



## Spiritual Tourism: Self-Healing through Melukat Ritual in Bali

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### **Abstract**

The incessant promotion of Bali tourist destination has resulted in other unique attractions offered by the island of God becoming popular. One of them is melukat, the purification ritual, which includes spiritual tourism. This study aims at examining the discourse of melukat ritual as a self-healing in the context of Bali cultural tourism development. The research method is exploratory to identify various indications related to the melukat ritual. Data collection techniques using observation, interview guidelines, and literature study. The informants were not only the locals but also visitors both domestic and foreign who were selected purposively. The results reveal that melukat itself is one of the religious traditions of Hindus in Bali, which is one of the series in the tirtayatra ritual. In the process of melukat, a series of rituals of praying, meditating, or taking tirta (holy water) are carried out. The main purpose of this tradition is to cleanse the soul from negative things, such as anxiety, nightmares, illness and other negative influences. One of the novelty drawn from this ritual is that even though this tradition is a religious activity of Hindus, Hindu priests do not bid anyone who wants to take part in the melukat ritual, including the tourists.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Tourism; Healing; Melukat Ritual; Holy Water*

### **I. Introduction**

Lifestyle trends that return to religion have become a new field for several countries to offer several religious tours that can be in demand and carried out by interfaith groups (Gautam, 2022). Since the post-pandemic period, there has been a tendency for people to take religious tours. Especially now that Indonesia is hosting the G20 Summit where one of the working groups is the R20. R20 itself is a gathering of religious leaders. Menparekraf Sandiaga Uno welcomed the holding of the International Summit for Religious Leaders or R20 Indonesia 2022 in Bali. According to Sandiaga Uno (Rachman et al, 2022) , this could be a momentum to show tolerance and boost religious tourism. "R20 is a new history engraved in which Indonesia shows our religious tolerance and (its location) is in Bali.

Bali is known for having well-maintained traditions and culture, besides that the level of tolerance that Bali has given freedom for people of any religion to be accepted with open arms (Indriani, 2019). Indriani further states that many Hindu religious ritual activities are starting to open and become religious tourism for foreign and local tourists. Judging from the large number of conference participants who are interested in knowing more about Bali, the government will develop religious tourism because

this is a new maintenance for Indonesia (Alexandri et al 2019). According to Burhanudin et al (2020) religious tourism is currently a mainstay because there are many advantages that other nations do not have. Sasongko (2018) explained that many religious places have the power to become tourist destinations.

On the other hand, the condition of Indonesian tourism is now starting to recover after two years of being hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pramana et al, 2021). Therefore, the government needs to pay attention to many things in preparing religious tourism which is in great demand by foreign tourists (Kristiana, et al 2021). Like melukat, which is currently a trend that can be done by tourists who come to Bali. Melukat, currently it is becoming a trend for local and foreign tourists to perform this ritual. Not a few foreign tourists, celebrities, artists, and celebrities come to Bali to experience the melukat procession. Melukat is no longer even a matter of personal spiritual experience, but has also become content on social media. Hindus in Bali believe that every human being has a dirty nature and must be cleaned. (Bambangsuparwa, 2021).

*Melukat* is a spiritual cleansing ceremony for the mind and soul in humans and this ceremony is carried out from generation to generation by Hindus until now (Dharmika, 2017). Melukat comes from the word *sulukat*, *su* which means good and *lukat* which means purification and this ceremony is led by traditional leaders (Subagia et al 2020). Melukat is usually included in a half day tour package, then proceed with other activities such as visiting temples and enjoying the natural scenery. According to Mahardika (2018) melukat can be seen from two sides, the first is religious activities for Hindus and the second is spiritual tourism that anyone can do. In fact, recently, visitors who spend their holidays in Bali are not only on the beach, such as Kuta Beach which is famous for the 3 S (sea, sand, and sun) for swimming or surfing, and sun bathing as well as the night clubbing. However, the existence of other places of interest, one of them is melukat the purification ritual including spiritual tourism in the isle of God. Nowadays, the melukat tradition seems to be loved by many people, including celebrities. There are several national actresses and artists from the capital city of Jakarta, starting from Pevita Pearce, Jessica Iskandar, Nikita Willy, Cinta Laura Kiehl, Valerie Thomas, even Raline Shah was seen sharing their experience of wounding through her social media accounts.

*Melukat* itself is one of the religious traditions of Hindus in Bali, which is one of the series in the Tirtayatra ritual (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021). In the process of melukat, a series of rituals of praying, meditating, or taking water (holy water) are carried out (Budiasih, 2017). The main purpose of this tradition is to cleanse the soul from negative things, such as anxiety, nightmares, illness, and so on (Suatama, 2021). Even though this tradition is a religious activity of Hindus, Hindu priests do not forbid anyone who wants to take part in the melukat ritual (Muliadisa et al, 2022). It is not surprising that the popularity of this tradition has increased because it is open to anyone. Apart from that, influencers such as Indonesian artists also actively share their experiences when painting through social media so that their followers also become curious and try it. This melukat activity is indeed suitable for those who want to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the city for refreshing and healing (. After carrying out this ritual, you will feel refreshed and calm. A series of activities that are carried out during melukat, such as praying and sitting in contemplation while listening to stories from nature, will also bring visitors into a solemn atmosphere. Not only do they clean themselves with holy water, they will also be invited to visit sacred and unique places when they make a wound. With that,

## **II. Research Methodology**

This study is a qualitative interpretive study, which aims at examining the ritual processes of purification ceremony that becomes a religious ideology not only for the locals but also the tourists who visit the Island of God. According to the theory of Religion and Structural Functional theory, melukat can affect the Psycho-Spiritual life of humans, namely the existence of a religious nature in a person as a

vibration to get closer to the Creator, so that the melukat procession has sacred values. This makes it an attraction for tourists visiting Bali, where apart from pleasure and at the same time doing pilgrimages for a rejuvenation from daily routine activities in their country which are so tiring. After their holiday, they will return to their respective countries with a new and fresher atmosphere to carry out their respective work activities. In order to obtain the primary data, in addition to conducting observations at several meukat places in Bali, we also conducted in-depth interviews with informants which are purposively assigned. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through a study of documents on the philosophy of the ritual itself.

### III. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Philosophical and Ideological Factors of the *Melukat* Ritual in Temples

Water is stabilized through a sacred ritual with the chanting of a mantra by Jero Mangku according to the spirit that is the goal. Accompanied by religious emotions that stimulate the human soul to carry out the melukat procession at a temple that is purified by the local community. Based on the results of interviews with Jero Mangku Pengempon of each temple, it can be seen the origins of the temple's existence. That when they want to purify themselves abstractly, Hindus in Bali have a method of melukat. The goal is to remove or dissolve all negative aura and bad luck. Temples in Bali are places where people choose to *melukat*, apart from self-purification, they also ask for healing.

Table 1. Tourist Attractions of several temples in Bali which have springs for the melukat ritual

No	Name of the temple	Location
1.	Tirta Empul Temple	Manuk Aya Let Customary Village, Tampak Siring, Gianyar Regency
2.	Pesiraman Sebatu/Dalem Pingit Temple	Sebatu Village, Tegallalang, Gianyar Regency
3.	Mumbul Temple Park	Sangeh Village, Abian Semal, Badung Regency
4.	Campuhan Windhu Segara Temple	Padanggalak Village, Kesiman, Denpasar
5.	Dalem Shooter Temple	Semawang Village, Sanur, Denpasar
6.	Giri Putri Cave Temple	Nusa Penida, Kelungkung Regency

An understanding of tourist attractions such as the Tirta Empul Temple which has been visited by many tourists, both domestic and foreign tourists, cannot be separated from Balinese culture itself which is imbued with Hinduism. The embodiment of Balinese culture which breathes Hinduism can be seen from various aspects, both in works of art related to religion (religious aesthetics), various symbols or symbols that are philosophical in nature, as well as various religious and customary ceremonies as daily practices. who live in society, all of them cannot be separated from the space of thought of Hinduism (Balinese). Ideological philosophical concepts in the space of Hindu human thought, especially Balinese, are closely related to the nature of God's omnipotence which includes three important elements, Satyam (truth), Siwam (goodness/holiness),

This perspective based on the formulation of Satyam, Siwam, Sundaram shows that every cultural performance in Bali as a practice that lives and is carried out by the community as a supporter of their culture contains a sense of beauty (sundaram), true divinity (satyam), contains elements of holiness (Siwam) as well as truth. (satyam) as a culture that needs to be continued and developed. Therefore, the religious culture of the Balinese people, who are mostly Hindus, has various forms, such as architecture, literature, ceremonies, and so on. Everything is a visualization of Hindu religious philosophy, religious culture which is full of symbols that can be used as a medium of appreciation by all levels of society. For people who have high levels of jnana and wijnana,

According to Hinduism, a holy place has two meanings, namely a holy place because of natural conditions (by itself) and a holy place because it is purified or built. An example of a sacred place in itself is a mountain peak and a spring. On the other hand, the sacred places built are temples. Etymologically the word 'pura' comes from Sanskrit (-pur, -puri, -pura, -puram, -pore) which means city, fortified city, city with towers or palaces. In its development in Bali, the term 'pura' became specifically for places of worship, while the word 'puri' became the residence of kings and nobles.

Pura as a sacred place for Hindus in Indonesia is a place of worship of Hyang Widhi Wasa in all of His prabawa (His manifestations) and/or Atma Sidha Dewata (holy ancestral spirits) by means of a yadnya ceremony from the Tri Marga. In the book Main Materials for Hindu Religious Events it is stated that a temple as a holy place for Hindus has meaning and function, including (a) a place to worship God in all His manifestations, (b) a place for people to draw closer to the Creator, namely God, (c) A place for community social dialogue/communication and a place for witnessing an activity, and (d) a place for sharpening and educating potential community leaders. Thus, in essence the establishment of a temple as a holy place emphasizes the existence of a social-religious dimension, including in this case the Tirta Empul Temple.

The existence of temples in Bali which are inseparable from the existence of springs such as the Tirta Empul temple which functions as a holy place can be traced from its historical dimension. This temple can be understood based on the information from the Manukaya Inscription in 960 AD issued by the King of Ancient Bali, namely Candra Bhaya Singha Warmadewa. The inscription now kept at Sakenan Temple, Manukaya Let Village, mentions the construction of a swimming pool (tirtha) in Air Hampul which is identified as Tirta Empul Temple.

Apart from the Manukaya Inscription, the history of Tirta Empul Temple can also be known based on the book Kakawin Usana Bali by Dang Hyang Nirartha. This lontar tells of the battle between Mayadanawa and Dewa Indra which was eventually won by Dewa Indra and his troops. Based on this book, it is informed that Tirta Empul is "holy water" created by God Indra's rod which can be used for various purposes, such as self-cleaning (malekat), removing disgrace, including for the benefit of religious ceremonies.



Figure1. The temple priest wholeading the prayers of the pemedek at Tirta Empul Temple  
Source: Personal collection, 12 November 2022

From these two written sources it can be seen that at first it was clear that Tirta Empul Temple was established for religious purposes. Tirta Empul Temple is a sacred place that is closely related to religious life for the Hindu community in Bali, especially Manukaya Village, Tampaksiring, Gianyar. Basically, religious life is a belief in the existence of supernatural powers that affect the lives of individuals and society. This belief creates certain behaviors, such as praying, worshipping, and creates

certain mental attitudes, such as fear, optimism, resignation from individuals and communities who believe in. Related to philosophical factors, Bandesa Adat Manukaya Let I Made Mawi Arnata (70 years), said the following.

"Tirtha Empul Temple is a Hindu holy place which is classified as a sad kahyangan temple. Therefore, from the bottom of my heart, those who personally disagree with tourists entering the Tirta Empul Temple area, especially the innards courtyard which is functioned by Hindus as a place to pray. If they only saw the shower of water at the fishing ground, in the middle jaba area, they don't think it's a problem. Tirta Empul Temple began to be visited by tourists at the beginning of the New Order government, which was around 1967. At that time, the Manukaya Let people had no intention of making Tirta Empul Temple a tourist object and attraction. Our society does not prohibit tourists from visiting the temple,

Based on the results of the interviews above, a framework of thinking can be built that in essence the manners of the Manukaya Traditional Village do indeed make the Tirta Empul Temple pure as a place of worship and the shower water as a place for self-cleaning (malukat). The community has a very tolerant attitude towards visitors, both those who come with the aim of visiting and those who come with the purpose of traveling, as long as the visitors can maintain the sacredness of the place. Thus, philosophically, Tirta Empul Temple is a holy place, namely a sacred area that is used for worship. The information provided by the Bandesa Adat and the Pemangku of the Tirta Empul Temple can be seen as a representation of the people of the Manukaya Let Traditional Village who view the Tirta Empul Temple as a holy place. Temple is understood as a sacred area that contains spiritual/sacred values. Likewise, the existence of the holy water source "yeh kelebutan" in the inner courtyard of the temple is channeled and a shower is made in the middle jaba courtyard for sacred purposes. In addition to asking for tirta, the shower is used as a place to purify oneself. The philosophy of Pura Tirta Empul as a sacred area is the wise foundation of the indigenous village community as the main supporter of Tirta Empul Temple. When this area turns into a tourist attraction, the indigenous village community sees it as a natural thing that doesn't have to change its meaning and function.

### **3.2 Basic Principles of Water for Purification Rituals**

Water is the first and foremost thing in life. Water is a chemical compound that is essential for life on Earth which cannot be replaced by other compounds. Water is a combination of two Hydrogen and Oxygen (H<sub>2</sub>O) atoms. Water can form liquids, solids, vapors and gases are distributed throughout the universe, in either form rain or what emerges from the bowels of the earth, in the form of rivers, showers, tenderness, lakes and the largest source of water is the ocean . Natural substance universe is water, 71% of the earth's surface is covered by water, earth floating on water (philosopher Thales). The sun has an important role in the hydrological cycle of water, the presence of heat energy makes all the water on the surface of the earth has evaporated space.

The water cycle is glorified in a civilization, because of water the cause of an area of land to be fertile in life society, so that humans whose lives initially migrated moved places, began to live sedentary by farming and building civilization, then accompanied by development great kingdoms. Balinese culture is formed by the civilization of water, on the banks of rivers, lakes, seas and other water sources which are built holy places, to then perform various religious rituals to show respect and devotion to the existence of water. The ritual is interpreted as water conservation, and the benefits of leading The feedback that is obtained is coolness of mind, creation of ideas and new ideas, because the place has provided prosperity in life.

The whole existence of a civilization cannot regardless of water, so water resources need to be maintained, the quality of the water so that it is always in a state of good balance macrocosm (Bhuana Agung) and in the microcosm (Bhuana Alit) (Darmika , 2017; 13). Water conservation is an absolute requirement for humans, because humans will not be able to live safely (rahayu), without the balance of

water quality, both in Bhuana Agung and Bhuana Alit. Humans need water not the other way around so take care of the purity of water sources which is very important to always remember and implement by humans. Water will be able to wrath and destroy all human life, if not treated well. When humans experience fear because the water discharge on earth begins to decrease and even disappears, due to water pollution everywhere due to human activities, in a place where the Balinese should purify it, so it is a threat to the continuity of human life. So there was a discussion of those who are serious about water, humans to re-contemplate and carry out the instructions of religious literature, traditions and local wisdom in maintaining water quality.

The most important task of Balinese community is to remind so that there is no exploitation of water, damaging and polluting the water due to the essence of water is God. Water sources with good quality are maintained is a legacy that must be continued and water conservation is a human obligation, so that the water balance in the earth is maintained in an effort to support life. In the meaning of not only water as an object but more to look at and put as a subject. Although modern humans feel they have the ability to conquer nature by exploring the existence of water and in full with the technology it has, but on the other hand it is a human obligation to pay respect by glorifying and worshiping water. Everyone in the island is ought to pay respect to water because water is a revered and glorified mother. In Addition, water has justice and water finds its own way to the ocean. The energy of water is primarily in health therapy, that water is life.

The logical consequence is that humans, as creatures, are part the magnitude is formed from water, the information should have been given well, so that mind and body will be healthy, so too on the contrary. So the water that is given positive information let alone the one in the form of words of gratitude and love, prayers that contain the power of God, the water will form beautiful crystals that can have a positive effect on human life. Previously, there was a ritual of glorifying deep water Hindu religious life in Bali. The water in question is already purified through a religious procession with a spell. Water made a mandala puja with thoughts, words and actions that are harmonious. There is the importance of water in religious life so that all ceremonies cannot be separated from water. Therefore in a religious and spiritual context, water is prayed with mantras, preceded by acts of self-harmonization, namely from people who have degrees of spiritual levels, making water the bearer of the divine grace that penetrates and pervades in the water Ganga is called *Tirta*. Sea water is *Tirta Amertaning Kamandalu*, which is holy water that will fulfill any noble desire. All ritual activities in Bali start from birth until death requires holy water.

### 3.3 The Influence of the *Melukat* Tradition on Psycho-Spiritual Life

Humans With the theory of Religion and Structural Functional theory it can be explained regarding the Influence of *melukat* on human Psycho-Spiritual life, namely: In Religious Emotions humans have a religious nature, is a vibration that stimulates the human soul to be afraid mixed with believing in things that are unseen. Besides that, humans also believe in the existence of a sacred power in nature, or humans are possessed by the emotion of unity by society and humans receive a word from God Almighty. The concept is centered on supernatural powers (mysterium) which are considered powerful or almighty (tremendum) and sacred (sacer). This encourages humans to have an inner desire to be attracted by things beyond reason and creates admiration and trust by something beyond logic. Therefore, humans are increasingly driven and want to be close and one with nature and its creations for harmony. Through this theory it is used in water glorification as the main means of the ritual of *melukat* in several water sources in Bali where there are usually temples, such as the Tirta Empul temple, Tampak Siring Gianyar, Sebatu temple, Tegal Lalang, Gianyar, Giri Putri Nusa Penida temple and several other temples. The ritual of *melukat* in the spring water of the temple is believed to have power and give a positive effect, as if the human energy itself were automatically generated by the *melukat* ritual. That is what causes the interest to carry out *melukat* in these various temples.



Figure 2. Foreign tourists are carrying out a melukat procession by wearing a sarong at the sacred pool of Tirta Empul Temple  
Source: Personal collection

*Melukat* adheres to religious and religious elements that are directly etymologically found in Bali. Social interaction occurs between various individuals, grows and develops not by chance, but grows and develops above the general standard of judgment that is mutually agreed upon by community members. The most important among the various general assessment standards, are what are known as social norms. It is these social norms that actually form the social structure. His understanding of the melukat tradition is (1) to glorify the function of water in the melukat ritual in the temples as a complex customary tradition of parts that are interconnected, interdependent and have clear functions and roles. As a tradition is to maintain harmony between pawongan and pekaahan which are still carried out from generation to generation until now, (2) humans have spiritual/spiritual needs, namely belief in God Almighty. Sometimes it is this closeness psychologically that seems to give suggestions to feel peaceful and safe. Spiritual life is very important related to mental health. Because spirituality can keep people away from stress, so that they become mentally healthy, meaning that a healthy mind will feel closer to God. If you have remembered God, you will surrender and believe, and the best will come from God, (3) there is also what is called spirituality therapy which is developing in society. But religion assures that illness is not merely suffering. All have a relationship with the Almighty. Here not only physical illness, but psychological illness as well. By having good spirituality, having faith and faith that God will provide a way of healing.

In relation to the melukat tradition it will have an impact on Psycho-Spiritual aspects, all aspects of mutual support between Bio-PsychoSosio-Spiritual, the need for survival/Biological aspects, physical and mental health/Psychological aspects, community relations/Sociological aspects, and worship are part of from the aspect of Spirituality, the balance of all aspects needs to be maintained, according to Maslow's law, 1994 in Motivation and Personality. The balance of both Psychology and Spirituality through water glorification can also be seen in the following sloka:

“Adbhir gatrani cuddhyanti manah satyena cuddhyti, cidyapobhyam buddhir jnanena cuddhyatir. This means that the body is cleaned with water, the mind is cleaned with honesty, the spirit is cleaned with knowledge and asceticism, the mind is cleaned with wisdom "(Manawa Dharma Sastra" Chapter V sloka 109).

The sloka indicates that there is a hidden goal to be achieved, moreover the implementation is in a temple which is purified and coincides with the Full Moon, Tilem and Kajeng Kliwon days, or other auspicious days. In relation to the melukat tradition, it is clear that water breeding is to benefit life and a balanced life.



## Conclusion

The ritual of melukat in several temples in Bali which is accompanied by the “Mendak Tirta Upakara” at the temple festival, is a place for painting which Hindus believe is blessed by Ida Batari Uma and Ida Dewi Gangga, has the main benefit of removing all impurities physically and mentally, including cleaning oneself from non-medical diseases. Since the beginning, this place of worship has been in great demand by the people because of the sensation that exists and is added to the fact that more and more parties are experiencing the benefits. Beliefs like this will continue to develop horizontally and expand as an exoteric religious phenomenon. At this level, *melukat* is a tourist attraction with sensation-based ritual appeal. *Melukat* can be rationalized as a form of holistic self-empowerment concerning self-cleaning. Water is scientifically proven to have ideal characteristics as a medium for self-empowerment. *Melukat* with water media provides a very significant treatment for the element of water (*apah*) within oneself, so as to create an ideal balance and formulation that is in harmony between layers of awareness within oneself. Health and fitness will be a bonus in itself. Understanding the essence of *melukat* and carrying out the process meditatively as a form of self-empowerment is a form of change in understanding and awareness, from ritual to spiritual. This is the progress of spiritual progress from exoteric to isoteric religious adherents, from skin consciousness to content awareness.

The Balinese people must be able to make the *melukat* ritual a spiritual movement or self-empowerment that brings great benefits to the progress of people's lives. After that, the *melukat* ritual is very worthy of being used as a spiritual tourism attraction, not just limited to sensation-oriented ritual tourism. Without having to deliberately carry out propaganda, the direct experience that is full of impressions experienced by tourists in carrying out the *melukat* procession after gaining an understanding of the spiritual essence of *melukat*, will produce strong testimonials from word of mouth. The power words of mouth will automatically become a powerful propaganda force in marketing. For this reason, what needs to be developed is the ability to explain the essence of the *melukat* ritual in a logical, scientific, and at the same time interesting way from a tourist perspective. Therefore, this essence is the result of decoding local wisdom values hidden in the *melukat* ritual tradition.

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