

Tri Hita Karana, a Spiritual Connection to Nature in Harmony

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ABSTRACT—The Balinese ancestors showed how to live in harmony with their natural environment, and how their traditional wisdom can mitigate the risk of natural disaster and the degradation now known as climate change. Today, the concept of harmony in Balinese Hinduism is not a relic of the past but part of people's daily activities that will be passed on to the next generation. To illustrate the relationship between cultural heritage and climate change, this article discusses the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana which promotes harmony in multiple ways: harmony among human beings through communal cooperation and friendship; harmony towards God, manifested in numerous rituals and offerings to the creator; and harmony with nature, through efforts to conserve the environment and promote sustainability and balance. Tri Hita Karana guides many aspects of Balinese life, from daily rituals to economic activities. Currently, efforts are needed to harness this philosophy in this era of urban development.

Background

Traditional wisdom created significant values attached to the locations of living and daily life. Tradition is not merely about the past, but also about passing on the current activities of people to the next generation. Each generation has its own dynamics which contribute to changes in tradition over time. We risk losing rich and unique traditions if there is carelessness in passing them from one generation to the next. A tradition should not be regarded as an obligation, but as a wisdom which reflects the daily customs of a community and their religious beliefs. The history behind each tradition helps to maintain community support for its practice, even among people who are migrants into the area where the tradition is upheld.

Balinese Hinduism has a long history. Bali is an island province of Indonesia where at present 86.9 percent adhere to Balinese Hinduism. In the past there were ten kingdoms which originated before the 8th century in different areas of the island. Today these kingdoms are not recognised by the government of Indonesia. The first king known from historical records was Sri Kesari Warmadewa whose capital was at Pejeng or Bedulu, now in the Gianyar regency. In these kingdoms spirit worship and reverence for the ancestors coexisted with Hindu and Buddhist influences from neighboring Java. In the 11th century, Erlangga went from Bali to rule a kingdom at Kahuripan in eastern Java.

During the Majapahit Empire from the 13th to the 15th century, Bali was conquered by Majapahit troops lead by Gajah Mada. When the empire declined in the 15th century and was eventually overrun by Muslim lords, a number of Balinese courtiers, nobles, priests and artisans left the Majapahit court and returned to Bali (Kubontubuh 2021). Bali became the last stronghold of the Hindu-Buddhist culture which had earlier flourished in Java (Rukmi 2015). Balinese kings expanded their influence over neighboring islands. In the late 16th and the early 17th century, the kingdom of Gelgel, for example, extended its influence to Blambangan and other regions in East Java, and the kingdom of Karangasem conquered the island of Lombok in the 17th century.

In the 19th century, the colonial state of the Dutch East Indies took control of Bali and suppressed the Balinese kingdoms. In 1946 Bali became part of the Republic of Indonesia. However, the old traditions derived from Hinduism continued to shape everyday life in Bali. Within those traditions there is cultural wisdom relevant to safeguarding the environment based on an ideal of harmony and balance of life. This experience is similar to other regions of Asia where old religious traditions continue to shape the relationship of humans with the environment. This article traces how one aspect of Balinese cultural wisdom contributes to thinking about the community's role in protecting the environment and cultural heritage in the present day.

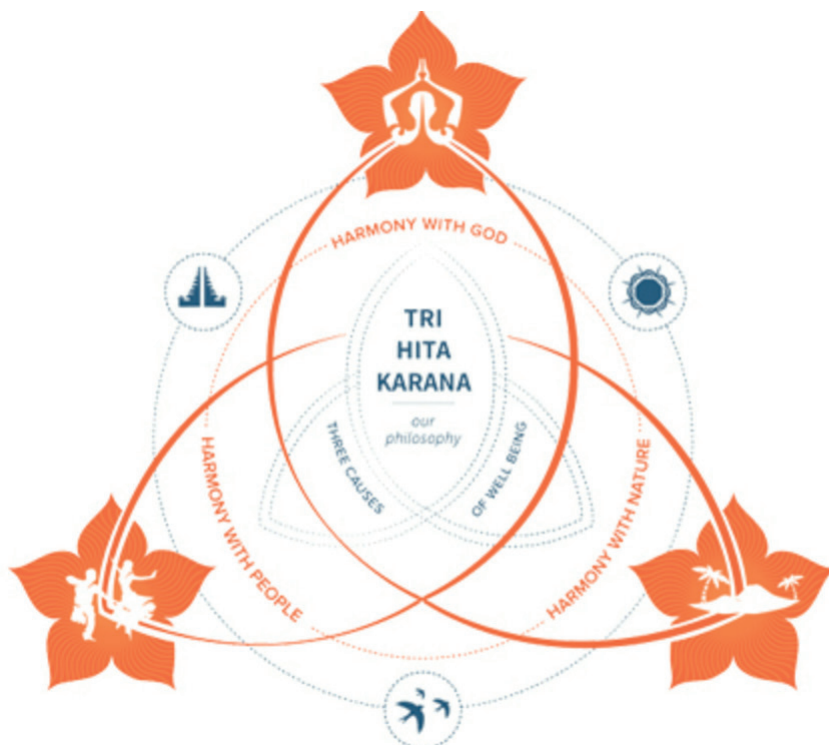


Figure 1. Tri Hita Karana philosophy (BPPI, 2015)

Tri Hita Karana as a concept of harmony

For the Balinese, Tri Hita Karana is a basic tradition about the balance between man and the environment, between man and man, and between man and the creator. Balinese believe that the environment is God's special creation, a rich gift that supports human life, and that needs to be maintained to achieve prosperity in harmony.

Tri Hita Karana can be translated as "the three causes of happiness". The concept has been present in Bali since at least the 8th century. It means that the three relationships — between man and the environment, between man and man, and between man and the creator — must be kept in balance (Figure 1). This concept guides many aspects of Balinese life, from daily rituals, to communal cooperation practices, and to spatial planning in Balinese architecture. The three relations are called Parhyangan, Pawongan, and Palemahan.

Parhyangan is the basis for all the rituals that mark the relationship between man and God. People express their appreciation of divine generosity through various rituals conducted as part of daily life. Drawing on Hindu concepts, people are considered as God's creation (Brahman), and Atman is the spark of the holy light of God's greatness that causes humans to live. Therefore, humans owe their lives to God. Every human being is obliged to be grateful, devoted and submissive to God by worshipping, following religious teachings, and making pilgrimages to holy places.

Pawongan is the harmonious relationship between neighbors that is essential for serenity in life. The spirit of Pawongan is manifested in the ways that people help one another, find solutions through discussion, and formulate plans through village meetings. Palemahan is based on compassion, nurturing, mutual respect and mutual love. Harmonious human relationships create security and inner and outer peace in society.

Palemahan is the relationship of humans and nature, which is a circular relationship of give-and-take. As nature provides for humanity through the necessities of life, humanity must preserve nature in return. This has long been the basis of sustainable development in harmony with the environment. Palemahan includes simple everyday actions such as watering plants and managing garbage, as well as larger-scale activities such as agriculture and forest conservation. People are very dependent on the environment and thus must take care of it. Forests should not be cut down arbitrarily and animals should not be over-hunted because such actions disturb the balance of nature. If the environment is properly maintained, it will create beauty and give humanity a sense of calm and serenity.

Tri Hita Karana states that good relationships between the three components of man, nature, and the creator are the basis of balance and harmony (Figure 2).

Tri Hita Karana and climate action

The degradation of the environment at the global level has caused long-term shifts in temperature and weather patterns. People are experiencing climate change in diverse ways. Some are already vulnerable to climate impacts which affect health, the ability



Figure 2. Tri Hita Karana connections (BPPI, 2015)

to grow food, housing, safety, and work (United Nations 2020). These conditions have advanced to the point where whole communities have had to mobilize to tackle the impact of climate change. Cultural heritage is one form of asset that can be a positive factor in designing climate action policies.

The movement to reinvent local tradition led to the formation of the Indonesian Network for Heritage Conservation in 2003 and the Indonesian Heritage Trust (Badan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia/BPPI) in 2004. BPPI works together with conservation organizations and individuals from various regions in Indonesia to promote local traditions as part of intangible heritage, to raise understanding and awareness of these traditions, and to preserve heritage nationwide. The Bali Field School for Subak (Subak is the irrigation system of terraced paddy fields) was started in 2015 and continues today. There is a need for a “sense of urgency” about protecting nature through cultural activities. The government has a role in formulating and implementing policies on climate action, but local communities also have a responsibility. Local wisdom and global policies must complement each other. The traditions of Balinese Hinduism can be a source of principles, paradigms, and strategies for effective and locally based climate action.



Figure 3. The Bali Field School for Subak.(BPPI, 2018)

Closing remarks

It is not difficult to integrate local tradition with modern approaches to combating climate change. Locally based climate action requires commitment, broad participation and understanding of the philosophy behind the tradition (Smith and Akagawa 2009). Conservation of the environment is part of Balinese tradition, based on the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana. The local people have a strong attachment to the legacy of their ancestors and a passion for nurturing local traditions (Lowenthal 2009). They understand that modern living poses threats to their environment. They are striving to maintain their own environment at the small scale as a contribution to the larger project of climate action at the national and global levels. They face the limitations inherent in their own capabilities as well as the obstruction inherent in the complexity of modern society. The local wisdom about harmony arising from the three relationships between humanity, nature and the creator can be a powerful basis for action to combat climate change. At present, not enough attention is paid to involving local communities and drawing on cultural heritage in climate campaigns. The context of heritage conservation is constantly changing under the dynamics of socio-economic development. There is a need for flexibility and negotiation among the various stakeholders. Tradition and modernity should not be seen as a dichotomy. The rituals, procession, and ceremonies of Balinese Hinduism are still performed today. Traditions passed down from the ancestors can be adapted by today's communities

to aid the conservation of heritage and the protection of the environment. People can preserve heritage through the practice of their living tradition.

Tri Hita Karana is an example of local wisdom about harmony that retains its relevance today and can help to stimulate thinking and discussion on climate action and community participation.

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