

The Function and Meaning of the Dewa Ruci Statue in the Perspective of Balinese Culture

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ABSTRACT

Statue is one type of fine art that gives an aesthetic experience through its three-dimensional form. Ruci or Nawa Ruci is a manifestation of God, Ida Sang Hyang Widhi, in a form that is one and absolute. The Ruci statue shows physical beauty and complete structure, where each figure connects and supports the others in its overall composition. The statue has several functions, such as sacred function, ritual or ceremony function, and religious-aesthetic function. The Ruci statue also symbolizes a snake or dragon in the ocean waves, describing the many bonds and challenges of human life in the real world that always move uncertainly. Bhima is shown as the microcosmos or as a human being who is searching for his true self. Ruci or Acintya in the statue represents the sense of “self” that exists in every human. Therefore, the real meaning of the Ruci statue is the dialogue between the human soul (*atma*) and the highest soul (*paramatma*) in the process of finding the true essence.

KEYWORDS

Dewa Ruci Statue,
Balinese culture,
sacred



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Balinese Art Development and Its Hindu Cultural Background

Bali, one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia, has characteristics of art and culture that are very interesting. Because of that, Bali is still attractive for foreign tourists to visit, to see the unity of cultural aesthetics that is inspired by one main frame, which is the religion of Hinduism. Based on that, Bali becomes famous with many nicknames like the Island of Gods, Island of a Thousand Temples, and many others. In Bali, the relationship of Hindu religion and art cannot be separated as it can grow deeply inside of society in many fields, especially in sculpture, gamelan, painting, dance, decorative art, statue art and others [1].

This is strengthened again by I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa [2] who said that Balinese art or the cultural art of the Bali-Hindu people that lives and moves until now is basically a child or a small branch from the Hindu religion in Bali. Art and religion have a very close connection and usually cannot be separated from each other. Strictly speaking, if the Hindu religion in Bali becomes extinct from this island, then it cannot be denied that Balinese-Hindu arts including literature, singing, dance, carving, fine arts, painting, and musical sounds will also disappear. On the other hand, if Balinese-Hindu art disappears,

maybe the Bali-Hindu religion will also fade away. Even though what was said by I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa is not fully proven in empirical reality, but normatively it still has reason, in the sense that he worried about the “extinction of Hindu art tradition.” The concept of creating art in Balinese society is closely related with Hindu values that often appear in the artworks.

The beauty of Bali can include aspects mentioned by The Liang Gie [3] which are artistic beauty, natural beauty, moral beauty, and intellectual beauty. The last two types of beauty relate to aesthetic rules that come from Hindu religion. Moral beauty relates to the attitude and behavior of Balinese people based on Hindu teachings, and intellectual beauty is reflected in the meaning and ideas contained in every artwork. Aesthetics is an important element in human life. It moves humans toward constructive actions in many areas of life, such as toward the feeling of *jengah* which is based on Rajasika and Satwika [1].

The basis of Rajasika and Satwika becomes the foundation that connects beauty with the essence of Hindu religion as the “soul” of artworks that appear and grow in Bali. Balinese art has developed very rapidly, creating new artistic creativity that tries to beautify Bali itself. One form of art that beautifies the city space or road in Bali is statue art. This statue art is included in sculpture, which includes statues and reliefs [4]. According to Murdowo [5], the island of Bali is full of carvings and statues; in palaces, temples, on the roadside and intersections there are always statues carved beautifully with special style characteristics of Balinese sculpture. Statues that decorate corners of the city or road intersections, like the Caturmuka statue in the center of Denpasar, Kala Rau Statue in Gianyar, Pemuteran Mandara Giri Statue in Gianyar, Dewa Indra Guarding Tirta Suci in Gianyar, and so on. These statues take their inspiration from Hindu mythology.

Also interesting to notice is the Dewa Ruci Statue located at the intersection of the Nusa Dua-Tanah Lot arterial road. The creation of the Dewa Ruci statue is a transformation from Old Javanese literary texts especially. But in its development in the field, there is improvisation in the statue’s form. The presence of the character Bhima here becomes something interesting to study, both materially and conceptually. Materially means the physical aesthetic aspects that can be seen by the eyes, while conceptually means the implied values contained inside the Dewa Ruci Statue. As a visual concept from a religious teaching, the Dewa Ruci/Nawa Ruci Statue is full of meanings about life and living.

Concept of the Dewa Ruci Statue

According to William Gaunt, statue is “sculpture” (English) that comes from the Latin word *sculpsit*, *sculptilis* which means statue or image [6]. A statue is a visual art that

expresses artistic experience through three-dimensional forms. Even though some statues can also have practical functions, generally statue art is three dimensional, so it really exists in space. Because of that, in statue art there is no perspective problem like in painting, which sometimes wants to create the impression of depth (the third dimension) on a flat surface. The essence of statue art is art that is three dimensional, which is the organization of mass, object or volume, contour, dark and bright areas, and also texture.

Statue art in Bali can be classified into two parts. The first is *arca*, which is a statue used in religious ceremonies and has been purified through ritual process. The second is statue art that is not used for religious purpose and does not go through ceremony. These statues are only used as decoration [4]. Manifestation statues in religious context in Bali are also called *pretima*, made from stone, earth, wood, or metals like silver, gold, and bronze. Pretima is a painting, statue, or special image that represents a god or ancestors. Usually it is placed in one of the shrines inside the temple and functions like a manifestation statue, its shape resembling human or animal and made from metal or wood [4]. So in the context of Balinese culture that breathes Hindu religion, the concepts of sacred and profane are two areas that always appear in Balinese society life. These two concepts place cultural products including statue art into such two groups. The Dewa Ruci Statue stands in between these two areas, so its presence once caused polemic between sacredness and profane nature.

Dewa Ruci/Nawa Ruci is the manifestation of God Almighty or Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa in a single form. The concept of Dewa Ruci can be understood through the journey of Bhima in searching for Tirtha Amerta, from heaven to the middle of the ocean.

Structure of the Statue Form

The Dewa Ruci Statue physically has an aesthetic appearance. Seen from the structure of the form and the composition of its placement, the Dewa Ruci Statue is a complete group statue, where one figure and the other look united, especially because it is placed in a very strategic location, which is at the intersection of Nusa Dua-Tanah Lot road, Nusa Dua-Denpasar City Center, and Sanur-Kuta, which becomes a traffic center for foreign and domestic tourists. The Dewa Ruci Statue consists of four main figures, so structurally it follows the socio-cosmic ethics that apply, which are: at the very top is placed the figure of Dewa Ruci/Nawa Ruci, who is identified with Acintya, in a position of observing the actions of Bhima fighting against Naga Nemburnawa/Naga Baruna. Below Dewa Ruci is placed the figure of Bhima in a position being wrapped by the angry Naga Nemburnawa/Naga Baruna, because Bhima insists to enter the South Ocean. Bhima, in a stable horse-stance position, stands strong while opening the mouth of the Naga. Below Bhima (almost on the same level) is the figure of Naga Nemburnawa/Naga Baruna trying to defeat Bhima by wrapping Bhima's whole body while spraying deadly

poison, and at the lowest part is placed the figure of the water waves (ocean waves) with a fountain pool that describes the noisy atmosphere of the South Ocean when the fight between Bhima and Naga Nemburnawa/Naga Baruna happened.

Structurally, the appearance of the Dewa Ruci Statue shows its beauty aspect from every point of view, based on the unity and interconnection between one figure and the other in forming a unity of meaning and aesthetic unity of the statue. The unity of meaning lies in how the storyline concept is woven into this statue's aesthetics, which not only considers the philosophical aspect but also the ethical aspect, so the structure of the Dewa Ruci Statue shows order in philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics.

Function of the Dewa Ruci Statue

The Dewa Ruci Statue, as an artwork and cultural product that carries the spirit of Hindu religion, can survive only if functionally it becomes a part of the cultural life of Balinese Hindu society. It has several functions, which are: the sacred function, the ritual/ceremonial function, the religious-aesthetic function, and the secular function.

a. Sacred Function

Ramseyer [7] explains that sacred art is basically a part of cultural tradition heritage that includes various kinds of art which are considered sacred and/or believed to have spiritual power by the community that supports it. In the Balinese cultural environment, sacred art has a very important function in the spiritual life of Hindu-Balinese society [8]. This sacred function is related with the life of Balinese people that breathes the Hindu religion. As long as the position of cultural arts is still strong in family and community life in Bali, and as long as ceremonies from birth until death are still solid, then art and culture will always live and be close to the people. This is something rare in other countries. Even the modern world is now moving toward giving more attention to socializing and preserving cultural heritages, especially in the development of science and technology that is experiencing globalization [1].

b. Ritual/Ceremonial Function

According to Widia [4], since prehistoric times, starting from the most simple forms, statues were already used as symbols of ancestor spirits or as media of worship. Because of that, many simple statues from the megalithic period were found in sacred places such as in temples. Since these *arca* were believed to have magical and religious power, until now they are still respected and considered sacred according to Balinese belief.

The creation of other simple statues was also based on the concept of magical protective power, placed in certain locations because they have the nature of protecting, so fertility can be achieved and harvest can increase. Guardian statues

(Dwarapala) with frightening appearance function to protect the holiness of a sacred place. The ideas that appeared at that time were about powers beyond human ability, so statues emerged as symbolic media [9].

In Balinese custom and Hindu religion, *pratima* are *pralina*, meaning they are burned and then the ashes are thrown into the sea. In this case, Balinese people consider that something damaged becomes *leteh* (impure), and must be returned to its origin.

A symbol is believed to be sacred by Balinese society only if it goes through initiation with Hindu ceremonies, such as *mulang dasar*, *pemakuh*, *pengurip-urip*, *mulang pedagingan*, *pemelaspas*, *pasupati*, and *piodalan*. If it does not go through ceremonial process, then the artwork, even if it has symbolic form, will not be considered sacred. For example, statues of gods, giant statues, and others displayed in Batubulan, Singapadu, Silakarang, and other places are not sacred. But if they are moved to a temple and initiated with complete religious ceremony, their status will change to sacred.

Likewise, the Dewa Ruci Statue at the Simpang Siur arterial road in Kuta is not considered sacred, even though it contains several symbols such as Acintya symbol identified with Dewa Ruci/Nawa Ruci, because this statue did not go through initiation or sacralization ceremony.

c. Religious Aesthetic Function

In Hindu society in general, and especially in Bali, Hindu people communicate with Ida Sang Hyang Widhi or God not only through spiritual connection but also through certain media. This is the universal nature of human life, as beings who use symbols (*animal symbolicum*) as tools of communication. The media used as communication tools by Hindus in Bali include statues or *arca* which, in mythology, are always connected with the manifestations of God. The inability of humans to connect directly with God through inner spirituality creates another way to reach the divine realm. These ways are through creating offerings or rituals from various materials (*banten* in Bali), where religious emotion of humans becomes focused through the symbol of *banten*.

Besides that, ritual arts also support the communication system between humans and God, especially through creating manifestation forms like statues (*arca*, *pretima*, and others). In such forms there are implied or integrated elements of religious emotion, ethics, truth, aesthetics, and philosophy that become the strength of a symbol. It is the embodiment of human thought as part of the power of the Great Divine, God Almighty. These symbols are the result of human creation and spiritual appreciation toward the presence of divine power that resides in the inner aesthetics of humans (the worshippers).

Such religious symbols in Hindu Balinese society are very sacred, because they are passed down through traditions taught to the community in many kinds of media, both in artistic media and others. Artistic media that receive religious acknowledgment are called sacred arts, and because they are called sacred, the attributes they carry follow their sacred nature. Meanwhile, arts that do not receive religious recognition or confirmation are called profane or secular arts. According to I Wayan Dibia, in understanding an artwork that is related to religion (religious aesthetic), which is also called sacred art, we cannot leave the Hindu (Balinese) way of thinking [8]. The concept of art in the mind of Hindu people, especially in Bali, is very connected with the nature of God's greatness that consists of three important elements: Satyam (truth), Siwam (goodness/purity), and Sundaram (beauty). Viewing art based on this formulation shows that Balinese arts, especially ritual arts, contain beauty (sundaram), true divinity (satyam), purity (siwam), and at the same time truth (satyam).

d. Secular Function

Statue art, especially in Bali, as a cultural product inspired by Hindu religion, besides having religious function, can also have secular function. The dichotomy between secular and sacred is basically a level of human appreciation, not only in relation with other humans, but also in relation vertically, meaning humans with the Almighty Creator. In physical aesthetic terms, art in principle can satisfy the sensory aspects of humans. Seen from the medium, an artwork has sensuous value and formal value. Sensuous value allows an observer to enjoy or gain satisfaction from sensory characteristics shown by the artwork, for example the colors that appear in a painting [3]. Sensuous value is the secular side of art function in the thinking of the dichotomy between sacred and secular art that develops in Bali.

Meaning of the Dewa Ruci Statue

The Balinese concept of thought called *Rwa Bhineda*, which means two things that are always different or opposite, divides this world into two phatries, such as masculinity (*purusa*) versus femininity (*predana*), day versus night, the upper world (*uranisch*) versus the lower world (*chtonisch*). This concept influences many aspects of Balinese human life [10]. *Rwa Bhineda* is a dualistic concept and in life there are always two opposing categories: good and bad, sacred and profane, upstream and downstream, and so on. The influence in life is dynamic, accepting reality and creating struggle toward the good. *Rwa Bhineda* is the basic potential that exists in the fundamental concepts that build and become the foundation of Balinese culture [1].

Based on the *Rwa Bhineda* concept mentioned above, the analysis of meaning for the characters Bhima/Dewaruci according to Hindu religious concepts has been expressed inside the understanding of sacred art. In Balinese art concept, based on the results of

the Seminar of Sacred and Profane Arts in the field of Dance, held by the Council for Cultural Consideration and Guidance (Listibiya) of Bali Province on March 24-25, 1971, a classification of Balinese dance was established, known as *wali* (sacred religious dance), *bebali* (ceremonial dance), and *balih-balihan* (secular dance). This classification was arranged based on the functions of Balinese dances within the socio-religious aspects of Hindu Balinese society. In line with this decision, sacred art in Balinese culture includes *wali* and *bebali* arts [8].

One of the implied meanings is the religious/philosophical meaning according to Hindu philosophy. If we observe the structure of the Dewaruci statue as a single unity, we will see aspects like ocean waves, the serpent or naga, then the figure of Bhima, and the highest figure which is Dewa Ruci or Acintya. If analyzed based on Hindu religious teaching concepts, the philosophical-religious understanding is as follows: the serpent or naga in the ocean waves represents all the bonds of human life in the real world that constantly shake and disturb human life. Human life is actually on top of the ocean, therefore life is always rolled by the crashing waves that rhythmically appear with speeds that is sometimes gentle and sometimes violent. If individual humans cannot control these waves, then human life will drown. Here is where understanding the essence of *dharma* is needed as a guide in crossing the wide ocean.

Then there is the figure of Bhima, who represents the individual (the microcosm), or the human being who is seeking his true self, wanting to find his “I.” That is why Bhima is shown wrestling with the serpent that coils around his legs, and Bhima is able to grip the neck of the naga very strongly (seen in the expression of Bhima’s face). This means Bhima can control the bonds or obstacles that tie his soul and always tempt him whenever he tries to step forward to search for his true identity. These obstacles appear in many forms, such as the warnings from his family not to follow the order of his teacher (Dhrona), then the waves of the ocean, and finally the serpent or naga itself.

In the *Bhima Swarga* wayang story, the toughness of the character Bhima is implied; only Bhima is able to bring his brothers and his mother to Heaven. As the son of Batara Bayu (prana) or breath, Bhima represents the strength of the human soul or the macrocosmos. Bhima is the ray or part of something higher, which is Ida Sanghyang Widhi.

The presence of Dewa Ruci/Acintya in the statue represents the power of the “self” that exists in every human being. Therefore, the phenomenon of the Dewa Ruci Statue is actually an event of dialogue between the human soul (*atma*) and the highest soul (*paramatma*) in the process of finding the true essence. Here, humans are always seen to be on two opposing sides: on one side, they are tied to life (*tresna*), the worldly life that they live in this material world. Human life is always tempted by external forces that can blind the inner eye, making it seem like worldly pleasures are what life is truly

about. But on the other side, humans also think about life after death; because of that, humans try to practice and follow the religious teachings (*dharma*) as a step toward enlightenment of the conscience.

This is done to reach the achievement of true human essence, which is real and eternal. In the Dewa Ruci Statue, there is an implied effort of humans to continuously create dialogue with the Almighty Creator, by releasing the attachments to material forces that bind the human soul. By understanding the essence of one's true self, indirectly we can understand the meaning of the Dewa Ruci Statue at the philosophical-religious level.

Conclusion

The Dewa Ruci Statue will be given function by Balinese society based on Balinese cultural principles which recognize the concept of *Rwa Bhineda*, meaning there is a sacred function and of course there is also a secular function. The sacred function includes its role in relation to Hindu (Balinese) religious rituals and the religious-aesthetic function related to Hindu aesthetic principles, which are *satyam*, *siwam*, and *sundaram*. This function needs aesthetic contemplation according to those three categories. Meanwhile, the secular function is related to how the Dewa Ruci Statue can beautify the city, increase tourist attraction, and make Bali even more interesting for visitors.

The meaning of the Dewa Ruci Statue can be seen based on the views or concepts that are contained in Hindu teachings. This interpretation is comprehensive and whole as part of the larger and more complex Balinese cultural system. The complexity of this cultural system also gives different colors to every message that appears in artworks such as the figures Bhima/Dewa Ruci. The presence of the Dewa Ruci Statue has given sensory enjoyment to humans who see it, whether through observation or vision, feeling, touch, and so on. The message related to Hindu philosophy, which is symbolic, conceptual, and philosophical in nature, can be seen through the expression of Bhima's strength in dialogue with Dewa Ruci—symbolically, conceptually, and philosophically as a reflection of the dialogue between the soul and *paramatma* (microcosmos and macrocosmos), as the path of searching for human true self for the achievement of the final goal, which is *Moksa*.

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