

Fall 2018

HOW THE BALINESE SEE THE SEA: INTERPRETATIONS OF OCEANIC POWER

Margaret Dougherty
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HOW THE BALINESE SEE THE SEA:
INTERPRETATIONS OF OCEANIC POWER

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Indonesia: Arts, Religion and Social Change

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Introduction

Objectives of the study

My objective of this field study was to gain an understanding of the feelings, opinions, and religious beliefs that belong to the Balinese people regarding the ocean. Furthermore, I aimed to learn about the practices employed in an effort to maintain a positive relationship with the sea and the results of these practices. Before embarking on the field study, I was exposed to the intense and inspiring relationship that Balinese people share with their surrounding nature. Within daily activity and religious practice, I witnessed a unique understanding and connection to nature, expressed in the forms of hobbies, rituals, and conversation. As an island surrounded by the sea, there is naturally a high level of interaction between the people and the coast. Furthermore, Hinduism in Bali is profoundly intertwined with the energy of the natural world, and many of its practices involve the resident spirits of the environment.

Personally, I have felt the effects of the ocean's power in a multitude of manners. Growing up, I went to the beach as often as possible, and often found rejuvenation from the source of the ocean there. The unfathomable breadth of the sea baffles me, and simultaneously fills me with confidence and humility. The tactile aspects of the ocean such as the sounds of the waves and the feel of their motion relax my mind and body. My experience with the ocean is a majorly positive one, and I know I am not alone in my recognition of its powerful qualities. Along with my personal connection with the sea, I was guided to this topic by my resolute curiosity of the unique manner in which the Balinese understand and utilize this power.

Field study methods and ethics employed

To find information on religious beliefs and practices and gauge general opinion regarding the ocean, I employed a series of interviews, instigated informal conversations, and took part in participant observation. In order to uncover a varied stream of information, I traveled to a plethora of places near the ocean. One guiding factor of my nomadic journey was the existence of sea temples. There are seven main sea temples on the island of Bali, but there are many smaller temples that exist by the ocean. During my field study, I was able to visit *Pura*(Temple) *Luhur Uluwatu* on the Bukit Peninsula, *Pura Tanah Lot* in Kediri, *Pura Sakenan* in Serang, *Pura Dalem Ped* on the island of Nusa Penida, and *Pura Segara Ulun Danu Batur* in the village of Batur. At each of these temples, I tried my best to portray respect and understanding of the sacredness of the area and the priests and people praying there. In an effort to present this, I wore *pakaian adat*(traditional clothing), and brought a *canang*(offering) with me to participate in prayer. Usually, I was able to pray with either a teacher or driver who accompanied me or a group of people who were nice enough to allow me to join them. After praying, I introduced myself to the present priest(s) at the temple and asked them questions about the prominence of the location of the temple and its background story. If they did not have time at the moment, I would sometimes be able to schedule an interview with them at another time. At *Pura Tanah Lot*, though I visited three times, I was unable to find a priest who had time to talk with me. However, I was able to speak with many visitors to the temple who provided me with extremely valuable information, and I was eventually directed to the main office, where the secretary agreed to answer my questions in an interview. It is important to note that most of my interviews and informal conversations were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. As I am still far from fluent in the language, there were certainly a number of miscommunications, and I

sometimes was unable to ask sufficient follow up questions. Still, I am pleased with the quantity and quality of insight I received from everyone I was able to speak with about my study.

Along with priests, I found much of my information from Balinese Hindus who were visiting the temples I traveled to. Luckily, I discovered that many Balinese were willing to assist me in my quest for knowledge, for they were proud to share pieces of their culture and religion with me. Before, during and after joining a group of people for prayer at a temple, I would ask them questions about their practice, beliefs, and feelings regarding the specific temple we were at and the ocean in general.

I was also able to participate in three religious ceremonies that involved the ocean. These included *melasti* (which I attended twice) and *melukat*. The first *melasti*, which is a procession to the ocean, took place from Mount Batur to Watu Klotok beach. The second was from a village temple in Pecatu Uluwatu to Labuan Sait beach. At these ceremonies, I dressed in *pakaian adat* and followed along with the participants in the ceremony. Whenever I was given the chance, I chatted with people about the meaning of everything that was happening and their personal beliefs. At the second *melasti*, I was invited to join in the practice of praying to the ocean by a family who was participating. For *melukat*, I was a direct participant because it was I who was being purified during the ceremony, along with two other students. We were able to experience the full ceremony and afterwards were allowed to talk with the priest about the practices employed during our purification.

Lastly, I simply talked with a multitude of fishermen, surfers, and other community members resident of villages near the sea. Due to the kindness of so many strangers, I was able to gather a wide variety of opinions and accounts of the ocean's effects on individuals and its

role in Balinese Hinduism. I am so thankful for the plentiful kind hearts who shared their experiences and beliefs with me, and would never have been able to learn as much as I did without every one of them.

To maintain an ethical practice, I was sure to inform those who agreed to an interview with me about my purposes in my study. I explained my project to them and informed them that they were free to exit the interview at any time without repercussions. I also let them know that I was recording their responses and that I may use their words in my writing. For official interviews, I offered monetary compensation for their participation, though sometimes the innate generosity of the Balinese disallowed for the success of this effort, for many people refused to accept the money. During my participant observation, I made a conscious effort to practice reverence. I wore the appropriate traditional clothes, took part in the prayers, and did my best to respect the space and silence of those who were praying. Lastly, I have changed many of the names in this paper and will not be mentioning all of the places I have traveled to in an effort to preserve privacy.

Brief statement of findings

Upon completion of my research, I was able to conclude that the interpretation of the ocean for the Balinese, with influence from personal experiences and religious beliefs, is the acknowledgement of its power primarily as a beneficiary source. I repeatedly encountered people's recognition of the ocean as a giver of healing and joy, as well the origin of sustenance in the form of food and revenue. I encountered a fair amount of uncertainty and fear regarding the ocean as well, due to its unpredictability and potentiality for danger. In Hinduism, the most prominent religion in Bali, the ocean is defined as the largest source of water and therefore the

most powerful source of life. Religion also inspires the ideas of connection with nature, necessity of the balance of good and evil, and the perceptions of energy, which all inspire Balinese opinions of the sea. Both in the secular and religious realms, the ocean conjures awe, fear, respect, gratitude, and well-being from the Balinese.

Balinese opinion of the sea

The entity of the ocean is vast, powerful, and mysteriously enchanting. “It’s strength is so great that man becomes meaningless.”¹ The ocean is unique amongst natural places because of its expansive energy and its effects on people. Though such effects occur in various forms and in various places, they have a special significance on the island of Bali. Because of its geography and its religious history (on which I will elaborate later in this paper), many Balinese people maintain a strong relationship with the nature that surrounds them, especially the sea. This relationship stems from a concept known as *Tri Hita Karana*.

The meaning of this concept is “three causes of happiness.” It accounts for the necessity of maintaining harmony. Its origins, according to professor Pak Arta Widana from the Institut Hindu Dharma Negeri (IHDN), are rooted in Balinese culture, but the concept has been mixed with religious beliefs in the form of Hinduism, the most prominent religion on the island.² The three elements included in *Tri Hita Karana* are *parhyangan*, which refers to a relationship with God, *pawongan*, which refers to a relationship with other humans and *palemahan*, which refers to a relationship with nature.³ In this paper, I will focus on the third aspect, as it is most relevant.

Palemahan, according to I Wayan Sukarma (2016) in his journal titled *Tri Hita Karana*:

¹ Ri Yudari, A.A. Kade et al. *Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda. e-Journal of Linguistics*, [S.l.], p. 54-72, oct. 2015.

² Pak Arta Widana, Interview, November 19, 2018.

³ Wayan Sukarma, I. (2016). *Tri Hita Karana: Theoretical Basic of Moral Hindu. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture*. 2. 86.

theoretical basic of moral hindu, stems from human's innate connection to the natural world. He states that "humans are in nature, therefore bound and dependent upon nature within all its contents."⁴ In fact, humans themselves are individual microcosms of the universe. The term *Bhuana Agung* refers to the "great universe," which initiates all life. *Bhuana Alit*, or "small world" refers to us humans, who are made of the same elements as the great universe.⁵ To explain this, Hindu Alukta(2016) writes that within the universe, there are

"the five crude elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether (*akasa*). These are the *panca mahabhutas*. There are also five fine elements or *panca tanmatra*, the subtle aspect of the *mahabhutas* within the human body. These include touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. The physical universe with its stars and planets is compared to the human body with its organs."⁶

Therefore, we cannot truly be separated from nature. Due to this understanding, consideration of nature heavily influences the daily life of the Balinese and guides many of their religious practices. Pemangku Wayan from IHDN explained that nature saves humans, so it is up to humans to respect and save nature so that the mutually positive relationship can continue.⁷ Many people from Bali whom I asked about the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* mentioned the necessity of respecting the nature around them so that society can continue to experience benefits from the natural world. Furthermore, homes and places of business are often spatially planned out to include the beliefs within *Tri Hita Karana*. According to Pak Arta Widana, professor at IHDN,

⁴ Sukarma. *Tri Hita Karana*. 91

⁵ Unsur-unsur dan Perbedaan Bhuana Agung dan Bhuana Alit. (2016, September 20). Retrieved November 29, 2018 from <https://hindualukta.blogspot.com/2016/09/unsur-unsur-dan-perbedaan-bhuana-agung.html>

⁶ McDaniel, J. A Modern Hindu Monotheism: Indonesian Hindus as 'People of the Book', *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1 November 2013, 344.

⁷ Pemangku Wayan, Interview, November 19, 2018.

houses usually include a space for the gods, a space for the humans, and a space for nature. All are necessary for harmony in daily life. He also mentioned that many natural areas are designated as extremely sacred, so building upon them is forbidden. The extent of the nature's influence on belief and activity is evident all over Bali, and during my field study I was able to specifically learn about the influences brought on by the sea.

Firstly, it is pertinent to discuss the manner of the interaction of the Balinese and the ocean for the purpose of livelihood and recreation. A common conception of the ocean is as a source of food and income. Fishing is an enormous industry on the island of Bali. Fish as a source of food is extremely important here, where the fish consumption per capita per year is 33 kilograms, compared to about 20 kilograms per capita per year for the whole world, according to Sapto Andriyono(2018) in the journal, *Overview of Indonesia fisheries sector: Java and Bali island*.⁸ Of this, 90% of the fish caught are from the ocean.⁹ Especially near the coast, fish are a common meal for many Balinese, and a source of income for a fair amount of families. Along with providing food and revenue, fishing is a popular pastime for many Balinese people. A fisherman named Made whom I met in the village of Balian fishes every single day at 4pm until the sun sets with his friends. They do not sell their catches, but simply cook and eat them with their families or with each other. Made said he has a lot of fun fishing and that being by the ocean relaxes him. Along with fishing, my informants often told of immense joy that originates from swimming, playing, and just hanging out by the sea. Made explained to me that surfing is also becoming a prominent pastime for the Balinese, so recreational activities involving the

⁸ Andriyono, S. (2018). Overview of Indonesia fisheries sector: Java and Bali island. *International Journal of Life Sciences & Earth Sciences*. 41-48.

⁹ Eiseman, F. B. J. (1995). *Bali: sekala & niskala: essays on society, tradition, and craft*. Indonesia: Periplus Editions. 340.

ocean are currently on the rise.¹⁰ In my opinion, it seems that in Bali the sea is often regarded with respect and gratitude due to its role in daily activities.

To explain the aforementioned respect and gratitude, one often looks to the natural energy that inherently belongs to the sea. According to Barbara Lovric(n/d) in her work, *The art of healing in the heartland of Sanur*, “the sea and the seaside...are significant to the Balinese...as sources of power-supernatural and ambiguous *kasakten*.”¹¹ *Kasakten* is mystical, magical, energy commonly found in natural sources. This energy can be harnessed and put to a variety of uses, but not by everyone. Ibu Wayan, from the sea village Balian, expressed to me that people like her and I were unable to gain control of the energy of the ocean directly, for we would need a priest or a *balian* (traditional healer) to aid us in such a conquest. Doing so would involve praying to the gods of the ocean and bathing in the sea.¹² Lovric similarly recognizes the necessity of a holy person in the endeavor of harnessing the ocean’s magical, mystical energy. With the use of meditation and praying, those with enough *sakti*, or cosmic energy, may capture the power of the sea, which will then be used for spiritual purposes such as purification.¹³ Though the *kasakten* can only be captured by a select group of holy people, the general energy of the ocean can be felt by all.

I learned of the ways the Balinese interpret this general energy through discussion of how being by the ocean makes people feel. When she goes to the sea, Ibu Wayan feels “free.” She told me that “when at home, there are many things to think about. But when I go to the beach, I just feel fresh energy.”¹⁴ To do so, Ibu Wayan practices meditation or simply focuses on the

¹⁰ Made, Personal Communication, November 29, 2018.

¹¹ Lovric, B.. (n/d) *The art of healing in the heartland of Sanur. Unpublished manuscript.*

¹² Ibu Wayan, Personal Communication, November 28, 2018.

¹³ Lovric, B.. (n/d) *The art of healing in the hotland of Sanur.*

¹⁴ Ibu Wayan, Personal Communication, November 28, 2018.

sound of the waves or the feel of the sand. According to her, there is a magnetic force within the sand that has the ability to connect one to the energy of the earth. However, during these sessions she does not dare to swim due to fear instilled by a traumatic experience she had when she was a little girl. As a kid, she would swim in the ocean every day after work, but one unlucky day she was pulled out to sea and had to be rescued by a passersby on the beach. Since this event, she has been wary of the strength of the ocean, and always reminds her children to exercise caution in the waves. Though she is alert to the eminent dangers of the sea, Ibu Wayan generally sees the ocean as a freeing and positively powerful source of healing and purification.

In accordance with Ibu Wayan's beliefs, many Balinese people whom I was able to speak with on the subject of the ocean recognized its innate power. Bapak Sidanta, a yoga instructor near the beach, explained to me how the ocean aids his meditation practices. When he meditates at the beach, he says that the sound of the waves, like "natural music" helps him to experience calm. He also mentioned that the beach has a different vibration than other natural settings. For him, the specific vibrations from the ocean are easy to connect with. He strongly believes that the Balinese have a natural respect for the ocean, cultivated through spiritual connection or reliance for livelihood.¹⁵

This respect became evident to me early during my field study when I learned of the ways in which the people of Bali appreciate and utilize the power of the ocean for healing. Surya, an 18-year-old I met, described how the ocean can make all problems pass because it is so beautiful. He said that "the ocean can make stress leave my head."¹⁶ Multiple people I met described going to the ocean to heal their sore body parts or sicknesses, such as Gede, who was

¹⁵ Bapak Sidanta, Personal Communication, November 30, 2018.

¹⁶ Surya, Personal Communication, November 9, 2018.

able to regain strength in his legs after submerging himself in the sea.¹⁷ Irene, a 17-year-old girl from West Bali, told me the story of her healing after an event where she was poisoned. She became quite ill and did not know how to cure her ailment. But upon bathing in the ocean, she somehow became healthy again, about which she declared: “the sea can be like medicine.”¹⁸ However, many people also mentioned their fear of the dangers within the ocean. The mystery and uncertainty of the ocean, according to a teenager named Putu, keeps the Balinese on their toes. Putu also remarked that there are often enormous waves and the looming possibility of a tsunami, so it is important to be careful around the sea.¹⁹ Usually, people I talked to would base their level of fear of the ocean on whether they knew how to swim and how intimidating the waves were at their respective beaches. Two young girls I met at Kelating beach were timidly wading in the water about knee deep. They admitted to me that they liked to come there to swim twice a week, but they were always careful not to go too far out because the waves can be very dangerous. From my small sample of informants from Bali, I discovered that the emotions of calm and fear are both commonly instigated by the ocean, though the former was almost always more evident.

How the ocean heals

The recurrent positive reactions from people who go to the ocean are not random. Marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols studies the tangible, scientifically proven effects that being near the sea or other bodies of water has on our physiology. In his book, *Blue Mind*, he writes:

“The term ‘blue mind’ describes the mildly meditative state we fall into when near, in, on or under water. It’s the antidote to what we refer to as “red mind,” which is

¹⁷ Gede, Personal Communication, November 15, 2018.

¹⁸ Irene, Personal Communication, November 9, 2018.

¹⁹ Putu, Personal Communication, November 15, 2018.

the anxious, over-connected and over-stimulated state that defines the new normal of modern life. Research has proven that spending time near the water is essential to achieving an elevated and sustained happiness.”²⁰

He further explains that it is the inclination of our brains to find calm and clarity when we are near or within the water. Similarly, aquatic therapist Sandy Oeverman recognizes the powerfully healing effects of water on human biology. He explains that hydrostatic pressure, “the force exerted on the immersed body by fluid molecules,” can relieve pain and increase range of motion, as well as provide a myriad of other benefits.”²¹ This may play a role in the healing experienced in the bodies of people I talked to in Bali. Additionally, the saltwater that is unique to the ocean has interesting health benefits. Pak Arta Widana, professor from IHDN, explained to me that the salt in the ocean can absorb negative energy from a person, leaving them with only positive energy.²² Medicinally, salt from the sea can alleviate skin illnesses, decrease the symptoms of respiratory disorders, and reduce inflammation.²³ For these and so many other reasons, the ocean is a natural source of healing for all, and the Balinese have discovered how to tap into this source.

Oceanic connection to religion

Balinese Hinduism acknowledges the natural power of the ocean as a source of life, tool for purification, and home to influential deities and demons. Like everything in Balinese

²⁰ Nichols, W. J. (2015). *Blue Mind*. Columbus, GA: Little, Brown and Company.

²¹ Oeverman, S. Why Aquatic Therapy? (2017, May 27). *Brain Line*. Retrieved November 25, 2018 from <https://www.brainline.org/article/why-aquatic-therapy>.

²² Pak Arta Widana, Interview, November 19, 2018.

²³ Alvarez, S. D. (2016, December 28). The healing powers of the sea: From soothing your skin to clearing up sinuses, expert reveals the benefits of swimming in the ocean. *Mail Online-Health*. Retrieved November 25, 2018 from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4071270/The-healing-powers-sea-soothing-skin-clearing-sinuses-expert-reveals-benefits-swimming-ocean.html>

Hinduism, there is a combination of holiness and non-holiness that must survive in the ocean to maintain harmony. As pointed out by Lovric, it is often interpreted that the ocean is seen as evil by the Balinese. This may stem partly from the directional orientation that has strong prominence on the island. The direction toward the mountains, known as *kaja*, is considered the most holy, and the direction toward the ocean, known as *kelod*, is the least sacred.²⁴ Furthermore, dangerous deities and demons are believed to have strong connections to the sea. However, I have learned from my informants and from participant observation that all entities who are known to possess dangerous qualities also possess powerful positive qualities, usually of protection and healing. This juxtaposition that is characteristic of the residents of the sea accurately embodies the disposition of the ocean itself according to Balinese Hinduism.

Oceanic deities

Such exemplary inhabitants of the ocean in Balinese Hindu beliefs include *Dewa Baruna*, *Dewa Siwa*, *Dewi Durga*, *Dewa Wisnu*, *Dewa Rudra*, *Ratu Gede Mecaling*, and *Bhuta kala*. *Bhuta kala*, as defined by Bapak Sidanta, is commonly known as the demonic manifestations of God.²⁵ An important note that he pointed out to me is that the differing gods is that they are merely manifestations of one central god, known as *Sang Hyang Widhi*. The myriad of characteristics of the main god are visualized in the form of deities. Therefore, “to connect to energy of creation we visualize Brahma, to connect to the energy of preservation we visualize Wishnu, and to connect to the energy of destruction we visualize Siwa.”²⁶ Beyond these main three, *Sang Hyang Widhi* is visualized in many more forms surrounding locations or features.

²⁴ Eiseman, F. B. J. (1996). *Bali: sekala & niskala: essays on religion, ritual, and art*. Hong Kong: Periplus Editions.

²⁵ Bapak Sidanta, Personal Communication, November 30, 2018.

²⁶ Bapak Sidanta, Personal Communication, November 30, 2018.

Also, it is a common belief that the demons are also simply manifestations of the central god; visualizations of the negative aspects of *Sang Hyang Widhi*. Lovric states that the specific manifestations of deities that are associated with the sea have “benign as well as demonic aspects.”²⁷ The concept *Rwa Bhineda*, or “the two in one,” defines this idea of the necessity of a balance of opposites, even within one entity. Fred B. Eiseman Jr. explains the intertwined nature of all opposites in Bali in his book titled *Bali: sekala and niskala: essays on religion, ritual, and art*. He states that for the Balinese, “(e)vil is part of the whole, and good is part of the whole. Neither can exist without the other.”²⁸ Regarding this idea, yoga instructor Bapak Sidanta furthers that the energy of both the positive and the negative are within all of us, and exist everywhere in nature. He mentions that “when something is destroyed, at the same time the source brings energy to create something.”²⁹ This applies to the malevolent and benevolent potentials that coexist in the ocean, which are exemplified by its residents and guardians.

Oceanic deities

The most popular guardian is *Dewa(god) Baruna*. In my field study, I found this name to be the one most commonly associated with the sea. *Dewa Baruna* is found at many sea temples. Dr. Ni Made Yuliani from IHDN describes *Baruna* as the a dominator of the ocean, a protector of nature, and “as identical as a God of savior.”³⁰ He is sometimes known to ride a marine creature known as *makara*, and as ruler of the sea, he controls all of its creatures. According to the authors Kade et al. in the journal *Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda*, the god of the sea also embodies the characteristics of calm, freedom, and power, which are essential

²⁷ Lovric, B.. (n/d) The art of healing in the hotland of Sanur.

²⁸ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 2.

²⁹ Bapak Sidanta, Personal Communication, November 30, 2018.

³⁰ Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 22, 2018.

characteristics of the ocean in Balinese Hinduism.³¹ *Baruna* is a well-known deity in Bali, and is commonly prayed to for ceremonies that include the ocean or simply when anyone is worshipping near the sea. From learning about the characteristics of this deity, I was able to discover the qualities associated with the ocean in Balinese Hindu belief; namely strength, protection, and prosperity.

Though *Baruna* is most prominently connected to the sea, there are a variety of additional gods who depict oceanic power. In Bali, villages usually consist of three temples, each one dedicated to one of the main triad of deities; *Brahma*, *Wisnu*, and *Siwa*. Amongst these temples, the one built in the *kelod* direction facing the sea, usually with the name *Pura Dalem*, is dedicated to *Dewa Siwa*, and often to his wife *Dewi Durga* as well. *Siwa* is known as the “dissolver and recycler of the spirit.”³² Similarly, *Durga* is often associated with destruction and ferocity. However, both *Siwa* and *Durga* are necessary for the balance of life, and are known to have curative and protective powers as well.³³ It is understandable that these deities are present at the temple that faces the ocean, for their mixed identities of danger and security match the ocean’s capabilities.

Another deity associated with the sea is *Dewa Rudra*, who is worshipped at the ocean temple *Pura Luhur Uluwatu*. *Rudra* has often been referred to as the “dissolver of life,”³⁴ who is responsible for disastrous occurrences such as storms and is sometimes considered a “murderer,” according to Jero Mangku Wayan, a priest who was visiting the temple when I went there. During an interview I had with him, he also explained that *Rudra* also has the reputation of

³¹ Ri Yudari,, A.A. Kade et al. Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda. *e-Journal of Linguistics*, [S.l.], p. 54-72, oct. 2015.

³² Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 8.

³³ Bapak Sidanta, Personal Communication, November 30, 2018.

³⁴ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 265.

healer and protector.³⁵ At *Pura Luhur Uluwatu*, the gods *Rudra* and *Baruna* are prayed to for protection and strength. Jero Mangku Wayan told of the importance of visiting the temple, especially for him personally. He feels as if the temple itself is a teacher, and its location near the ocean allows it to be a powerful spot for meditation. *Pura Luhur Uluwatu* is one of the *sad kahyangan*, or six temples of the world.³⁶ Like Jero Mangku Wayan, many Balinese Hindus come here for worshipping and meditation. According to him, doing so in this particular location can help one change negative energy into positive. *Rudra*'s presence at this temple is certainly evidence of the fear of the ocean, but it is even more characteristic of the positively transformative power that stems from the sea.

Ratu Gede Mecaling, who is worshipped at the ocean temple *Pura Dalem Ped* in Nusa Penida, holds a similar position to that of *Rudra* at *Pura Luhur Uluwatu*. On November 14, I traveled to this island off the coast of Bali to visit this particular temple. At *Pura Dalem Ped* in Nusa Penida, in addition to *Siwa* and *Durga*, the main temple is dedicated to *Ratu Gede Mecaling*, who is known as the demon king.³⁷ A visitor to the temple from Bali described *Ratu Gede Mecaling* as “haunted” and the source of disaster, but the demon king does not inspire terror alone. Eiseman explains that “if a god or demon is powerful enough to bring evil and sickness, then surely he is equally capable of preventing and curing evil and sickness.”³⁸ At the temple, I was able to talk about this power with some priests who were waiting to assist people in their praying. One of the priests explained to me that *Ratu Gede Mecaling* was an extremely powerful deity who is greatly feared but also worshipped by the people of Nusa Penida and

³⁵ Jero Mangku Wayan, Interview, November 7, 2018.

³⁶ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 265.

³⁷ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 40.

³⁸ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 40.

Hindu people from other islands, especially Bali. At the temple, I noticed that those who came to pray began their practice in the temple named *Pura Segara*, which means sea temple. One family was incredibly kind in asking me to join them in their praying. They noted that the praying must begin at *Pura Segara* in order to ask for permission from the sea gods to continue their worship. The family noted that they were in Nusa Penida to visit this temple and pray for safety. They also mentioned that the gods present at this temple were capable of protection from disasters such as tsunamis. When we entered *Pura Segara*, which was right on the coast and oriented so those who pray there are facing the ocean, I noticed that a statue of *Dewa Baruna*, the god of the sea, stood in the center of the temple. I asked about this and was told that *Baruna* is prayed to for protection and welfare here. We proceeded to sit and pray for about 10 minutes facing *Baruna* and the ocean. Afterwards, we continued to three more temples and repeated the same praying method. Once the family departed, after we exchanged facebook names of course, I sat down with a priest to discuss more about the temple. Pemangku Ketut explained to me that *Baruna* is the ruler of the sea and is responsible for the safety of the ocean as well as protection of the people who go to it. He continued to disclose that people pray to *Baruna* for anything they may wish for from the sea. Furthermore, he told me that if one feels dirty, he/she may go to the ocean to bathe and be “saved” by becoming clean. During the process, the person must pray to *Baruna*.³⁹ Pemangku Ketut continued to describe his personal experience with the sea’s power. He meditates every day by the ocean, once in the morning during sunrise and once in the evening during sunset. Regarding this, he mentioned that the ocean, along with all nature, can provide us with luck and healing if we want these things. However, he also mentioned that the ocean is dangerous and

³⁹ Pemangku Ketut, Personal Communication, November 15, 2018.

many people are afraid, due to the fact that that many have died in the sea.⁴⁰ Pemangku Ketut's assurance in these convictions reinforced the powerful idea in Balinese Hindu belief of the strength of both positive and negative capabilities of the sea. Like *Siwa*, *Durga*, and *Ratu Gede Mecaling*, the ocean is simultaneously a source of protection and healing as well as a source of danger. However, it is clear to me that according to the priests and visitors of *Pura Dalem Ped*, the former benevolent qualities are more closely associated than the latter malevolent ones.

The sea as a source of life

The malevolent forces from the sea certainly hold prominence in the belief of Balinese Hindu people, but in my opinion, the positive aspects of its power are far more influential in general thought and practice. Balinese Hinduism is referred to as *Agama Tirtha*, meaning the religion of holy water. This is because of the integral role water holds in belief and practice within Hinduism. According to Dr. Ni Made Yuliani from IHDN, holy water is used for Hindu ceremonies and rituals for purification. She mentioned that the significance of this lies in the fact that “water is the source of life. Without water we cannot live because 70% of our life is water.”

41

Not only is the sea a common and powerful source of this holy water, it is the original birthplace of the substance. The story of *Pamutera Mandara Giri* tells of the struggle between the gods and the demons to conjure and take control of the first holy water: giver of eternal life. As relayed by Eiseman, the demons and gods were forced to work together to churn the “Sea of Milk” using the mountain “Mount Mandara” as their tool. Once the holy water was concocted, there was a long battle between the gods and the demons. In the end, the gods were victorious in

⁴⁰ Pemangku Ketut, Personal Communication, November 15, 2018.

⁴¹ Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 19, 2018.

gaining sole control over the holy water, and this is why they remain eternal.⁴² Dr. Ni Made Yuliani explains that this is what differentiates deities from humans.⁴³ After the battle was over, the gods retreated to the sky and the demons fled to the sea.⁴⁴ This story, in my opinion, further explains why the ocean is such a powerful source of holy water, for it was indeed the original foundation of “the elixir of life.”⁴⁵

In the journal, *Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda*, Kade et al. explain that water holds the role of making things alive, as defined by the Rg Veda, a sacred text of Hinduism.⁴⁶ The authors go on to explain how the ocean has the most powerful role in this task, as it is the largest source of water from which life is given. This is designated by the Bhagavad Gita, the holy book of Hinduism, which states: “(a)nd of all bodies of water, the ocean is the greatest”⁴⁷ When I asked about her opinion on the matter, Ni Made Sriarta, secretary at *Pura Tanah Lot*, responded that “the ocean is a source of livelihood.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Lovric states in her writing, “the sea is the source of all life and knowledge(sastra).”⁴⁹ From a variety of primary and secondary sources, it has become clear to me that Balinese Hinduism delegates vital generative responsibilities to the sea.

One concept in Hindu belief that reinforces this belief of the ocean as a giver of life is known as *gunung segara*(mountain-sea). From what I understand, this term comes from the representations of the mountains as “father” and the ocean as “mother.” Bapak Nengah, a

⁴² Eisman. Bali: *sekala & niskala*. 64.

⁴³ Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 19, 2018.

⁴⁴ Eisman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 67.

⁴⁵ Eisman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 63.

⁴⁶ Ri Yudari,, A.A. Kade et al. *Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda. e-Journal of Linguistics*, [S.l.], p. 54-72, oct. 2015.

⁴⁷ Ri Yudari,, A.A. Kade et al. *Tri Hita Karana and hydrolic cycle based on veda*. 58.

⁴⁸ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁴⁹ Lovric, B.. (n/d) *The art of healing in the hotland of Sanur*. 70

member of the village of Batur and the photographer of religious events there, described how people from the mountain must go to the ocean and vice versa because together they are needed for the creation and balance of life.⁵⁰ Again, this concept relates to the importance of the sea in Balinese Hindu belief and cosmology. In our interview, Jero Mangku Wayan explained that for life, “we must devote to the sea and mountains”⁵¹ These explanations further demonstrate the reliance on the ocean as the foundation of existence and maintainer of life’s balance. Though providing the source of all life is a tremendous ability, it is merely one of the powers of the ocean here in Bali.

Ceremonies for the sea

Melasti

Along with mothering all living things, the sea is a major source of purification and cleansing. Many people living in Bali whom I asked about the significance of the ocean mentioned immediately that it has the capacity to cleanse one of unholy things, visible and invisible alike. The ocean has an enormous role in ritual life to act as the purifier for humans as well as for important religious symbols. During the ceremony *melasti*, large masses of people proceed to the ocean from their respective temples, bringing religious symbols and a plethora of offerings. The ceremony most commonly takes place once a year around the time of the Balinese New Year, which is in March. However, there are special occasions that necessitate the intense purification that originates from the ocean.

I was able to observe and partake in this ceremony twice during my independent study. The first participant observation was a *melasti* procession from Mount Batur to Watu Klotok

⁵⁰ Bapak Nengah, Personal Communication, November 2, 2018.

⁵¹ Jero Mangku Wayan, Interview, November 7, 2018.

beach that occurred on November 3, for which I was accompanied by my driver, Putu, and a fellow student, Lorin. This particular *melasti* is called *manca wali krama*, which occurs about every five years. The ceremony serves the purpose of thanking the gods for a good life and asking for protection, according to Bapak Nengah. The total duration of the ceremony was 15 days. Bapak Nengah also mentioned that the god most prominently involved with this ceremony is *Wisnu*, because he is the maintainer of life and is associated with water and fertilization, so he is capable of facilitating the extraction of life that stems from *gunung segara*.⁵²

Before the procession began, a gathering of priests and holy people from various villages presented their elaborate offerings at *Pura Ulu Danu Batur*, which is the largest temple surrounding Mount Batur. Mount Batur is the second largest mountain in Bali, located in the Bangli regency. These offerings included long, colorful poles resembling umbrellas which are provided for the divine spirits who reside above. Also present were plentiful offerings on the ground, including many natural elements and often small sacrifices in order to appease the demonic spirits who reside below. Lovric explains that due to the potentially dangerous inhabitants of nature, specifically the ocean, quelling the demons with ground offerings is a necessary action during *melasti*.⁵³

After introducing these offerings and beginning the *gamelan* (Indonesian traditional musical ensemble often used for religious rituals), people piled into trucks and cars and made their way to the ocean. According to Bapak Nengah, the procession consisted of approximately seven hundred cars and five thousand people. The drive took about two hours. Once we arrived, we walked straight to the beach, which was about a mile from where everyone parked. Many

⁵² Bapak Nengah, Personal Communication, November 2, 2018.

⁵³ Lovric, B.. (n/d) The art of healing in the hotland of Sanur.

people were already proceeding, and a large group was already at the beach preparing for the next step in the ceremony. Many people, mostly women, carried offerings or *pratima* (religious symbols) on their heads, which would later be purified in the sea.

Upon arriving at the beach, we saw the extent of how many people were present. The setup was amazing. Many *gamelan* ensembles played on continuously while others ate lunch or played on the beach. The priests and holy people worked tirelessly to set up the offerings all along the wall that lined the beach. Similarly to what was done at *Pura Ulun Danu Batur*, offerings were given to the divine spirits high up and for the demonic spirits on the ground.

We met again with Bapak Nengah at the beach, and there he explained that about two hours were allocated for resting, eating, and simply hanging out. During this time, I saw many children frolicking on the beach, groups sitting and talking in the shade, and a few people appeared to be praying alone by the water. Though this section of the ceremony did not involve conscious practice to receive power from the ocean, I noticed that the overall mood of all those present was positive. After the resting commenced, performances began. There was more *gamelan*, traditional dances, and even cockfighting. I inferred that all of these performances were to entertain and please both the participants in the ceremony and the gods.

Bapak Nengah introduced us to the Head of the Region, who was in charge of the ceremony that day, but took the time to allow us to interview him. He kindly explained that soon he would be performing a purification ritual in the sea, during which he himself would bathe in the water while everyone lined up on the beach to pray. He explained that this would make him, everyone there, and the *pratima* pure. Furthermore, he was planning to create holy water from the ocean.

During this participant observation, I was able to learn from joining the procession and asking people who were taking part about the happenings and their respective motivations. I discovered that this ceremony relies on the purification qualities of the ocean and its provocation of sacred power. The intense size of the ceremony, along with the impressive preparatory efforts, invited me to believe that the faith in the ocean's abilities are extremely strong among the participants.

The second time I was able to observe *melasti* was in the village Pecatu, in Uluwatu. When walking on the street in the village, I saw some people wearing *pakaian adat*, or traditional clothes, and preparing offerings. I asked them if there was a ceremony occurring, and they explained to me that there was going to be a procession to the beach for *melasti*. They further explained that this particular *melasti* served the purpose of asking for the rainy season to begin. Apparently the Bukit Peninsula, where Uluwatu is located, is dryer than the rest of Bali, so the people of this village need to perform *melasti* twice a year; once to instigate the rainy season and once just once before the Balinese New Year. When I asked why a *melasti* ceremony was performed to ask for rain, I was told that rain comes from the ocean.

After learning all of this, I asked if I could join the procession to watch the ceremony, and I was allowed to do so as long as I was wearing appropriate clothing. Luckily, I had my *sarong* (Balinese traditional skirt) with me, so I quickly put it on and joined in the large mass of people who were walking to the ocean. The street where the procession was taking place was full of people, so much so that vehicles could not fit. We walked from the Pecatu village temple to the Labuan Sait beach. Since I am not a local, I was required to pay ten thousand rupiah to enter the beach, but once I paid this I was allowed to continue with the procession down to the water.

On the beach, there were approximately five hundred people participating in the *melasti*. All of these people were wearing all white *pakaian adat*, and sitting on the sand looking toward the ocean. I was told by a participant in the ceremony named Yoga that wearing white was technically optional, but doing so allowed for the ceremony to be more clean.⁵⁴ Many people were eating food, talking with friends, or helping to prepare the offerings. Before the main part of the *melasti* began, a group of about ten women carried offerings and holy water toward the sea. After this, a boat was loaded with offerings and three animal sacrifices. Approximately five priests got into the boat and went far out to sea in order to deliver the sacrifices to the ocean. According to Yoga, this practice ensured that the demonic spirits in the ocean did not bother us while assisting the success of our worship.⁵⁵ While this was occurring, all of the people on the beach began to pray. For this process, I was invited to join by Yoga and his family, who were participating in the ceremony. They provided me with a *canang*(offering) and *dupa*(incense) and guided me in the technique. We prayed for about ten minutes and then a group of women came around to purify us with holy water. Yoga explained that this praying was different for each person, but he guessed that the general goal was to pray for the beginning of the rainy season from *Baruna*, as well as for protection and well-being.⁵⁶

After the praying finished, a dance began in front of the tent. One of the participants I was with explained that this dance was the beginning of a process that would invoke trance for a lot of people. After about 30 minutes, I was told that spirits had entered some of the people. Those who had been entranced one by one sprinted to the ocean holding a traditional dagger known as *kris*. The journal *A modern Hindu monotheism: Indonesian Hindus as 'people of the*

⁵⁴ Yoga, Personal Communication, November 7, 2018.

⁵⁵ Yoga, Personal Communication, November 7, 2018.

⁵⁶ Yoga, Personal Communication, November 7, 2018.

book' by June McDaniel explains that these *kris* contain a high level of *sakti*, or spiritual power, and play a large role in folk Hinduism.⁵⁷ Once the entranced members arrived at the sea, they usually dropped to their knees and pressed the *kris* against their chests. Once they had finished this action, they often handed the *kris* to someone nearby and put their hands to their head to pray facing the ocean. I inferred that the presence of spirits during this ceremony was augmented by the spiritual power present in the ocean.

Once the trance section of the ceremony was over, there was a final movement of all who were present toward the ocean. Everyone worked together to carry all of the offerings that were on the beach to the edge of the water. Once everyone was lined up, they prayed for about five minutes facing the sea, and then the clean up began.

I felt so lucky to be able to partake in this amazing ceremony. Praying with such a large amount of people to the ocean was a spiritually powerful experience. I was also so grateful to the family who helped me partake in the praying and taught me all about the happenings and meanings of the ceremony. What I learned from watching the ceremony was that its occurrence was due to the necessity of asking for the rainy season from the god *Baruna*. It was evident to me that people clearly respected the ocean's power and potential. This is why it was necessary to provide an offering to the sea and pray together toward it.

Both of the ceremonies of *melasti* that I was able to witness were exemplary of the powerful belief in the ocean's purification powers. Everyone from Bali whom I have asked about the ceremony has recognized that it accomplishes the goal of cleansing people and symbols and providing life. In our interview, Jero Mangku Wayan explained that "*melasti* can clear negative

⁵⁷ McDaniel, J. A Modern Hindu Monotheism: Indonesian Hindus as 'People of the Book', *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 1 November 2013, Pages 333–362.

auras to become positive auras.”⁵⁸ Pemangku Wayan from IHDN mentioned that *melasti* can purify all that is bad, both in humans and for *pratima*.⁵⁹ Ni Made Sriarta from *Pura Tanah Lot* furthered this point during our interview when she explained that *melasti* is a “purification of all nature,” and that the ceremony was important for all temples and all people.⁶⁰ In my interpretation, *melasti* demonstrates clearly that the ocean is widely known in Balinese Hinduism to allocate the qualities of livelihood and purity.

Melukat

Though purification from the ocean is most commonly assigned to the ceremony of *melasti*, there are a variety of other methods of receiving cleansing and renewed holiness from the sea. *Melukat* is a purification ceremony that can be performed many places for many purposes. I have learned that it is most often sought out when one feels unclean. When this feeling is present, the person will request help from a priest or *balian* (traditional healer) and participate in purification. Ni Made Sriarta from *Pura Tanah Lot* explained that *melukat* allows us to “clear the negative things in our self.”⁶¹ The process involves bathing in holy water, which can be from a variety of sources, and praying to the gods, as I learned from the priest who assisted me in the ceremony, Jero Pemangku Gede⁶².

On November 3, I participated in this purification ceremony with three other students at the ocean of Kelating beach in Tabanan. The purpose of performing this ceremony was to keep me safe during my study of the sacred topic of the ocean and Balinese Hinduism, as well as keep the other students safe during their respective sacred topics. I was and am so grateful for the

⁵⁸ Jero Mangku Wayan, Interview, November 7, 2018.

⁵⁹ Pemangku Wayan, Interview, November 19, 2018.

⁶⁰ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁶¹ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁶² Jero Pemangku Gede, Personal Communication, November 3, 2018.

people who aided me in this ceremony, as well as for permission and protection from the gods during my study. The ceremony began with the Jero Pemangku Gede, the priest who guided our process, asking for permission for carrying out the ceremony from the gods by praying and providing offerings of flowers, grass, and incense. After this, we entered a holy area on a cliff overlooking the ocean. Once here, we gave more offerings and prayed for about 20 minutes. Then, the priest and his wife guided us in a series of actions in which we washed ourselves with holy water that they had created with abundant flowers. Then, Jero Pemangku Gede used holy water that he collected from the ocean water for our purification. We were instructed to drink a small amount of the water that was placed in our hands and then wash our mouth, nose, eyes, ears, hands, and feet with the holy water. After this we were told to bend down while the priest poured a larger amount of ocean water on our heads, during which we mimicked the activity of bathing. Lastly, the wife of the priest placed rice on our heads and chests and instructed us to eat some. Upon completion of these actions, we had finished the ceremony and were purified. Jero Pemangku Gede said that bathing in the holy water cleanses our souls similarly to how bathing in day to day life cleanses our bodies.⁶³ Perhaps this effectiveness in cleansing is due to how, as pointed out by Lovric, “the sea has the capacity to absorb all the impurity of the world.”⁶⁴ By partaking in *melukat*, I was able to observe firsthand the purification abilities of the sea and experience the process of receiving a cleansing renewal. The event reinforced the belief in Balinese Hinduism that the sea must be respected, can make us holy again, and will provide protection.

⁶³ Jero Pemangku Gede, Personal Communication, November 3, 2018.

⁶⁴ Lovric, B.. (n/d) The art of healing in the hotland of Sanur.

Though *melukat* is defined as an extremely effective method of purification, it is not necessary to acquire cleansing from the ocean. When asked about the healing effects of the ocean, many people I talked to explained from personal experience or observation their knowledge on the ability to renew one's holiness by simply praying and bathing in the ocean. At Kelating Beach in the Tabanan regency of Bali, I witnessed a man and woman who were employing this method. They sat upon the sand with a *canang* and *dupa* while they prayed. After about 10 minutes, they went to the ocean, where they used a bucket to dump saltwater upon their heads and thoroughly wash their arms, legs, and faces. This was followed by another session of praying for about 10 minutes. When they had finished the process, I approached and inquired about what they were doing. They excitedly explained that they were "becoming clean." They also told of how they often come to the beach to feel better and generate good thoughts. Through praying to god and bathing in the ocean, they felt that they had accomplished these goals. The couple then urged me to try the process, as they predicted it would make me feel good. Their faith in the cleansing effects of the ocean showed me how strong the belief is that the sea facilitates healing of many sorts for the Balinese people.

Ngaben

Another ceremony in Balinese Hinduism that has helped me understand the connection of Balinese Hinduism and the ocean is called *ngaben*. This is a ceremony that occurs following someone's death. As described in the journal *Ngaben conception in lontar siwa tattwa purana* by I Nyoman Kiriana, the process involves the cremation of the body following an elaborate procession. After this, the ashes are taken to be deposited in the ocean.⁶⁵ According to Ibu Made,

⁶⁵ Kiriana, N. (2017). Ngaben conception in lontar aiwa tattoo purana. *International journal of Hindu science and religious studies*. Volume 1, No. 2. October 2, 2017. Pages 84-91

whom I met at *Pura Dalem Ped*, these actions serve the purpose of returning the *panca mahabhuta*, or five great elements of the physical body back to the earth in order to allow the soul of the person to be properly put to rest.⁶⁶ The elements of the physical body that must be returned to the earth are fire, wind, earth, water, and ether. Sending the ashes of the body into the sea allows the water element of the human to return to nature. Furthermore, “the sea purifies the souls of the dead before they go to heaven.”⁶⁷ During *ngaben*, the ocean once again demonstrates cleansing, but also acts as an acceptor of our natural elements back to their origin. In the process of learning about this ceremony and the reasoning behind it, I was able to discern the extent of Balinese connection to the sea. People receive life from the source of the ocean, and the very nature of their anatomy requires that they return to it upon exiting life.

Origins of religious beliefs

The powers of the ocean seem to be accessible through praying, ritual, ceremony, meditation, and other methods. But how did these powers come to be known by the Balinese? The answer originates in the history of religion on the island of Bali. Here, the population is predominantly Hindu, approximately 89%.⁶⁸ But the Balinese religious belief system has a much deeper story than this. The indigenous members of Balinese society, known as the Bali Aga, based their spirituality on the nature around them. They worshipped deities who resided in different places in nature. When Hinduism arrived and spread in Bali, McDaniel explains that instead of rigid implementation and eradication of pre-existing concepts, the religion was “blended with indigenous traditions and beliefs such as animism and ancestor worship to form a

⁶⁶ Ibu Made, Personal Communication, November 17, 2018.

⁶⁷ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 339.

⁶⁸ McDaniel. A Modern Hindu Monotheism. 334.

new and unique faith.”⁶⁹ Mysticism, rituals, and connection to nature within Balinese Hinduism all have roots in the practices of the indigenous Balinese population.

The coming of Hinduism to Bali has a myriad of origins, but one main contributor to the establishment of the religion was the island of Java. When the great Hindu Majapahit kingdom in east Java began to decline with the advent of Islam in the area, many nobles and priests involved with the empire fled to Bali to safely continue their practices. In 1284, the first “expedition” from the Majapahit empire to Bali spreading Hinduism was launched. By 1343, a Javanese ruler from the Majapahit empire had become king of Bali. Though these events had important political impacts on the religion of Bali, Hinduism’s spread took place in a variety of modes, not limited to expeditions and conquest.

One of the influential priests from Java who played a large role in the establishment of Hinduism in Bali was Dang Hyang Nirarta. He was known as the “*Pedanda Sakti Rauh*,” meaning “The Holy Priest Who Recently Arrived.”⁷⁰ This was due to his possession of magical and spiritual power as well as his ability to harness energy. He spread Hinduism around Bali during his journey on the island, building temples where he found spiritually prominent areas. According to Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Dang Hyang Nirarta did not just spread Hinduism throughout Bali, he provided protection for the island by distributing positive energy.⁷¹ One of the ways in which he accomplished this was by establishing temples by the ocean, from which love and positive energy emanated.⁷² For this reason, Dang Hyang Nirarta had a big influence on the Balinese belief regarding nature, specifically the ocean. He left a trail of energy bursting,

⁶⁹ McDaniel. *A Modern Hindu Monotheism*. 351.

⁷⁰ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 266.

⁷¹ Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 19, 2018.

⁷² Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 19, 2018.

protection providing temples along the coast of the island. This trail begins with *Pura Rambut Siwi*, where Dang Hyang Nirarta first arrived in north Bali in 1537.⁷³ And the trail ends with *Pura Luhur Uluwatu*, located on the southwestern coast of the Bukit peninsula, at the bottom of Bali. Along the way, Dang Hyang Nirarta was inspired to to build *Pura Tanah Lot*, which means “temple of land in the sea.”⁷⁴ The holy priest was called to the beach by a ray of light at the spot where the temple rests now. Ni Made Sriarta from *Pura Tanah Lot* explained during our interview that he followed the ray and was led to a spiritually powerful spot by the ocean.⁷⁵ After meditating often and experiencing the natural holiness of the area, he decided to build a temple here, which still stands today as *Pura Tanah Lot*. At the temple in present day, daily worshipping is common amongst Hindus and people from all religions. Ni Made Sriarta explained that there is a natural spring under the main temple, from which holy water is constantly being extracted. This particular holy water has a powerful healing ability, and people from all over have come to be cured by the spring, often through the ceremony of *melukat*.⁷⁶ *Pura Tanah Lot* is also a popular destination for *melasti* due its immense energy stemming from its location right along the coast. Another important piece of this temple is the *pelinggih*, or tower, that is for the worship of *Dewa Baruna*. As the power of this temple comes majorly from the sea, the necessity of expressing gratitude and praying to the gods of the sea is recognized here.⁷⁷ This tangible power was evident for Dang Hyang Nirarta, and remains evident in present day due to the natural spiritual energy emanating from the ocean.

⁷³ Eiseman, *Bali: sekala & niskala*, 266.

⁷⁴ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁷⁵ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁷⁶ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

⁷⁷ Ni Made Sriarta, Interview, November 22, 2018.

Dang Hyang Nirarta did not only find energy from this particular spot. He continued to spread positive energy and the message of Hinduism throughout Bali, building more temples along his way. Another significant stop of his was at Uluwatu, where he found another spiritually powerful area. At the top of a cliff in Uluwatu overlooking the ocean, there already existed a temple. Dang Hyang Nirarta practiced meditation often here, and according to Jero Mangku Wayan, this allowed him to generate energy in his body and unite that energy with the universe at this place. Eventually, the holy priest was able to achieve *moksa*, or enlightenment at the spot atop the cliff overlooking the ocean where the main part of the temple still exists. Jero Mangku Wayan explained that the priest was meditating here, and was suddenly lifted and carried through the sea to reach *moksa*. The spiritual significance of this spot defines it as “sacred and sanctified.”⁷⁸ From this knowledge and the insight from Jero Mangku Wayan, I can infer that the ocean’s power and energy is easily accessed at *Pura Luhur Uluwatu*, and allows many to experience successful meditation and prayer. By discovering and utilizing the ocean’s facilitative power, Dang Hyang Nirarta was extremely influential in establishing some of the religious beliefs surrounding the sea that are still held by the Balinese.

Conclusion

“Without the ocean’s wealth we cannot live well.”⁷⁹ Like Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, who proclaimed this when discussing reliance on the sea, the people of Bali have an excellent grasp on the power of the ocean and how it affects their lives, both in a religious and non-religious sense. Bali is a tropical island, completely surrounded by the sea, on which Hinduism is the most prominent religion. These elements contribute to the fact that the Balinese have an intimate

⁷⁸ Jero Mangku Wayan, Interview, November 7, 2018.

⁷⁹ Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, Interview, November 19, 2018.

connection with the ocean. Many people live, work, play, and often meditate by the coast.

Fishing is a huge source of food and revenue for many members of Balinese society. From many of my informants, I learned that swimming and playing at the beach are becoming commonalities amongst the population of Bali, and people often find peace and happiness in the presence of the sea. However, oceanic opinions also include fear of dangerous waves and currents. Religiously, the population of Bali generally believe that the ocean is an enormous source of life, according to those I was able to ask about the subject. I also repeatedly encountered the belief that it has the potential to protect, purify, and heal us. Simultaneously, the sea is known to sometimes possess malevolent qualities and the acts as a home to evil spirits.

The gods and demons that are known to reside in and govern the ocean exemplify many of its capabilities. *Dewa Baruna*, the main god of the sea, controls all of the creatures of the sea and protects all who enter it. *Dewa Siwa* and *Dewi Durga*, found at the temples in villages that face toward the sea, are known for their destructive habits but also for their healing and protection. *Dewa Wisnu*, associated with all water, controls fertilization and life, which are staples of the sea to the Balinese. *Dewa Rudra*, associated with disaster, is worshipped at the temple by the sea in Uluwatu. Here he is revered as a protector and provider. *Rate Gede Mecaling*, found at the powerful ocean temple of Nusa Penida, holds similar qualities. All of the beings connected to the sea share its juxtaposition of dispositions. However, they accurately represent the ocean in that they are more beloved than feared.

Also, a plethora of religious ceremonies and rituals in Bali are heavily involved with the powers of the ocean. Among these are *melasti*, *melukat*, and *ngaben*. *Melasti*, a procession from temples to the ocean, exemplifies the belief in the ability of the ocean to purify anyone and

anything, as long as the correct intent is present. Such purification can also be accessed through the ceremony *melukat*. *Melukat* can occur at a variety of locations, but my participation in the ceremony took place at the ocean, where I learned more about its power to cleanse the soul along with the body. When people told me of this ceremony at the sea, they often included that it can heal a myriad of ailments, and is sought out when one feels “dirty.” Lastly, after cremation, a recently deceased person’s ashes are given to the ocean during the ceremony *ngaben*. This demonstrates the connection of humanity to the sea as well as to the environment as a whole. The concept behind *ngaben* relies on the fact that our bodies are comprised of the same elements as the universe. These elements must be returned to their origins in order for the soul of the person to make its way to heaven. As one of the elements is water, putting the ashes in the ocean allows for its return to nature. All of these ceremonies exhibit the ample aptitude sought out from the ocean by the Balinese.

The spiritual relevance of the ocean, however, transcends just the ceremonies that include it. I discovered that it common practice amongst the Balinese to pray to the ocean or the gods within the ocean for livelihood, protection, well-being or other wishes. I also discovered the common practice of bathing in the ocean to seek healing. Usually following offerings and prayers, people will go to the ocean and submerge themselves or mimic the action of bathing in order to cleanse their bodies and minds and even heal illnesses or sorenesses.

Common opinions and beliefs surrounding the sea in Bali stem from the natural interaction made inevitable by the geography of the island and the religious prominence of a special form of Hinduism that is based on the environment. The contribution of the latter cause developed through the integration of animism beliefs native to the pre-Hinduism inhabitants of

Bali. Additionally, the journey of Dang Hyang Nirarta, a holy priest from the Majapahit empire, brought belief in the energetic influence of the sea and faith in its protection to the Balinese.

Due to both of these factors and the presence of the sea in daily life on Bali, the people who live there are strongly connected to the ocean. The Balinese have a unique and powerful understanding of how the ocean can facilitate healing, invoke fear, purify the mind, body, and soul, and above all, give us life.

Interview with Pak Arta Widana, Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, and Pemangku Wayan

Note: This interview was conducted primarily in Bahasa Indonesia, so the translation cannot accurately depict the questions and answers completely. The following answers are mixed responses from the three informants who were present at the interview: Pak Arta Widana, Dr. Ni Made Yuliani, and Pemangku Wayan. My language teacher, Dian, completed the translation.

What are some of the beliefs surrounding the ocean within Balinese Hinduism?

There is belief in Hinduism about ocean, ocean is the fountain because it can destroy and purify the bad things in *Sekala* (the tangible world). Then we believe especially for Hinduism for example there's *Melasti* ceremony it can purify the bad things. In *Sekala* beliefs, Balinese believe the *Pratima* (symbol of God. It can be *arca*/statue) can be purified in the ocean.

How can the ocean make people and symbols become purified?

Why ocean can purify, the answer is Based on Lontar, there's 2 literatures. That means it takes the core of life from the ocean. Then, the content of Lontar said that as a place to purify called "*Bhuana Agung*" and for our self called "*Bhuana Alit*". It is like the ocean is the place to purify, sometimes our mind is like stress and think too much so we can feel calm after doing purification.

Can the ocean heal?

Yes. When there are people got sick for example, maybe they can buried their feet in the sand. Because it can restore acid and Balinese believe when they always tingling that means the movements of feet is not normal. Maggie, you should try to buried your feet if you feel tingling not more than an hour. Also if there is itchiness you can swim in the ocean. So the conclusion, ocean is pure because it's the fountain and also can heal diseases. Oceans are the fountain and the place to do purification.

How is *lontar* related to the beliefs about nature? Who usually reads it?

He reads *Lontar* (palm leaf manuscripts) often because he has it in his house. His brother who works in tourism there is a guest come to their house order the *Lontar* and the write it but not much. The content is about the legend story. Because in the past we didn't have paper to write that's why we write it in *Lontar*.

Do you know the story of *Dewa Baruna*?

Dewa Baruna is authority of the ocean. His symbol is Dragon. *Dewa Baruna* in Hinduism context is "*Prabawa Tuhan*" manifestation of God. The function is to protect nature in the ocean. If we worship Him hopefully what we want and wish can come true. For example we worship for our health and safety. So *Dewa Baruna* is identical as a God of savior. In Sanskrit

“War” from Baruna means stretched and dominate the ocean. Everything in oceans is dominated by Him. His wife’s name is *Baruni* who helps Him to dominate all parts in the ocean. Without the ocean’s wealth we cannot live well. For example, salt comes from the ocean, so cannot have the taste and love without *Baruni*. When human cannot save the nature, nature is angry and we are away from *Tri Hita Karana*. The relations between human and nature are so human can save the nature and human is close to the nature so the nature will save us. That’s the point.

Can you tell me the story of *Pamuteran Mandara Giri*?

When the God of war “*Dewa Brahma*” got together and said that there is giant who will destroy the heaven. There was a meeting with Gods about how to overcome the giant. So they must become strong and immortal. So, how to get the immortal? They must find *tirtha amerta* (holy water). So that’s why there was the incident of *pamutaran*. There is a lot of obstacles, when *Siwa* finish the problems about *pamutaran* that’s why there’s shrine called *Padmasana*. That is symbol that’s show *Siwa* was sitting there so no one can spoil the process of *pemutaran mandara giri* because *Siwa* is there. But the giant still tried to mess it up and grabbed the *Tirta Amerta*. Finally *Dewa Wisnu* come there when the snake and dragon is there try to disturb when the snake and dragon hit by *tirtha amerta* their tongue become cloven. So that’s why after that, the world between human and animal is separated. Don’t disturb each other. And *Wisnu* flew to get the *tirtha amerta*. And He licked a little bit of the *tirtha amerta* so that’s why He was kind of reborn. But finally *tirtha amarta* is still owned by the Gods as the winners. That’s why Gods live immortal, not humans. Using *tirtha amarta* to pray but the holy *tirtha* is the *tirtha* that already give the mantra because water is source of life. Without water we cannot live because 70% of our life is water.

What was the influence of Dang Hyang Nirarta?

He is a priest who came to Bali and protect Bali by building lots of temples because if small Bali is not protected by positive energy from a long time ago, Bali would sink and be wrecked. That is why His mission to come to Bali was to spread the theory of Hinduism. Only love can protect us. That’s why there is a lot of temples in Bali and by the ocean because they protect bali and get positive energy. Energy comes from praying, singing hymns, and etc. There is a concept when people come to pray and always pray and say God’s name the positive energy will come also sing the *kidung suci* (specific hymn).

Do you ever do meditation?

Yes, 1-2 times a day. Certainly in the morning, drink water first. But I am happy to do meditation. Finding the calmness is very hard.

Where do you find is the best place for meditation?

First we must have a clean area in our house if we do meditation in our house. Sometimes we do it in nature but for that we need a high concentration. But some of them make a place that is special for meditation. When we're sitting to meditate there is a guideline book but when we're back to nature we use our experience.

Can you tell me about *Tri Hita Karana*?

It is implemented in the daily life of Balinese. Houses are organized to have a space for god, a space for man, and a space for nature. Many villages used to have sacred areas of nature that were protected, and people were not allowed to build there. Nature is not responsible for natural disasters, human conduct is responsible. There are places that are deemed sacred that may not be built upon. However, with tourism there have been more instances of ignoring these rules. But there are some regulations that are in place to control this. *Tri Hita Karana* is usually implemented into hotel construction and maintenance. There has been commodification of many aspects of Balinese culture. But we believe that sacred is always sacred. Also, holy will purify the non-holy. Even if non-holy people go to the temple, the holiness of the temple will make the people holy. Balinese Hinduism is very strong because of its culture. There is a lot of importance on physical space. For a temple or holy area, the more inner the courtyard, the more sacred.

Is the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* originally from Bali or Hinduism?

It is Balinese concept but the values also concept of Hinduism. It is mix. Religion come, and combine with the culture, not culture combine with the religion. That's why there's a combination with religion and culture.

Photos



Pemangku getting ocean water to purify us during *Melasti*



Beginning of *Melasti* from Mount Batur to Watu Klotok beach



Melasti in Pecatu, Uluwatu: praying to *Dewa Baruna* for rain



Dewa Baruna, at *Pura Segara* in Nusa Penida

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Glossary

- *Agama Tirtha*-name for Balinese Hinduism meaning “religion of holy water”
- *Balian*-traditional healer
- *Bhuana Agung*- “great universe”
- *Bhuana Alit*- “small world”refers to humans as a microcosm as the universe
- *Canang*-offering
- *Dewa* or *Dewi*-term for manifestation of god
 - *Baruna*-God of the sea
 - *Brahma*-god of creation
 - *Wisnu*-god of sustaining life
 - *Siwa*-god of destruction
 - *Durga*-warrior goddess, wife of *Siwa*
 - *Rudra*-mighty god of disaster
 - *Ratu Gede Mecaling*-demon king
 - *Bhuta kala*-demons
- *Dupa*-incense
- *Gamelan*-Indonesian traditional musical ensemble often used for religious rituals
- *Gunung segara*-concept that the mountains(*gunung*) and the ocean(*segara*) together provide life
- *Kaja*-most sacred direction toward the mountains
- *Keloid*-Least sacred direction toward the sea
- *Mancang Karma*-ceremony held every 5 years for purification of Mount Batur

- *Kasakten*-mystical, magical energy found in natural sources
- *Kris*- traditional dagger with spiritual power used during trances
- *Lontar*-palm leaf manuscript
- *Melasti*-ceremonial procession to the sea
- *Melukat*-purification ceremony
- *Makara*-mythical creature in the sea ridden by *Dewa Baruna*
- *Moksa*- enlightenment
- *Pura*-temple
- Names of temples:
 - *Luhur Uluwatu*
 - *Tanah Lot*
 - *Sakenan*
 - *Dalem Ped*
 - *Segara Ulun Danu Batur*
- *Panca mahabhutas*-five elements that make up everything in the universe
- *Panca tanmatra*-five senses that originate from the elements
- *Pakaian adat*-traditional clothing
- *Pamutera Mandara Giri*-origin story of holy water
- *Pelinggih*- tower within a temple
- *Pratima*-religious symbols
- *Rwi Bhineda*-the concept of the necessity of “the two in one”

- *Tri Hita Karana*-concept within Balinese Hinduism that translates to “three causes of happiness”
 - *Parhyangan*-concept of *Tri Hita Karana* that defines human relationship with God
 - *Pawongan*-concept of *Tri Hita Karana* that defines human relationship with human
 - *Palemahan*-concept of *Tri Hita Karana* that defines human relationship with nature
- *Sang Hyang Widhi*-overarching God in Balinese Hinduism
- *Sarong*-Balinese traditional skirt
- *Sakti*- spiritual power
- *Sekala*-the “seen” aspect of the universe
- *Segara*-sea

Recommendations for further study

- During my study, I was able to learn a little bit about the pollution in Bali, and likewise the actions that are being taken to counteract it. Many people associated this with general opinions about the sea. An interesting further study could analyze the strength of respect for the ocean versus actual treatment of it in Bali.
- Meditation is strongly associated with nature in Bali, and one could more deeply study the connection of meditation with the sea, how it aids the process and provides natural energy.
- I often encountered the rapidly changing culture surrounding the ocean in Bali. Mostly in area with more tourists, the Balinese interaction with the sea has been and continues to change in a variety of ways. A comparison of rural and populated areas in treatment and opinion of the ocean could be a further study topic.

