

Culture as an Expression of The Practice of Hindu Religion

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ABSTRACT: Hindu culture in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, reflects a deep interconnection between religious teachings and cultural expression rooted in the Vedic scriptures. This study explores how Hindu religious values, such as dharma, śraddhā, bhakti, critical thinking, diligence, and honesty, shape and animate various forms of cultural practices, including ritual arts, literary traditions, music, dance, architecture, and communal activities. Using a descriptive-analytical qualitative method grounded in literature review, this research examines primary Hindu texts, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Sarasamuscaya, and Bhagavad Gita, alongside academic works by Koentjaraningrat, Titib, and other scholars to uncover the philosophical foundations underlying Hindu cultural development. The results indicate that culture in Hinduism is not merely aesthetic but constitutes a living manifestation of sacred values that guide individuals and communities toward harmony, wisdom, and spiritual awareness. Cultural practices such as ngayah, yadnya, melasti, and sacred dances like Rejang Dewa exemplify how rituals function as vehicles for internalizing religious teachings and reinforcing communal cohesion. The study also highlights the moral responsibilities of Hindus in cultivating critical thinking (viveka), hard work (karma yoga), and fairness (satya), which are regarded as essential virtues for sustaining ethical behavior and spiritual growth. These values demonstrate that Hinduism encourages reflective reasoning, disciplined action, and truthful conduct as integral components of living dharma. Furthermore, the findings affirm that Hindu culture operates as a dynamic bridge between the seen (sekala) and unseen (niskala) realms, embodying cosmological principles and reinforcing the unity of Brahman in all existence. By integrating Vedic wisdom into artistic and social practices, Hindu communities in Bali maintain cultural continuity while adapting to contemporary challenges. Overall, this study underscores the vital role of culture as a transformative medium for transmitting ethical, philosophical, and spiritual principles, thereby contributing to the preservation and revitalization of Hindu identity in modern society

KEYWORDS: Balinese Hinduism, Cultural expression, Dharma, Hindu culture, Vedic teachings.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a reflection of the thoughts, values, and beliefs upheld by a society. In the context of the Hindu community, culture cannot be separated from the religious teachings rooted in the sacred scriptures of the Vedas. The Vedas, as divine revelations from Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (God), provide spiritual guidance as well as the foundation for the formation of a rich and diverse culture. Vedic teachings not only guide Hindus in their religious life but also inspire various cultural expressions such as dance, music, literature, visual arts, and performing arts, all of which flourish particularly in Bali as the center of Hindu culture in Indonesia. Expressions within the Vedas emphasize the importance of culture as a means to guide humanity toward truth, virtue, wisdom, prosperity, and both material and spiritual well-being. Through culture, Hindus are able to embody noble values that help prevent wrongdoing, advance knowledge, and create a harmonious life. Balinese Hindu arts and culture, for instance, are tangible expressions of deep spiritual experiences and strong religious practices, serving as media for conveying sacred Vedic teachings adapted to the local context.

According to Koentjaraningrat, culture is a system of ideas, feelings, actions, and human works within social life that is passed down through learning. This definition provides the basis for understanding that Hindu culture is the result of codification and internalization of Vedic teachings that permeate various aspects of Hindu life (Koentjaraningrat, *Introduction to Anthropology*). In this sense, culture is not only an aesthetic expression but also a manifestation of the implementation of religious values that are eternal and universal. Beyond the artistic aspects, Hindu teachings also emphasize the importance of critical thinking, hard work, and honesty as foundations of moral and ethical behavior. Scriptures such as the *Sarasamuscaya* and *Wrehaspati Tattwa* underline the significance of wisdom, mental discipline, and the ability to discern right from wrong. These values align with Vedic principles that uphold diligence and integrity in all aspects of life. Rahmawati and Sadiana (2024) demonstrate that Hindu values play a major role in shaping character, morality, and legal awareness in modern society, thereby reinforcing the notion that Hindu teachings are not merely ritualistic but are also reflected in everyday conduct.

Therefore, a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the interconnected relationship between Hindu religious teachings and cultural expressions becomes essential in affirming that culture is not merely an aesthetic or artistic product, but a tangible manifestation of lived religious values. Recognizing this relationship enables us to view cultural practices as integral components of spiritual life, where rituals, arts, and social norms operate as vehicles for internalizing and transmitting the ethical, philosophical, and spiritual principles embedded in the Vedas.

Accordingly, this study seeks to thoroughly examine the extent to which Vedic teachings shape, inform, and guide the development of Hindu culture and arts in Indonesia, particularly within the dynamic and culturally rich Hindu communities such as those in Bali. Furthermore, this research aims to explore the moral and intellectual responsibilities of Hindus in applying and embodying the values emphasized in the Vedas, including critical thinking, diligence, integrity, and justice. These values are not only fundamental to personal spiritual growth but also essential for fostering a harmonious, ethical, and meaningful collective life. Through this investigation, the study aspires to highlight how the integration of Vedic wisdom into cultural practices contributes to the preservation, revitalization, and enrichment of Hindu cultural identity in contemporary society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method with a qualitative approach, based on a literature review. The primary data sources include Hindu sacred texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Sarasamuscaya, the Bhagavad Gita, as well as supporting literature such as Koentjaraningrat's works on culture. The analysis is conducted by examining the interrelationship between Hindu religious teachings and culture, particularly in the context of arts, traditions, and ethical life. This study also explores the role of culture in actualizing the noble Hindu values of critical thinking, diligence, and honesty in the daily lives of Hindu communities.

RESULTS

A. Definition and Significance of Culture in Hinduism

In Hindu religious teachings, culture is an integral component rooted in the spiritual values of the *Weda*. Etymologically, the term "budaya" derives from *budhi*, which refers to intelligence and the nobility of thought. From a Hindu perspective, culture is the refined product of elevated thinking intended to create harmony in both individual and communal life. Culture is not merely an aesthetic expression but a medium for internalizing sacred values that guide human beings toward wisdom and spiritual awareness. Koentjaraningrat (2009) defines culture as the entire system of ideas, actions, and human creations within society that are passed down across generations. This definition aligns with the Hindu view that culture encompasses ritual arts, value systems, ethics, and patterns of life grounded in *dharma* (Titib, 2003). Culture does not stand alone; it serves as a vessel for expressing human understanding of sacred teachings and becomes a bridge between the realms of *sekala* and *niskala*.

The *Sarasamuccaya* and *Wrehaspati Tattwa* emphasize the importance of wisdom, mental discipline, and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong as the foundation for a harmonious life. *Manava Dharmasastra* 11.26 further asserts that a family rich in *Weda* knowledge, even if materially poor, is considered noble and honorable. This underscores that the quality of culture in Hinduism is not measured by material wealth but by spiritual depth and adherence to sacred values.

A clear example of the importance of culture in Hinduism can be seen in the Balinese tradition of *ngayah*. *Ngayah* is an act of selfless service undertaken during religious and customary activities, such as preparing offerings, organizing ceremonial arrangements, or maintaining the cleanliness of temples. This tradition is a direct embodiment of *dharma* and reflects the value of *sewa* (sacred service). Through *ngayah*, the community learns discipline, sincerity, cooperation, and reverence for ancestral heritage. Similarly, sacred dances such as *Rejang Dewa* provide strong evidence that Hindu culture is not merely aesthetic but also devotional. This dance is performed only during specific ceremonies as an offering to the deities, embodying the principles of *bhakti*, purity of heart, and harmony between humans and the divine. Without cultural preservation like this, the spiritual values of Hinduism risk losing their contextual and experiential depth.

Thus, Hindu culture is not merely a set of inherited traditions but an expression of spiritual values that enrich the inner and social lives of its followers. Culture becomes a medium for the practice of *dharma*, fostering a life aligned with the will of the Supreme God. It also functions as a means of transmitting sacred values, shaping character, and strengthening social unity within Hindu communities.

B. The Relationship Between Religion as the Core of Culture

Hindu culture in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, stands as a vivid embodiment of the community's religious experiences that permeate every aspect of daily life. This intimate relationship is reflected in the Vedic aphorism *Yad bhāvam tad bhavati*, which teaches that human thought shapes the reality of life and culture. The spiritual essence of culture is further affirmed in *Chandogya Upanishad* III.14.1: *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*, meaning that all elements of existence, including cultural practices, are manifestations of Brahman. In alignment with this view, *Bhagavad Gita* III.9 emphasizes that all actions ought to be performed as an offering (*yajña*), signifying that cultural activities become sacred when grounded in devotion.

Hindu culture, therefore, represents the lived practice of *dharma* through symbols, rituals, and social actions (Titib, 2003). This is rooted in the worldview expressed in *Rigveda* I.164.46: *Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*, the One Truth is spoken in many ways. Consequently, even though Hindu cultural expressions may appear diverse, they all originate from a singular spiritual source, giving them unity in essence despite their outer variety.

1. Culture as a Reinforcement of Faith

Cultural practices such as *yadnya*, *ngayah*, and sacred arts play a pivotal role in strengthening *śraddhā* and *bhakti* within the community. This dynamic is illustrated in *Bhagavad Gita* IX.22, wherein the Lord ensures the well-being of those who remain steadfast in devotion. Through cultural participation, individuals do not merely understand religious teachings intellectually; they experience them emotionally, spiritually, and communally (Bagus, 2002). Ritual movements, offerings, chants, and performances serve as transformative experiences that bind the community to the divine.

2. Harmony of Sekala – Niskala

The concept of *sekala – niskala*, the coexistence of the seen and unseen dimensions is visibly embodied in ceremonies such as *melasti* and *pecaruan*, which aim to purify and harmonize both realms. These rituals align with the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, emphasizing harmony between humans, nature, and God. *Bhagavad Gita* IX.4 reinforces this worldview by stating that the entire universe is permeated by God in an unseen form, affirming the spiritual foundation of all cultural activities.

3. Culture as an Expression of Hindu Teachings

Koentjaraningrat (2009) identifies seven universal elements of culture, which include religion, social organization, knowledge systems, language, arts, livelihood, and technology. In the context of Hinduism in Indonesia, these cultural components become powerful expressions of religious teachings, giving form to spiritual ideas through artistic and communal activities (Titib, 2003). Several artistic and cultural expressions rooted in Hindu values include:

a. Traditional Dance

Classical dances such as *Rejang*, *Sanghyang*, and *Barong* (Bandem & deBoer, 1995) function not merely as performances but as sacred acts connected to ritual obligations and spiritual protection.

b. Vocal Arts

Forms such as *kidung*, *kakawin*, and *Dharma Gita* serve to convey philosophical teachings through poetic recitation, preserving ancient wisdom in melodic form.

c. Literary Arts

Works like *Arjunawiwaha*, *Bharatayuddha*, and *Sutasoma* express moral and philosophical narratives that reinforce ideals of heroism, virtue, and devotion within society.

d. Visual Arts

Architectural and sculptural works, including *candi*, *pura*, and traditional *arca*, serve as tangible embodiments of cosmological principles and devotional symbolism.

e. Musical Arts

Ensembles such as *gamelan*, *gong*, and *gender* provide the rhythmic and melodic foundation for ritual life, reinforcing collective harmony and spiritual atmosphere.

C. Responsibilities of Hindus in Critical Thinking, Hard Work, and Fairness

Hindu teachings position human beings as moral and intellectual entities endowed with the capacity to shape their own destiny through thought, speech, and action. Within this worldview, humans are not merely passive recipients of reality but active creators of it through the dynamic interplay of *manas*, *buddhi*, and *atman*. The *Sarasamuccaya* emphasizes that the mind (*manah*) is the root of all actions; whatever one consistently holds in thought ultimately manifests in behavior, habits, and karmic outcomes. Thus, the

quality of thought becomes fundamental in upholding dharma in everyday life. In this regard, Hindus bear an ethical responsibility to cultivate critical thinking, diligence, and fairness, as these three values are not only social virtues but direct expressions of living the Vedic teachings in practical, embodied ways. By internalizing such values, individuals not only maintain inner harmony but also contribute to a social order grounded in truth, justice, and spiritual awareness.

1. Critical Thinking (Viveka, Yukti, Anumana)

The cultivation of thought is regarded as the foundation of ethical and spiritual life. Before an individual engages in speech or action, the mind (*manas*) serves as the inner source that shapes intention, perception, and moral direction. Thus, the practice of critical thinking is not merely an intellectual exercise but a spiritual discipline that aligns human consciousness with dharma. By developing a discerning and reflective mind, Hindus are encouraged to navigate both worldly challenges and spiritual inquiries with clarity, wisdom, and integrity.

In Hindu philosophy, critical thinking refers not only to intellectual skills but also to the capacity for *Viveka*, the discernment between truth and untruth, the beneficial and the harmful, the real and *maya*. *Viveka* guides individuals to make decisions rooted in wisdom, preventing them from being swayed by ignorance (*avidya*) or emotional impulsiveness. This aligns with the Upanishadic emphasis on knowledge (*jnana*) as the path to liberation.

Titib (2003) affirms that Hinduism encourages the pursuit of truth through *pramana*, especially *anumana* (inference) and *yukti* (rational reasoning). These methods cultivate a reflective mindset rather than blind acceptance, allowing practitioners to evaluate teachings, experiences, and ethical dilemmas through the lens of reason. This demonstrates that Hindu thought inherently values intellectual maturity and analytical depth.

Scholars such as Radhakrishnan (1993) and Sharma (2000) highlight that Upanishadic traditions have long promoted dialectical inquiry, introspection, and logical analysis as pathways to *jnana*. These perspectives show that Hindu intellectual culture is rooted in dialogue, reflection, and philosophical investigation rather than dogmatic obedience. In the modern era, critical thinking remains vital for navigating the complexities of contemporary Hindu society, especially in responding to globalization, ethical dilemmas, and the evolving dynamics of cultural identity.

In Bali, Hindu religious educators often encourage *tattwa*-based discussions, where students are guided to analyze religious concepts instead of merely memorizing them (Suhardana, 2011). Through dialogic learning, they are invited to evaluate scriptural teachings, question philosophical principles, and relate dharma to everyday life. This demonstrates how critical thinking is integrated into religious education as a means to deepen understanding and reinforce spiritual maturity.

In essence, the cultivation of critical thinking represents a vital expression of living according to dharma. It equips Hindus with the intellectual and ethical capacity to discern wisely, act responsibly, and engage meaningfully with the world. By nurturing *viveka*, individuals not only strengthen their personal spirituality but also contribute to the development of a thoughtful, compassionate, and morally conscious society.

2. Hard Work (Karma Yoga, Tapas, Sraddha)

Work ethic in Hindu thought is not merely a practical necessity but a spiritual discipline rooted in dharma. Actions performed with sincerity, self-control, and devotion are believed to purify the mind and elevate one's spiritual consciousness. Within this framework, diligence becomes more than a personal virtue, it becomes a sacred responsibility that reflects one's relationship with the Divine and with society.

Diligence is regarded as a sacred duty through *karma yoga*, where work is performed as an offering to the Divine. *Bhagavad Gita* III.9 teaches that every action should be carried out as *yajña* (sacred offering), while III.19 emphasizes working without attachment to the results. These principles align closely with *tapas* (spiritual discipline) and *sraddha* (devotional conviction), both of which encourage perseverance, sincerity, and inner dedication.

Hindu communities often possess strong work ethics due to deeply internalized dharmic values. In the Indonesian context, Putra & Atmadja (2019) show that Balinese work culture is profoundly influenced by the concept of *yajña*, where work becomes an act of service for the community and the Divine.

The Balinese tradition of *ngayah* illustrates selfless communal labor performed without expectation of reward. This practice embodies the essence of *karma yoga*, serving with purity of intention, full commitment, and genuine devotion.

Overall, Hindu philosophical teachings, especially those related to *karma yoga*, *yajña*, *tapas*, and *sraddha*, provide a strong ethical foundation for understanding diligence. Work becomes a path to spiritual growth, a contribution to communal harmony,

and an expression of devotion. This perspective reinforces that diligence is not only a moral obligation but also a sacred pathway toward achieving balance and fulfillment in life.

3. Fairness and Honesty (Satya, Dharma, Ahimsa)

Honesty holds a central place within Hindu ethics and is deeply embedded in the practice of dharma. As a virtue that guides both thought and action, honesty is not merely a social expectation but a spiritual imperative that sustains harmony within oneself, the community, and the cosmos. Within Hindu philosophical teachings, *satya*, truthfulness, functions as a moral compass that ensures one's actions remain aligned with righteousness.

Honesty, *satya*, is a foundational pillar of dharma. *Sarasamuccaya* explains that sincerity leads individuals toward happiness and ultimately moksa, while dishonesty becomes the root of suffering and spiritual decline. Titib (2003) notes that honesty in Hinduism serves as both a personal and communal virtue, ensuring trust, social cohesion, and ethical stability within society. A universal ethical ideal that aligns well with global moral frameworks, making it a timeless and cross-cultural value.

In the Balinese context, Wirawan (2020) finds that *satya* plays a significant role in shaping community decision-making processes and strengthening traditional governance systems rooted in adat and desa kala patra. In *pitra yadnya* ceremonies, sincerity and honesty are essential to maintaining ritual purity and spiritual integrity. Accurate intentions, truthful communication, and transparent execution of ritual duties reflect *satya* as a sacred commitment.

The principle of *satya* illustrates how honesty is not only an ethical requirement but also a spiritual practice that guides individuals toward liberation and collective harmony. By grounding daily actions in truthfulness, Hindu communities, especially in Bali, preserve cultural values, strengthen social structures, and uphold sacred responsibilities. Thus, honesty becomes a transformative force that nurtures both personal virtue and communal well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the profound interdependence between Hindu religious teachings and cultural expressions, particularly within the Indonesian, especially Balinese, context. Culture in Hinduism is not merely a human-made tradition but a manifestation of spiritual consciousness rooted in the Weda. The results reaffirm that Hindu culture is inherently value-based, functioning simultaneously as a medium of religious expression, ethical formation, and communal cohesion. This aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (2009) notion of culture as a generational system of ideas and actions, which in the Hindu perspective becomes infused with dharma and sacred symbolism.

A key insight from the results is the inseparability of religion and culture in the Hindu worldview. The Upanishadic affirmation *Sarvam khalvidam Brahma* positions all cultural forms as expressions of the divine essence. Thus, arts, rituals, social practices, and communal traditions are not viewed as secular activities but as spiritual embodiments. This explains why ritual arts such as Rejang and Sanghyang, literary works like Kakawin, and musical expressions like gamelan possess both aesthetic and sacred significance. These cultural forms effectively translate abstract philosophical teachings into lived experiences, reinforcing that Hindu culture is not only symbolic but pedagogical, transmitting values such as harmony, devotion, discipline, and spiritual awareness.

The results also reveal how culture functions as a reinforcement of *śraddhā* (faith) and *bhakti* (devotion). Participation in *yadnya*, *ngayah*, and sacred performances provides emotional, communal, and spiritual engagement that deepens understanding beyond mere scriptural study. This supports Bagus (2002), who argues that religious experience becomes more meaningful when ritual and cultural engagement are involved. Culture thus serves as a bridge between the intellectual and experiential dimensions of Hindu religiosity, helping individuals actualize dharma in everyday life.

Another important dimension emerging from the results is the harmonization between *sekala* and *niskala*, a distinctive feature of Balinese Hinduism. Rituals such as *melasti* and *pecaruan* emphasize that cultural actions hold metaphysical consequences, aligning humans with cosmic balance. This indicates that culture in the Hindu context does not operate solely at the material level but is inherently intertwined with spiritual cosmology. *Tri Hita Karana* becomes a framework through which cultural practices ensure harmony among humans, the environment, and the divine.

The findings further illustrate that Hinduism promotes a strong ethical foundation through the cultivation of critical thinking, diligence, and honesty. Critical thinking (*viveka*) emerges as a philosophical necessity rather than merely an intellectual skill, rooted in the Upanishadic tradition of inquiry and reflection. Hindu scriptures emphasize discernment as essential to moral decision-making, suggesting that religious understanding requires rational engagement rather than blind obedience. This not only aligns with classical Hindu epistemology (*pramana*) but also supports modern educational approaches that encourage reflective learning.

Similarly, Hindu teachings frame hard work (karma yoga) as a sacred expression of devotion. The results show that diligence becomes a spiritual discipline when tied to yajña and tapas, reinforcing that work performed without attachment purifies the mind and contributes to social harmony. This provides a strong cultural explanation for the prominence of communal service (ngayah) in Balinese society. Hard work is therefore not merely an economic necessity but a form of spiritual offering that sustains collective welfare.

Finally, the results emphasize the ethical imperative of honesty (satya) as a central expression of dharma. Honesty functions both as a personal virtue and a communal requirement, sustaining trust, social order, and ritual purity. The case of pitra yadnya illustrates how spiritual integrity is inseparable from truthful intentions and transparent actions. This reinforces the conceptual framework that moral conduct is essential not only for social harmony but also for spiritual progress toward moksa.

Overall, the discussion indicates that Hindu culture cannot be understood through a purely sociological or anthropological lens. Rather, it must be approached as a spiritually infused system where religion provides the philosophical foundation, while culture serves as its experiential and practical manifestation. The results collectively demonstrate that Hindu teachings cultivate not only ritual devotion but also intellectual maturity, ethical rigor, and communal responsibility, ensuring that culture remains dynamic, meaningful, and spiritually grounded across generations.

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