
Rentak Bulian Dance: The Evolution of Magic in the Talang Mamak Tribe Towards the Realm of Education

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Abstract. This research explores the Rentak Bulian dance of the Talang Mamak tribe in Indragiri Hulu, Riau, which originates from sacred healing rituals rooted in animistic beliefs. Traditionally, the dance functions as a magical medium to communicate with spiritual entities, known as "Bulian," to cure illnesses. The ritual is led by a "Kumantan" (shaman) and supported by "Bujang Bayu," featuring repetitive, monotonous movements such as "Merentak" (foot-stomping) and "Sembah" (venerating spirits). This study aims to analyze the shift of the dance from a mystical ritual to an educational tool within the modern school curriculum. By integrating Rentak Bulian into formal education across various levels, from early childhood to high school, it serves as a vital medium for preserving local cultural identity and introducing students to ancestral traditions. The findings suggest that while the functional context of the dance has evolved, its core movements and values remain a significant cultural heritage. This research emphasizes the importance of utilizing traditional arts as a foundation for character and cultural education in the Riau region.

Keywords: Rentak Bulian dance, Talang Mamak tribe, healing ritual, arts education, cultural preservation.

INTRODUCTION:

The rapid development of dance today has led to significant functional shifts in several traditional dances. Dances originally performed as part of healing rituals have evolved into artistic performances for various events, including cultural and tourism activities. A prominent example is the Rentak Bulian dance, which serves as a ritual healing dance for the Talang Mamak tribe. However, not all dances share identical functions, as each region adapts them to local needs and traditions. Every region possesses unique arts influenced by climate, culture, customs, livelihoods, and beliefs, which are ancestral heritages that must be preserved (UNESCO, 2023).

Originating from the Talang Mamak tribe in Indragiri Hulu Regency, Riau Province, the Rentak Bulian dance is believed by the community to possess healing powers. Movements in a dance go beyond mere aesthetic functions. These movements carry complex contextual meanings as a representation of cultural values and local historical narratives that have become internalized within the social life of its community. For the Talang Mamak people, Rentak Bulian carries a sacred ritual meaning intended to cure the sick (Kaepler, A. L., 2000).

Etymologically, "*Rentak*" means to step, while "*Bulian*" refers to supernatural beings or "*Bunian*" in local belief. Thus, Rentak Bulian can be interpreted as a step toward the supernatural world. Bulian dance plays a fundamental role in constructing the identity and social characteristics of the Talang Mamak tribe. Within the daily life of the tribe, the existence of this dance is not merely entertainment, but a reflection of their social structure and belief system (Desmond, J. C. 1997).

Magical practices within society are often expressed through the art of dance. Dance is a cultural form born from tradition, which aligns with Geertz, C. (1973) statement that culture is not limited to external aspects

such as rituals and traditions, but also encompasses worldviews, belief systems, and symbolic representations within the life of a community. The social function of this dance is evident through the collective involvement of the community in healing rituals, where the dance serves as an instrument to bind solidarity and a medium of communication between humans and the spiritual realm that forms the foundation of their lives (Geertz, C. (1973).

The dance features repetitive and monotonous movements centered on the "*rentak*" pattern (rhythmic foot-stomping). The Kumantan (lead dancer/shaman) leads the performance, followed by other dancers. Key movements include the *Sembah* movement, representing worship toward the mystical realm. The Kumantan stands at the front, flanked by Bujang Bayu dancers who carry incense and areca nut blossoms. In the *Merentak* movement, dancers stomp their feet alternately while holding the waist of the person in front of them, as the Bujang Bayu apply charcoal and betel lime to the Kumantan's arms. Rentak Bulian dance serves as a cultural manifestation of the Talang Mamak tribe, realized through a blend of mythology, ritual, and aesthetic expression. Within the context of healing rituals, this dance acts as an active instrument that shapes the tribe's collective identity; it is not merely physical movement but a system of meaning regarding the relationship between humans and the supernatural realm. When the dance is performed, local historical narratives and animistic belief systems are internalized within social interactions, making it a dynamic mechanism that preserves ancestral values amidst modern developments (Geertz, C. (1973).

Other symbolic movements include *Goyang Pucuk*, representing the preparation of offerings, and *Meracik Limau*, where dancers mimic the slicing of kaffir limes while seated. During the *Sembah*, it is believed that supernatural spirits enter the Kumantan's body, causing his hands to move in various directions as a sign of respect to the spirits aiding the ritual. Today, dance art has become a crucial part of cultural development through education. Dance education is integrated into schools from early childhood (PAUD) to high school (SMA), allowing students to understand Indonesian culture, specifically local traditions like the Rentak Bulian dance.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, an approach aimed at describing and understanding the researched phenomena in depth based on qualitative data. This method is utilized to explore complex meanings, experiences, or social processes without relying on numbers or statistics as the primary analytical tool. According to Moleong (2018), qualitative research is descriptive, where the collected data consists of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors to understand a phenomenon deeply within a specific context (Moleong, L. J. (2018).

In line with this, Gunawan (2022) asserts that qualitative research seeks to uncover social realities comprehensively by placing the researcher as the key instrument in data collection. Furthermore, Creswell & Poth (2019) state that a qualitative approach is highly effective for investigating issues that require a profound understanding of how individuals or groups ascribe meaning to social or human problems. Additionally, Sugiyono (2020) explains that the descriptive method aims to provide a systematic and accurate description of facts and the relationships between the phenomena being investigated

The scope of this research focuses on the evolution of magic in the Rentak Bulian dance towards the realm of education. The study was conducted at SMKN Pertanian Terpadu Pekanbaru as the primary location to observe the integration of traditional dance into the school curriculum. The research objects include the learning process, dance movements, and cultural values taught to students. Informants or data sources in this study consist of arts and culture teachers and students actively involved in the dance practice.

Data collection techniques were carried out through direct field observations, in-depth interviews with informants, and documentation studies related to learning materials. The data analysis techniques used include data reduction, systematic data display, and drawing conclusions to verify findings. This detailed explanation is structured to ensure the research can be replicated by other researchers and to provide a strong foundation for the validity of the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Every region possesses a unique culture, such as that of the Talang Mamak tribe, which utilizes *Rentak Bulian* as a healing ritual believed to cure illnesses. Williams, R. (1981) perspective on culture as a dynamic social process is highly relevant in explaining the phenomenon of the *Rentak Bulian* dance within the Talang Mamak community. As a living entity, this dance is not static but continuously evolves through adaptation mechanisms in response to changing times. The transformation from a magical function for healing rituals to an educational instrument at SMKN Pertanian Terpadu Pekanbaru demonstrates that the supporting community is capable of adjusting traditional values to modern social contexts and educational environments. Consequently, *Rentak Bulian* remains a living social process as its functions are continuously developed without diminishing its original cultural essence.

The development of dance in Indonesia today is highly dynamic, with various expressions of movement accessible to the public through both performance stages and digital platforms. This phenomenon reinforces the fact that every modern dance work maintains a close connection with past cultural heritage and traditional values passed down through generations. This aligns with the perspective of Adshhead (2020), who states that the integration of movement, rhythm, and expression in dance carries meanings that are profoundly dependent on their social and historical contexts. Furthermore, dance movements go beyond mere aesthetic functions; they represent complex contextual meanings as a reflection of cultural values and local historical narratives internalized within the social life of the community. Thus, the aesthetic movements displayed today serve as an active mechanism for preserving national identity, which is deeply rooted in the history of its supporting community (Kaepler, A. L. 2000).

Dance is one of the rapidly developing art branches in Indonesia. Various dance works can be witnessed both directly and through electronic media. The dance performances often seen today are inseparable from the cultural heritage of the past, where each dance is rooted in the traditions and values of previous societies. Dance is an artistic expression realized through movements performed by dancers with deep meaning and aesthetics.

As understood by Reckwitz (2020), dance is a social practice utilizing repetitive movement patterns and bodily engagement within the dimensions of space and time, where cultural knowledge is socially produced and reproduced. For the Talang Mamak tribe in the Indragiri Hulu region, dance serves as a medium of expression for healing rituals; the *Rentak Bulian* dance is believed to be a means of exorcising evil spirits through various movements that carry profound meanings. For the Talang Mamak community in the Indragiri Hulu region, dance serves as a medium of expression for healing rituals. The *Rentak Bulian* dance is believed to be a dance that can exorcise evil spirits through several movements containing profound meanings. Emphasize that within the world of education, dance serves as an effective educational instrument for transmitting noble values and strengthening students' cultural identity (Kemendikbudristek. (2022).

Through dance pedagogy in schools, educational institutions do not only facilitate the transfer of aesthetic knowledge but also act as the frontline in ensuring the sustainability of local traditions amidst the currents of modernization in contemporary society. The movements in the *Rentak Bulian* dance possess symbols and meanings, including the *Merentak* movement, which involves rhythmic alternating foot-stomping. Dancers hold the waist of the person in front of them, while the *Bujang Bayu* dancers on the left and right sides of the *Kumantan* (shaman) apply charcoal and betel lime to the *Kumantan's* arms. The next movement is *Goyang Pucuk*, where dancers raise their hands upward, symbolizing the gathering of areca nut blossoms (*mayang pinang*) to prepare offerings for the *Bulian* ceremony.

Furthermore, *Sembah* is a movement showing respect to the supernatural spirits believed to facilitate the *Bulian* ritual. These spirits are believed to possess the *Kumantan's* body, who then moves both hands joined together as if in worship, moving them in various directions. *Meracik Limau* is a movement symbolizing the preparation of kaffir limes. This movement is performed by swinging the hands while in a seated position. The *Kumantan* moves around the other dancers to ensure everyone is in good condition. These movements serve as the fundamental basis for the Talang Mamak community to express themselves in healing rituals.

The evolution of the *Rentak Bulian* dance from a magical function to an educational realm brings shifts in its presentation. While previously used for healing, the *Rentak Bulian* dance in the school environment focuses more on symbolic aspects as a form of artistic appreciation for students. Through this approach, the dance remains preserved as part of cultural conservation efforts. Several movements retain specific meanings related to their original function, such as the *Sembah* movement, reflecting respect for spirits.

In the original Talang Mamak healing rituals, the *Sembah* movement utilizes several properties, such as areca nut fronds, incense burners, and containers filled with frankincense, believed to summon spirits into the shaman's body. However, in school performances by students, these properties are used merely as symbols without spiritual intent. In line with Adthead's (2020) perspective, the integration of movement, rhythm, and expression in dance carries meanings that are profoundly dependent on their context. In a ritual dance, these elements function as a means of sacred and historical communication for the Talang Mamak community. However, when the dance is brought into an educational context at SMKN Pertanian Terpadu Pekanbaru, its social significance undergoes a recontextualization; the dance is no longer perceived as a magical practice, but rather as an educational artistic expression that reflects cultural identity and social values for the students.

The evolution of the Rentak Bulian dance from its magical function to the educational realm has brought about shifts in the meaning of its presentation. While this dance was previously utilized as part of a healing ritual, it is now focused on symbolic aspects as a form of artistic appreciation for students within the school environment. Through this approach, the dance remains preserved as part of cultural conservation efforts, as stated by Kasmahidayat (2023), where students are expected to be capable of creating and appreciating dance works based on existing traditional symbols and meanings. Thus, integration into the curriculum ensures that ancestral values remain relevant for the younger generation.

Table 1. Analysis of Changes in the Function and Meaning of Rentak Bulian Dance Movements

No	Movement Name	Movement Name	Educational Meaning (Symbolic/School Context)
1	Merentak	Foot-stomping to summon spiritual energy and build a ritual atmosphere.	Training motor coordination, rhythm, and group cohesion (teamwork).
2	Goyang Pucuk	A symbol of gathering areca nut blossoms (<i>mayang pinang</i>) for offerings in the Bulian ceremony.	Aesthetic expression and appreciation of natural symbols within local culture.
3	Sembah	An act of respect toward supernatural spirits to ensure a smooth healing process.	A form of respect for cultural values and self-discipline in dancing.
4	Meracik Limau	A symbol of cleansing and protection for all ritual participants to ensure their well-being.	Learning about traditional properties and developing creativity in creative dance works.

Rentak Bulian has evolved into a medium for passing down dance arts to the younger generation through school education. Syofi Salsabila Sania and Yuliawan Kasmahidayat (2023) state that in the Merdeka Curriculum, students are expected to create dance works based on the meanings and symbols of traditional dance. This aligns with current curriculum outcomes emphasizing that students must be able to perform dances containing meaning and symbols. Moleong (2018:62) also emphasizes that dance education in schools serves as a medium to preserve local culture while building students' understanding of traditional values. Through learning the Rentak Bulian traditional dance, students exhibit positive changes in attitude, developing discipline, social awareness, and group cooperation. This dance serves as effective classroom material because, beyond its high historical value, it contains vital meanings and symbols for understanding cultural evolution.

Table 2. Comparison of Rentak Bulian Dance Characteristics: Ritual vs. Education

Characteristics	Ritual Realm (Talang Mamak Tribe)	Educational Realm (School)
Primary Objective	Healing and exorcising evil spirits.	Art appreciation, cultural preservation, and character building.
Properties	Uses sacred objects (incense, embers, real areca blossoms) to summon spirits.	Uses properties as aesthetic visual aids (symbolic) without spiritual intent.
Performers	Shaman (<i>Kumantan</i>) and <i>Bujang Bayu</i> in a sacred state.	Students as a creative learning medium under teacher guidance.
Learning Outcome	Mystical healing of the patient..	Changes in attitude, discipline, social awareness, and teamwork.

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that the Rentak Bulian dance has undergone a significant functional transformation, evolving from a sacred healing ritual of the Talang Mamak tribe into an adaptive art learning medium at SMKN Pertanian Terpadu Pekanbaru. The synthesis of these findings reveals that although the magical aspects such as spirit summoning in the Sembah movement or the use of incense have shifted into symbolic and aesthetic representations, the fundamental values of the dance remain preserved.

The significance of this research for readers and the educational world lies in the effectiveness of traditional dance in shaping student character. Through movements such as Merentak and Meracik Limau, students not only learn bodily aesthetics but also internalize values of discipline, group cooperation, and respect for ancestral heritage. Thus, the integration of the Rentak Bulian dance into the school curriculum is not merely an effort of cultural documentation, but an active preservation strategy that ensures Riau's local identity remains relevant and holds new functional meaning for the younger generation in the face of modern developments.

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