, not on mechanical processes or binding social systems. Herbert Mead showed that in order to understand human behaviour, a view of subjectivity must be presented in order to interpret its true meaning (Aksan et al., 2009). The movement created in the Widya Prakrti Greatness Dance is a form of power that is meaningful to ITB STIKOM Bali. Body movements, sounds, physicality and expressions show a symbol of offering to God.



Figure 1. The Part of Widya Prakrti Dance

In line with Mead's concept of the meaning of Widya Prakrti Dance, Blumer's basic theory is that symbolic interaction refers to the special and distinctive character of interactions that occur between people. Furthermore, the sacredness of Widya Prakrti Dance is derived from the reaction of the dancer playing Lord Vishnu, who always experiences possession after performing the dance. Based on interviews, it was conveyed that there seemed to be a magical power that strengthened the actor playing the role of Lord Vishnu. Seeing this response, the community as an audience assumes that this Widya Prakrti dance has a sacredness based on tradition, character and love for the character of Lord Vishnu. Thus, what Blumer conveyed, that this interaction process focuses on the thought process of individuals in interpreting or interpreting actions between individuals, is a central point in the symbolic interaction process (Firmando, 2024). Within the interaction process, the individual response resulting from the stimulus is not direct or mechanical, but is indicated by the process of the individual's interpretation of the meaning of the stimulus they are confronted with in order to further create a response from the individual (Zhang & Yue Luo, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

The research reveals the symbolic depth and meaning of Widya Prakrti Dance, a performance art piece created especially for ITB STIKOM Bali. The performance not only highlights the beauty and harmony of the movements, but also contains a deep philosophy inspired by nature and the concept of macrocosm and microcosm. Widya Prakrti dance depicts the majesty of God through the manifestation of Lord Vishnu and the elements of Panca Maha Bhuta, namely earth, water, fire, air and ether. Each of these elements is symbolised in elegant and dynamic movements that reflect the balanced rhythm of life. The movements of this dance, performed by nine dancers, emphasise flexibility and expression in harmony with the theme, emphasising the message of knowledge and nature.

The main character, Lord Vishnu, is portrayed with powerful and authoritative movements, while the other eight dancers represent the elements of nature that enhance Vishnu's majesty. The dance emphasises the importance of balance between man and nature and encourages creativity and wisdom in life. Through Widya Prakrti Dance, the audience is invited to explore the harmonious relationship between man and nature and the importance of using knowledge for the benefit of humanity. The research highlights how dance can be a medium of cultural expression, rich in symbols and meanings.

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