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The Archetype of the Ocean in Balinese Culture

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THE ARCHETYPE OF THE OCEAN
IN BALINESE CULTURE

Ava Hull

SIT Study Abroad

Indonesia: Religion, Arts & Social Change

Spring 2023

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Abstract

An archetype is essential for expressing an understanding of symbols and adding depth to the meaning derived from everyday life. It is a connection of source and meaning through the lens of the human experience. In the case of the ocean, people all over the world turn to the sea as a source of healing and a symbol of the murkiness of the unconscious mind. This holds true for the people of Bali as their beautiful Island is in deep connection with the force of the ocean. From the everyday contact like fishing and relaxing at the beach, to the ritual and ceremonial importance like Melasti, the seas surrounding the island of Bali have become a purifying, yet destructive archetype of power.

The Balinese people have a deep respect for the ocean and its power, which is reflected in their daily lives and spiritual practices. The ocean serves as a reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of living in harmony with nature. It is a symbol of fertility and life giving force. However, as it is also a powerful and unpredictable force, it demands respect and caution from those who rely on it for their livelihoods and cultural traditions.

By reflecting on practices involving the ocean like fishing, surfing, purification ritual and meditation, the ocean truly embodies the Balinese principle of *Rwa Bhineda*. As it not only is a source of creation, but also is revered as a force of destruction, whether this be the power to take lives or natural disaster.

Thus, this study dives into the blue world of the oceanic powers of life giving yet also taking. Finally I attempt to apply the cultural understanding of the ocean to conservation efforts and how this can aid in spreading awareness surrounding the current environmental issues. Most marine environments, especially coral reefs, are in a critical state. There are few solutions to problems of pollution and global warming, while maintaining an ideology of consumption. We

can turn to traditional cultures like the Balinese who have successfully lived sustainably for generations before globalization to pave the way for a more environmentally friendly future.

Introduction

Objectives of the Study

As Bali is enveloped in the Indian Ocean, with diverse coastlines ranging from mountainous drop offs like at Uluwatu Temple, to the calmer waters of North Bali, the presence of the ocean is respected like that of a god. The purpose of this study is to better understand how the people of Bali view and connect with the ocean, or *Laut* in the Indonesian language. In the sections below, I outline the metaphorical significance as well as the practical role the sea plays in the life of the Balinese. This lays the foundation for interpretation of the ocean as a source of mystery, purification and destruction. I also hope to expand on the work of a previous SIT Student and their writing, *How the Balinese See the Sea*. As this study gave initial insight into the interpretations of oceanic powers on this island of Bali.¹

By aligning the spiritual and philosophical perception like the Tri Hita Karana with the physical embodiment of ritual and practice, I aim to connect the cultural importance of the ocean to conservation and how this could aid in protecting marine ecosystems. There are numerous projects taking place all along the coast of Bali to protect coral life and support local communities. Additionally, highlighting the significance of the ocean in Balinese culture can also promote sustainable tourism practices and encourage visitors to engage in eco-friendly activities that benefit the marine environment. By educating both locals and tourists on the importance of conservation, we can work towards preserving Bali's unique marine ecosystems for generations to come.

¹ Margaret Dougherty, *How the Balinese See the Sea*, 2018

Field Study Methods employed

In order to gain a firsthand understanding of the Balinese connection to the ocean, the field methods I employed consisted of engaging in interviews, casual conversation, and participation in ceremonial events. In doing this, I hoped to see the ocean through the lens of the people I spoke to, thus adding to the larger perception of the sea within culture. Through these field methods, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of the ocean and how it is perceived by different communities of Bali. This approach allowed for a more holistic view of the ocean and its importance beyond just its ecological and economic value.

On my journey, I was drawn to the areas of Pemuteran, Amed and Nusa Penida because of the presence of Sea temples, *Pura Segaras*, and a cultural affiliation to oceanic activities like fishing. I was fortunate enough to visit a multitude of temples, or *Pura*, including: *Pura Tanah Lot*, *Puri Pulaki*, *Puri Pabean*, *Puri Pemuteran*, *Puri Bukit Kursi*, *Goa Giri Putri*, *Puri Penataran Ped*, *Puri Dalem Ped* and *Pura Segara*. When visiting the temples, I wore traditional clothing (*Pakaian adat*), and brought an offering, the *Chanang*. There, I prayed with kind families who allowed me to join, or with a guide. Afterwards, if the priest was available, I would ask permission to interview them about the temple, or set up a time at a later date. Aside from talking to the priests, if people there were willing to chat, I would ask questions like why they were there to pray and the purpose of their visit to the temple. Most of these conversations were conducted in Bahasa Indonesian, and I have to admit that a lot was lost in translation, as I am still at a very basic level of fluency. Nevertheless, I am very grateful to all of the friendly people who were willing to share parts of their culture and traditions with me.

In addition to temple visits, I visited different coral conservation efforts along the coast. Most notably, the Biorock project in Pemuteran. Where I was able to converse with people working to conserve the ocean life and provide jobs to locals. I also reached out to a few other conservation organizations, however, I was not provided a response to be able to interview. To supplement this, I visited the locations and chatted with different dive instructors and fishermen hanging around who knew of the projects.

For the sake of anonymity in my personal contacts, many of the people I will quote or refer to in this project will not have their names mentioned. In order to respect the privacy of those I gained insight from, I always asked permission before beginning the interview or conversation and made sure that they felt comfortable and not obligated to answer.

Brief Statement of Findings

In completing this study I have found a wide range of opinions and strong emotions surrounding the view of the ocean. By better understanding principles like the Tri Hita Karana and Rwa Bhineda, which guide the worldly understanding of the Balinese people, the archetype of the ocean became more clear. The sea encompasses healing and protective properties of purities. However, if there is an upset in the balance in the Tri Hita Karana, Gods, humans and the natural world, disaster will ensue. Thus, bringing to light the destruction and fear the sheer power of the ocean instills in people. I also found that the ocean represents a sense of calm and serenity, an ideal place for meditation and healing.

In a metaphorical sense, the sea can be used as a symbol of life's ups and downs, with the waves representing the highs and lows of existence. The ocean is seen as a symbol of impermanence, highlighting the transience of life and the need to embrace change. Additionally,

the ocean is a symbol of the subconscious mind and the depths of the human psyche, representing the unknown and unexplored aspects of the self. Within the religious context, the ocean is a giver and receiver of life, which can be connected to the modern scientific understanding of the role the ocean ecosystem plays in a worldly setting.

Due to this close cultural connection to the sea, practices like Melasti, Melukat and Ngaban harness and use this power purification whether it be used for the purification of images or the body. This power is represented poetically and metaphorically through the embodiment of deities like the god Baruna. When there is an upset in the balance between the Gods, humans and nature, the *Tri Hita Karana*, catastrophic events ensue. In light of the environmental degradation we are witnessing today, there is clearly an upset in the balance. As the anthropocentric world of humans dominates that of nature, there is a drastic unbalancing of the scales of justice. While this study does not offer solutions to the problems of pollution and global warming, I hope that by giving insight to how essential the ocean is to most everyone, that it can aid in raising awareness and consciousness surrounding the issues.

The Delicate Balance Between Humans, God and Nature

Tri Hita Karana

In order to understand how the ocean manifests as an archetype in Balinese culture, the relationship between humans, god, and nature must first be understood. The Tri Hita Karana is the “theoretical basis of moral hindu”² and creates an essential balance between God, humans, and nature. These sects are described as the three causes for welfare, as it is deeply embedded in the Balinese culture through the practice of Hinduism. I Wayan Sukarma summarizes it as follows:

“It literally comes from the words "tri" means three, "hita" means a welfare, and "karana" means the cause. It is understood by Hindus in Bali to three causes to be a welfare. Therefore, Tri Hita Karana concepts are illustrated as the cause and effect. Thus, in addition to consist of a welfare cause, as well as it illustrates a result, welfare purposes.”

(I Wayan Sukarma, 104)

This blueprint for societal function is made on the basis that welfare can be achieved by following the teachings of the Tri Hita Karana, which include maintaining a balance in the anthropocentric world of humans, the ecological world of nature, and the divine world of the Gods. Through this, the health of nature and one's relationship to a higher power will be preserved, enabling true welfare.

² I Wayan Sukarma, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/281246-tri-hita-karana-theoretical-basic-of-mor-7756e902.pdf>

The philosophy of the Tri Hita Karana is based on the morals deemed theologically good in the eyes of God. Thus, these ethics upheld by the Balinese are in accordance with the norms based on the law of God, “Human nature, precisely due to God is created in accordance with God's will. The core doctrine stated, ‘Act in accordance with your nature as a human being, namely, complete my abilities-abilities, and you will simultaneously achieve a real happiness, and fulfill God's will.’”(I Wayan Sukarma, 106) This core doctrine forms the basis of many religious norms and moral codes that aim to guide individuals towards fulfilling their potential as human beings and living in harmony with God's will. By following these norms, believers hope to attain happiness in this life and the next. Not just welfare and harmony in a personal context, but also with nature. As humans are dependent upon their environments and function as ecological beings, one must respect the natural world they inhabit. Thus, the presence of the Tri Hita Karana in the consciousness of the Balinese fosters a sense of connection and responsibility for the natural world all humans rely on.

Following this train of thought, nature, like humans, is a creation of the gods, so forces like the ocean must be respected and understood as the strength of the gods. “Appreciating the God’s strength through the blessing provided by Gods is the way in which the Hindu worshippers respect the nature as the God’s creation. Thus, there is an ethic education to protect the nature so that it will keep balanced and be in harmony.” (I Nyoman Suarka, 56) In this case, when the appropriate actions are not taken to uphold the Tri Hita Karana, disorder and human suffering will ensue. Disorders such as natural disasters and disease, which are viewed as the anger of the gods.

All this will in turn affect humans and their personal welfare, as it would be a failure to uphold a section of the Tri Hita Karana. Therefore, it is important for individuals and society as

a whole to strive towards maintaining balance and harmony with nature and the spiritual world, in order to prevent such disorders and ensure the well-being of all. This can be achieved through practices such as sustainable living, respect for cultural traditions, and mindfulness towards one's actions and their impact on the environment.

Further connecting this to the archetype of the ocean, through the lens of the Tri Hita Karana, the sea can be viewed as an essential layer of the trinity of humans, nature, and the gods. Since the sea is associated with the power of the gods, it must be respected like such. In order to achieve harmony, the Balinese utilize sacred rituals and sacrifice to show appreciation to the forces of the gods and nature. Thus, with this understanding of the morality of Hindu culture, it is essential to discern how these values are upheld. In this case, humans are constantly in deep connection with the realm of nature and the divine, as all three rely on each other. This connection is reflected in the various rituals and ceremonies that are performed to honor the gods and nature, such as *puja* and *yagna*. Additionally, Hinduism emphasizes the concept of karma, where one's actions have consequences that affect not only themselves but also the natural world and the divine.

Upholding the Tri Hita Karana

It is nearly impossible to walk the streets of Bali without smelling the sweet incense and almost stumbling over the *Canang Sari*, the daily Balinese offering. This colorful offering is made up of a small woven basket filled with flowers, rice, and other small items. It is placed in front of homes, shops, and temples throughout Bali. These offerings are an integral part of Balinese culture and are a way for the people to show their gratitude and devotion to their gods.

It is one among many of the offerings used to appease the *Niskala* and pay respect to nature. Oftentimes, before Balinese swim in the ocean, a *Canang* is placed on the beach to show appreciation and respect for the sea.

This example illustrates the Hindu concept of *karma*, where the Balinese people believe that their actions have consequences that affect not only themselves but also the natural world and the divine. By offering the *Canang Sari*, they are showing their gratitude and respect to their gods and nature, which in turn helps maintain a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment, ultimately upholding the Tri Hita Karana.

Sekala & Niskala: The World of the Unseen

Another essential aspect of understanding the Balinese connection to the natural world is the relationship between the seen, physical world and the unseen world of spirits. The dimension of reality that humans, plants, ritual and ceremony encompass is *Sekala*. On the other hand, the occult realm of *Niskala* is not seen, but felt. “Sekala means what you can sense - see, hear, smell and touch. Niskala involves that which cannot be sensed directly, but which can only be felt within. Niskala plays a much more important role in the Balinese culture than it does in the West. Niskala is a very personal matter, often difficult to articulate, or in some cases, hazardous to do so.” (Eiseman, 219). This concept of *Niskala* is deeply ingrained in Balinese religious practices and is believed to be the source of spiritual power that drives their way of life. It is considered to be the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe and achieving inner peace and harmony. This influence of the spiritual world is in connection with the belief in animism, which predates the arrival of Hinduism in Bali.

Overall, the concept of *Niskala* plays a significant role in Balinese culture and religion, as it is believed to be the source of spiritual power and gives a spirit to the nature world, like the *Kasakten*, which is the mystical energy found within nature. It is deeply ingrained in their religious practices and is considered to be a personal matter that is often difficult to articulate. It is embodied in interpretations of the ocean, as there is the physical aspect of the waves, sand and beach. The *Kasakten* is believed to be a powerful force that can both heal and harm, and it is often invoked in rituals and ceremonies that take place on the beach. These practices reflect a deep connection between the people and the ocean, which is seen as a source of life, sustenance, and spiritual renewal.

Interpreting Deities of the Ocean

Animism attributes a soul and spirit to each individual being, whether that be a plant, rock, or human. Which is the unseen force residing in all objects and is oftentimes correlated to the presence of a god. This holds true in the case of the ocean as well. For example I found when visiting the different temples that *Dewa Baruna* is most commonly associated with the sea, along with a host of other deities. Numerous *pura segaras* (ocean temples) are built for the worship of Baruna, as he represents the protection and dominance of the ocean. At these temples he is often depicted riding his marine steed, *Makara*. The *Makara* is half elephant, half fish and is a symbol of fear and fertility³.

³ https://p2k-stekom-ac-id.translate.google/ensiklopedia/Makara?_x_tr_sl=id&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc

The makara embodies the vastness and complexity of the ocean, which was considered a realm of mystery and wonder. Its association with Baruna suggests that it was also seen as a powerful and potentially dangerous force that could not be fully controlled or understood. “Baruna who rules the ocean has the connotation of ignorance, the underworld, and darkness as a reflection of the breadth and depth of the ocean waters that were not touched by ancient Indian society. As Baruna's vehicle, makara also has the connotation of a mysterious sea creature whose various aspects cannot be understood by ordinary humans.”⁴ Attributing these traits to Baruna metaphorically represents how humans perceive the ocean. The ocean has always been a source of mystery and intrigue for humans, and the use of makara as a metaphor for Baruna's vehicle reflects our limited understanding of the depths of the ocean that remain unexplored even today. The vast expanse of uncharted waters serves as a reminder of how much we have yet to discover and learn about our planet.

Baruna is also associated with purification powers, for example, after the cremation of the deceased (*Ngaben*), there is a procession to the ocean for the soul to be cleaned. “People say that the soul of the deceased is entrusted to the care of Baruna, who will look after it until completion of the post-cremation rites. It is during that period that the soul is believed to be tortured, and thus cleansed in Balinese purgatory (*swarga*), located somewhere in the depths of the sea.”(2015, Bali Editorial Team)The purification process in *swarga* is believed to be necessary for the soul to reach moksha, the ultimate goal of Hinduism. This is why the Balinese take great care in performing the post-cremation rites and entrusting the deceased to Baruna's

⁴ Universitas Sains, Ensiklopedia Makara

care. It is like Eisemen stated in his book *Sekala and Niskala*, the impurities will fall like sediment and the elements of the body have been fully returned to the five elements.⁵

Hence, as it is with most Hindu deities, Dewi Baruna is a manifestation of another god, Brahaman, who is the ruler of water. Brahaman is not only the ruler of water, but he is also the god of all creation. He plays a vital role in the trinity of Hindu deities: *Brahaman, Wishnu, and Siwa*. Who are all manifestations of the mighty god *Sang Hyang Widhi*. Brahaman is believed to be the ultimate reality and the source of all existence, and his role as the ruler of water symbolizes his power over the life-giving force that sustains all living beings on earth. In Hindu mythology, water is also associated with purification, regeneration, and spiritual cleansing.

⁵ Eisman, Fred. *Essays on Religion and Art: Sekala and Niskala*

The Ocean as a Source of Purification

Holy water or *Tirta Empul*, is used in every ceremony for the purification of people, offerings and other items like masks or art. The distribution of the holy water is headed by the priest of the village who collects it from the river then prays for the purification of it. In the village of Muduk Pakel, Pak Nanda was the priest who was in charge of the holy water, stating that “All ceremonies use water. I get the water for purification by taking offerings like katsina to the river and collecting the water after saying prayers and giving thanks. Then that water is brought to the temple and kept in a special jar and place. If there is a temple festival, water is placed on the shrine in the temple with flowers and other offerings.”. These offerings are sometimes used to “invite in the spirits”(Pak Muli) or for the worship of Vishnu. Vishnu is the god of the river, therefore anytime Pak Nanda took water to be used as Tirta Empul, he gave offers as thanks to this deity and others related.

Holy water appears in almost all ceremonies the Balinese partake in for the purification of the mind, body and soul. Such as the rituals of Melukat and Melasti, which I have chosen to focus on these two due to their usage of the ocean as a power for purification.

Melasti

Melasti is a Hindu-Balinese purification ritual that is an integral part of the religious and cultural practices of the Balinese people. The primary aim of Melasti is to cleanse oneself and society of spiritual, material, and environmental impurities. The ritual involves the procession of ceremonial objects and offerings to the sea or other bodies of water, which symbolize the purifying power of the ocean. It is held a few days before the Balinese New Year, Nyepi. Although not all communities travel to the ocean due to proximity, if they are able, then that is

what is common practice. During the ritual, participants also perform various cleansing activities such as meditation, fasting, and self-reflection to achieve a state of inner purity. The ceremony is an important part of Balinese culture and is believed to bring good luck and prosperity to the community.

During Melasti, the Balinese people make offerings to the sea, including flowers, rice, and fruits, as well as various other items that symbolize prosperity, happiness, and peace. The offerings are typically carried in elaborately decorated wooden or bamboo containers and are accompanied by traditional music, *Gamelan* and dancing. Once the offerings have been placed in the water, participants immerse themselves in the ocean to cleanse themselves of spiritual impurities.

Melukat

“The sea has the power to cleanse away the negative, the mind, body and soul can be made clean by the ocean.” (Pak Gede)⁶ This purification power the ocean embodies is emphasized in Melukat, as this withstanding ceremony specially cleanses the body spiritually and physically from evil forces and impurities. Melukat is a sacred ritual that is still practiced in Bali today, and it involves a series of prayers, offerings, and bathing in natural water sources such as rivers or the ocean. The Participants believe that the water has the ability to remove any negative energy and impurities from their body, mind, and soul, ultimately leading to a sense of renewed strength and positivity. This ceremony will bring balance and harmony to the individual's life, washing away any negative energy and allowing them to start anew.

⁶ 2023, Personal Conversation

During Melukat, participants will immerse themselves in the ocean or river water multiple times while reciting prayers and mantras. The ceremony is often performed during significant life events such as births, weddings, or after experiencing a traumatic event to help purify and renew the individual's spirit. An example of a mantra used is '*Om Sarira Parisudhamam Swaha*' which means 'May the physical body and the mind body be pure'.⁷

Purification Through Healing

The ocean engages all of the senses: the salty taste and smell of the water, the cooling sensation of dipping in, the soothing sound of the waves crashing against the shore, and the sight of expansive blueness. Extending even to our sixth sense, the all encompassing feeling of reverence. The sea instills a sense of calm relaxation, which is ideal for healing. The therapeutic benefits of the sea have been recognized for centuries, with many people seeking out coastal locations for their physical and mental well-being. From saltwater therapy to simply gazing out at the horizon, the sea has a powerful effect on our overall health and happiness. Whether it's swimming, surfing, or simply lounging on the beach, the sea offers a wide range of activities that can help reduce stress and promote overall well-being. In fact, many people find that spending time near the ocean is one of the most effective ways to recharge their batteries and reconnect with nature.

I learned from conversations with casual beachgoers about the healing properties the ocean embodies. Pak Wayan shared with me a story of how his younger sister managed her arthritis by burying her body in the sand and praying to Baruna for health. Invoking the god Baruna for healing magic appeared to be a widespread practice among those wanting to use the

⁷ Titasya, *Melukat Cleansing Rituals of Bali*, <https://balipedia.com/cleansing-rituals-in-bali/>

power of the ocean to heal themselves of illness. In an article by a Balinese Editorial Team, they mentioned, “When the diseases are deemed of a graver nature, small offerings such as buratwangi and lengawangi may be made to invigorate the magical virtue of the prayers and incantations. The prayers are normally addressed to God Baruna, and phrased as such: “Ratu Batara, Titiang nunas tamba, mangda tiang seger.” (Lord Baruna, I beg you helping hand, send me a cure for my illness).”⁸

Using the ocean to heal is not simply just spiritually based, but scientifically backed as well. Salt water is anti-inflammatory and helps to prevent infection as it has vitamins like zinc, magnesium, iron and potassium.⁹ This also aids in our consumption of trace minerals as the skin absorbs them, boosting immunity. Along with this, just as the ocean grounds us spiritually through calming the mind, by submerging the body in water, it grounds us physically as well. This is because of “Positive electrons in the form of free radicals can build up in our bodies and direct contact with the sand and salt water, which have negative charges, balances this out.”(Padi, 5) which is the scientific process known as ‘grounding’. In addition to balancing out the positive electrons in our bodies, grounding has also been shown to reduce inflammation and improve sleep. Therefore, spending time on the beach not only provides a mental escape but also has physical health benefits. Thus, applying this to the cultural understanding, the ocean manifests as a rejuvenating source of healing energy.

⁸ Bali Editorial Team, 2015 <https://www.nowbali.co.id/when-the-balinese-go-to-the-sea/>

⁹ Padi, 2022 <https://blog.padi.com/health-benefits-salt-water/>

The Ocean as a Force of Destruction

The Principal of Rwa Bhineda

The ocean is an essential force of purification, yet it hosts the demonic as well. This is a true embodiment of Rwa Bhineda, the principle of duality within Balinese Hinduism. The ‘art of opposites’ is found within this principle, as life is in a delicate balance of opposing forces. Rwa Bhineda is also reflected in the Balinese culture, where harmony is achieved through the integration of opposing elements such as light and dark, good and evil, and male and female. This principle emphasizes the importance of balance and acceptance of both positive and negative aspects of life. However, unlike the typical understanding of dichotomies from a western standpoint, the values of good and evil are not entirely separate. Especially in the case of deities versus demons. While the gods typically represent a force of good, they can dip into the realm of evil. In the same case, the demonic forces are not necessarily completely evil, as they can be purified and pacified. In this sense, as Lovric stated, both categories belong to the realm of the divine.

“Any confrontation between deities and demons cannot represent a conflict between good and evil because these moral categories simply do not apply... Deities and demons are not directly concerned with each other or with human moral or ethical conduct. They merely demand deference. Moreover, Balinese are not concerned with the morality or virtue of deities and demons but with their power and the ambiguous nature of that power. It is not a case of lofty, exalted, high-minded deities aligned against apolaustic, iniquitous demons. Neither align to oppose, oppugn or objurgate the other. Both belong to the realm of the divine.” (1987, Lovric)

The power of deities and demons is often portrayed as ambiguous, as it can be used for both good and evil. This reflects the complexity of human nature and the idea that even divine beings are not always straightforward in their actions.

Applying this understanding to the ocean, while it possesses soothing and healing properties and an association with the god Baruna, it is also a source of destruction and fear, home to a host of demonic creatures. The physical embodiment of evil is seen in natural disasters, like tsunamis and floods. Disasters that eradicate communities and take lives instill a great fear of the destructive power the ocean contains. Thus, it is understandable that the ocean is known to be home to numerous mythological figures of malicious intent. In many cultures, the ocean is personified as a vengeful deity or a monstrous creature that demands sacrifice and appeasement. These legends reflect humanity's attempt to make sense of the unpredictable and often deadly nature of the sea. These mythological figures often serve as cautionary tales, warning people of the dangers that the ocean can bring. They also reflect humanity's attempt to make sense of the destructive power of nature and find meaning in tragedy.

One such example in Balinese culture is *Dewa Siwa* and his consort, *Dewi Durga*. According to the Puranic Hindu Creation Story, these deities manifest in the realm of the demonic in order to achieve duality after creating the universe. The story of Dewa Siwa and Dewi Durga illustrates how destruction and chaos are necessary components of creation and balance in Hindu mythology. It encourages individuals to find acceptance and understanding in the face of tragedy, recognizing that it is a natural part of the cycle of life. The goddess Uma transformed into Durga, and thus, “The goddess then went into the ocean, where she gave birth to all kinds of terrifying sea monsters; and fish of every strange and terrifying kind and shape: dugongs, sharks, sawfishes, gigantic eels and bladder fish.”(Ariati, 34). It illustrates the Hindu

belief that destruction and creation are two sides of the same coin, and that tragedy can ultimately lead to growth and transformation.

This perspective allows individuals to find solace in the face of natural disasters or personal hardships by recognizing that they are part of a larger cosmic cycle. These mythological figures serve as a way for people to explain the unexplainable and make sense of the devastation caused by natural disasters. They also highlight the human tendency to personify and attribute agency to natural phenomena.

Perhaps the most essential aspect of duality is finding the balance between the forces of creation and destruction. Just as the ocean is a power of annihilation, without it, there would be no room for creation. Therefore, it is necessary to respect the dangers of the ocean. The duality of the ocean as a force of both creation and destruction is deeply ingrained in many cultures, with fishermen and sailors often paying homage to the sea through rituals and offerings. Despite its dangers, the ocean remains a vital source of sustenance and inspiration for many communities around the world. In addition, the ocean plays a crucial role in regulating the Earth's climate and supporting diverse marine ecosystems, making it essential for the survival of life on our planet.

Churring the Sea of Milk

A quick jump back in time a few 3.5 billion years ago, it is hypothesized that in the depths of the ocean the first single cell organisms of life began. The alkaline rich thermal vents releasing copious amounts of negatively charged ions came into contact with the highly acid ocean which was charged with positive protons. This kickstarted the life we now see today as, “It is thought that the electrical charge created by this voltage powered the creation of simple

carbon-based molecules such as amino acids and proteins from carbon dioxide and hydrogen. As time progressed, the gradient began to shape cell membranes and power the creation of self-replicating molecules such as DNA.” (Moloney, 2017) Thus, the ocean is truly the mother of all life, however, before the scientists reached this conclusion, the Balinese associated the ocean with fertility and life giving properties.

This metaphor for fertility can be expanded by interpreting the story of the *Churning of the Sea of Milk*. The puranic perspective of life based on Hinduism mythology is rooted in this story. It comes from the Mahabharata, relating the creation of holy water and the birth of various divine beings. The churning represents the struggle and effort required to achieve abundance and prosperity, while the resulting nectar symbolizes the rewards of perseverance and dedication. This story highlights the importance of balance and cooperation in achieving success, as both the gods and demons had to work together to churn the sea. The sea is viewed as the source of the divine gifts, as they arise from the depths.

Conservation & Culture

Fishing Practices

Indonesia is one of the world's leading fishing nations, with large quantities of fish caught every day to sustain the local communities. "With over 7 million tons of catch annually, Indonesia is the second-largest fishing nation after China. Most is for domestic consumption, with the 270 million-strong population eating more than three times as much fish and seafood as the global average." (Merk, 2) This massive consumption has depleted local supplies, left people jobless, and the marine environment hurting. Fishing is central to the coastal culture of Bali, yet the people in this profession are struggling with the low numbers of catchable fish. In a casual conversation with a local fisherman, he stated, "all fishermen are looking for a new way of life. You cannot support a family like this. Yet fishing is how I find my peace, I don't want to accept change" Most of the catch is not sold or used to make money, rather the fish is taken home and eaten for dinner.

A withstanding practice of fishing in Bali is the Jukung, which is the traditional ocean boat. While traveling the coasts of Bali, it was hard to miss the harbors of these boats, whether they were used for fishing or taking tourists out diving. Along with this, the fishing methods employed consisted of either large scale netting, spear fishing or jigging, which uses hook and line. This practice is in deep connection with the cultural heritage of Balinese coastal communities, as it has been passed down through generations of fishermen. This is in connection to the deep connection that religion fosters to the natural world, as the fishermen have an inherent respect for the oceans.

The chain of the Temples of Pabean, Goa Tirta and Pulaki are believed to provide protection to the island of Bali from the destructive power of the ocean.¹⁰ These locations are also where local fishermen go to pray for protection and safety in their ocean travels. The deity of Baruna, is evoked and given offerings for this protection while at sea. However, in light of this cultural connection, the ocean is suffering from exploitation and misuse. It is important to find a balance between utilizing the ocean's resources and preserving its natural beauty and biodiversity. Sustainable fishing practices and responsible tourism can help ensure the ocean's health for generations to come.

The ocean is facing a lot of environmental challenges such as pollution, overfishing, and climate change, which are threatening the livelihoods of these local fishermen. It is important to find sustainable solutions to protect the ocean and ensure that it continues to provide for these communities. It comes down to the large corporations and their ability to quickly deplete fishing stocks without the need to preserve the ecosystem. This due to the fact they do not rely on it long term, as these fishing companies can simply relocate whereas locals cannot. The majority of Indonesian fisheries are overexploited and the government has implemented various policies and regulations to address this issue, including the establishment of marine protected areas and promoting sustainable fishing practices. However, more efforts are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of these fisheries and the communities that rely on them.

Conservation Efforts for Coral Reef Ecosystems

Currently the ecosystems of the ocean are in critical condition, especially the coral reef life. Reefs are essential for the preservation of biodiversity, as over twenty five percent of all fish

¹⁰ Information from Personal conversation, April 20th, 2023

live out or start their lives in coral ecosystems. In Bali, only about fifty percent of reefs are still in healthy conditions, with this number quickly dropping. This is due to: rising sea temperature caused by global warming, overfishing and destructive fishing practices like cyanide and bombing, ocean acidification, poor waste management and other pollutants like plastics. Thus, affecting the health and wellbeing of the oceans, especially that of the coral reefs.

It is a surprise to many to know that corals are actually composed of thousands of tiny animals known as polyps. These polyps do not produce their own food and instead rely on a symbiotic relationship with algae which is the main source of nutrients. This relationship is crucial for the survival of both the polyps and the algae, as they exchange nutrients and waste products in a mutually beneficial way. The coral depends on a delicate balance of conditions like temperature, which are essential to its survival. As ocean temperatures increase, an event known as coral bleaching has begun to occur on a wide scale. When temperatures surpass the niche corals thrive in, they become stressed and dispel the algae necessary for the production of food. They then become ghostly white, and slowly die from lack of nutrition, because the algae is what gives the corals a lively color.

The decline of coral ecosystems not only affects marine biodiversity but also has a significant impact on the livelihoods of coastal communities who rely on fishing and tourism. It is crucial for governments, businesses, and individuals to take action to protect and restore these vital ecosystems. Around the island of Bali, there are numerous conservation efforts working to preserve these vital ecosystems like the BioRock Project in Pemuteran.

The BioRock project provides structures for the corals to grow on by placing underwater steel braces, which can take the shape of turtles, or even culturally significant structures like the Barong and Rangda structure. To aid in the coral growth once it has anchored to the structure,

they send electrical energy into the steel brackets which the coral absorbs. This allows the corals to anchor more successfully, thus growing faster and replenishing the reef life in the area. This effort combines the help of local fisherman, dive shops, welders, and even staff from the nearby hotels. The BioRock project also works to provide jobs and raise awareness within the local community. They provide internship opportunities to students who wish to aid in reef restoration and run beach cleanups to combat ocean pollution. Additionally, they have also implemented educational programs for local schools to teach children about the importance of ocean conservation and how they can make a difference in preserving it for future generations. These efforts have not only helped to protect Bali's marine ecosystem but also raised awareness and inspired others to take action towards a more sustainable future. They are paving the way for other organizations of Bali to follow by combining the surrounding communities' love for the ocean by providing the opportunity to help protect it.

One example of the BioRock project's success can be seen in the restoration of Pemuteran Bay. Before the project, the bay was severely damaged due to destructive fishing practices and pollution. However, after implementing BioRock structures, the bay now has a thriving coral ecosystem and has become a popular destination for tourists interested in sustainable tourism. This brings hope for a future of restored reefs around Bali, as other conservation efforts work to do the same.

Overall, it is important to recognize the fragility of coral reefs and the impact that human actions have on their health. By taking steps to reduce our carbon footprint and protect marine ecosystems, we can help ensure the survival of these important habitats for generations to come.

The Problem of Plastic

Bali specifically generates 1.6 million tonnes of waste a year, with some 33,000 tonnes of plastic, ultimately ending up in the oceans and waterways of the island.¹¹ This is a total of 11% of the world's plastic waste generated, which poses the question: if Bali's culture so deeply values the relationship between humans and nature, why is there so much pollution generated? There is no simple answer to this question, rather a multitude of underlying dilemmas at the root of the problem. However, after staying in Bali for three months, one of the most personally noted aspects was the beauty of the natural landscape littered with bottles, bags and other human made objects polluting the scene.

It became clear that Bali, like many other places in the world, is facing a serious environmental crisis. The issue of waste management and plastic pollution is a pressing concern that needs to be addressed by both individuals and governments alike. The issue of pollution in Bali is not just an environmental concern, but also a cultural and economic one. The reliance on tourism and the lack of infrastructure for waste management have created a complex problem that requires a multi-faceted solution. However, this cultural problem is not from a lack of responsibility from the people of Bali. Instead it stems from the large corporations creating the immersions and plastics people have come to rely on. Coupled with inadequate government regulations and enforcement. The solution will require a combination of education and awareness campaigns, investment in sustainable infrastructure, and stricter regulations on corporations to reduce their waste production. Additionally, community-based initiatives such as beach clean-ups and composting programs can also play a role in addressing the issue.

¹¹ Sea Circular, Indonesian Country Waste Profile https://www.sea-circular.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SEA-circular-Country-Profile_INDONESIA.pdf#:~:text=According%20to%20recent%20research%20by.waterways%20and%20seas%20every%20year.

Before the introduction of single use plastics, the Balinese had highly sustainable methods of interacting with nature and minimizing waste. For example, they used banana leaves and other natural materials for packaging and wrapping food. However, with the rise of tourism and globalization, these traditional practices have been overshadowed by convenience and profit-driven motives. Therefore, it is important for both individuals and corporations to take responsibility and make conscious efforts towards sustainability in Bali. This can include reducing plastic use, supporting local businesses that prioritize eco-friendliness, and implementing sustainable tourism practices. Today, efforts are being made to revive traditional practices and implement sustainable waste management systems in Bali. For instance, local organizations have started promoting reusable bags and containers, while the government has launched campaigns to educate the public on proper waste disposal. Such initiatives aim to protect Bali's natural beauty and preserve its cultural heritage, while also supporting the local economy by attracting responsible tourists who prioritize sustainability.

Conclusions

The ocean is an ancient force embodying the depths of this planet and the human soul. The Balinese connect to this power through a variety of activities from surfing to meditation, as it is a source of enjoyment, livelihood and relaxation. The ocean also plays a significant role in Balinese culture and religion, with many ceremonies and offerings dedicated to the sea gods and goddesses. It is seen as a symbol of purification and renewal, as well as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living beings.

The ocean can be viewed as a metaphor for the human experience, with its vastness representing the unknown and the depths representing the mysteries of the human psyche. Our souls are like a drop in the ocean of collective consciousness, constantly influenced by the ebb and flow of the world around us. As we navigate through life, we must remember that our actions have ripple effects that extend far beyond ourselves, just as a single drop can create waves that travel across the entire ocean.

Just as we are in connection with the oceans and natural world, the large-scale degradation the environment is experiencing will in turn affect us as well. "If the universe around us seriously changes or are seriously disturbed by pollution then automatically our bodies will change as well."(I Nyoman Suarka, 66). This is simply a further example of how the Tri Hita Karana manifests within culture, because as the natural landscape is altered, humans will be too.

Recommendations for further study

I believe the best way to expand this study would be to dive deeper into how the cultural importance of the ocean can aid in raising awareness of conservation efforts. With this, how can the concept of karma be applied to conservation efforts by fostering a sense of responsibility to the environment. As the natural landscape of Bali is quickly changing due to globalization and with this a large influx of tourists which calls for accommodation, a further study would be to better understand the effects of globalization on the oceans of Bali.

It would also be interesting to look further into the healing properties of the ocean. How the ocean can be used to heal from past traumas and why it fosters such a sense of calm and relaxation perfect for meditation. In correlation to meditation, a further study could include the religious and spiritual significance by diving into more literature and scripture.

Example of an Interview With Pak Muli from the Village Pakel

This interview has been translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English

1. What Ritual usages of water are there in this village and how is it used for purification?

All ceremonies use water. I get the water for purification by taking offerings like datsina to the river and collecting the water after saying prayers and giving thanks. Then that water is brought to the temple and kept in a special jar and place. If there is a temple festival, water is placed on the shrine in the temple with flowers and other offerings. The offering cuci uses duck and the holy water.

2. Who/what are the offerings for?

The offerings with holy water are to invite in the spirits, however the specific spirits and gods do not have names. Occasionally, the water is for the worship of Vishnu who is the god of the river. I take offerings and pray to Vishnu for the purification of it.

3. Are there any healing properties associated with the water? Is it used to heal in any way?

Not in this village, water is just used in ceremonies

4. Are there ceremonies for the water within the rice field irrigation systems?

There is prayer for the rain to come and for the subaks to be filled with water. I use holy water for the rice field alters as they are given the water of purification of the offerings

5. How often do ritual purification ceremonies occur?

The water is used everytime there is a temple ceremony or for home temples.

6. Can you tell me more about what your daily activities are as a priest?

Everytime there is a temple ceremony, I purify the offerings brought with holy water. He brings it from inside the main temple to give to the house temples and offerings.

7. How did you become a priest?

I owned the land the temple is built on so I became the priest for it.

8. Do you have a personal connection with the water?

No, I was asked to perform the duties with the Holy water so that is why I use it.

9. Is there a particular place in the river the holy water comes from?

No, it is just brought to the pura and then prayed for using an offering

10. Is that why it is different from the other water?

Yes, it is regular water prayed for to make it holy.

11. Is there a mythology or reason for why the holy water is used so regularly?

We have a lot of temples here, so each temple has their own holy water. It is inviting the gods into the festival to see the ceremonies and offerings.

12. What are the origins to the usage of holy water?

Again, to invite the gods in but other than that, I am unsure. It is what it is basically. We continue the practice without knowledge of the reasons why.

13. Do you know when in history the holy water was first used or became common practice?

A very long time ago. Possibly with the spread of hinduism into Bali.

14. How does holy water purify images and items and why do you need to purify them?

To cleanse them of demonic spirits. In the example of the mask, it is to ensure the ceremony goes as planned and the wearer of the mask is not dirty.

15. By dirty do you mean demonic spirits?

Yes, holy water is used to cleanse demonic spirits.

Glossary

Makara

The half mammal, half fish steed of Dewa Baruna

Tirta Empul

Holy water: Used for ceremonial purposes and offerings

Dewa / Dewi: God/Goddess

Dewa Baruna

Deity associated with the ocean.

Dewa Siwa

\ God of destruction and is associated with the trinity of deities.

Dewa Durga

The Warrior Goddess, Consort of Siwa.

Dewa Brahma

God of Creation and is associated with the trinity of deities.

Dewa Wisnu

God of preservation and is associated with the trinity of deities.

Sang Hyang Widhi

Main God of hinduism, other deities manifest from this being.

Tri Hita Karana

The relationship between humans, nature and god.

Sekala

The seen or physical world humans exist in.

Niskala

The unseen world of spirits and gods.

Gamalan

Traditional Indonesian percussion music.

Pakaian Adat

Traditional attire worn for ceremonial purposes and other religious events.

Kaja

Directional orientation to the mountains which is the most sacred.

Keloid

Directional orientation to the sea which is the least sacred.

Melasti

Ceremony for the purification of images and items. Including a procession to the sea.

Melukat

Ceremony for the purification of the mind, body and spirit.

Pura

Temple

Rwa Bhineda

Principal of duality.

Segara

Sea

Luat

Ocean

Moksha

Liberation of the soul from the cycle of rebirth.

Canang

Daily offering to appease the Gods and demons.

Nyepi

Balinese New Year

‘Om Sarira Parisudhamam Swaha’

‘May the physical body and the mind body be pure’

Ratu Batara, Titiang nunas tamba, mangda tiang seger

Lord Baruna, I beg you helping hand, send me a cure for my illness

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