Hindu Rituals in India and Bali

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Introduction

Balinese Hinduism is originally from the Indian mainland, which came into contact with the Malay-Archipelago during the first millennium CE. However, Hinduism in Bali has developed into its own unique religion, which has undergone an amalgamation between Indian Hindu elements with indigenous Balinese elements. Therefore, although we both worship the same gods and goddesses, perform religious ceremonies devoted to those deities, and build sacred temples dedicated to their presence, there are some elements of the Balinese tradition that have been created based on local beliefs and traditions.

The following paper is about how Hindu festivals and ceremonies in India differ from the Hindu rituals developed in Bali. To understand that development, it is important to first trace the history of Hinduism in India, which later on spread to the vast Malay-Indonesian archipelago wherein Bali still maintains its unique form of Hinduism in the surrounding ocean of the Islamic faith, the majority religion of Indonesia.

Indus Valley Civilization: Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (c. 3000-1500 BCE)

The study of ancient India has usually centered mainly on the culture of the Indo-European, or Aryan, pastoral settlers who brought their sacred books, the Veda and their Vedic rituals to India. However, studies of archeological sites like the ancient cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa reveal another side of ancient Indian culture that some scholars feel had a strong influence on the later emergence of the worship of local deities like the mother goddess (Craven, 1976: 19).

Before the nomadic Indo-Europeans came to India (c. 2000 BCE) Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa flourished in the Indus Valley. Archaeologists assume these urban centers were populated by indigenous ethnic groups that today we call the Dravidians, whose languages form a distinct group outside the domain of the Indo-European languages (Coomaraswamy, 1965: 7; Watson,
1979: 26). From the remains at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa archaeologists have learned that the pre-Aryan civilization of India had reached a very high level of advancement. This is evident from the arrangement of their household and public compounds, and the material they used for building. It is also clear that they were very concerned about maintaining a healthy environment, which can be seen from the arrangement of facilities for carrying wastewater away from the household, and providing fresh water for daily needs. From the use of red-brick as a building material, we can tell that the Dravidian had a more advanced material culture than that of Mesopotamian or the Greek of a similar period, because in those civilizations fired red-brick was not used for household compounds, but only for certain important buildings (Zimmer, 1955: 20; Craven, 1976: 10; Watson, 1979: 23).

There are numerous small images made of clay or limestone found in the dwellings of the Indus valley civilization. These images apparently served for worship at the family altars, which indicates some kind of household cult. The use of small images in the ancient Indus Valley cult suggests similar practices known from the Hindu religion of today, in which small images of clay, wood, or bronze are used for family worship. These small cult images were not known to the Aryans, which means that the practice of using the images for family worship must have been an element of the pre-Aryan tradition (Coomaraswamy, 1965: 6; Craven, 1976: 14).

In the archaeological excavations of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa archaeologists have also unearthed terracotta seals, most often decorated with animal figures. On the back of each of those seals we find a brief inscription using language that till this time has never been deciphered (Hawkes, 1973: 292, 306; Watson, 1979: 26; Kinsley, 1982: 10). These seals can be compared to those discovered at Mesopotamian sites, which are dated to c.3000-1500 BCE, so it is probable that the seals from the Indus Valley are from roughly the same period. As these seals tell us the quality of the art of the pre-Aryans was very high, and with this we find more evidence that the pre-Aryans inhabitants of the Indus valley area must have been highly civilized (Zimmer, 1955: 4, Hawkes, 1973: 293). Zimmer (1955: 4) has also given detailed descriptions of the terracotta seals of the Indus Valley. He points out that the terracotta seals featured animal figures like elephants, cows, goats, pigs, dogs and horses. From the animal figures on the seals scholars have learned that the pre-Aryans had domesticated those animals. Of special interest are the domesticated cattle with long horns illustrated in the seals, since these indicate an exceptionally long history of cattle breeding in India. Among the wild animals found on the seals were the tiger and the rhinoceroses.

1 This is not to mention “tribal” languages of the Munda and Toda groups that survive in modern India, and were likely also present in ancient India before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans.
The figures of elephants on the seals suggest that the pre-Aryans used elephants as a vehicle for war.

What is surprising in the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa cities is the fact that scholars did not find any specific sites which might be used as the sacred place for worship. This is contrary to what archaeologists found at the ruins in the Mesopotamian area where structures are found that suggest to us that that place must have been used for performing worship of specific deities. However, in the case of the Indus valley civilization, in the center of the cities we find walled compounds containing large bathing pools, sunk below the level of the floor of the compounds which Kulke and Rothermund (1986) call the “Great Bath”. The outer surrounding walls of this building were quite thick, with two large entrances in the south side and one smaller door in the north. There was another small door in the east side. A row of chambers ran along the east wall, with a large well midway from which the pool could be filled (Craven, 1976: 11-12; Kulke and Rothermund, 1986: 19).

Scholars reason that these bathing sites must have been sacred places, and they remind us of the sacred bathing places used by Hindus today throughout India, which are a common destination for pilgrimages (Craven, 1976: 12; Kinsley, 1982: 3). The bathing places like the one of the Indus Valley are presumed to have been considered to contain a magical power that could cure people from diseases, cleanse people’s sins and wash away evils and suffering (Zimmer, 1955: 21; Kinsley, 1982: 118). Holy bathing places are also very common in Bali. Each temple has a sacred water source called a beji. The beji is used as the place for purification for the deities during the temple festival. In addition, we also find that certain sacred springs are set-aside as places of worship. These include the holy springs at Tirta Empul in Tampaksiring that are believed to have a magical power to cure people from sicknesses caused by black-magic. Sites like these remind us of the continuing importance of sacred water sources for Hindus of India and Bali in a history that stretches all the way back to the civilization of the Indus valley.

Zimmer (1955: 70) tells us that the pre-Aryans must have performed their religious rites in the fashion that is today called puja. This can include pouring milk or oil on a sacred object like a lingga, or scattering flowers or sacred grains in front of images or other sacred objects. Zimmer held that scattering flowers is a gesture characteristic of the pre-Aryans rites that survived in both Hindu and Buddhist rituals of a later period. After the period when the Vedic fire sacrifice was the

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2 A beji is a sacred place located near the temples or a holy place in certain tenget (magically powerful and dangerous) spots on the river. Sometimes the beji is a natural spring where the devotees should bathe before worshipping in the temple.
most important ritual of the Aryans who dominated the Gangetic plain from c. 1500 CE, offerings in the form of *puja* came back in style for the early Buddhists and still constitute a basic form of worship for modern Hindus. Puja offerings in modern India consist of flowers, rice, fruits, milk, water and oil which are sprinkled before (or poured over) sacred objects (Kinsley, 1982: 105-107).

**The Indo-Aryan Civilization**

The nomadic Aryans who entered India c. 2000 BCE did not adopt the religious patterns of the Indus valley civilization, but rather brought with them their own beliefs and their holy utterances and ritual rules that are collectively called the Veda. The Vedas consists of four major sections. These are the Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda and Atharva-Veda (Craven, 1976: 30; Kinsley, 1982: 11). The Rig and Sama-Veda are mostly concerned with the mantra-s and prayers associated with the priestly fire ritual, while the Yajur and Atharva Veda focus on rules for the performance of the Veda and a large body of related lore that includes attention to magic and healing practices. These holy books were standardized in the period 1200 - 800 BCE when the Vedic recitation, used for the all-important fire ritual of the Aryans, was analyzed in terms of separate words, which became the basis for an elaborate system of memorization by which the Vedas were preserved by the *brahmana*, or Brahmin caste of the Aryan society. Appended to the four collections are prose commentaries known as *Brahmana-s* which contain detailed discussions on the various elements and connotations of Vedic ritual. Another form of commentary on the Vedas is found in the *Upanisads*, which take the form of esoteric philosophical dialogues treating the realization of the transcendent Self. These works are further removed from the Vedic tradition and may have been influenced by the surviving Dravidian style of yogic techniques practiced by the so-called “forest philosophers” (Zimmer, 1955: 5; Kulke and Rothermund, 1986: 34).

The Vedas used a language called Sanskrit, which has similar characteristics to the Greek, Italic, Celtic, Germanic and Slavic languages (Craven, 1976: 30). When European scholars discovered this fact in the eighteenth century, this became the basis for the study of comparative linguistics, and the realization that Sanskrit was among the Indo-European group of languages. The Aryans were thus speakers of a language from a completely different group than the pre-Aryans, whose languages survive in modern India in the large family of languages called Dravidian and several groups of tribal languages like Toda and Munda (Spear, 1961: 13; Wolpert, 1977: 8).

The Aryans focus their rites on the fire ritual, which is called *homa*. Fire was very important for the Aryans, who used it to clear forestlands and convert them to pasture for their cattle herds, and so the Vedic ritual focuses on sacrificial rituals to the fire. Because the Aryans were a nomadic
society and their religious beliefs were not focused on local deities who represented fixed elements of the natural, agricultural or social landscape; therefore they did not attach themselves to a specific place to do the fire ritual. They believed in the power of natural phenomena, which they associated with specific deities. Thus Indra represents rain and thunder, Agni fire, Ushas dawn, Vayu wind, Surya the sun and Vak, the ability to speak well.

The most prominent goddess among the Vedic deities was the goddess of Dawn, Ushas. The goddess Ushas is portrayed as a beautiful maiden, who brings light to the universe and is followed by the sun (Surya). Every morning she wakes up the entire living world from their sleep, except those who sleep in death, and she thus sets all life in motion. She is praised to drive away the oppressive darkness, and she is asked to chase away the demons of the night (Kinsley, 1986: 7; Spear, 1961: 33-34; Guleri, 1990: 11-19). There are some beautiful hymns including Rig-Veda VII.77.1 that devoted to especially to Ushas:

Like a youthful maiden, Dawn shines brightly forth,
Stirring to motion every living creature.
Divine Fire was kindled for the use of men;
Dawn created light, driving away the dark (Le Mee, 1975: 70).

The Aryans worshipped these deities by performing oblations to the sacred fire accompanied by the recitation of appropriate hymns from the Rig-Veda, and gestures and ritual actions prescribed in the other Vedas. They believed that by giving sacrificial offerings to the deities using the fire god (Agni) as a messenger, they could reach the other deities who lived in their abode above the sky. Through its smoke, fire relates the offerings to the other deities. In return the deities above will bless human society with prosperity, victory and a happy life for both the worshippers and their cattle (Kulke and Rothermund, 1986: 36).

Since the Aryans were nomadic, herding their cattle from one place to another, the fact that their fire oblation (homa) did not require a specific, fixed place for its performance was a distinct advantage. However, the design of the sacred altar was based on elaborate mathematical calculations that have inspired an interest in modern India in what is called “Vedic mathematics”.

The priests who performed the rituals were members of what became in time the brahmana or priests of the Brahmin caste, who used the books of the Veda as their guide to the correct performance of ritual. The Aryans believed that the Brahmin could see the gods using their spiritual power, and that is the reason why only the Brahmins had the authority to conduct the Vedic ritual. During the ritual the Brahmin (Brahmana) recited the hymns from the Rig-Veda.
The ritual they perform which was called *homa*, but is sometimes known by the more general name for ritual; that is *yajna* (Coomaraswamy, 1965: 5).

The arrival of the nomadic Aryans brought with it a new tradition and new civilization in India (Coomaraswamy, 1965: 5). Gradually the mixture of the two civilizations, the pre-Aryans and the Indo-Europeans gave birth to the tradition we now speak of as Hinduism. Zimmer (1955: 4) has carefully described the complex interaction of Aryan and pre-Aryans civilization that gave rise to this new cultural formation:

> The Aryan feudal warriors and chieftains and their priests developed in India a historical structure of prodigious vitality. Their religion, based on the holy revelations preserved in the Vedas, and their social order, expressed in the caste system, supplied the framework for a powerful and unique civilization. The priests (brahmins) and the chieftains (ksatriya) made of themselves a new Indian aristocracy and in the course of the subsequent centuries their fruitful religious insights and philosophical ideas, coalescing gradually with the complex heritage of the earlier, largely the conquered races, molded, through a series of creative transformations, that subtle and multifold, extraordinarily flexible spiritual tradition known as Hindu (Zimmer, 1955: 4).

The Aryan not only introduced their holy books, the Vedas, and the Vedic rituals, but also brought with them the social order or caste system based on the occupations of persons and a hierarchy of occupations based on the idea of purity and impurity. The general division can be classified as follows. The Brahmins are the persons who are expert in the Vedas, the Ksatriya are the persons who are expert in government and war. The ones who are expert in trading are called Vaisya and those who have skill in cultivating the lands are classified as Sudra (Watson, 1979: 31; Kinsley, 1982: 16). This idealized system later was complicated by the notion of the impurity of occupations that have to do with the slaughter of animals. This led to the development of the “untouchable” (*acuta*) castes, which were considered outside the idealized system of four major occupations (*catur-warna*).

The Indus Valley civilization embraced many elements and symbols that emerged in the religious texts of India after the Vedic period. Those ancient elements seemed to have temporarily disappeared with the arrival of the Aryans, but it is likely that they continued to exist at the “folk” level but were not referred to in texts of the Vedic tradition (Watson, 1979: 31). But they reemerged and flourished during the Maurya dynasty (321-184 BCE). This can be seen from the presence of numerous deities whose images are sculpted on the gates and on the pillars of the railings of early Buddhist sanctuaries where they serve as guardians of the sanctuary (Zimmer, 1955: 6).
Hindu Rituals in India

In present day India, there are several Hindu festivals and holidays that are celebrated nationally. These are: Holi, Diwali and Durga Puja. In addition to those major festivals, there are also minor festivals. These include festivals like Mahashivaratri (“the sacred night of Shiva”), which is popular in both North and South India, Ram Navami (“the birthday of Rama”), Krishna Jayanti (“the birthday of Krishna”) and Raksabandhana (“the renewing of bonds between brothers and sisters”). Some festivals are most popular in particular regions of the subcontinent; Dassera, celebrating the victory of Rama over the demon king Ravana, for example is most popular in the north, while Ponggal, which may have originally been a rice harvest festival, is celebrated only in the south. Other festivals involve pilgrimages timed to astronomical cycles, like the Kumbha Mela, which is held every 12 years at the confluence of the Gangga and Yamuna rivers at Prayag.

Holi is the Spring festival of colors celebrated for two days in either February or March. On the evening of the first day of Holi the celebration begins with a public bonfire commemorating the burning of the Holika, and effigy that represents the aunt of Prahlad, a devotee of Vishnu, whom she threatened with a fiery death if he disobeyed the ban on worshipping Vishnu that had been issued by her brother Hiranyakashapu. The second day of Holi is called Dhul-hendi. People spend the day cheerfully throwing colored powder and water on each other, regardless of the usual questions of hierarchy and status that dominate traditional Indian social life. During this Holi celebration the rigid social norms and traditions associated with caste, sex, status and ages that confine them in daily normal life are loosened, and a carnival-like atmosphere dominates everywhere. The Holi festival helps to bridge social distance and brings people together as they set aside polite behavior for one day. By the end of Holi, everyone should look the same—very colorful and with barely recognizable difference among them. Some people also celebrate Holi by indulge in drinking alcohol, or thandai, a cooling drink that on this special day is laced with bhang, a concoction made from cannabis that is sacred to the god Shiva.

Diwali or deepavali is the celebration of lights that celebrates the victory of good over evil and the triumph of light over darkness. It is held in early November and for many communities represents the high point of the yearly cycle of rituals.

Durga Puja, the celebration of the power of Shakti, the female energy of the gods, focuses on the goddess Durga and the celebration of her victory over Mahisasura, the buffalo demon. Durga Puja is an especially important festival for the Bengalis. It consumes an enormous amount of energy during the period of its festivities, which usually fall during the first week of October. The city of
Kolkata is especially notable during this festival. People from every neighborhood build pandals, temporary buildings designed to enshrine images of the goddess Durga, and at times her “sister goddesses” Saraswati and Lakshmi. The goddess Durga is the central image, flanked by the goddess Saraswati on the left side and the goddess Lakshmi on the right. The goddess Durga is the most popular amongst the devotees compared to the other goddesses because the goddess Durga is very generous to her devotees.³ Here for a period of nine days devotees can do puja by chanting sacred hymns taken from the Devi Mahatmya or Durga Saptasati to temporary images of the goddess artfully fashioned from papier-mâché and paint. After this the images are taken to the steps (ghat-s) that line the river Ganges and are thrown with reverence into the waters of the holy river with the hope that with the completion of the cycle of Durga Puja new life will begin.

**The Beginnings of Hinduism in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago**

Hindu and Buddhist priests who traveled to the archipelago during the 1st millennium CE introduced Indian religious and cultural elements, perhaps most important the art of writing (Schrieke, 1957 Vol. II: 308; Miksic, 1990: 19). Zimmer (1955: 104) tells us that the first wave of migration seems to have been into the western part of Java (contemporary Sunda) during the 6th century CE, while a second wave that took place during the 7th and 8th centuries CE was concentrated in Central Java and further east. However, the oldest surviving evidence of writing in the archipelago is the inscriptions in Kutai of east Kalimantan, dated by Vogel (1918: 167), de Casparis (2001: 46), Schrieke (1957 Vol. III: 308), Sarkar (2001: 52), van Naerssen (1977: 18) between 350-400 CE. These inscriptions record the gift of cattle to a community of Brahmins at a series of seven “sacrificial posts” called yupa. These inscriptions record the gift of cattle in a ritual characteristic of “archaic” Hindu religion; however, in contrast to several sites in India where inscriptions record rituals related to yupa posts, cattle were not sacrificed at the posts, but were rather given as gifts to the local community of Brahmins.⁴ We do not know the name of the state or settlement at Kutai, but from the inscriptions on the posts it is clear that this was the earliest dynasty of the archipelago. The reigning king referred to

³ Personal communication with the devotees during the Durga Puja in India, October 2002
⁴ According to the Kutai inscriptions King Mulavarman performed a ritual called bahu-suvarnaka (“gold in great measure”) and gave away 20,000 head of cattle to the Brahmins of his realm in the sacred ground of Vaprakesvara. The Brahmins who participated in that religious ceremony immortalized the occasion by setting up records on the sacrificial pillars. The records were written in Sanskrit language in anushthubh and arya meters (Sarkar, 2001: 52). Anushthubh meter is known more commonly as sloka, a very common meter with many variations and relative freedom in structure that consists of stanzas of two lines of sixteen syllables each.
in the inscriptions is referred to with Indian names, as Mulavarman the son of Ashvavarman and the grandson of Kundunga (Bondan et al, 1982: 1, van Naerssen, 1977: 20; H.B. Sarkar, 2001: 52). The inscriptions are written in Sanskrit language and the Pallava script, a script, which is named after the South Indian dynasty that issued inscriptions in this type of writing. As shown by J.P. Vogel (1918) this Pallava script originated in India, but was further developed in Southeast Asia before it reappeared in South India about 700 CE. This shows that Hindu culture was actively developing during this period in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago (Damais, 1995: 7).

The evidence of the Kutai inscriptions is followed by evidence from West Java in the form of the inscriptions of King Purnavarwan, who founded a state or settlement called Tarumanagara during the 5th century CE (van Naerssen, 1977: 24; Chhabhra, 1965: 26; Miksic, 1990: 19). Archeological evidence shows that its capital was located somewhere in the area of Jakarta, Banten and Bogor in West Java (Sunda). The name of King Purnavarman is recorded on a number of inscribed stones, one of which was found in the middle of a streambed. The king’s footprints were engraved on a boulder, and may indicate conquest or occupation of the area. In ancient India, footprints were commonly used as a symbol of divine beings. In the text of the inscription, King Purnavarman compares his footprints to those of the Hindu god Vishnu (de Casparis, 2001: 46; van Naerssen, 1977: 23-24; Bambang Soemadio, 2000: 46; Damais, 1995: 7; Fontein, 1990: 25). It is well known from Javanese sources that the ruler was considered one of Vishnu’s incarnations, and was regarded not just as the savior of the world, but also as the world-sustainer (Schrieke, 1957: 76).

Archaeological evidence for Hinduism in Java from as early as the 5th century CE is corroborated by the annals of the Chinese sage, Fa-Hsien (Faxian), who started his journey from China to visit the holy places of Buddhism in India by land, with the second purpose of collecting holy manuscripts. On his return to China by ship he records passing through Sri Lanka, but then having to stop in Java in 414 CE to wait for the “trade winds” to blow in the right direction. He wrote that, “heresies and Brahmanism

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5 Buddhism originated in India more than thousand years before the construction of Borobudur. Siddharta Gautama-later known as Buddha or “the Awakened One”- was born at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains around 500 BCE. He was the member of the Sakya ethnic group or lineage; thus he is often called Sakyamuni, “Jewel of the Sakya People” (Miksic, 1990: 18).
were flourishing, while the Faith of Buddha was in a very unsatisfactory condition” (Vogel, 1918: 183; Bondan et al, 1982: 11; H.B Sarkar, 2001: 35; Fontein, 1990: 25). From what is mentioned in Fa-Hsien’s book, we know that the trade route between China, India and Indonesia must have been well established by the 5th century CE.6

While earlier scholars talked of Indian “immigration” to the archipelago in terms of massive movements of “colonists” (Miksic, 1990: 20), F.D.K. Bosch (1961) showed in an important article that Hinduism and Buddhism were not introduced into Indonesia by traders, conquerors or settlers but rather by religious persons who were closely allied in that period with the merchant class (Bosch, 1961: 11):

In Hindu-Indonesian civilization, we meet with elements of a theoretical and scholastic character, elements which remind us of the manuscript, the code of law, the recluse’s cell, the monastery, and which undoubtedly are just as incompatible with an environment of warriors or traders as they are in harmony with an intellectual sphere: with the classes of scribes, scholastics, initiates in the holy scriptures and legal sciences.

In this passage Bosch suggests that the most important source of Indian influence in the archipelago were the “scribes, scholastics” and priests who came over the ocean from India with traders seeking wealth. There are many illustrations of trading ships among the bas-reliefs of Borobudur, a famous Buddhist temple of central Java built between 750 CE and 850 CE.7 It is also significant that many Jataka stories about merchants and other travelers are illustrated at Borobudur. One important Tibetan Tantric text known as the Sarva-durgati-parisodhana or “Elimination of all Evil Rebirths” is the Buddhist work belonging to the Yoga Tantra class whose teaching is geared towards procuring a better

6 The “trade winds” were a very important influence on the culture of the Indonesian archipelago. During the Asian winter (December-April) cold, heavy air is pushed outward from India and the Asian mainland toward the warmer south. This current of air is made to “bend” to the east close to the equator by the “Carioles effect”. This creates a “seasonal wind” (Persian mausam “monsoon”) that allowed sailors to sail from India and the Persian Gulf toward the archipelago during the months of December through April or May. The reverse current happens during the winter of the southern hemisphere, when cold, heavy air from Australia and the Antarctica is pushed over the archipelago. This current is then “bent” to the west by the Carioles effect. This is the “returning monsoon” that allowed sailors sail back from the archipelago toward India and the Persian Gulf. This same “cycle of winds” was also important for the large Chinese ships that carried trade goods between the archipelago and China. It seems that Fa-Hsien was forced to stop over in Java to await the December-April “monsoon” that would allow him to return to China with Chinese merchants from the Hokkien coast.

7 Borobudur was not built and designed as a copy of some foreign monument, but was a blend of Indian and local elements, like the terraced pyramids still found on the slopes of some Javanese mountains like Mount Penanggungan. This combination created a new kind of sanctuary.
rebirth for the dead and a better life for those who are living. Some scholars believe that this work originates from the hand of a Buddhist scholar from the kingdom of Sriwijaya, now believed to have its center near present-day Palembang in southeast Sumatra (Skorupski, 1983: xvii, Bentor, p.c. 2004). There were other records of the experiences of Buddhist priests both from India and China who traveled on trading ships between India and the archipelago, and also of the profound influence of Indian and Southeast Asian scholars on each other. For example, Vajrabodhi, born in Kanchi, South India in c. 670 CE and considered one of the most important Buddhist thinkers of the eighth century, was believed to be the monk who studied and revised the Buddhist texts which became very important in Java. Yi-jing (I-Tsing), a Chinese monk who visited India and stopped over twice in Sumatra during the seventh century (635-713 CE) to study Buddhism in Sriwijaya left an especially important record of his travels that shows that the teaching of Buddhism and Sanskrit had reached a very high level of advancement at the time of his visits (Miksic, 1990: 21; de Casparis, 1992: 279; Fontein, 1990: 29). A famous Buddhist teacher, Prince Gunavarman of Kashmir, also spent many years in Java (Miksic, 1990: 20). In a later period another Indian scholar, Atisa, who came to Sumatra from northeast India spent twelve years (1013-1025 CE) in the court of Srivijaya to study Mahayana Buddhism at the feet of the renowned Buddhist master Dharmakirti or Serlingpa, a Tibetan word meaning “a monk from the golden country” (Snellgrove, 1959: 15; Jordaan, 1997: 288; Fontein, 1990: 29; Yael Bentor). Atisa is renowned for his later role in the development of Tibetan Buddhism.

Priests and other religious persons who traveled to the archipelago during the first millennium CE introduced many Indian cultural elements. Edy Sedyawati (2001: 50) summarizes the main aspects of Indian influence as follows:

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8 Yael Bentor (personal communication at the Hebrew University 29 April 2004), Dr. Yael Bentor is Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and classical Tibetan language at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research on Tibetan rituals has taken her on several visits to Tibetan exile communities in Nepal and India.

9 The texts studied and revised by Vajrabodhi were the Mahavairocana or “Great Vairocana Scripture” and the Vajrasekhara or “Diamond Crown Scripture” (Miksic, 1990: 20).

10 Personal communication with Dr. Yael Bentor conducted at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on 29 April 2004.

11 It is important to note there that the Sumatran Dharmakirti should not be confused with the Indian Buddhist logician of that name.
Cultural and religious circumstances, the introduction of Sanskrit for writing, and the adoption of Buddhist and Hindu mythology were not the domain of traders. It is more likely that the princes who ruled small Indonesian kingdoms were influenced by priests and Brahmans from India. These priests would have been responsible for introducing a religion that allowed the king to identify himself with a deity or bodhisattva, reinforcing his temporal power. More abstract cultural elements also played a role, such as the concept of the cakravatin (universal ruler), warna or social class, the existence of a supreme supernatural power, rasa in aesthetics, and all the detailed artistic renderings of those concepts. Kingdoms that adopted Indic concepts of kingship were found in Kalimantan, Java, Sumatra and Bali.

Indian civilization reached the shores of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago during the first millennium CE, a time when Buddhist monks and priests of the Shaiva form of Hinduism joined the voyages of seafaring merchants who traveled to and from the archipelago as part of the trading networks that connected China with India, the mid-east and Europe via the archipelago. From archaeological and written evidence we know that Hindu religious scholars who came along with the merchants from India introduced their pantheon of gods and goddesses, who provided special protection to the ruling families of local political centers and to the population at large. In invoking those deities, it was very important to make offerings that were appropriate for the specific nature of rituals designed to honor the gods and ancestors, to placate the chthonic forces of the land, and to mark important points in the life cycle of families and communities.

**Hindu Rituals of Bali**

Hinduism flourished in Indonesia roughly from the 4th century CE through the late 15th century CE, when Islamic trading networks began to play an important role in the politics and economics of the archipelago, and brought about a period that is marked for the predominance of Islam in the religious life of the archipelago. However, Hinduism survived in a number of areas among the islands of Indonesia, most notably in Bali, which today is home to a remarkably colorful and artistic form of Hinduism.

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs has recently estimated that 6,501,680 Hindus live in the modern Indonesian state, although the Hindu association titled Parishada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) claims that the number is much larger. In Bali, where it is estimated that almost 90 percent of the population follows the Balinese form of Hinduism, religious beliefs and practices have developed various local characteristics that include a focus on worship of the ancestors and ‘animist’ beliefs that distinguish it from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. Balinese religious practices depend heavily on rituals, which can be classified into five groups known as the Panca Yadnya. These are:
(1) Dewa Yadnya, rituals performed for deities;
(2) Manusa Yadnya, life-cycle rituals;
(3) Resi Yadnya, rituals for the initiation of priests;
(4) Bhuta Yadnya, ritual to appease the demonic spirits so that they are transformed into protective spirits; and
(5) Pitra Yadnya, rituals performed to purify the souls of recently deceased members of the community.

Dewa Yadnya or Rituals for divine beings

Dewa Yadnya are rituals performed for deities, which include especially temple festivals or Odalan that are most often timed according to the 210-day Balinese sacred year or Pawukon, as well as full moon and new moon rituals. During an Odalan, the shrines in the temples are decorated with colorful traditional umbrellas, banners with images of deities and elaborate offerings made from fruits, flowers and meats. People go to the Odalan in their best traditional customs. The men are often busy playing the ensembles of the gamelan orchestra or working in the community kitchen of the temple, while the women are busy with preparing and placing offerings of plaited palm leaves, flowers and foodstuffs or taking part in processions that are a major part of the activity of an Odalan. One of the most lovely aspects of their participation is the stately Pendet dance they perform when they welcome the deities upon their return from a blessing of holy water at the holy spring or point on a river that is sacred for the temple where the Odalan is going on. Temples are very lively during the festival. People come to the temple not only for praying but also for socializing with other people. The temple festival is the melting point when the sekala and niskala beings (the visible and invisible beings) of this world interact with each other. The physical layout of the Balinese temples is divided into three courtyards that are linked to varying degrees of sacred activity. The outer courtyard is a place that has an atmosphere something like a “county fair” and is the place for dances, shadow plays and other performances aimed at pleasing the temple goers. In the middle courtyard final preparations are made to make ready the many offerings that are brought to the temple for blessing by all the community members, and is also the space for special dances like Topeng Sidhakarya that are an important part of the successful completion of a ceremony. This is also the area reserved for the pavilions that house the gamelan ensembles of the temple, and so is often alive with the resonant and exciting sounds of the Balinese gamelan. The innder courtyard is the area for the most sacred shrines, and the more solemn worship of the deities that is accomplished by offering flowers with hands outstretched in prayer-like fashion, and completed with a blessing of holy water. It is a very strict rule in Bali that women who having period or menstruation are not allowed to enter any temples or other sacred places because blood is considered attractiveve to the negative forces and
can thus put women in danger. This prohibition is often misunderstood by Western visitors to Bali as being a way to “keep women down” However, this is not the view of Balinese women, who often speak of menopause as a time in their lives that frees them to become closer to the deities and less directly involved in the difficulties and challenges of the reproductive cycle of life.

*Manusa Yadnya or life cycle rituals*

There are several life-cycle rituals that need to be performed during the lifetime of a Balinese Hindu, although not everyone follows each and every one of them. However, the following rituals must be carried out by every Hindu Balinese. Those important rituals are the three months ritual called *Telubulanin*, the six months ritual called *Otonan* or Balinese birthday which comes every 210 days of the Balinese calendar system and the tooth-filing ceremony conducted either before the marriage or during the marriage ceremony. The main purpose in carrying out all those life-cycle rituals is to purify one’s physical and spiritual body so that one can appropriately face this mortal life in a proper way as regulated by religious and social norms. In Balinese belief every baby is born with its four siblings called *Kanda Empat*. Those four siblings are represented physically by the blood, vernix caseosa, amniotic fluid and placenta which are born with the child and personified as potentially divine or demonic beings that can either protect or harm the baby depending on how we treat them. The *Otonan* ritual, which falls 210 days is also very important for Balinese to get the blessing from the ancestors, so a great deal of thought and preparation is put into putting together the offerings for this ritual. The ceremony is performed for men throughout their lives, but girls will stop getting their *Otonan* rituals as soon as they get married into their husband’s house, as it is assumed that they then fall under the protection of his ancestors and guardian spirits. The next important ritual which must be done by Balinese is the tooth-filing ceremony. In the “low” or “common” form of the Balinese language this is called *mesangih*, while the term *mepandes* from the “high” or “refined” form of Balinese is reserved for use by the the three higher castes (Brahmins, Ksatriya and Wesya). The aim of this ritual is to reduce the influences of our six inner enemies (*sadripu*) by filing the six upper teeth, especially our two canines, which are believed to be the remnants of our animalistic characteristics. These upper six teeth are the symbols of our six inner enemies: *kama, lobha, krodha, mada, moha* and *matsarya,* “lust, greed, anger, drunkenness, spiritual confusion and jealousy.”

While some commentators consider marriage the last of the *Manusa-Yadnya* others include the *mawinten* ceremony in this category. This is a ceremony of purification and initiation undertaken before the commencement of a course of spiritual study, including the study of sacred arts like the shadow theater (*wayang*). Those who hold that marriage should be considered the last of the *Manusa Yadnya* point out, not without good reason that the *mawinten* ceremony should actually
counted among the Rsi-Yadnya, or ceremonies devoted to initiation into religious study. They point out that this ceremony has many features in common with madiksa ceremony at which a novice High Priest and his wife are symbolically reborn into a state of sanyasa (“spiritual renunciation”), thus assuming the rights and responsibilities of full-fledged High Priest and Priestess.

**Pitra Yadnya or Post-mortem Rituals**

The post-mortem rituals are very crucial for every Balinese because the main goal of these rites is to liberate the soul (atman) or the non-physical aspect of the self, and allow it to enter the world of deities and ancestors. In the Hindu-Balinese cosmology, the body of human being is a microcosm of the universe, made up of the same five elements as those that constitute the physical universe. These five elements, known as the Panca Maha Bhuta, are pertiwi, apah, teja, bayu, and akasa or earth, water, fire, air and ether. We believe that the soul is confined to a physical form by those five elements; therefore when someone dies the living family must perform a cremation ritual, called ngaben or palebon, to return the five elements to their sources and liberate the atman so that it can join the world of the deities and ancestors who provide protection to their living relatives. In each Balinese compound there is a family temple called a Sanggah (common Balinese language) or Merajan (high Balinese language), which consists of several shrines to worship the deities and the ancestors. A special wooden shrine set atop a stone pillar and divided into three parts is said to be sacred to the three major Hindu deities, Wisnu, Brahma and Shiwa and at the same time represents the deified ancestors of the family.

This ngaben ritual can be simple or very elaborate depending on the economic condition of the family. In high caste family, this ngaben ritual is called palebon can be very elaborate. For royal family like those of Ubud, Gianyar, Klungkung and Badung the cost of a cremation ceremony can run into the millions of Indonesian rupiah. The high cost of these rituals stems from the need to maintain status and prestige in their communities, and reflects the pattern of what Clifford Geertz famously called “the theater state”. In this form of society higher status families must carry enormous amounts of income in order to support the huge public spectacles that are the basis of their power. In contemporary Bali the “theater state” lives on, but now with the support of income generated by “cultural tourism” and the negotiation of fees allowing the filming of rituals that are highly valued among documentary film-makers with an eye for the exotic complexities of the living culture of Bali.

**Bhuta Yadnya or Rituals for the chthonic spirits**
Balinese believe in both sekala and niskala, or visible and invisible worlds that are inhabited by human beings as well as a host of invisible beings who live alongside us and are the “real owners” of the land and space of the world. We human beings reside in the visible (sekala) world but must remain ever aware and attentive to the needs and wishes of the niskala beings of the invisible world. We live together in this world; therefore we should share this world in a harmonious way, and strive to maintain the balance of life. The invisible beings can be good or bad, divine or demonic. They live with us in the world around us, and also within ourselves. Balinese believe that in order to create and maintain a harmonious relation with the unseen beings we need to make offerings on a daily basis, and more elaborate offerings on particular days within the lunar and Pawukon time cycles, as well as for rituals of all types. As I have mentioned above, the rituals for the divines or deities are called Dewa Yadnya, while the rituals performed for the demonic spirits are called Bhuta Yadnya. The main goal of the Bhuta Yadnya rituals is to placate the demonic spirits in order that they will not bother us while we are carrying out our obligations as human beings. Offerings for the demonic spirits are usually laid on the ground because we believe that they are from the nether world. While the simplest offerings to these spirits, the bhuta-kala, can consist of nothing more than bits of rice on banana leaf and more elaborate ceremonies must include offerings that contain the blood or flesh of animals that are sacrificed especially for ritual needs, and assumed to attain a higher station in future rebirths through their ‘participation’ in human rituals. Offerings made at Bhuta Yadnya rituals include the simplest segehan offerings, which are made of colorful cooked rice placed on a square container made from young coconut leaves and decorated with flowers, fruits and the rice. Each color of the rice of a segehan offering should be placed according to the proper direction of the four-compass points, which each have a corresponding color, sacred weapon, mantra and even place of “being seated” in the human body when carrying out healing rituals. For example, white rice should be placed in the east as the symbol of the deity Iswara, whose demonic form as Anggapati whose role in our body is to occupy the hearth. In Balinese belief, both divine and demonic beings are two sides of a single entity, which can assume one, or another form depending on how we treat them. Those invisible beings are malign and benign at the same time. It is our duty to placate the demonic spirits through offerings and thus enable them to be transformed into divine protective beings.

Hindu minorities are to be found in East Java, Central and East Kalimantan, the city of Medan (North Sumatra), in South and Central Sulawesi, and on the island of Lombok, the eastern neighbor of Bali that was under Balinese rule throughout the 19th century. Indian religious holidays like Holi and Divali are almost unknown on Bali, where a complex local calendrical system based on the pawukon year of 210 days is used to determine the auspicious days for important Balinese festivals like Galungan and Kuningan, which celebrate the victory of dharma, cosmic and social order and goodness, over adharma, the forces of disorder. In addition to the
many rituals that follow the *pawukon* cycle, there are important festivals in Bali that are timed according to the lunar cycle or to the solar-lunar Shaka year. The most important of these festivals in Nyepi, the Hindu “day of silence” that falls on the day following the new moon of the 10th lunar month. On the day before Nyepi a ceremony called *caru* or *tawur* is performed aimed at appeasing demonic spirits through a ‘feast’ offering of fresh slaughtered domestic animals. In the evening following this ritual temporary images of demons—called *ogoh-ogoh*—are carried in procession through the villages and then discarded, in this way entertaining the demonic forces that threaten the peace and solidarity of village communities and then chasing them away. Nyepi itself is a very special day in Bali, that has led to its being designated a national holiday: all use of fire, electricity or motorized transportation is banned; Balinese must stay in their homes, while tourists are confined to their hotels (but given a special dispensation that allows the use of electricity and gas-ranges for cooking). The sense of quiet and tranquility that descends on Bali during Nyepi is remarkable, a reminder of what life might be like if the meditative virtues of the past were brought to the fore again in our troubled, globalized world today.

**Conclusion**

Hinduism is one of the five official religions recognized by the Indonesian government and is understood by Balinese authorities to be the oldest world religion of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago originally coming from India in the first great age of seafaring trade and cultural contact of the first millennium CE. Hinduism and Buddhism enjoyed a golden age from the beginning of the first millennium through the coming of Islamic influence into the archipelago during the mid-15th century CE. Bali is one of the provinces in Indonesia that still maintains its Hinduism. But the Hinduism of Bali has become a unique religion because in its development it has been amalgamated with important local traditions and beliefs, perhaps most visible in the coalescence of ideas about the nature of divine beings from the Indian side with veneration for the protective nature of family ancestors on the Indonesian side. The characteristics of Balinese Hinduism are distinctive and unique especially in their religious practices, which have carried the art of creating offerings from floral, plant and edible components to a level unknown in any other manifestation of the basic religious instinct of human society. While some modern Balinese are adopting new practices based on recent contacts with the mainstream Hindu practices of India, the ancient ritual aspects of Balinese religion continue to live on in most of the households, villages and temple systems of Bali.
Suggestions for further reading


Casparis, J.G. de 1949 Three more Yupa Inscriptions of King Mulavarman from Kutei (East-Borneo)


Nagaswamy, R. 1982 *Tantric Cult of South India*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.


