

## SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE WHITE BIRD DANCE IN PUTRI SAK AYU STUDIO, MUSI BANYUASIN REGENCY

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the symbolic meaning of the Burung Putih Dance within the cultural context of the Musi Banyuasin community. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach conducted at Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu, Musi Banyuasin Regency. Data were collected through observation, interviews with instructors, dancers, and art observers, as well as documentation in the form of photos and performance videos. Data analysis refers to the theory of symbolism in dance. The results show that the symbolic meanings of the Burung Putih Dance are reflected in each movement sequence. The wing-flapping movement symbolizes peace and freedom, the right and left kecubung movement represents the act of driving away pests as a symbol of the relationship between humans and nature in agrarian life, and the bird formation movement reflects togetherness and cooperation. These meanings indicate that the dance movements are not only representational but also contain philosophical values such as harmony, balance, and mutual cooperation, which are integral to the life of the Musi Banyuasin community. The findings affirm that the Burung Putih Dance functions not only as an aesthetic performance but also as a medium for conveying cultural values and local wisdom.

### Informasi Artikel

#### Kata Kunci:

Makna Simbolis, Tari Burung Putih, Budaya Lokal, Nilai Filosofis, Musi Banyuasin.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna simbolis Tari Burung Putih dalam konteks budaya masyarakat Musi Banyuasin. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus yang dilaksanakan di Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu Kabupaten Musi Banyuasin. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara dengan pelatih, penari, dan pengamat seni, serta dokumentasi berupa foto dan video pertunjukan. Data dianalisis dengan mengacu pada teori simbolisme dalam seni tari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna simbolis Tari Burung Putih tercermin melalui setiap ragam gerak yang ditampilkan. Gerak kepak sayap melambangkan kedamaian dan kebebasan, gerak kecubung kanan dan kiri merepresentasikan aktivitas mengusir hama sebagai simbol hubungan manusia dengan alam dalam kehidupan agraris, serta gerak pembentukan burung menggambarkan kebersamaan dan kerja sama. Makna tersebut menunjukkan bahwa gerak tari tidak hanya bersifat representasional, tetapi juga mengandung nilai filosofis seperti keharmonisan, keseimbangan, dan gotong royong yang menjadi bagian dari kehidupan masyarakat Musi Banyuasin. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Tari Burung Putih tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai pertunjukan estetis, tetapi juga sebagai media penyampaian nilai budaya dan kearifan lokal.

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## INTRODUCTION

Dance plays an important role as a medium of cultural expression, regional identity, and the transmission of local wisdom values. Dance is understood as a series of rhythmic body movements used to express human ideas, feelings, and experiences that possess aesthetic value and symbolic meaning (Yulianti et al., 2022). Each region in Indonesia has distinctive dance characteristics reflected in its movements, musical accompaniment, costumes, and cultural messages, making traditional dance not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for conveying symbolic meanings that represent the worldview of its community.

Musi Banyuasin Regency possesses a rich tradition of arts that has developed alongside the agrarian life of its people. One of these cultural heritages is the White Bird Dance (Tari Burung Putih), which has been designated as an Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage with certificate number 490/WB/KB.00.01/2015, thereby being recognized as a regional cultural identity by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Giwang SUMSEL, 2023). This designation demonstrates that the White Bird Dance not only holds aesthetic value but also contains symbolic meanings that reflect the cultural values of the Musi Banyuasin community.

The origin of the White Bird Dance is rooted in the experiences of the community within their agrarian lifestyle, particularly their interaction with egrets inhabiting rice field areas. These birds were considered beneficial in helping farmers control pests such as rats and grasshoppers (Syahriyanto, 2012). This experience was later transformed into symbolic representations through dance, which not only presents movements but also represents the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. These values reflect gratitude, balance, and respect for the environment, which are integral parts of the local community's life.

Birds as symbols are interpreted as representations of purity, peace, freedom, and natural balance (Puditasari, 2025). These meanings are embodied in movement patterns that imitate bird behavior, such as flapping wings and agile motions, which have undergone a process of stylization to produce aesthetic and meaningful dance movements. Therefore, the White Bird Dance is understood not merely as a visual performance but also as a

symbolic medium conveying the social, cultural, and spiritual messages of the Musi Banyuasin community (Giwang SUMSEL, 2023).

The development of modern times and the influence of popular culture present challenges to the existence of traditional dances, particularly in maintaining an understanding of their symbolic meanings. The declining interest among younger generations and the limited availability of documentation may lead to shifts in meaning during the transmission process. In this context, art studios play an important role as spaces for preservation and interpretation of the symbolic meanings of dance so that they can continue to be understood comprehensively by society.

Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu is one of the art institutions actively involved in preserving the White Bird Dance in Musi Banyuasin Regency (Giwang SUMSEL, 2023). The studio not only provides technical training in dance movements but also instills an understanding of the symbolic values and meanings contained in the dance. Training activities, performances, and participation in various cultural events have made the studio a center for the sustainable transmission of cultural values.

The selection of Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu as the research location is based on the studio's consistency in maintaining the sustainability of the White Bird Dance, as well as the availability of authentic data sources related to the symbolic meanings of the dance. The trainers and dancers possess a deep understanding of the philosophy behind the movements, enabling this research to examine the symbolic meanings more comprehensively within the cultural context of the Musi Banyuasin community.

Research on the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance is significant as an effort to understand and document the cultural values embedded in each movement pattern. The study of symbolism in dance helps reveal meanings that are not directly visible but are implied through movement as a result of the collective experiences of the community (Pertiwi et al., 2025). This understanding is essential to ensure that the meanings of the dance are not oversimplified or diminished during the preservation process.

Therefore, this research focuses on how the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance are understood within the cultural context of the Musi Banyuasin community. This study aims to analyze the symbolic meanings contained in the movement

patterns of the White Bird Dance as representations of local cultural values. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using observation, interviews, and documentation techniques to obtain in-depth and contextual data. This study contributes to strengthening the study of symbolism in dance, particularly in understanding the White Bird Dance as a medium of cultural expression rich in meaning. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance at Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu, which has not been widely examined, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between dance movements and the cultural values of the Musi Banyuasin community.

## METHOD

### Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design, as it aimed to understand the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance (Tari Burung Putih) as an artistic phenomenon that is contextual, visual, and rich in cultural values, which cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach. The descriptive approach was used to describe systematically and in detail the meanings contained in each variety of dance movements as performed by Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu without manipulating the research object. Therefore, the findings reflect the actual conditions in the field, both in terms of movement expressions and the symbolic values accompanying them.

In addition, an ethnographic approach also underpinned this study because the data collection process was carried out through in-depth observation in a single cultural setting, namely Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu in Musi Banyuasin Regency. The study focused not only on the presentation of the dance but also on the social and cultural contexts surrounding the training process, interpretation, and preservation of the dance. Through direct observation, interviews with artists, and documentation, the researcher acted as the primary instrument in recording and interpreting the symbolic meanings of the dance movements from the perspectives of the performers and their cultural environment. This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the White Bird Dance as part of the cultural expression

of the Musi Banyuasin community and is considered relevant for traditional performing arts studies (Supriandi, 2025).

### Data Sources

The data sources in this study were divided into two categories: primary data sources and secondary data sources.

#### 1. Primary Data Sources

Primary data were obtained directly through observations and interviews with informants involved in the White Bird Dance activities at Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu (Sutriyanti & Muspawi, 2024). The informants consisted of five individuals: one studio leader, one choreographer, one dance instructor, and two active dancers who were directly involved in training and performances. Data collection aimed to explore their understanding of the symbolic meanings of movements, the process of meaning formation, and the cultural interpretations embedded in each movement variety.

#### 2. Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data were derived from supporting documents such as performance videos, photographs of rehearsals and performances, studio archives, and choreography notes (Sutriyanti & Muspawi, 2024). In addition, books and scientific journals discussing theories of symbolism, dance arts, and local culture were used to strengthen the theoretical foundation and support the systematic analysis of symbolic meanings.

### Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques in this study included three main methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

#### 1. Observation

Observation was conducted as the primary technique to obtain data regarding the symbolic meanings contained in the White Bird Dance. Observations were carried out directly during rehearsals and performances at Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu to understand how each movement variety was

performed and how meanings were embodied through body expressions, movement patterns, and interactions among dancers. Participatory observation was applied so that the researcher could capture the meanings of the movements more deeply, not merely as visual forms but also as cultural expressions living within practice (Zanariyah, 2024).

Observation Aspect	General Description
Symbolic Meaning of Movements	Includes the interpretation of meanings in each movement variety, such as wing-flapping movements symbolizing peace and freedom, kecupung movements symbolizing pest repellent actions, and the relationship between movements and the cultural values of the community.
Interaction Among Dancers	Patterns of relationships among dancers reflecting togetherness, cooperation, and solidarity as representations of mutual cooperation values within society.
Facial Expressions	Expressions supporting the delivery of symbolic meanings, such as calmness, gentleness, and harmony representing the character of the white bird.
Space and Floor Patterns	The use of direction, levels, and floor patterns containing symbolic and meanings, such as circular formations symbolizing freedom or centered formations indicating unity and balance.
Cultural Context	The relationship between movements and the cultural background of the Musi Banyuasin community, particularly agrarian values, the relationship between humans and nature, and the symbolic function of dance in social life.

## 2. Interview

Interviews were conducted to obtain data related to the understanding, experiences, and interpretations of artists regarding the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance. Interviews were carried out directly with the studio leader,

choreographer, dance instructor, dancers, and cultural figures. The interview technique used was semi-structured, enabling the researcher to explore information flexibly and deeply regarding the philosophy of movements, the meaning-making process, and the cultural values contained in the dance (Trivaika & Senubekti, 2022).

## 3. Documentation

Documentation was used as a supporting technique to strengthen data obtained from observations and interviews. Documentation in the form of photographs, performance videos, studio archives, and choreography notes was utilized to identify and analyze movement symbols in greater detail (Hasan, 2022). The visual data were repeatedly analyzed to understand the relationship between movement forms and the symbolic meanings contained within them.

### Data Validity Techniques

This study employed source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation as proposed by Moleong (2017).

1. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants, such as choreographers, dancers, and dance instructors.
2. Technique triangulation was carried out by using more than one data collection method, namely observation, interviews, and documentation, to test the consistency of the findings.
3. Time triangulation was conducted through repeated observations at different times to ensure that the observed movement forms were consistent and not merely temporary improvisations.

In addition to triangulation, this study also applied member checking by confirming the researcher's findings and interpretations with the main informants to ensure that the data corresponded with their understanding in the field. This technique aimed to minimize interpretation errors and improve data accuracy. Furthermore, peer debriefing was conducted through discussions with colleagues or academic supervisors who possessed expertise in

dance arts or qualitative research. This process provided critical feedback that strengthened the analysis and enhanced the overall credibility of the research.

### Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis process was conducted continuously and interactively from the beginning of data collection until the completion of the study. This approach was chosen because it effectively manages qualitative data that are descriptive and interpretative, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding and interpretation of the symbolic meanings contained in the White Bird Dance.

#### 1. Data Reduction

Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, and simplifying observational, interview, and documentation data related to the symbolic meanings of dance movements. The collected data were classified based on categories of meaning, such as symbols of peace and freedom in wing-flapping movements, symbols of the human relationship with nature in kecubung movements representing pest control, and symbols of togetherness in bird-formation movements. In addition, the reduction process also considered the cultural context underlying the emergence of these meanings so that the analysis remained connected to the values of the Musi Banyuasin community. Data irrelevant to the focus on symbolic meanings were excluded to make the analysis more focused and in-depth.

#### 2. Data Display

Data were presented in the form of narrative descriptions, categorization tables of meanings, and visual documentation supporting interpretation. The data presentation focused on the relationship between movement varieties and their symbolic meanings so that each movement was not only described descriptively but also interpreted symbolically. Interview data were used to strengthen interpretations from the perspectives of the artists, while visual documentation such as photographs and

videos clarified the symbolic representations within the movements. Through this presentation, the relationship between dance movements and the cultural values they represent could be understood more systematically and comprehensively.

#### 3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted by interpreting all analyzed data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic meanings of the White Bird Dance within the cultural context of the Musi Banyuasin community. The conclusions were then verified through rechecking field data, examining their relevance to symbolism theories in dance arts, and confirming the findings with informants through member checking. This stage aimed to ensure that the analysis truly reflected the meanings understood by cultural practitioners and could be scientifically justified.

## RESULTS

### Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu

Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu is one of the art studios that plays an important role in preserving the White Bird Dance in Musi Banyuasin Regency. The studio serves as a center for guiding younger generations in learning traditional regional dances and understanding the cultural values embedded within them. Routine training activities, artistic performances, and the studio's participation in various regional cultural events demonstrate its commitment to maintaining the continuity of traditional dance. The role of the studio as a center for arts education aligns with the view that local art institutions have a strategic function in cultural transmission and community identity formation (Sedyawati et al., 1986).

The existence of Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu is also closely related to efforts to preserve the White Bird Dance, which has been designated as an Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage with certificate number 490/WB/KB.00.01/2015. This dance originated from the experiences of the agrarian Musi Banyuasin community living in harmony with nature, particularly the rice field ecosystem. Community narratives describe the white bird, or egret, as an animal that helps farmers control rice crop pests such as grasshoppers and rats. The representation of the bird was then embodied in

dance movements imitating bird behavior, such as flapping wings and moving agilely across rice fields. These movement varieties reflect the community's gratitude for natural balance and the harmonious relationship between humans and their environment (Syahriyanto, 2012).

The preservation activities carried out by Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu not only maintain the existence of the White Bird Dance but also strengthen its dissemination and understanding within society. The studio's involvement in various cultural activities, including regional art festivals organized by the Musi Banyuasin Regency government, demonstrates that the White Bird Dance has become widely developed and performed by various art groups across several districts. Data from the Musi Banyuasin Regency Office of Education and Culture recorded the participation of several dance groups performing the White Bird Dance in regional cultural festivals (Muardi, interview, 2022). This development indicates that art studios play a crucial role as the main driving force in sustaining dance traditions and introducing local cultural values to broader society.

#### Description of the Symbolic Meanings of the White Bird Dance



Gambar 1. Wing-Flapping Movement  
Source: Researcher (2026)

The wing-flapping movement serves as the primary symbol representing peace and freedom. This movement depicts a white bird flying freely in open nature without boundaries, symbolizing the hope for a calm, peaceful, and unrestrained life. In

addition, the repetitive and flowing flapping motions reflect the continuity of harmonious life. The light and flexible quality of the movement represents the character of the community, which upholds gentleness, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. This movement also becomes the central element of meaning in the White Bird Dance because it is the most dominant and easily recognized by the audience.



Gambar 2. Kecubung Movement  
Source: Researcher (2026)

The symbolic meaning is also reflected in the right and left kecubung movements, which symbolize the act of driving pests away from rice field areas. These movements demonstrate the close relationship between humans and nature within the agrarian life of the Musi Banyuasin community. In this context, the white bird is viewed as a creature that helps farmers protect their crops from pest disturbances, making the kecubung movement a symbol of protection and the sustainability of harvests. This is consistent with the concept of movement stylization, which states that dance movements are derived from real-life motions that are then artistically processed and given aesthetic as well as symbolic values (Murgiyanto, 1996). Therefore, the kecubung movement not only illustrates the physical activity of the bird but also conveys a message about the importance of maintaining ecosystem balance and appreciating the role of nature in human life.



**Gambar 3.** Gerak Kepak Sayap Duduk Pembentukan Burung Sumber: Peneliti, (2026)

The pose movements in the White Bird Dance are derived from the image of birds flying in groups, which is then embodied through dancer formations that create particular patterns. These movements symbolize togetherness, cooperation, and solidarity in facing various challenges, including pest disturbances in agricultural life. The positions of the dancers, who stand close to one another and form structured formations, demonstrate strong social relationships among individuals within the community. This meaning reflects the value of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), which is an important aspect of the life of the Musi Banyuasin community. The relationship between movement and community life indicates that symbolic meanings in dance cannot be separated from the cultural background underlying them (Sedyawati et al., 1986).

The symbolic meanings in the White Bird Dance can also be seen in two forms, namely representational and abstract symbols (Dibia, 2012). Representational symbols are reflected in the wing-flapping movements and *kecubung* movements, which directly depict the behavior of birds in real life, such as flying and driving away pests. Meanwhile, abstract symbols are expressed through the soft, flowing, and continuous quality of the movements, symbolizing peace, tranquility, and harmony in life. The combination of these two forms of symbolism makes the White Bird Dance not only visually understandable to audiences but also rich in emotional and philosophical depth.

These symbolic meanings also function as a form of nonverbal communication between dancers and audiences, in which every movement conveys messages without words (Hadi, 2016). Audiences are invited to understand and interpret the meanings contained in the movements based on their own cultural experiences and knowledge. This process creates a connection between dancers and audiences through shared cultural understanding, even though interpretations may differ. Therefore, the White Bird Dance serves not only as an artistic performance for entertainment but also as a medium for conveying cultural values, moral messages, and the identity of the Musi Banyuasin community that has been passed down through generations.

The symbolic meanings in the White Bird Dance are clearly reflected in each variety of movements performed, where movements function not only as visual beauty but also as expressions of the cultural messages of the Musi Banyuasin community, as explained in the view that art serves as a medium for expressing meaning and value systems (Cassirer & Verene, 1979). The wing-flapping movement becomes the primary symbol representing peace and freedom because it depicts white birds flying freely in open nature. In addition, the soft and flowing movements strengthen the impression of calmness and harmony, reflecting a society that values balance and tranquility.

Symbolic meaning is also reflected in the right and left *kecubung* movements, which function not merely as movement variations but also as representations of driving pests away from rice field areas. These movements illustrate the close relationship between humans and nature in agrarian life, where white birds are believed to play a role in protecting farmers' crops. This is in line with the concept of movement stylization, which states that dance movements are derived from real-life actions that are artistically processed and given aesthetic and symbolic values (Murgiyanto, 1996). The *kecubung* movement not only illustrates physical activity but also conveys messages about protection and environmental balance.

The pose movements in the White Bird Dance are inspired by birds flying in groups, which are then embodied through dancer formations that create specific patterns. These movements symbolize togetherness, cooperation, and solidarity in overcoming disturbances such as pests, thereby reflecting the value of mutual cooperation within the Musi Banyuasin community. This relationship

between movement and community life demonstrates that symbolic meanings in dance cannot be separated from the cultural background underlying them (Sedyawati et al., 1986).

The symbolic meanings in the White Bird Dance can also be categorized into two forms, namely representational and abstract symbols (Dibia, 2012). Wing-flapping movements and pest-repelling movements are considered representational symbols because they directly depict bird behavior in nature, whereas the soft and flowing movement qualities represent abstract symbols that signify peace and harmony in life. The combination of these two symbolic forms makes the White Bird Dance not only visually understandable but also emotionally meaningful for audiences.

These symbolic meanings also function as a means of nonverbal communication between dancers and audiences, where every movement conveys messages without words (Hadi, 2016). Audiences are able to understand meanings related to peace, freedom, and the relationship between humans and nature through the performed movements. Therefore, the White Bird Dance serves not only as an artistic performance but also as a medium for conveying cultural values, moral messages, and the symbolic identity of the Musi Banyuasin community.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the symbolic meanings in the White Bird Dance are closely interconnected as a unified expression of the aesthetic and cultural values of the Musi Banyuasin community. These findings can be discussed through the perspective of symbolism theory and related to previous relevant studies. The meanings contained in each variety of movement demonstrate that dance functions not only as a visual form but also as a medium representing community values and collective experiences. This aligns with the view that art, particularly dance, is a symbolic system containing cultural meanings and serving as a medium for expressing life values (Cassirer & Verene, 1979). The findings are also consistent with the opinion of Sedyawati et al. (1986), who state that traditional Indonesian dances cannot be separated from the cultural contexts of the supporting communities, meaning that each movement is connected to the social realities underlying it.

The symbolic meanings of movements in the White Bird Dance reveal two forms of symbolism: representational and abstract symbols. The wing-flapping movement as a symbol of peace and freedom, as well as the kecubung movement as a symbol of driving away pests, represent forms of representational symbols because they directly portray bird behavior in real life. Meanwhile, the soft, flowing, and continuous quality of the movements reflects abstract symbols representing harmony in life and balance in nature. These findings are consistent with Dibia's (2012) concept of symbolism in dance, which states that symbols not only depict real objects but also contain deeper philosophical meanings. Furthermore, the process of movement stylization, which transforms bird activities into dance forms, strengthens Murgiyanto's (1996) argument that dance movements are artistic transformations of reality endowed with aesthetic and symbolic values. Compared with other agrarian-based dance studies, these findings show similarities in representing the relationship between humans and nature, while maintaining uniqueness through the use of bird symbolism as a representation of ecosystem balance.

The interpretation of the findings demonstrates that the White Bird Dance functions as a medium of nonverbal communication that conveys cultural messages to audiences through symbolic movements (Hadi, 2016). Each movement is understood not only as an aesthetic form but also as a message conveying peace, the relationship between humans and nature, and the values of togetherness within community life. The implications of these findings emphasize that the preservation of traditional dance should focus not only on maintaining performance forms but also on preserving the symbolic meanings embedded within them. The contribution of this research lies in strengthening the study of symbolism in traditional dance, particularly in revealing how cultural meanings are manifested through movement as part of the identity of the Musi Banyuasin community.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the symbolic meanings in the White Bird Dance at Sanggar Putri Sak Ayu represent the cultural values of the Musi Banyuasin community manifested through a series of dance movements. The elements

of movement, space, and time within the dance function as supporting media that strengthen the delivery of meaning, so that every aspect of the performance is not only aesthetic in nature but also rich in structured and harmonious cultural messages.

These symbolic meanings are reflected in each variety of movements performed. The wing-flapping movement symbolizes peace and freedom, the kecubung movement represents the activity of driving away pests as a symbol of the relationship between humans and nature, and the bird-formation movement symbolizes togetherness and cooperation. Each movement not only imitates bird behavior visually but also represents a stylized form containing philosophical meanings that correspond to the life of the agrarian community.

Therefore, the White Bird Dance functions not only as an artistic performance but also as a medium of symbolic communication that conveys values such as harmony, natural balance, and mutual cooperation. Consequently, preserving this dance is important not only for maintaining its performance form but also for preserving its symbolic meanings as part of the cultural identity of the Musi Banyuasin community.

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