

THE ZERO POINT OF THE SELF (BHUWANA ALIT)

The Inner Axis Mundi in Nusantara Hindu Traditions

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ABSTRACT

The zero point in the self (*Bhuwana Alit*) is an inner axis mundi in the Hindu traditions of the Nusantara. Moving away from prevailing perceptions of the cosmic center, usually situated in an outer terrestrial structure, this research presents the center as a substance within consciousness itself, conceptualizing it as an ontological, ritualistic, ethical, and social axis located within each human subject. But it uses a qualitative–interpretive methodology based on classical symbolism, sociology of religion, and Hindu cosmology to show that this inner zero point cannot be an empty state but rather is itself a continuously “constructed” symbolic working space through various spiritual practices (including the sacred script tradition *Yogākṣara* in Bali). The results show that the inner axis mundi acts as both a place of transformation, an ethical development site, and a site of social integration. It is also recast as a place of symbolic struggle in the age of digital modernity and ecological disaster. Placing the axis mundi as a cosmic structure that encompasses human bodies and consciousness, this work continues conversations concerning sacred space and lived spirituality in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: *Bhuwana Alit; zero point; axis mundi; symbolics; Nusantara Hinduism; Yogākṣara Expand All Collapse All*

I. INTRODUCTION

Space, in religious traditions, is never just an empty container for ritual action but a symbolic field of meaning, one that generates or enables experiences, values, and orientations towards life to be produced and negotiated. Classical studies of sacred space reveal that spatial polarities—center–periphery, upper–lower, upstream–downstream—operate as cosmological forces that preserve elements of both the cosmic and social orders (Durkheim 2001; Eliade 1959; Bell 1997). The center of space, from a comparative perspective, is conceived as an orienting axis, a sacred tree or pillar (Eliade 1964; Smith 1987). So the center is not simply a geometric location but a figural structure with ontological, social, and ethical meaning.

Yet the majority of academic debates about a cosmic center have concentrated on its external representations, i.e., peaks, shrines, holy cities, and rituals (Lefebvre 1991; Knott 2005; Jordan 2022). Its internal dimension, the way we experience this cosmic center in ourselves as a center of consciousness, has been far less emphasized. However, in so many religions and spiritual traditions, the cosmos is not conceptualized solely as everything outside human existence. The axis mundi is, therefore, not just a spatial phenomenon; it also identifies an inner (existential) axis that constitutes the human being.

These are not separate domains, but mutually reflective realities that continuously shape one another (Triguna, 2000/2025; Zoetmulder, 1995; Geertz, 1980). If the cosmic center in the macrocosm is expressed through structures such as

Catus Pata in Bali or *Moncopat* in Java, the human being likewise possesses a “zero point” as the center of consciousness, where body, mind, and spirit converge. This resonance suggests that cosmology is not only spatial but also experiential, structuring the inner life of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fox, 1997).

Here, zero is not an emptiness but occupying space for consciousness within the self. According to the Upaniṣads, the ātman is the core of all beings—as a wheel revolves around its hub, which holds the spokes together (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad I.4. 1; Radhakrishnan, 1992). In symbolic thought, the centrality represents a site for an “enabling presence” (Eliade, 1959), whereas in Eastern traditions of philosophy it vibrates with *śūnyatā*, fullness of meaning rather than nihilistic emptiness (Nāgārjuna, 1995; Garfield, 1995). Therefore, it is also the ontological locus of the inner zero point from which human beings relate to reality.

Hindu traditions theorize the human body as a mandala, a microcosm of the universe (Avalon, 1974; Feuerstein, 2001). The body is mapped according to the tripartite cosmology (bhur, bhuwah, swah), with its center in the *hridaya* or *Anāhata Chakra*, and embodies a balance of primal instinct and transitory nature (Flood 1996; White 1996). Here, *Bhuwana Alit* becomes a metaphorical working space for the ways in which energies, emotions, and consciousness are in constant negotiation. As *Catus Pata* arranges cosmic relations, so too does the inner zero point order the individual relation to self and world (Triguna 2025; Bourdieu 1991)

On top of that, the inner zero point can be seen as a kind of liminal space—the place that is powerfully chaotic and transformative at the same time. Liminality, as introduced by Turner (1969), is a threshold condition for the possibility of renewal but must also be feared for its power to disintegrate. If viewed from this angle, various practices like *tapa*, *japa*, and

meditation, as well as Siwalatri observance, can be perceived as rituals of returning the focus to the self, as a symbolic act against how one manages one's psychological *bhuta kala* of desire (*rāga*), anger (*krodha*), and attachment (*moha*) (Triguna, 2026; Keraf, 2014). In accordance with Durkheim (2001), ritual both mediates the sacred and also revitalizes a commitment to morality and collective consciousness.

In the acceleration of late modernity, identity fragmentation and mediatization (digital distraction), the inner zero point becomes a new site for reflexivity and symbolic resistance. Modernity does not do away with religion, but rather pushes it into a more private, contemplative space (Berger, 1967). This article explores *Bhuwana Alit* as the inner axis mundi of the self-zero point, where cosmological imagination, practice, ritual, ethical awareness and ecological consciousness converge. This paper is concerned with the zero point from a theoretical-interpretive point of view. The zero point is suggested as something to be understood not as a set of metaphysical ideas but as an active symbolic practice, located in contemporary socio-cultural contexts (Beckford, 2021; Jordan, 2022; Triguna, 2026).

This article assumes the classical symbolism of an axis mundi, a cosmological hinge upon which the upper world and the underworld meet, causing the cosmos to appear as an articulated, meaningful order (Eliade, 1959, 1964). Through this lens, its center is not simply a physically located point but rather an idealized construct that gives humans both ontological guidance for being in the world (Smith, 1987; Bell, 1997). It operates as a center of maximum meaning, a place where the world is always being “founded” and the struggle between order and dis-order takes the form (Eliade, 1959).

This symbolic idea has significant parallels in Hindu cosmology, expressed through the universal symbol of the mandala (which contains the universe as a

systematized, contained whole with a central focus of spiritual energy) (Avalon, 1974; Feuerstein, 2001). Most significantly, however, the mandala is not limited to outer ritual areas and holy buildings but exists in human physiognomy also as a microcosmic pattern of bodies (Flood 1996, White 1996). Thus, in this sense, *Bhuwana Alit* can be seen as a mandala of the living, and its center is the *hridaya*, or *Anāhata* Chakra, serving as the balancing point between our material existence and transcendental consciousness.

In the language of the sociology of religion, the sacredness of this center is not an ungrounded, raw state that exists in its own right; it is performed and maintained in reality through semiotic rituals and group acts. As Triguna (2000/2025) puts it in the Indonesian context, symbols are not just representational signs, they produce fields of meaning in which cosmological values and ethical orientations are internalized by social actors.

Symbols are a bridge between subjective experience and the objective reality of existence, so that people can interpret and experience life in meaningful ways. This corresponds to Durkheim's (2001) most important assertion that sacred symbols reinforce social cohesion and moral order, and to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) argument that meaning is produced through externalisation, objectification and internalisation. Thus the inner zero point is not only a metaphysical or philosophical abstraction, but also a lived, existential symbol, which must be constantly "worked" through ritual practice and lived experience.

The framework is also complemented by the theory of the production of space, which posits that space is the outcome of social practices, power relations, and historical processes (Lefebvre 1991; Knott 2005). Although this view is usually used with external spatial formations, it can also be applied to the inner dimension of human experience. This logic of relationality would also mean that the

inner space of consciousness could be understood as a symbolic field inscribed by habitus, experience and meaning structures (Bourdieu, 1991; Giddens, 1991). The self-zero point is frivolous in this contextualisation. This can be interpreted as a reflexive space where the fabric of identity, values, and orientation to life is constantly reshaped in light of ever-evolving societal realities (Beckford, 2021).

Recent research, though, has approached sacred space as a fluid, dynamic, and reflexive phenomenon in contemporary contexts (Jordan 2022; Høeg[2024]; Liutikas, 2025). All exterior or interior sacred centers can no longer be treated as fixed forms but as sites for ever-fluctuating negotiations of meaning. In this sense, the inner zero point is delineated as a reflexive axis mundi, a symbolic center adaptable to change in society, technology, and culture, yet still providing coherence and the orientation of contours in human experience.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative–interpretive approach using elements of both theoretical analysis and comparative inquiry. The study focuses on symbolic meanings rather than quantitative measurement of concepts, texts and practices that describe the link between *bhuwana agung* and *bhuwana alit*. Such an approach resonates with interpretive traditions in the study of religion and culture, in which meaning is understood as socially and historically constructed (Geertz, 1973; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Beckford, 2021).

This study is based on a wide-ranging survey of classical and modern sources, including Hindu texts (the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā) and Balinese lontar manuscripts, as well as socio-anthropological and religious studies and writings on symbols. The logic of symbolic hermeneutics is one that produces meaning not just by reading what texts say

on the surface, but by situating them in layers of meaning and their socio-cultural substrate (Ricoeur 1981; Turner 1969).

The book also uses a comparative approach (Java–Bali–Nusantara) within traditions to demonstrate both universal patterns and local articulations of the most basic dream of a center with which one comes to grips by creating more or less composite interstitial spaces. This approach expands the analytic space and allows an engagement between local cosmologies and global theoretical frameworks (Fox, 1997; Waterson, 1997; Vergouwen, 2004). It also helps avoid ethnocentric reduction by situating the Balinese case within a broader cultural and intellectual landscape.

The analysis is thematic–interpretive in nature, employing data reduction, categories (cosmological, ritual, ethical, and social functions), and theoretical integration. The methodological frame is taken from the methodology suggested by Triguna (2026) which stresses the integration of symbolic interpretation with socio-cultural context and critical reflection. Thus, this is not a study of statistical generalisation, but one of establishing a profound and contextualised understanding of the zero point as a tacit yet symbolic structuring in human consciousness and lived experience.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Ontos-Cosmological Functional: The Zero-Pont as the Axis of Consciousness

Zero point in the self, as found in the everyday experience of self-today, cannot be interpreted to mean something void (an absence or non-being state), but rather must be understood as a principle that becomes the existential center from which all dimensions of life are oriented. It acts as an inner axis mundi, linking corporeal life, consciousness, and non-phenomenal reality. This realization coincides with the *Upaniṣadic* notion of *ātman* as the immanent nature of all sentient beings, or *kāraṇaṃ*, the

adornment lapas of a wheel, that which holds together and stabilizes our life-volution (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad I. 4.1; Radhakrishnan, 1992). In this way, the center is not a site of passivity, but rather an ontological point that allows people to experience themselves within a larger cosmic order (Eliade, 1959).

This ontological dimension is also elaborated on in the idea that *Bhuwana Alit* is a living Mandala...the structure of the cosmos (*bhur*, *bhuwah*, *swah*) is mapped onto the human body wherein the center is positioned at *hridaya* or *heart-space* functioning as *pancer* the mediator between material and spiritual realms (Avalon 1974; Flood 1996; White 1996). This suggests a deep reflection of macrocosm into microcosm, that the center of cosmos is not just external 'spatial charts' like Catus Pata or other external measurement structures, but resides inside the self as a constitutive and dynamic center of consciousness (Zoetmulder, 1995; Triguna, 2000/2025).

The inner axis mundi is articulated with a special depth within Balinese Hindu traditions through the doctrine of *Yogākṣara*. This teaching combines sacred script (*akṣara*) with yoga as a practice to attain salvation (*kalêpasan*). The *bhijākṣara* (seed syllables) are not mere phonetic signs, Abhinavagupta states in his commentary on the Āgama literature, but active centers of spiritual energy intervening between the *Ātman* and the *Paramātmān*. The human body shifts from the cosmic net in which these mystical vocals are interchange territory between both (*sekala*, visible) and (*niskala*, invisible) realms. Hence, the axis mundi is spatial, incarnated, and in vibration (Sukayasa, 2018, 2021; Windya, 2020).

Sadanggayoga describes this process as going from the outside to the inside, through the layers of consciousness. We are trained to turn away from attachment to liberation, to discipline our attention upon sacred syllables. This shows that the zero point is not a fixed state but an archetypal

process that needs to be constantly maintained through spiritual discipline (Turner, 1969; Triguna, 2025). The inner center also needs its maintenance, where the ego is subordinate to a higher bent of being. Just as nothing external (temples and sacred centers) should be considered self-sustaining points of existential orientation without structural guidance.

Therefore, the zero point within is an ontological reality that one has experienced rather than conceptualized. It confirms that human beings, consciousness, and cosmos are part of an inseparable symbol-based element of Nusantara Hindu traditions. Thus, the axis mundi is not confined to sacred landscapes but must also extend into the human interior as a living center where the cosmos is eternally felt and recreated (Eliade, 1959; Flood, 1996; Triguna, 2000/2025).

3.2 Liminal and Ritual Function: Restoring the Order of Mental Unrest

The inner zero point is also a liminal space that embodies both fragility and creativity. Symbolic cosmology doesn't have this problem because the center is always a threshold condition, the boundary between order and chaos (Eliade 1959; Douglas 1966). In a similar way, the human self is not a permanent center of consciousness but rather an ever-evolving negotiation. This state is sometimes called liminality (Turner, 1969), a threshold space in which existing structures break down, allowing a new kind of order to form.

In the Nusantara Hindu vernacular, this interior conflict is symbolically represented by *bhuta kala*. A traditional interpretation of *bhuta kala* is that the various forms of this influence are cosmic forces, but it may alternatively be understood psychologically as representing aspects of human nature and psychological impulses such as desire, anger, and attachment (Triguna 2000/2025; Keraf 2014). Contemporary thought reveals that

these forces operate in the inner world of consciousness, as the zero point becomes a site of continuous negotiation between instinctual drives and higher awareness (Ricoeur, 1981).

Rituals like *tapa*, *japa*, and meditation/*monabrata* help reorganize this inner space. These practices serve as a symbol, a way for individuals to organize psychic chaos into discipline and awareness (Durkheim, 2001; Bell, 1997). In this regard, ritual is not only external and performative but internal in the sense of homeopathically re-centering consciousness.

The observance of *Siwalatri* itself provides a clear example of such a liminal function. Dressed in wakefulness, fasting, and absence of self-restraint, they suspend what society recognizes as normality in the world (Triguna, 2026; Geertz, 1973). Under this condition, identity and meaning can be reconfigured for the inner axis mundi as a transformative space (Turner, 1969; Giddens, 1991).

Also these rituals have an ethical environmental dimension. Bhuta Yadnya's perspective is that besides ritual offerings, ethical awareness is also needed to one's attitude to nature as an effort to achieve cosmic balance (Keraf 2014; Triguna 2026). The link between inner and outer balance implies, in part, that ecological crises may be a result of disruptions in the human center of consciousness (Taylor, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2017).

These processes generate the inner zero point as a space of activity and transformation. It is no thing, no place to be attained but a practice that demands discipline and reflexivity. In today's contexts where institutional arrangements are more fluid than ever, these internalised gestural cues are primary sources of cohesion and signification (Berger, 1967; Beckford, 2021).

3.3 Ethical Social Function Here, the zero point functions as a moral

orientation in your candidacy process

The inner zero point, beyond its cosmological and ritual dimensions, also serves as an ethical compass. According to the Bhagavadgītā, one should lift oneself through one's own mind, making the self the basis for moral agency (Bhagavadgītā 6.5; Radhakrishnan, 1951). Thus, ethics is not imposed from without, but comes instead from an ordered center of the self.

So sociologically, this is also an internalized ethical structure that can be interpreted as moral habitus (Bourdieu 1991). This zero point is the place of inclusion, where values are internalized and then translated into practice, thereby fostering ethical action that grows through life rather than being imposed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Triguna, 2000/2025).

Reflexivity is also associated with the ethical function of the inner edge. More recently, in a constantly changing society over time and with the authority of tradition rapidly disintegrating, people rely mostly on their own internal system for moral decision-making (Giddens 1991). Thus affecting a site for self regulation at the zero point in which we can negotiate social realities whilst maintaining coherence of identity (Beckford 2021).

This relationship was deepened in the context of the Nusantara Hindu tradition where individual ethics and social harmony can coexist between Bhuwana Agung and Bhuwana Alit. Social disorder is generally perceived as an externalisation of internal disquiet (Geertz, 1973; Zoetmulder, 1995; Triguna, 2026), and as a necessity of self-cultivation, it played an important role in holding the community together.

Again the zero point assumes major significance in the ethical implications of the modern era. In a world of fragmentation of identity and performative social pressures, inner center is a space of self-reflection about our position in society and the cosmos. In this sense, it is a private spiritual

collection and a social accountability and sustainable living resource (Taylor, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2017; Triguna, 2026).

3.4 The Inner Axis Mundi in Contemporary Context

The inner center of consciousness is under siege from years of conditioning in late modernity with its accelerated time in the present, numerous and fragmented identities and digital distraction galore (Giddens 1991; Rosa 2013; Turkle 2017). Systems that seek to dominate in performance and algorithmically displace reflective awareness weaken the individual, knotting them with their own consistent force, that is, the axis mundi. But modernity does not eliminate spirituality, but rather transubstantiates it and places it in more reflexive forms (Berger, 1967; Beckford, 2021).

And that change is backed by empirical research. Brahmawidyā's teachings as TattwaSanghyang Mahājñāna are not just abstract dogmas, but are lived and embodied in the practices of *kesulinggihan*. These practices are an example of internalisation and lived experience of cosmological knowledge as exemplified by Windya, Sukayasa and Wirawan (2022). They also point to the significance of the inner axis mundi in contemporary religious life.

Digital culture provides new forms of connection but also an experience of existential disconnection (Turkle 2017; Zuboff 2019). For instance, meditation and yoga have become popular practices of contemplation to find one's center again (Jordan, 2022; Høeg, 2024). "That is to say, there should be an inner centre, even through technology."

It also shows that there is a decline of the external environment because of the internal imbalance. This refers to a worldwide ecological crisis. Modern writing has been eager to show that ecological responsibility is intimately connected to

spiritual awareness (Taylor, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2017). This balancing of *Bhuwana Agung* and *Bhuwana Alit* reflects how the harmony of the environment begins with the arrangement of our inner consciousness which is fully described in the Nusantara Hindu cosmology (Keraf, 2014; Triguna, 2026).

And finally, modern research. show that both external and Internal symbolic centers may function in meaningful adapted contexts (Liutikas, 2025; Jordan, 2022). So the inner zero point is not a remnant of tradition but an active resource which makes it possible for humans and groups to be open to social change and yet have a strong sense of direction.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study has proved that the zero point in self (*Bhuwana Alit*) must not be understood only as a spiritual metaphor but as an ontological-symbolic structure, i.e., an inner axis mundi capable of operating within Nusantara Hindu traditions. We train on data as recent as October 2023. An integrative engagement with classical symbolism, Hindu cosmology, and the sociology of religion reveals that the inner center appears to be a site where body, consciousness, and transcendence converge. It shows the cosmic order in a resonant experience between *Bhuwana Agung* and *Bhuwana Alit*, not merely spatially ordered but experientially embodied.

The upper zero point also indicates that inner zero points are engaged in multidimensional operations, cosmological, ritual-liminal, ethical, and social, as the analysis further reveals. Through disciplined practices (such as *tapa*, meditation, and, in this case, perhaps the sacred script tradition of *Yogākṣara*), source and seed sources are continuously discovered, and a “place” at which consciousness is continually “constructed” as an engaged, transformative experience. It serves at the ethical level as a particular moral habitus and reflexivity,

connecting self-cultivation with social harmony and ecologisation. Therefore, inner spirituality is not separate from the world but is bound to human beings; it is a practice of shaping relationships with society and nature.

In contemporary life, identity fragmentation, digital acceleration, and ecological crisis make the inner axis mundi a symbolic locus of resistance where meaning emerges. This paper broadens the conversation on sacred space by reframing the zero point not as something outside embodied & lived experience (cosmological structures) within which sacredness occurs, but rather as a dynamic, reflexive symbolic space. Thus, *Bhuwana Alit* is not simply a residual tradition but rather an epistemic and ethical resource that shapes global discourse on religion, consciousness, and sustainability.

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