

Balinese

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

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** Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Indic Religious Traditions, Hinduism

The Balinese people live on the island of Bali, which has been a part of the Republic of Indonesia since 1950. The Balinese religious beliefs are described as a Malayo-Polynesian culture influenced by Hinduism; key features include religious practitioners (priests), offerings, prayers, and rituals, as well as belief in gods and ancestral spirits. Religious beliefs are central to the Balinese culture, and settlements are focused around the temple, and villages are defined as "the people who worship at a common village temple, not as a territorial unit" (McCauley, 2010). This entry focuses on the general religious beliefs of the Balinese, ca. 1958.



Date Range: 1933 CE - 1960 CE

Region: Tihingan region of Bali

Region tags: Asia, Southeast Asia, Indonesia

Tihingan region of Bali, ca. 1958

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

— Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

— Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=of07-004>

— Source 1 Description: Belo, J. (1949). *Bali: Rangda And Barong*. Monographs Of The American Ethnological Society. New York: J. J. Augustin

— Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=of07-002>

— Source 2 Description: Covarrubias, M. (1938). *Island Of Bali*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf

— Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=of07-000>

— Source 3 Description: McCauley, A. P. (2010). *Culture Summary: Balinese*. New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files

Notes: Covarrubias, M. (1938) is an overview of Balinese culture from fieldwork in 1935

General Variables

Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "Since the earliest times, when Bali was under the rule of the great empires that flourished in the golden era of Hinduistic Java, the various forms of Javanese religion became in turn the religions of Bali, from the Mahayanic Buddhism of the Sailendras in the seventh century, the orthodox Sivaism of the ninth, to the demoniac practices of the Tantric sects of the eleventh century. In later times Bali adopted the modified, highly Javanized religion of Madjapahit, when Hinduism had become strongly tinged with native Indonesian [Page 261] ideas. Each of these epochs left a deep mark in Balinese ritual; to the native Balinese cults of ancestors, of the elements, and of evil spirits, were added the sacrifices of blood and the practices of black magic of the Tantric Buddhists, the Vishnuite cult of the underworld, Brahmanic juggling of mystic words and cabalistic syllables, the cremation of the dead, and so forth, all, however, absorbed and transformed to the point of losing their identity, to suit the temper of the Balinese" (Covarraubias, 1938:260).



Is the cultural contact accommodating/pluralistic:

– Yes

Notes: "...the Balinese have been extremely liberal in matters of religion. Every time a new idea was introduced into the island, instead of repudiating it, they took it for what it was worth and, if they found it interesting enough, assimilated it into their religion, since no one knew what power there might be in the new gods. In this manner, from all the sects and cults that at one time or another reached the island, they selected anew the principles that best suited their own ideas and accumulated a vast store of religious power" (Covarraubias, 1938:263).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that "internal warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).



Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved Rating), indicates that "external warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

– Yes

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– Yes

Notes: "...villages were ruled by councils of village members and officials who governed as representatives of the ancestral spirits" (Covarraubias, 1938:262).

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "Religion is to the Balinese both race and nationality; a Balinese loses automatically the right to be called a Balinese if he changes his faith or if a Balinese woman marries a Mohammedan, a Chinese, or a Christian, because she takes leave forever of her own family gods when she moves into her husband's home and instead worships his gods from that time on" (Covarrubias, 1938:261).

↳ Are apostates prosecuted or punished:

– I don't know

Size and Structure

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "In the old style villages the priestly functions are fulfilled by the old, top ranking men, the kebajan and kebae, in the dual organization, and occasionally by a balian, a priest or priestess, who may be a member of the village or called from outside the village. Balian are knowledgeable, have a store of rituals and formulas chiefly borrowed from the Hinduistic and Buddhistic ceremonial, and often practice by going into trance in order to ascertain the gods' will. They may serve, alternatively, for curing the sick, finding lost objects, setting up communications with the other world by divining the gods' will or by impersonating them. Another sort of specialist who may be called in is the sengguhu priest, also casteless except as regards the older guild castes, who derives his title from the conch shell he blows, who knows about rituals and offerings, but who does not as a rule go into trance" (Belo, 1949:8). "In the usual Balinese village, type 2 above, the priestly function is performed by the pemangkoe of each temple, who may be a commoner or a man of Hinduistic caste. He is in charge of the temple, performs the calendrical rituals, dedicates offerings, recites prayers in a mixture of Old Language and Sanskrit slokas, and officiates at household rites de passage, babies' festivals, weddings, birthdays, and the like. He is rather contemptuously referred to by the higher caste priesthood as 'sweeper,' and in ceremonial trance-talk in the temple festivals 'djero sapoeh' (sweeper) refers to this priest" (Belo, 1949:9).

↳ Are religious leaders chosen:

– No

Notes: "The office of the pemangku is often hereditary, but he may also be chosen by some mystic while inspired by the spirits" (Covarraubias, 1938:270).

Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– Yes

Notes: "Temples consist of one or more courtyards, open to the sky, surrounded by a wall, and containing small shrines and buildings" (Belo, 1949:10).

↳ In the average settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

– I don't know

↳ Size of largest single religious monument, square meters:

– I don't know

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

– I don't know

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

– I don't know

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

– I don't know

↳ In the largest settlement, what percentage of area is taken up by all religious monuments:

– I don't know

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– Yes

↳ Temples:

– Yes

Notes: "Villages have as a rule three main temples, the Village Temple, the Temple of Death (sacred to the memory of the Dead Kings), and the Temple of Origin" (Belo, 1949:7).

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes

Notes: "The abode of the gods is the sacred mountain of Bali, the Goenoeng Agoeng. The god of this mountain is a male, and his wife is the sacred lake, the Danau Batoer. The mountain is thought of both as a god and as a site, the home of the Hinduistic gods, who return there after they have been down to manifest their presences in the temples at the time of festival" (Belo, 1949:8).

↳ Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

– Yes

Notes: "The abode of the gods is the sacred mountain of Bali, the Goenoeng Agoeng. The god of this mountain is a male, and his wife is the sacred lake, the Danau Batoer. The mountain is thought of both as a god and as a site, the home of the Hinduistic gods, who return there after they have been down to manifest their presences in the temples at the time of festival" (Belo, 1949:8).

Beliefs

Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: "Cremation ceremonies are, in Bali, directed to free the soul that it may be once more reborn" (Belo, 1949:59).

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "Cremation ceremonies are, in Bali, directed to free the soul that it may be once more reborn. There is no other paradise than earth, and a return to living is the reward for adequate fulfillment of the dues imposed by Death. A man's descendants are responsible for the fulfillment of these dues, and it is of maximal importance that he have children so that they may perform this office for him and he may be reborn. Thus the system is circular and self-perpetuating" (Belo, 1949:59).

– Yes

Notes: "Between incarnations, until the time comes for its return to this earth, the soul goes to Indra's heaven, the swarga, a reservoir where "life is just as in Bali, but devoid of all trouble and illness." But this process does not go on forever; when the individual has attained the highest wisdom and has reached the highest position among men, that of a Brahmana who has been ordained as a priest, he hopes to obtain liberation from this cycle of births and become a god. The man of low caste attributes his state to former misconduct, redeemable in future lives only through a virtuous existence, which entitles him to be reborn into a higher and higher caste" (Covarrubias, 1938:361).

Reincarnation in this world:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1998, Belief in Reincarnation of Deceased Adults, indicates a strong belief in the reincarnation of deceased adults is present among the Balinese (Rosenblatt, Walsh, and Jackson, 1976; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ In a human form:

– Yes

Notes: "The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is thought of in Bali as continuous within a family line. It is not, as in orthodox Hinduism, considered possible to be reborn in a different caste from one's own" (Belo, 1949:59).

↳ In form of an inanimate object(s):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence of a belief in reincarnation in the form of an inanimate object(s).

↳ In non-individual form (i.e. some form of corporate rebirth, tribe, lineage. etc.):

– Yes

Notes: "The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is thought of in Bali as continuous within a family line. It is not, as in orthodox Hinduism, considered possible to be reborn in a different caste from one's own" (Belo, 1949:59).

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information on the treatment of corpses among the Balinese.

↳ Cremation:

– Yes

Notes: "Cremation ceremonies are, in Bali, directed to free the soul that it may be once more reborn" (Belo, 1949:59).

↳ Mummification:

– Yes

Notes: Corpses are either buried or mummified for a period of time before final cremations take place. See Covarrubias, 1938:365.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: Corpses are either buried or mummified for a period of time before final cremations take place. See Covarrubias, 1938:365.

↳ Corpse is flexed (legs are bent or body is crouched):

– No

Notes: (Covarrubias, 1938:365)

↳ Corpse is extended (lying flat on front or back):

– Yes

Notes: "The corpse is laid in the grave with an open bamboo tube in the place of the mouth to let the soul out, the grave is filled, and a bamboo structure with a roof of white tissue paper is erected over it" (Covarrubias, 1938:365).

↳ Corpse is upright (where body is interred in standing position):

– No

Notes: (Covarrubias, 1938:365)

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism among the Balinese.

↳ Secondary burial:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1850, Secondary Bone/Body Treatment: Original Scale, indicates that "secondary contact with the body or bones of the deceased does not occur" (Schroeder, 2001; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Re-treatment of corpse:

– Yes

Notes: Corpses are either buried or mummified for a period of time (42 days, or longer if money for a cremation still needs to be obtained) before final cremations take place. See Covarrubias, 1938:365.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– I don't know

Notes: Insufficient information

Are grave goods present:

– No

Notes: Goods are not buried in a grave, rather, items are burned along with the corpse during the cremation ceremony. "At cremation ceremonies hundreds of people in a wild stampede carry the beautiful towers, sixty feet high, solidly built of wood and bamboo and decorated with tinsel and expensive silks, in which the bodies are transported to the cremation grounds. There the corpses are placed in great caws (hewn out of tree-trunks to serve as coffins and covered with precious materials), and caws, towers, offerings, and ornaments are set on fire, hundreds and even thousands of dollars burned in one afternoon..." (Covarrubias, 1938:359).

Are formal burials present:

– No

Notes: Formal burials are not present. Rather, formal cremation ceremonies are present. A body may be either temporarily buried or mummified for a period of time (42 days, and longer if funds for the final cremation still need to be obtained) before final cremation. See Covarrubias, 1938:359 for a detailed description of a cremation ceremony.

Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: "The conglomerate of religious principles manifests itself in elaborate cults of ancestors and deities of fertility, of fire, water, earth, and sun, of the mountains and the sea, of gods and devils. They are the backbone of the Balinese religion, which is generally referred to as Hinduism, but which is in reality too close to the earth, too animistic, to be taken as the same esoteric religion as that of the Hindus of India" (Covarrubias, 1938:260).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 238, religion: high gods [Note, identical to Ethnographic Atlas column 37], indicates that "a high god absent or not reported in substantial descriptions of religious beliefs" (Murdock, 1962-1971; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: "...the main concern of the Balinese centres in the propitiation of the protecting ancestors who descend to this earth on special holidays and at the anniversaries of the innumerable temples, when they receive offerings and entertainment from the people" (Covarraubias, 1938:262).

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The names of the chief deities of Hinduism, Siva, Brahma, Vishnu, Iswara, are known to them [the Balinese] and are heard in the priestly formulas and in prayers the priests recite, but they are not, even after 500 years, very closely held in the hearts of the people, they are not endowed with personalities, not intimately prayed to" (Belo, 1949:7). These Hindu deities are present among the Balinese belief system, but because the deities do not play a significant role, there is limited ethnographic information describing their specific characteristics.

↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "Great calamities will fall upon the village when the butas [demons] predominate or when they are angry. Then they cause epidemics, the loss of crops, and so forth, and only by the most elaborate ceremonies of purification and great offerings of blood sacrifices can the pollution of the village be wiped out" (Covarraubias, 1938:277).

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "...ancestors are merged with gods" (Belo, 1949:7). "When a Balinese speaks of his gods, collectively called dewas, he does not mean the great divinities of Hinduism, but refers to an endless variety of protective spirits – sanghyang, pitara, kawitan, all of whom are in some way connected with the idea of ancestry. The rather vague term dewa includes not only the immediate ancestors worshipped in the family temple, or the nameless forefathers, founders of his community, to whom the village temples are dedicated, but also certain Hindu characters of his liking whom he has adopted into the Balinese race and has come to regard also as his ancestors" (Covarraubias, 1938:288).

Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– I don't know

Notes: The supernatural beings of the Balinese religious system are briefly described, but not in enough detail to determine if supernatural monitoring is present or not.

Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "Rather than a sectarian Church system, separate from the daily life and in the hands of a hierarchy of priests to control and exploit the people, the religion of Bali is a set of rules of behaviour, a mode of life" (Covarraubias, 1938:262).

Practices

Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

I.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– Yes

Notes: "...the prescribed ceremonials and the regular, calendric giving of offerings to propitiate the gods are very strictly held to. The way the temple membership is set up in the village organization, it is impossible, and unthinkable, to abstain from participation in the calendric services" (Belo, 1949:7).

"Once a year, at the spring equinox, every community holds a general cleaning-out of devils, driving them out of the village with magical curses and rioting by the entire population. This is followed by a day of absolute stillness, the suspension of all activity, from which the ceremony takes its name. Nyepi marks the New Year and the arrival of spring, the end of the troublesome rainy season, when even the earth is said to be sick and feverish (panas). It is believed that then the Lord of Hell, Yama, sweeps Hades of devils, which fall on Bali, making it imperative that the whole of the island be purified" (Covarraubias, 1938:277).

Society and Institutions

Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

– A state

Notes: The Balinese have three levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local community, which is

indicative of a state society (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: The Balinese are subject to the Indonesian government.

Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in communal facilities (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– Yes

Notes: "The pedandas [highest class of Brahmanic priests] still exert a powerful influence on Balinese life despite the fact that their relations with the people were never intimate; they represent the law, and the judges of the high native courts (raadkerta) are still pedandas in the majority" (Covarraubias, 1938:293).

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– Yes

Notes: "In the adat law [religious law] of every village the line of conduct for every act of the villagers is carefully set down. In a general way, the most serious crimes are those that seriously impair the well-being of the community and most especially acts that would weaken the village magic, such as temple vandalism, theft from the gods, arson, running amuck, and murder, some of which may be punished by the killing of the offender on the spot" (Covarraubias, 1938:64).

Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: "The calendar that regulates the social and religious life of Bali is an intricate mechanism by which not only all communal and private festivals are established, but even the most ordinary actions of the Balinese are determined" (Covarraubias, 1938:282). "The Balinese use two simultaneous systems of time-calculation: one, the saka, 1 the Hindu solar-lunar year, similar to ours in duration, twelve months, "moons," by which they observe the full (purnama) and the "dark" or new moons (tilem)

important for agriculture, for nyepi, and for the festivals of the mountain people. The other, the wuku year, the so-called native or Javanese-Balinese year of 210 days, is not officially divided into months, but into weeks, ten of them running parallel and simultaneously, from a week of one day in which every day is called luang, a week of two days, one of three, of four, five, and so forth, up to a week of ten days" (Covarraubias, 1938:283).

Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The Balinese rely primarily on intensive, irrigated agriculture for subsistence, with a secondary dependence on animal husbandry. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Pastoralism

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: The Balinese rely primarily on intensive, irrigated agriculture for subsistence, with a secondary dependence on animal husbandry. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.