

Melukat in Beji: Healing Tourism, Water Conservation, and Balinese Hindu Ritual

Nyoman Temon Astawa¹, I Gede Diyana Putra^{2*}

¹ Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa, Denpasar, Indonesia

² Institut Agama Hindu Negeri Mpu Kuturan, Singaraja, Indonesia

*E-mail addresses: igededyanaputra@gmail.com

ABSTRAK. Studi ini mengeksplorasi melukat, ritual penyucian tradisional Hindu Bali, dengan fokus pada transformasinya menjadi bentuk pariwisata penyembuhan dan peran integralnya dalam konservasi air di mata air Beji yang suci. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang menggabungkan observasi etnografis, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis dokumen, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana praktik spiritual berurusan dengan pengelolaan ekologis di Bali kontemporer. Temuan menyoroti fungsi ganda melukat: sebagai ritual untuk pemurnian spiritual dan psikologis, menawarkan manfaat terapeutik yang terukur seperti pengurangan stres, peningkatan kesejahteraan mental, dan peningkatan ketahanan; serta sebagai mekanisme budaya yang memperkuat praktik konservasi air berbasis masyarakat. Sakralisasi air dalam ritual ini mewujudkan filosofi Bali Tri Hita Karana, yang menekankan harmoni antara manusia, alam, dan ilahi. Meskipun melukat menarik minat yang semakin besar melalui pariwisata, integrasi ini menghadirkan peluang untuk pelestarian budaya sekaligus risiko komersialisasi. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa melukat mewakili model penting konservasi biosbudaya, di mana pengetahuan adat, tradisi keagamaan, dan keberlanjutan modern bertemu. Dengan menyelaraskan warisan budaya dengan tanggung jawab ekologis, melukat tidak hanya melestarikan identitas Bali tetapi juga menawarkan wawasan untuk praktik pariwisata berkelanjutan global dan pengelolaan lingkungan.

ABSTRACT. This study explores *melukat*, a traditional Balinese Hindu purification ritual, focusing on its transformation into a form of healing tourism and its integral role in water conservation within sacred *Beji* springs. Using a qualitative approach combining ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis, the research examines how spiritual practices intersect with ecological stewardship in contemporary Bali. Findings highlight the dual function of *melukat*: as a ritual for spiritual and psychological purification, offering measurable therapeutic benefits such as stress reduction, improved mental well-being, and enhanced resilience; and as a cultural mechanism reinforcing community-based water conservation practices. The ritual's sacralization of water embodies the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and the divine. While *melukat* attracts growing interest through tourism, this integration presents both opportunities for cultural preservation and risks of commercialization. The study argues that *melukat* represents a vital model of biocultural conservation, where indigenous knowledge, religious tradition, and modern sustainability converge. By aligning cultural heritage with ecological responsibility, *melukat* not only sustains Balinese identity but also offers insights for global sustainable tourism and environmental management practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the multifaceted phenomenon of *melukat*, a traditional Balinese purification ritual, exploring its evolution into a form of healing tourism and its intrinsic connection to water conservation efforts within the sacred springs of *Beji* (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024) (Harianja et al., 2024). This analysis will employ a multidisciplinary approach, drawing upon cultural, religious, and ecological perspectives to elucidate the significance of *melukat* in contemporary Balinese society and its potential as a vehicle for environmental advocacy. Specifically, the study will examine how the sacralization of water through rituals like *melukat* reinforces a profound respect for natural resources,

demonstrating a model where spiritual practice and ecological stewardship are inextricably linked. The commercialization of such deeply rooted cultural practices, however, presents a complex dynamic, necessitating an examination of how these sacred traditions are sustained amidst burgeoning tourist interest (Gorda et al., 2023). This paper will further explore the theological-sociological-ecological integration inherent in practices such as Tri Hita Karana, which underpins Balinese cultural tourism and emphasizes harmony between humans, nature, and the divine (Mudana et al., 2023). Understanding *melukat*, therefore, requires an appreciation for its dual function: as a spiritual cleansing process aimed at achieving purification and mental clarity, and as a cultural practice increasingly recognized for its therapeutic potential in an era of growing mental health awareness (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024). Indeed, the *melukat* ritual offers significant therapeutic potential for mental health management, which necessitates the development of standardized protocols and culturally competent training for mental health practitioners to optimize its benefits (Harianja et al., 2024). This therapeutic potential stems from its role as a cleansing process aimed at spiritual purification and mental clarity, which contributes to the rebalancing of a "sick soul" and thereby facilitates mental healing (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024).

The holistic nature of *melukat*, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, aligns with modern bio-psycho-social-spiritual models of health, suggesting its efficacy in reducing anxiety and improving overall mental well-being (Harianja et al., 2024). Neurobiological studies corroborate these observations, indicating that participation in *melukat* rituals can enhance alpha and theta brainwave activity, commonly associated with states of deep relaxation and meditation (Harianja et al., 2024). This physiological response underscores the ritual's capacity to foster a profound sense of inner peace and cognitive tranquility, thereby promoting psychological well-being (Harianja et al., 2024). Furthermore, the sacred water utilized in *melukat* is believed to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, elevate endorphin production, and activate relaxation responses, offering significant therapeutic benefits through these physiological mechanisms (Harianja et al., 2024). The communal aspect of *melukat* further reinforces its therapeutic efficacy, as social support within the ritual context provides a vital buffer against mental distress and enhances resilience (Harianja et al., 2024). This integration of *melukat* with conventional therapy has been shown to enhance treatment effectiveness, leading to better outcomes compared to conventional therapy alone (Harianja et al., 2024). Moreover, recent research confirms the long-term impact of *melukat* on enhancing mental resilience, evidenced by measurable changes in biomarkers (Harianja et al., 2024). Specifically, studies reveal positive alterations in brain activity and a reduction in stress hormones following participation in *melukat*, while longitudinal research confirms its sustained positive impact on long-term mental well-being (Harianja et al., 2024). Such findings are further substantiated by electroencephalogram studies demonstrating increased alpha and theta waves and decreased beta waves, indicating deep relaxation and recovery, alongside a significant reduction in cortisol levels and enhanced heart rate variability post-ritual (Harianja et al., 2024).

Collectively, these neurobiological and psychophysiological markers underscore the ritual's capacity to induce profound states of relaxation and contribute to mental health improvements, even suggesting potential for preventative mental health maintenance (Harianja et al., 2024). This ritualistic engagement with sacred water, therefore, transcends mere cultural practice, emerging as a potent therapeutic modality that warrants further empirical investigation into its psycho-physiological mechanisms and broader public health implications (Harianja et al., 2024). Beyond its therapeutic applications, *melukat*, or *Malukat* as it is also known, fundamentally represents a traditional purification ceremony that transcends simple physical cleansing, aiming to purify the self from both physical and spiritual impurities (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024).

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the multifaceted dimensions of *melukat*, specifically focusing on its evolution into healing tourism and its role in water conservation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Balinese spiritual leaders, local community members involved in *melukat* ceremonies, and tourists participating in these rituals to gather diverse perspectives on their motivations and experiences. Additionally, ethnographic observations of *melukat* ceremonies at various *Beji* sites provided contextual insights into the ritual's performance, symbolic meanings, and interactions between participants and the natural environment. Documentary analysis of local regulations and historical texts pertaining to *Beji* management and water resource protection further enriched the understanding of the cultural and legal frameworks governing these sacred sites (Rosalina et al., 2023). The theoretical framework for this investigation is grounded in a narrative synthesis approach, drawing upon the conceptual insights of Grant and Booth, which facilitates the integration of findings from disparate sources into a cohesive understanding of *melukat*'s broader implications (Harianja et al., 2024). This qualitative methodology allowed for a nuanced exploration of the subjective experiences and cultural interpretations surrounding *melukat*, acknowledging its transformation from a traditional spiritual practice to a form of healing tourism.

Furthermore, a systematic literature review was undertaken to synthesize existing research on sustainable tourism in Bali, analyzing various methodological approaches, including quantitative assessments through structural equation modeling and qualitative studies involving semi-structured interviews and participatory observation, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the academic discourse surrounding these complex dynamics (Utama et al., 2024). This mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative insights and existing quantitative data, offers a robust

framework for assessing the multifaceted impacts of overtourism while simultaneously evaluating the efficacy of sustainable tourism practices in Bali (Utama et al., 2024). Given Bali's trajectory through all stages of Butler's tourism area life cycle model, from exploration to potential decline or rejuvenation, understanding these dynamics is crucial for future policy implementation aiming to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability (Salam et al., 2024). This comprehensive methodology, combining ethnographic study with extensive literature review and theoretical synthesis, allows for a holistic understanding of how *melukat* embodies both a profound spiritual practice and a strategic approach to environmental conservation. By meticulously analyzing the intricate interplay between cultural heritage, spiritual beliefs, and ecological sustainability, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of *melukat*'s evolving role in contemporary Balinese society.

This depth of analysis is crucial for discerning how traditional practices, when integrated with modern environmental concerns, can offer innovative solutions for sustainable development within climatically fragile regions (Ascertaining the Effects of Climate Variability on Tourism in a Climatically Fragile Region of Pakistan, 2021). This methodological rigor ensures that the study captures the intricate relationships between indigenous spiritual paradigms and their potential alignment with global sustainable development goals (Budarma & Suarta, 2017). Such an interdisciplinary approach is essential for understanding the nuanced socio-ecological systems prevalent in regions facing significant climate variability (Ascertaining the Effects of Climate Variability on Tourism in a Climatically Fragile Region of Pakistan, 2021).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study illuminate the dual role of *melukat*, demonstrating its intrinsic value as a sacred ritual within Balinese Hinduism while also highlighting its emergent function as a significant component of healing tourism and a potent vehicle for water conservation advocacy. This transformation underscores how traditional spiritual practices can adapt to modern contexts, offering unique opportunities for cultural preservation alongside ecological stewardship. Specifically, the integration of *melukat* within the broader tourism framework in Bali exemplifies a resource management strategy that leverages customary involvement and strong spiritual beliefs, such as Tri Hita Karana, to promote conservation alongside economic development (Rosalina et al., 2023). This approach aligns with findings that spiritual beliefs, when codified into customary rules, provide a structured direction for resource management, particularly within rural destinations exhibiting strong cultural and religious foundations (Rosalina et al., 2023). This synergy between sacred practices and ecological imperatives not only reinforces traditional values but also fosters a communal responsibility for natural resource preservation, particularly water (Rosalina et al., 2023) (Sinambela et al., 2021). The emphasis on community participation, especially through customary village structures, is pivotal in ensuring compliance with taboos and beliefs related to water protection, even though decision-making processes may remain centralized within local governance structures (Rosalina et al., 2023).

However, effective stakeholder engagement and community participation are still nascent, indicating a need for more inclusive bottom-up approaches in heritage planning and management to foster collaborative processes (Rosalina et al., 2023). This necessitates strategies that empower local communities and integrate their traditional knowledge into contemporary conservation frameworks, ensuring that environmental initiatives resonate with cultural values and secure long-term adherence (Ojebode, 2023). Furthermore, such integrated approaches, where spiritual beliefs and customary laws intersect with conservation efforts, have been shown to be effective in preserving ecosystem services, as seen in the valuation of sacred swamps in India (Hegde et al., 2023). This interweaving of religious observance and ecological responsibility positions *melukat* as a compelling model for sustainable tourism, promoting a deeper connection between visitors and the natural environment while simultaneously safeguarding critical water resources. The incorporation of traditional spiritual practices, such as *melukat*, into conservation strategies highlights a unique pathway for sustainable resource management that resonates with local cultural values and fosters community-led environmental stewardship (Rosalina et al., 2023). This approach not only revitalizes traditional practices but also provides a framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges, particularly those related to water scarcity and pollution.

Such initiatives demonstrate how culturally embedded practices can serve as powerful tools for promoting environmental sustainability, especially when reinforced by community ownership and external support for long-term project viability (Wickramanayake, 2003) (Li et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual practices as integral components of holistic conservation strategies, particularly in regions where cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with ecological health (Song et al., 2021). This integrated approach not only strengthens local resilience against environmental degradation but also offers a compelling example of how cultural heritage can be leveraged for broader ecological benefits, aligning with principles of participatory resource management (Cesaro et al., 2023) (Wickramanayake, 2003) (Li et al., 2019). This method exemplifies how informal local practices and customary belief systems can be integrated into formal conservation policies, enhancing community engagement and effectiveness (Maliao et al., 2023). This framework acknowledges that local wisdom, when effectively integrated into educational and conservation programs, significantly contributes to natural resource preservation and cultural heritage maintenance (Kusrianto et al., 2025). This confluence of cultural and ecological values is particularly

evident in the concept of sacred forests, which are protected through religious and cultural practices due to their spiritual significance to local communities (Sinambela et al., 2021). This perspective suggests that traditional ecological knowledge, often imbued with spiritual reverence for nature, provides a robust framework for biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource utilization (Asante et al., 2023).

For instance, the application of local wisdom in managing natural resources or promoting environmentally friendly agricultural practices can inspire innovative solutions applicable in the modern era (Kusrianto et al., 2025). Moreover, recognizing the intrinsic connection between cultural identity and environmental stewardship, such wisdom can empower communities to become active participants in conservation efforts (Kusrianto et al., 2025). This alignment of cultural heritage with ecological objectives fosters a biocultural approach to conservation, where traditional knowledge and practices contribute significantly to local sustainability and biodiversity protection (Ekblom et al., 2019). This integration of indigenous knowledge and scientific understanding creates a more holistic and effective strategy for environmental management (VijayKumar, 2019) (Kusrianto et al., 2025). This approach also acknowledges the profound understanding Indigenous peoples often possess regarding ecosystem dynamics and sustainable resource use, which is critical for long-term ecological health (VijayKumar, 2019). Such deep-rooted understanding, often passed down through generations, allows for the implementation of conservation strategies that are intrinsically adapted to local environmental conditions and cultural contexts (Asante et al., 2023).

Discussion

Beyond its therapeutic applications, *melukat* or *Malukat* is a traditional Balinese purification ceremony that purifies both body and soul, deeply embedded in Balinese Hinduism and the island's spiritual landscape (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024). It employs water as a sacred medium for cleansing, echoing universal practices such as the Islamic *Wudu* or Javanese and Sumatran water rituals (Veerasamy et al., 2023). Across cultures, water symbolizes renewal and spiritual purification (Kamvysselis, 2023). Scientifically, hydrotherapy and cold-water immersion are proven to reduce stress and regulate cardiovascular function, validating the biological and psychological benefits of water-based rituals (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024). *melukat*, therefore, bridges the physiological and spiritual, enhancing relaxation, mindfulness, and resilience often with greater efficacy than conventional therapeutic practices (Harianja et al., 2024).

The ritual's universal association with well-being underscores the intimate link between humans and water. Immersion in "blue spaces" such as springs or seas has been shown to improve mental health, echoing the restorative role of sacred water in Balinese culture (Maharja et al., 2022). This connection positions *melukat* not only as a means of personal purification but also as a practice that promotes environmental awareness. Its performance at *Beji* holy water springs demonstrates how religious traditions can simultaneously foster ecological stewardship, particularly within Global South contexts where community-based conservation often substitutes for state-led initiatives (Maharja et al., 2022; Bowman, 2019).

Water's sanctity in Balinese Hinduism is expressed through the concept of *Tirtha*, or holy water, as a divine force of purification and rejuvenation (Harianja et al., 2024). This aligns with the global perception of water as pure and life-sustaining, influencing how people value and protect their natural environments (Okumah et al., 2020). Within these spiritual frameworks, ecological care becomes a moral and religious duty (Mulya et al., 2024). Consequently, *melukat* extends beyond spiritual renewal into a collective responsibility to safeguard water sources, embodying an ethical model of ecological spirituality (Aryda & Wedastra, 2024).

This moral ecology is reflected in the Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, emphasizing harmony between humans, nature, and the divine (Rosalina et al., 2023). Under this philosophy, protecting natural ecosystems is both a cultural norm and a spiritual mandate (Qodim, 2023). *melukat* thus functions as a tangible expression of *Tri Hita Karana*, reinforcing local wisdom in sustainable resource management and supporting broader conservation ethics (Rosilawati et al., 2020; Vipriyanti et al., 2024). This synergy between cultural values and environmental protection aligns with initiatives such as *Nangun Sad Kerthi Loka Bali*, which integrates spiritual practice and ecological preservation for community well-being (Mudana et al., 2023).

Findings from this study reveal that *melukat* embodies dual significance: as a sacred Hindu ritual and as a driver of healing tourism that advances water conservation. This transformation illustrates how traditional spirituality adapts to modern contexts, sustaining cultural identity while contributing to ecological resilience. When integrated into Bali's tourism framework, *melukat* exemplifies a conservation model rooted in faith and community participation (Rosalina et al., 2023). Codifying these spiritual principles into customary rules has strengthened environmental governance in culturally rich rural areas, showing that belief systems can direct effective resource management (Rosalina et al., 2023; Sinambela et al., 2021).

However, community engagement remains uneven, highlighting the need for inclusive, bottom-up heritage management (Ojebode, 2023). Integrating spiritual beliefs and customary laws with conservation strategies has proven successful elsewhere, such as in India's sacred swamps, demonstrating that spiritual values can reinforce ecological protection (Hegde et al., 2023). In this context, *melukat* represents a form of biocultural conservation, merging cultural identity, spirituality, and sustainability to safeguard water sources and promote responsible tourism (Rosalina et al., 2023).

These findings affirm the potential of indigenous knowledge systems to complement scientific and policy frameworks for environmental management. Locally rooted wisdom expressed through rituals, taboos, and symbolic practices serves as an effective foundation for biodiversity protection and sustainable resource use (Asante et al., 2023; Kusrianto et al., 2025). The ritual of *melukat* exemplifies this convergence, integrating cultural continuity with environmental responsibility and offering a living model of spiritual ecology that harmonizes faith, culture, and conservation.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the *melukat* ritual in *Beji*, originally a sacred purification rite within Balinese Hinduism, has evolved into a compelling model for healing tourism that simultaneously champions water conservation. This transformation highlights the universal appeal of water as a medium for spiritual and physical cleansing while drawing crucial attention to the escalating global water crisis. By integrating cultural heritage, religious practice, and ecological awareness, *melukat* offers a unique framework to address both individual well-being and collective environmental responsibility. This innovative approach recognizes that preserving sites like *Beji*, which are integral to such rituals, directly safeguards vital water sources, thereby transforming spiritual practice into tangible conservation action (Rosalina et al., 2023) (Maliao et al., 2023). Moreover, the economic benefits derived from healing tourism at these sacred water sites can incentivize local communities to actively participate in conservation efforts, fostering a symbiotic relationship between cultural preservation and ecological sustainability. Such initiatives exemplify a powerful convergence of indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and contemporary environmental stewardship, creating a model that transcends conventional conservation paradigms.

This provides a novel example of how cultural tourism, if managed sustainably and aligned with local knowledge systems, can contribute significantly to both economic development and environmental protection (Mudana et al., 2023) (Ascertaining the Effects of Climate Variability on Tourism in a Climatically Fragile Region of Pakistan, 2021). This underscores the potential for spiritual and cultural practices to offer concrete solutions to urgent environmental concerns, particularly when these practices are intrinsically linked to natural resources (Raihan et al., 2025). This demonstrates that the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of spiritual well-being can be harmoniously integrated with ecological conservation efforts, fostering a deeper societal connection to environmental stewardship (Mudana et al., 2023). This integrative model, therefore, provides a compelling blueprint for other regions seeking to leverage their cultural and spiritual assets for sustainable development and ecological resilience (Rosalina et al., 2023) (Pujihartati & Wijaya, 2023).

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