



“Rejang Ilud, the Sacred Dance of Empowerment and Symbolism”

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ABSTRACT

Bali is known for having numerous centers of classical art, but since the 1970s, the artistic focal point of the island has been Gianyar Regency. The 1970s marked Bali's shift toward culture-based tourism, making tourists more aware of the rich artistic heritage in Gianyar. The sacred Rejang Ilud dance, which accompanied Hindu ceremonies, was once prevalent in this village. However, over the past 15 years, it has been supplanted by the Rejang Dewa dance, a common occurrence with Rejang dances across Bali. Rejang Ilud dance represents a synthesis of various communication elements, including movement as the dance choreography, sound and language as the accompanying music, and appearance as the makeup and costume—a reality shaped by complementary forms. The understanding of the diverse communication elements found in dance goes beyond rational comprehension; the sharpness of perception is vital in capturing the true essence. Recently recognized by the government as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTH) in 2021, the Rejang Ilud Dance in the village of Buahon, Payangan District, Gianyar, features a distinctive move called Ngilud. This motion involves the palm seemingly grasping something and moving from the inside to the outside. The presence of the ngilud movement can be associated with *bodhyagiri mudrā*, a hand gesture symbolizing the act of grasping. The awareness of women regarding their role can potentially impede or rectify the hastening of the era of destruction (*kaliyuga*). Hinduism itself teaches that the destruction of the world is significantly influenced by the Sakti community.

Keywords: Bali, Dance, Rejang Ilud, Symbol.

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INTRODUCTION

Bali is known for having numerous centers of classical art, but since the 1970s, the artistic focal point of the island has been Gianyar Regency. The 1970s marked Bali's shift toward culture-based tourism, making tourists more aware of the rich artistic heritage in Gianyar. By the early 1990s, the regency solidified its status as the City of Art. Gianyar, known as the art city, hosts a wealth of classical and contemporary art. However, the rise and fall of different art forms in tourist areas are influenced by tourists' preferences, and this dynamic is shaped by evolving aesthetic aspects within individuals over time. The aesthetic sense of individuals tends to change based on their empirical experiences. What was once perceived as beautiful may undergo gradation when exposed to new forms that resonate with evolving aesthetic sensibilities. This decline in certain art forms due to changing human aesthetic preferences is also observed in the village of Buahon, Payangan District. The sacred

Rejang Ilud dance, which accompanied Hindu ceremonies, was once prevalent in this village. However, over the past 15 years, it has been supplanted by the *Rejang Dewa* dance, a common occurrence with Rejang dances across Bali. Rejang dances are integral to Hindu ceremonies in Bali, symbolizing the descent of *widyadari* from the celestial realm to guide *Ida Bhatarā* during ceremonies like *Melasti* or *Tedun ring Peselang*. The decline of Rejang Ilud in Buahon is part of a broader pattern observed in various regions of Bali.

Rejang Ilud in Buahon, Payangan District, Gianyar, was recently recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021. Initially a sacred dance for religious ceremonies in Buahon, Rejang Ilud disappeared for nearly 15 years, replaced by the Rejang Dewa dance. Efforts have been made to reconstruct and preserve this cultural heritage. Notably, Rejang Ilud stands out from other Rejang dances with its unique *Ngilud* movement. This distinctive palm movement, resembling a grip from the inside out, is reminiscent

of the *bodhyagiri mudra*, symbolizing the firmness of knowledge or consciousness. *Ngilud* is interpreted as a concentration of *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi's* power in bestowing blessings, symbolized by the *ngayab* movement called *vara mudra*, which involves presenting offerings. The symbolic significance of Rejang Ilud aligns with other Rejang dances, but the *Ngilud* movement emphasizes the empowering role of women in human life. Women are seen not only as providers of purity, as reflected in the *ngayab* movement, but also as capable of decisively warding off dangers and disasters through their power as *shakti*, showcased in the combination of the *ngayab* movement, hip-swaying, and the straightening of hands known as *abhāya mudra*, a gesture symbolizing repelling danger.

Historical Background of Rejang Ilud Dance

In the bygone era of Buahon village, the Rejang Ilud dance, a sacred performance accompanying various Hindu ceremonies,

flourished. However, for nearly the last 15 years, this dance form yielded its place to the Rejang Dewa dance, a pattern observed in Rejang dances across Bali. Rejang dance is a customary element in every sacred Hindu ceremony in Bali. According to the *Usana Bali* manuscript, Rejang symbolizes the *widyadari* descending from the celestial realms to the earthly realm, guiding Ida Bhatara during ceremonies like *Melasti* or *Tedun ring Peselang*. As per the narrative in *Usana Bali*, after Bhatara Indra triumphed over the Balinese king Mayadenawa in battle, all the gods convened at Manukraya to meet Bhatara Indra. Bhatara Indra then established four heavenly realms in Kedisian, Tihingan, Manukraya, and Keluhuran.^{1,2} Post-construction, the gods celebrated at Manukraya, with the Widyadari performing the Rejang dance, Widyadara executing the baris dance, and the Gendarwa assuming roles as percussionists, playing the flute, rebab, and selonding. This marked the tradition that whenever there's an odalan or temple ceremony, performances of Rejang, Baris Gede, and Pendet are obligatory. Among the diverse Rejang dances in Bali, Rejang Ilud in Buahan village, Payangan, Gianyar, stands out as a unique form with distinctive features not found in various regions of Bali.³

Two intriguing elements distinguish Rejang Ilud from other Bali Rejang dances. The dance incorporates a distinctive movement called *ngilud*, where the hand's palm seems to grasp something and is moved from the inside to the outside. Typically, Rejang dances involve the *ngayab* movement, opening the palms in a specific direction. The *ngayab* movement is also present in Rejang Ilud. The *ngilud* movement can be associated with the "bodhyagiri mudrā," a hand gesture symbolizing the steadfastness of knowledge or consciousness. The *ngilud* movement can be interpreted as a symbol of concentrating the power of Ida Sang Hyang Widhi in bestowing blessings, symbolized by the *ngayab* movement known as "vara mudrā" (gesture of giving blessings) and presenting offerings. Another distinctive aspect is observed in the accompanying music (*tabuh*). While typical Balinese dances follow the rhythm of the percussion, Rejang Ilud operates in a contrasting manner.^{4,5}



Figure 1.⁶ The dance incorporates a distinctive movement called *ngilud*, where the hand's palm seems to grasp something and is moved from the inside to the outside.

Symbolic Meaning of Rejang Ilud Dance

In general, the Rejang Ilud dance is not different from other Rejang dances. However, the presence of the *ngilud* movement strengthens the role of women as a powerful force in human life. Women can not only offer contributions to the sanctity of a region, as reflected in the *ngayab* movement, but they can also take decisive action to repel various dangers and disasters with their power as a force, demonstrated by the combination of *ngayab* movement and hip-swaying movements, as well as the straightening of their hands, known as *abhāya mudrā* (a gesture to ward off danger).⁷

The unparalleled nature of the Rejang Ilud dance gives it a strategic role in elevating the dignity and status of the community in the Buahan village in the era of globalization. Another strategic role lies in the educational aspect. This dance can be used as a learning medium for women regarding their role as a powerful force. If women are aware of their role, the acceleration of the era of destruction (*kaliyuga*) can be hindered or even rectified. Because Hinduism itself teaches that the destruction of this world is significantly determined by these powerful forces. The symbolic meaning embedded in the Rejang Ilud Dance lies in the *ngilud* movement, which reinforces the role of women as a divine force in human life.⁸

Women not only have the ability to offer

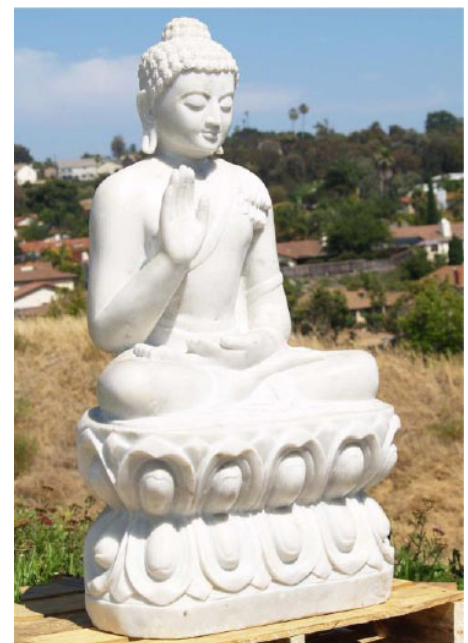


Figure 2.⁹ Buddha Statue with Abhaya Mudra pose.

contributions to the sanctity of a region, as reflected in the *ngayab* movement, but they can also take decisive action to repel various dangers and disasters with their divine power. This is demonstrated through the combination of *ngayab* and hip-swaying movements, as well as the straightening of hands, known as *abhāya mudrā* (gesture to ward off danger).

The Dance's Stages

The initial stage or opening of the Rejang Ilud dance begins with the movement of joining the two thumbs, right and left,



Figure 3.¹² This dance movement indicates the willingness of the dancer to surrender and purify oneself as the primary offering to God, allowing the great natural power to be internalized.

and the other fingers are brought together, forming a triangle. This movement is called Yoni mudrā, signifying the manifestation of divine power within the dancer, awakening self-preparedness to perform this dance as a form of the dancer's primary self-offering. Placing Yoni mudrā at the beginning of this movement is expected to invoke the power of God, in this case, as a manifestation of the divine force (*Pradana/Acetana*), indicating the dancer's readiness to perform.¹⁰

The initial stage consists of two main movements: *manglot* and *ngilud*. The *manglot* movement is synonymous with *vitarka mudrā*, signifying the emergence of self-awareness and learning, leading to spiritual consciousness about one's own strength to counteract the negative forces within. On the other hand, the *ngilud* movement is a *bodhyagiri mudrā* movement, resembling holding something as a symbol of the firmness of consciousness, knowledge, and power, becoming more unified within the dancer. This movement is accompanied by the rotation of the hands clockwise, called *Purwa Daksina*, symbolizing purification and the power of creation.

Other movements in this first stage are also combined with the straightening of the left hand and raising the palm upwards, which is identical to the *abhaya mudrā* movement, a symbol of warding off danger. This can be observed as the hand

movements occasionally shift to the center, in front of the chest, representing the core movement of this mudra. This mudra symbolizes how humans can continually reject all negative influences from external sources. For women, their energy center is more on the left side due to the concept of *Purusa-Pradana*, where *Pradana's* power dominates the left side, centered on the power of the earth.¹¹

On the second stage, The dancer demonstrates the *ngilud* movement in front of the chest, with the left hand crossing in front of the chest. This movement is identical to the *vajrahunkara mudrā* movement, where the hand crosses in front of the chest as if holding a vajra. This stance signifies the concentration of energy within, subsequently used for self-protection and guarding oneself against negative forces. The rotation of the vajra is combined with the *ngilut* movement in the *Purwa Daksina* direction, symbolizing purification. Therefore, the combination of *vajrahunkara mudrā* with *ngilut murwa daksina* means self-protection not through the power of weapons but through surrender and purity to focus human energy.

This dance movement indicates the willingness of the dancer to surrender and purify oneself as the primary offering to God, allowing the great natural power to be internalized. *Rejang Ilud*, up to this stage, does not demonstrate the movements of *Widyadari* as shown in the general *Rejang*

dance, such as stretching the arms and playing with a scarf and showing *sevana mudrā*, a hand movement as if providing service. The dominant movements shown by *Rejang Ilud* emphasize the concentration and unity of personal and natural forces for purification and the bestowal of God's grace.

The third stage consists of three main movements: *manglot* combined with *ngilut* while hip-swaying (*nungked bangkiang*), *manglot* combined with *ngilut* while straightening the hand, and the last movement is the movement of covering the hands on the chest. The first two types of movements have forms, types, and meanings of mudra movements, as explained earlier. However, the transition of movements from *ngilud* with *nungked* indicates a change in position. When *ngilud* with *nungked* occurs, it shows the dancer in a position of consciousness positioned as *Daivastana* (divine being), as indicated by the higher *ngilud* movement, signifying the establishment of God's power as *Sakti*.

Nungked itself symbolizes in this position that humans must always respect the commands and guidance of God, creating a vertical relationship between God and humans. On the other hand, when *ngilud* without *nungked* occurs, it indicates a change in position to *Manavastana* (human being), meaning self-awareness as a human causing the true essence of the true human (*Atman*) to be enveloped by *Maya*, causing human darkness of mind (*avidya*). In this position, humans must be aware of themselves to return to true essence, namely by manifesting the power of God within to regain the position of *Daivastana*. This movement indicates a horizontal relationship among fellow humans. If these movements are combined, the addition sign will be formed, symbolizing the *Swastika*, a symbol of life. Therefore, the movements in this stage indicate human efforts to achieve a balance in life between humans and God, fellow humans, and the environment. The movements in this stage end with the *Añjali mudrā* movement, a gesture of respect, signifying that after achieving this balance, it must be based on sincere worship and devotion. Sincere worship and devotion are the basis of the

teachings of Bhakti and Karma Marga.¹³

On the fourth stage, movements in this stage consist of three core movements: ngayab combined with hip-swaying (nungked), ngayab combined with straightening the hand, and the Añjali mudrā movement. The core of the ngayab movement is identical to the sevana/naivedya mudrā movement, a gesture of offering that symbolizes sincerity in presenting offerings, both offerings and worship to God and respect for fellow humans and the environment. This ngayab movement is also identical to varamudrā, a hand movement giving grace. Therefore, this movement shows the activity of giving grace from God that we receive to humans. Since the function of ngayab is in line with the context of ceremonies and rituals, it involves presenting offerings to God, and after being presented, the grace from God is then accepted by humans.

Based on these five stages of Rejang Ilud dance movements, it forms a series of mudra movements that indicate the concentration of Sakti power to turn the wheel of life and the process of self-purification to achieve consciousness and freedom from avidya. After that, with sincerity and surrender, this body is used as a means of bhakti and karma to realize the harmony of human life with God, fellow humans, and the environment. Rejang, synonymous with the movements of Widyadari guiding Ida Bhatara in ceremonies, seems to have a different symbol, namely manifesting the power of God within the dancer himself to spread the positive vibration of God in the ceremony venue. Therefore, the existence of Rejang Ilud, in terms of meaning and the essence of this dance movement, has a higher quality, although it is simple in motion and appearance.^{14,15,16}

CONCLUSION

Rejang Ilud dance represents a synthesis of various communication elements, including movement as the dance choreography, sound and language as the accompanying music, and appearance as the makeup and costume—a reality shaped by complementary forms. The understanding of the diverse communication elements found in dance goes beyond rational comprehension; the sharpness of perception is vital in capturing the true essence. Recently recognized by the government as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTH) in 2021, the Rejang Ilud Dance in the village of Buahan, Payangan District, Gianyar, features a distinctive move called Ngilud. This motion involves the palm seemingly grasping something and moving from the inside to the outside. The presence of the ngilud movement can be associated with bodhyagiri mudrā, a hand gesture symbolizing the act of grasping. This dance can serve as an educational medium for women to understand their role as sakti. The awareness of women regarding their role can potentially impede or rectify the hastening of the era of destruction (kaliyuga). Hinduism itself teaches that the destruction of the world is significantly influenced by the Sakti community.

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