

The Symbolic Cosmology on the *Bedhaya Tirta* Dance: *Ardhanareswari* as Its Deep Structure

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This study examines the position of the Ardhanareswari symbol as the deep structure of the symbolic cosmology underlying the Bedhaya Tirta ritual dance performed during the Purnama Kasa odalan at Pura Tirta Empul Babatan, Surabaya. Unlike previous studies that treat icons, indexes, and symbols at the same analytical level, this research positions Ardhanareswari: the union of puruṣa and pradhana, as the deepest cosmological structure governing the entire sign system of the dance. Using an interpretive qualitative approach and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, the study draws upon performance documentation, ritual archives, and Hindu cosmological literature. Data were analyzed through interpretive coding and semiotic categorization based on Peirce's triadic model. The findings reveal that icons and indexes, "such as the dominance of green costumes, the presence of five female dancers, soft movement qualities, the role of the pamangku, and the ritual timing of Purnama Kasa" function as surface layers pointing toward the central cosmological symbol. The highest symbolic moment appears in the solanugrah sequence when the sacred waters of the kakuluh (puruṣa) and the kendil (pradhana) are ritually united, enacting the cosmic union of Ardhanareswari. The study demonstrates that the deepest meaning of ritual dance does not lie merely in visual form or ritual action, but in the cosmological symbol that structures their operation. This research contributes theoretically by refining the application of Peircean semiotics to the study of Hindu ritual performance in Nusantara.

INTRODUCTION

As a cultural expression, ritual dance articulates the connection between human embodiment and the cosmological order believed to underlie existence (Geertz, 1973; Bell, 1992). Within Hindu communities of the Indonesian archipelago, ritual performance is not merely a ceremony, but rather functions as a symbolic system where human actions are integrated into the structure of the cosmos (Tambiah, 1985). Through movement, objects, and spatial orientation, ritual dances materialize metaphysical processes in the unseen realm (*niskala*) and renew the sacred bond between humans and divine forces.

Ritual meaning, according to Turner (1967), is generated through liminal symbols capable of transforming experience; conversely, Staal (1979) argues that ritual actions possess an autonomous logic where meaning is already embedded in structured repetition. This perspective aligns with Southeast Asian performance studies that show how religious and cosmological concepts are actualized through patterned choreography, sacred space, and symbolic embodiment (Foley, 2021; Hughes-Freeland, 2020; Asad, 2003). Crucially, in Hindu cosmological thought, these dimensions stem from metaphysical principles including *Ardhanareswari*, the union of *puruṣa* (consciousness) and *prakṛti* /*pradhana* (primordial matter), which represents the inherent unity of masculine and feminine cosmic energies (Zimmer, 1946; Kramrisch, 1976). In this perspective, ritual dance becomes a medium where cosmological concepts are materialized through visual forms (icons), ritual actions (indexes), and metaphysical structures (symbols). This

understanding is highly relevant to the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance, a ritual dance performed during the *Purnama Kasa* ceremony at *Pura Tirta Empul Babatan*, Surabaya. (https://youtu.be/wuTO_N_rcpg?si=Liwyece_JSc2Qe5S) The dance features five female dancers in green attire and presents the sacred segment *solanugrah*, which is the unification of two forms of tirta (holy water): tirta *purusa* in the kakuluh and tirta *pradhana* in the kendil.

While previous works have successfully mapped the triadic icon-index-symbol relation in Javanese-Balinese ritual dance (Bandem & deBoer, 1995; Soedarsono, 1997; Bourdieu, 1977; Srinivas, 1952), a significant academic gap remains: no study has yet fully examined how *Ardhanareswari* acts as the deepest cosmological structure governing the entire sign system of the performance. To address this, the study employs Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotics-icons are based on resemblance, indexes on causal relations, and symbols on convention (Peirce, 1931; Nöth, 1990). However, differentiating itself from a purely textual application of Peirce, this research applies his categories within the context of ritual art: icons are manifested as visual forms (costume, movement quality, spatial patterns), indexes are displayed as ritual actions (mantra, priestly presence, sacred water handling), and symbols function as the cosmological deep structure that regulates the meaning of icons and indexe

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a qualitative research approach, utilizing Peircean semiotics as the main analytical framework to interpret the sign structure of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance. The qualitative approach is chosen considering the object of study involves layered cultural meanings, ritual symbolism, and cosmological structures that cannot be simplified into quantitative variables. Therefore, the data must be examined holistically within their ritual and social context. In this regard, Geertz (1973: 5) contends that culture consists of "webs of significance" that require interpretive analysis.

Research data was obtained through direct observation of the *Bedhaya Tirta* performance during the *Purnama Kasa odalan* at *Pura Tirta Empul Babatan*, Surabaya, supported by photographic documentation, video recordings, and detailed field notes. This data collection method is aligned with performance studies approaches that emphasize embodied experience and contextual awareness within ritual settings (Schechner, 2002: 25; Bandem & deBoer, 1995).

Data analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages, which were meticulously designed to align with the operational reinterpretation of Peircean semiotics in this research. Firstly, Identification of Signs: Choreographic elements, costume components, ritual objects, spatial formations, and dramatic sequences were categorized into Peirce's triadic model (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.249; Nöth, 1990: 45). In this stage, icons were analyzed as visual forms, indexes as ritual actions, and symbols as cosmological structures. Secondly, Ritual Contextualization: Gestures, spatial orientation, and sacred objects were interpreted in relation to Hindu cosmology, utilizing the ritual symbolism of Turner (1967: 1969), Kramrisch (1976), and Zimmer (1946). This contextualization clarified how indexical ritual actions connect aesthetic forms with cosmological meaning. Thirdly, Determination of Deep Structure: The focus was on *Ardhanareswari* as the dominant symbol that governs the semiotic system. This analytical step is grounded in theories of symbolic dominance (Bell, 1992: 34-36; Tambiah, 1985: 130) and Indonesian

performance literature (Soedarsono, 1976; Sudarsono, 2002), verifying the argument that symbols regulate icons and indexes within the ritual choreographic structure.

Validity Strategies

To ensure validity, this research relied on two types of triangulations. Source Triangulation was conducted by comparing field observations and archival records with informal interviews with the *pamangku* (temple priest). Meanwhile, Conceptual Triangulation was achieved by cross-referencing the data with Hindu cosmological theories (Radhakrishnan, 1953; Michaels, 2004) and ritual performativity theories (Schechner, 2002; Staal, 1979). This combination of methodologies allowed the research to present a coherent semiotic interpretation and definitively assert *Ardhanareswari* as the fundamental symbolic structure controlling the *Bedhaya Tirta* performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structure and Performance Description of the *Bedhaya Tirta* Dance

During the *Purnama Kasa odalan* at *Pura Tirta Empul Babatan*, Surabaya, the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance is performed, adhering to ritual procedures derived from the Hindu-Balinese ceremonial structure. The performance location is the inner courtyard (*jeroan*), positioned directly in front of the *padmasana*, the temple's primary cosmological axis. This kind of sacred space selection reflects an alignment with ritual performance theory, in which space functions as a mediating symbolic field, not merely a physical container, for the relationship between humans and the cosmos (Schechner, 2002: 28; Bell, 1992: 34). The absence of a stage and the shared spatial experience among dancers, priests, and spectators underscore the communal and liminal nature of ritual performance (Turner, 1967; Tambiah, 1985).

The ritual commences with the purification of the space, through incense smoke and the sprinkling of *tirta pamarisudha* by the priest. Philosophically, this moment is a clear marker of the transition from profane to liminal space, a key thesis in ritual theory (Turner, 1969: 94). Subsequently, five female dancers enter the sacred area in a linear formation that corresponds with the *kaja-kelod* cosmological axis, a fundamental spatial principle in the sacred orientation of Balinese and Javanese traditions (Bandem & deBoer, 1995).

The costumes worn by the dancers are predominantly green with soft green sashes, a choice that symbolizes vegetative fertility and feminine energy. The color green simultaneously acts as an icon (resembling vegetation), as an index (signifying an agricultural ritual atmosphere), and as a symbol (representing *prakṛti*, the feminine cosmic principle) (Zimmer, 1946: 56; Kramrisch, 1976: 43). As a semiotic consequence, the Peircean perspective establishes a multilayered sign system in which the costume color already encodes cosmological meaning (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.249; Nöth, 1990: 45). The two most vital ritual objects are the *kendil* carried by the dancer and the *kakuluh* held by the priest. They contain sacred water: *tirta pradhana* in the *kendil* and *tirta purusa* in the *kakuluh*. These dual cosmic principles possess a singular role; their union forms the metaphysical foundation for Hindu cosmology (Radhakrishnan, 1953: 267-268). Aligned with Staal's theory (1979: 303), that ritual meaning is manifested through objects and action rather than verbal explanation, these vessels become the core of the performance's semiotic structure.

The choreography of the performance is segmented into three main sections: *pangawit* (opening), *pangawak* (main section), and *panyuwud* (closing). The opening segment is marked by slow, gentle movements that emphasize stability, purity, and controlled transitions, a reflection of the feminine aesthetic inherent in Javanese-Balinese dance (Soedarsono, 1976; Sudarsono, 2002). Subsequently, the core section shifts to circular and diagonal formations that explicitly symbolize cosmic harmony.

The culmination of the performance is the *solanugrah* segment, when the priest carrying the *kakuluh* approaches the dancer holding the *kendil*. Through controlled and meaningful gestures, they enact the union of *puruṣa* and *pradhana*, a direct symbolic embodiment of *Ardhanareswari* (Zimmer, 1946: 56). Following the unification of the *tirta*, the dancers form a tight circle, an action that symbolically channels cosmic energy back to the center of the universe (the *padmasana*), which is a clear illustration of 'embodied cosmology' in ritual performance, as asserted by Schechner (2002: 30).

Evidently, through this structure, the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance transcends mere aesthetic presentation; it validates Hindu cosmology. The dance successfully integrates space, body, color, gesture, and ritual objects into a single symbolic system that is rooted in the deep structure of *Ardhanareswari*.



Figure 1. The *Solanugrah* Segment.

Iconic Signs in the *Bedhaya Tirta* Dance

The icon in Peircean semiotics is a sign that functions based on its resemblance to the object it represents (Peirce 1931, CP 2.276). However, in the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance, the iconic sign is expanded to include visual similarities between performance elements and natural phenomena, cosmological *tattwa* concepts, and feminine aesthetics. The icon thus serves as the initial perceptual layer that must be accessed by the spectator before they engage with the deeper indexical and symbolic dimensions (Nöth, 1990: 43). The most prominent icon is the green costume used by the dancers. The color's similarity to vegetation, water, and natural growth instantaneously associates the dancers with fertility and feminine cosmic energy. This association is strongly aligned with the principle of *pradhana* as primordial matter and the generative source of life (Zimmer 1946: 56; Kramrisch 1976: 43). The refined, flowing movements emphasizing *lasya* (the delicate feminine aesthetic) of Javanese-Balinese dance (Soedarsono, 1976; Sudarsono, 2002) further asserts their iconic embodiment of nurturing, life-giving energy.

Iconicity is also manifested in the movement vocabulary, particularly in *ngembat*, *nyalud*, and other soft gestures that resemble the flow of water and the drift of wind. These

movements evoke the purifying and life-sustaining qualities of water, a central element in Hindu ritual cosmology (Michaels, 2004: 77). The circular formations performed by the dancer's function as icons of cosmic rotation, resonating with the anthropological observation that circularity often represents the universe in ritual performance (Tambiah, 1985: 132).

ironically, the *kendil* (a rounded clay vessel) is an icon of the cosmic womb; its shape resembles the maternal form capable of holding and generating life (Kramrisch 1976: 55). Contrary to this, the *kakuluh*, being smaller and more pointed, visually evokes the sharp, penetrating quality associated with the *purusa* principle. Therefore, these ritual objects are cosmological icons prior to their roles being developed into indexical and symbolic ones.

Iconicity is further materialized in spatial formations, particularly the diagonal and circular arrangements of dancers. These formations resemble cosmological structures of movement and balance, underscoring Turner's (1967: 45) discussion of liminal symbols that mediate transformation and cosmic alignment. As a summary, iconic signs in the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance do not function solely as aesthetic embellishments but as fundamental visual resemblances that prepare the conceptual ground for understanding the subsequent indexical and symbolic layers. Icons thus form the preliminary structural base that fundamentally supports the symbolic dominance of *Ardhanareswari*, which will be examined in the following sections.

Indexical Signs in the *Bedhaya Tirta* Dance

The index in Peircean semiotics is a sign that relies on a factual, existential, or causal connection to its object (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.248). If the icon requires visual resemblance, the index demands direct association through physical connection, spatial orientation, or causal effect. In ritual performance, indexicality assumes a central role because many elements act as direct pointers toward sacred actions and cosmological structures. Bell (1992: 38) affirms that ritual draws meaning from embodied actions that actively link the body, space, and the cosmos.

The most significant index in the *Bedhaya Tirta* is the ritual space, particularly the temple's *jeroan* with the *padmasana* positioned directly in front of the performance area. The *padmasana* does not function as a simple backdrop but as an existential index of divine presence. In Balinese Hindu cosmology, it is the dwelling seat of *Siwa-Rudra*, the supreme aspect of divinity (Kramrisch, 1976: 103; Michaels, 2004: 81). Consequently, when the dancers face the *padmasana*, their spatial orientation acts as an index of devotional engagement, not a symbolic metaphor.

The manifestation of indexicality is also seen in the presence of the priest carrying the *kakuluh* containing *tirta purusa*. The priest is not a symbolic figure but an actual ritual agent whose involvement situates the dance as part of a living ritual cycle. Bell (1992: 42) underscores that ritual authority is crucial in generating the efficacy of ritual action; consequently, the priest becomes an indexical anchor connecting the dance to the sacred order. His movements, attire, and handling of holy water demonstrate the real, enacted nature of the ritual.

Indexicality is most strongly manifested during the *solanugrah* segment. The slow approach between the priest and the dancer holding the *kendil* is highly indexical; their physical proximity and the impending unification of the waters indicate the real-time

enactment of the *puruṣa-pradhana* union, a fundamental process in Hindu cosmology (Zimmer 1946: 56). Furthermore, indexical signs are embedded in ritual objects and sensory cues. Incense smoke rising before the dance is not merely symbolic but functions as an index of purification, a factual trace of the *pamasupatian* ritual (Staal 1979: 303). Likewise, the musical accompaniment, consisting of soft, repetitive gamelan patterns, acts as an auditory index of the sacred atmosphere, as such musical textures are traditionally reserved for ritual contexts (Bandem & deBoer 1995).

Shifts in tempo and movement energy also act indexically. The slow opening section denotes a subdued and purified atmosphere, while the gradual intensification during the unification of the waters indexes the heightened ritual intensity. In conclusion, indexical signs in the *Bedhaya Tirta* transcend mere representational markers; they are the direct connective tissue between performance and ritual structure. Indexicality serves as the key bridge between visible action and underlying cosmological meaning, which definitively leads to the symbolic dominance of *Ardhanareswari*, the topic to be examined in the following section.

Symbolic Analysis: *Ardhanareswari* as the Deep Structure

According to Peircean semiotics, a symbol is the highest level of signification, operating through cultural convention, collective belief, and cosmological systems, rather than through visual resemblance or physical connection (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.292; Nöth, 1990: 45). Within the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance, the central symbolic structure directing all layers of meaning is *Ardhanareswari*, the union of *puruṣa* and *pradhana/prakṛti*, a fundamental concept in Hindu cosmology. Unlike icons, *Ardhanareswari* is materialized through ritual enactment, specifically through the unification of two sacred waters: the *puruṣa* water in the *kakuluh* and the *pradhana* water in the *kendil*. As Kramrisch (1976: 43) notes, the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies forms the metaphysical basis of Hindu thought, and ritual acts of water unification dramatize the primordial process of cosmic creation. In conclusion, the *solanugrah* segment is not an aesthetic gesture, but a cosmic symbol enforced in real time.

Ardhanareswari, according to Zimmer (1946: 56), is the integration of complementary principles, spirit and matter, whose union brings forth manifestation and sustains cosmic balance. In this dance, the *kakuluh* carried by the priest symbolizes *puruṣa* through its small, pointed form and its association with elevated spiritual authority. The *kendil*, rounded and capacious, then symbolizes *pradhana* as the maternal, containing, and generative principle. This object imagery is consistent with Radhakrishnan's (1953: 267-268) interpretation of *puruṣa-prakṛti* duality in classical Hindu philosophy. The manifestation of *Ardhanareswari* continues in the symmetrical movement patterns between the priest and the dancer. Turner (1967: 52) argues that ritual symbols are multivocal and operate simultaneously on physical, social, and cosmological levels. The approaching gestures in *solanugrah* validate the principle of cosmic integration, rendering the symbol performative rather than merely representational. Subsequently, following the water union, the dancers form a tight circular formation, symbolizing the restoration of cosmic equilibrium. Tambiah's (1985: 132) observation regarding circularity, as a universal symbol of wholeness and cosmic order, reinforces that the dance's symbolic logic is structured around *Ardhanareswari*'s integrative power. The dominance of the *Ardhanareswari* symbol demonstrates that all iconic and indexical signs in the

performance culminate in a single cosmological intention: the union of cosmic energies. This symbol functions as the deep structure because it provides the metaphysical foundation upon which the choreography, ritual objects, spatial orientation, and narrative may unfold. Schechner (2002: 30) terms this phenomenon embodied cosmology, where the body becomes the medium for enacting the structure of the universe. Ultimately, *Ardhanareswari* is not one symbolic element within the dance; it is the primary symbolic core that organizes, shapes, and directs the meaning of all other signs. Collectively, it constitutes the deep structure underlying the entire semiotic system of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance.

Iconic and Indexical Analysis in Relation to the *Ardhanareswari* Symbol

Undeniably, the iconic and indexical elements of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance must be understood through the lens of its symbolic structure. The icon operates through resemblance (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.276) and the index through causal relations (Peirce, 1931, CP 2.248; Nöth, 1990: 45). Essentially, the meaning of these signs is entirely directed by the symbolic core: *Ardhanareswari*. The iconic elements, such as the green color (which correlates with growth, Bandem & deBoer, 1995: 54) and the circular formations symbolizing life cycles (Soedarsono, 1976: 14), create the imagery of *pradhana*. The indexical elements, such as the priest, mantra vibrations, incense smoke, and ritual objects, directly mark the presence of sacred power and *purusa* (Turner, 1969: 110). In conclusion, icons and indexes function as structural extensions of the *Ardhanareswari* symbol.

When the Primary Symbol of *Ardhanareswari* is used as a lens of analysis, all semiotic signs are divided into the Group Symbols of *Purusa* and *Pradhana*. The Icon (wujud/form) is the manifestation of the Group Symbol that is manifested, while the Index (aktivitas/activity) is the process that is driven by it. The Primary Symbol of *Ardhanareswari* itself is then responsible for integrating these two roh (spiritual principles) into the highest cosmological unity. Tambiah (1985: 132) emphatically notes that a dominant symbol must orchestrate the operation of other signs. Consequently, *Ardhanareswari* functions as the organizing center that substantiates the meaning of every form (Icon) and every activity (Index) within the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance. This is the core contribution of the thesis: the iconic and indexical layers of the dance convincingly reinforce the symbolic foundation of *Ardhanareswari*, confirming its role as the deep structure of the entire semiotic system.

Ritual Dramatic Dynamics: *Solanugrah* as the Climax of Union

Within the dramatic structure of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance, the *solanugrah* segment functions as the climax of the ritual performance. It is the moment when the two cosmological principles, *purusa* and *pradhana*, are united through the ritual act of merging the sacred waters (Turner, 1969: 94). Furthermore, *solanugrah* is not merely a choreographed interaction, but a cosmological drama enacted through embodied ritual action. Schechner (2002: 30-32) explains that the body becomes a cosmological medium, and certain actions serve as meeting points between sacred energy and human agency. This context is reinforced by the slowing musical tempo, the resonance of mantra, and the intensified ritual atmosphere (incense smoke, bells). These conditions create cosmic condensation, the ritual concentration of sacred energy. As Staal (1979: 303) asserts, ritual meaning

emerges from the logic of the action itself, not from its verbal explanation; consequently, *solanugrah* operates as an autonomous ritual process. The dramatic impact of the scene culminates in the symmetrical movement between the priest and the dancer, which blurs the boundary between human and cosmic bodies. When the kakuluh touches the kendil, this moment becomes the actualization of *Ardhanareswari*, the union of complementary cosmic principles. Kramrisch (1976: 43) affirms that the fusion of polarities is at the core of Hindu cosmogony, and the merging of sacred waters is one of its most authentic ritual enactments. Following this climax, the circular configuration of the dancers marks the restoration of cosmic order (Tambiah, 1985: 132). Thus, *solanugrah* is not merely a choreographic moment, but the gravitational center of the ritual, where *Ardhanareswari* is not only represented but dynamically brought into presence.

Spatial Structure and Cosmological Orientation of the Performance

The spatial structure of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance is not merely a physical setting but an integral component of its semiotic and cosmological system. Hindu traditions, such as those in Bali and Java, organize sacred space through cosmological orientations (kaja-keled, kangin-kauh) and the tri mandala hierarchy. Kramrisch (1976: 15-18) asserts that ritual spaces function as 'miniature cosmos,' representing the structure of the macrocosm. Therefore, the performance held in the jeroan, the innermost courtyard, which is the most sacred ritual space in the tri mandala hierarchy, becomes an ontological threshold. Turner (1969: 94) refers to such conditions as a 'liminal zone,' where symbolic transformation can occur. In the context of *Bedhaya Tirta*, the jeroan functions as a sacred field that enables the cosmic union of *purusa* and *pradhana* to manifest.

Directional orientation and positioning concretely embody the *Ardhanareswari* symbolism. The priest's position, taking sacred water from the padmasana, functions as an index of *purusa*, reinforced by the kaja/kangin direction associated with spiritual elevation. Conversely, the dancer carrying the kendil stands in a lower space, with the keled/kauh direction, symbolizing *pradhana* as the principle of material manifestation. This aligns with Radhakrishnan's (1953: 265) interpretation of *puruṣa* as originating from the highest center of consciousness and *pradhana* as rooted in material expression. Furthermore, movement orientation follows cosmological logic; movements toward kaja-kangin represent the search for *purusa*, while circular movements symbolize cosmic cycles. Tambiah (1985: 132) notes that circularity in ritual symbolizes wholeness and integration, as seen in the post-*solanugrah* circular formation marking the restoration of cosmic balance.

The dancers' gaze orientation, primarily toward the padmasana, reinforces spiritual focus. The padmasana represents the axis mundi, the vertical link between humans and divine energy. Schechner (2002: 28) highlights that ritual space directs bodily energy and shapes the meaning of performance. Thus, the dancers' orientation strengthens the ritual's function as an act of cosmic alignment. In summary, the spatial structure of the *Bedhaya Tirta* dance demonstrates that the performance does not merely occur in space; it creates cosmological space. The arrangement of architectural zones, directional orientations, and movement trajectories together form a symbolic system that sustains the deep structure of *Ardhanareswari*. Space becomes an active participant in shaping meaning, further affirming that the dance operates as an embodied cosmology.

Integration of Aesthetic, Ritual, and Cosmological Meaning

The *Bedhaya Tirta* dance presents a harmonious integration of aesthetic, ritual, and cosmological dimensions; these three layers interlock to form a unified semiotic structure. In Balinese and Javanese performance traditions, aesthetics is never detached from religious function or cosmological worldview (Bandem & deBoer, 1995: 18; Soedarsono, 1976: 14). Aesthetically, the soft gestures, slow tempo, green costumes, and circular floor patterns produce a visual atmosphere symbolizing water, fertility, and harmony. This aesthetic dimension follows symbolic logic, functioning as the iconization of cosmological qualities inherent in the *Ardhanareswari* symbol (Zimmer, 1946: 56). Thus, aesthetics serves as the initial layer guiding the audience into deeper realms of meaning. Ritually, the dance operates as a cosmological enactment. The presence of the priest, mantra, incense, bells, and sacred objects forms an indexical system that evokes the sacred (Turner, 1969: 110). The merging of sacred waters in *solanugrah* follows a ritual logic that is autonomous and action-based (Staal, 1979: 303), constituting its core performative energy. On the cosmological layer, *Ardhanareswari* acts as the structural core organizing icons and indexes. The union of *purusa* and *pradhana* manifests through objects, actions, spatial structure, and dynamics designed to reenact the cosmogonic process (Kramrisch, 1976: 43). Furthermore, as highlighted in the author's earlier study (Mariasa, 2025), this integration demonstrates that ritual dance can mediate between human corporeality and cosmic order, offering a form of communication that transcends the observable world.

Ultimately, these three dimensions converge into a unified system of meaning: Aesthetics envelops symbolism, ritual energizes it, and cosmology grounds it. In this sense, *Bedhaya Tirta* functions as an embodied cosmology, where the body and ritual space materialize the structure of the universe (Schechner, 2002: 30). In Peircean terms, icons and indexes, despite their visual and contextual power, are not autonomous; they converge toward the symbol as the deepest layer of meaning (Nöth, 1990: 45). Therefore, *Bedhaya Tirta* must be understood as a multilayered sign system in which bodily aesthetics, ritual action, and cosmic structure merge into a single performative unity. This analysis definitively confirms that *Ardhanareswari* occupies the position of deep structure, orchestrating and giving coherence to all aspects of the performance.

Theoretical Implication: A Triadic Semiotic Model for Ritual Dance

The triadic semiotic structure identified in the *Bedhaya Tirta* ritual dance generates a significant theoretical implication concerning the contextual application of Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of signs. This study does not alter Peirce's original definitions: icons signify through resemblance, indexes through causal connection, and symbols through convention. Rather, the finding proposes an operational re-interpretation that emerges naturally within the domain of ritual dance analysis. The finding reveals that Peirce's categories, when applied to sacred performance, manifest as three distinct yet interrelated ontological layers of meaning. Within the *Bedhaya Tirta* context, Symbols function as the conceptual deep structure (*Ardhanareswari*); Icons emerge as visual forms (*wujud*), such as costumes and ritual objects; and Indexes appear as ritual actions (*aksi*), such as mantra chanting and the manipulation of movement. This stratification affirms that each Peircean category represents a separate layer of meaning within the performative hierarchy.

This is the proposed model: Symbol-concept, Icon=form, Index=action. The model does not redefine Peirce's categories; rather, it interprets how each category operates within the epistemological and performative logic of ritual dance. The model offers a refined analytical tool that expands Peirce's semiotics into the field of sacred performance. It strongly demonstrates how cosmological symbolism governs the visual (form) and the enactment (action) layers of meaning within ritual choreography. This discovery constitutes the central contribution of the thesis in providing the necessary framework to understand the hierarchical interdependency of semiotic signs in the context of ritual performance.

CONCLUSION

This study definitively demonstrates that the deepest meaning of *Bedhaya Tirta* lies in the complex interplay of Icon (form), Index (activity), and Symbol (concept), with *Ardhanareswari* as the principal cosmological symbol structuring the entire semiotic system. Icons, expressed through visual forms such as the dancers in green costumes, circular formations, and ritual objects, reinforce meanings of fertility and cosmic feminine. Indexes, embodied through ritual activities such as the process of merging the sacred *kakuluh* and *kendil* waters and the dance movements, mediate between Icons and Symbols, activating sacred energies that anchor the performance within an operative ritual context.

The spatial arrangement, directional orientation, and dramaturgical flow reveal that *Bedhaya Tirta* is constructed as a cosmological space where aesthetics, ritual, and cosmology form an inseparable triad: aesthetics discloses symbolic meaning, ritual enacts it, and cosmology provides the ontological foundation. This conclusion affirms that a Peircean semiotic approach enables an understanding that transcends mere observation, simultaneously confirming the triadic model discovered by this research (Symbol-concept, Icon=form, Index-action). *Bedhaya Tirta* functions as a performative manifestation of cosmogony that integrates body, space, and sacred energy, making it a coherent, multilayered sign system.

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