

## Revealing Cultural Exclusivism In Bali Through *Wastra Bebali*

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The unpopularity of *wastra bebali* among the Balinese themselves inspired the writer to explore further and in depth about the factor that made *wastra bebali* not popular in Balinese society and the thoughts of the *sulinggih* (*pedanda*) who intensely described Balinese Hindu religious teachings through *wastra bebali*, known even by the people themselves. Case study research and cultural studies approach is used to uncover the causes of the unpopularity of *wastra bebali* in Balinese society. The results of the study indicate that there is an indication of the exclusivity of the *geriya* as the upstream of the knowledge and practice of making *wastra bebali* as the key factors in the unpopularity of *wastra bebali*, the exclusivity of the *geriya* occurs as a result of several accumulative factors caused by past experiences. This attitude of exclusivity is like a double-edged sword, an attitude that can protect the existence of *wastra bebali* while making it slowly extinct. The emergence of figures like a descendant of the Brahmins who consciously began to introduce *wastra bebali* to the community, needed support from local researchers, so that they could bring this *wastra bebali* as an exclusive product not only for the *geriya* but for Balinese society.

*Keywords: Wastra bebali, Cultural Exclusivism, Bali*

### INTRODUCTION

The international world calls Bali as a living museum, where culture and cultural actors are still living their religion, customs, and cultures from the past to the present. The Balinese singularity is caused by social phenomena being in one space and time. The uniqueness of Bali is a strength in the struggle for its existence. Balinese reflection and tradition are strategic issues in this research. Directional flexibility is related to the existence of Bali as a locus or entity. Refers to Arumsari et.al (2019), belief of Hinduism in Bali creates a variety of traditions, customs, cultures, arts, and so on that have distinctive characteristics, which are a combination of tradition and religion. In every-day life, these characteristics manifest themselves in various conceptions, social activities, and physical works of the Balinese. Tradition has characteristics, among which are, related to collective memory, tradition involves rituals as a defense strategy. While related to the idea of formulative truth, tradition has a guard, as well as normative or moral content which forms the binding character. Therefore, people follow traditions without needing alternative thinking. Tradition provides a frame of reference for acting that is considered right so that people do not need to question it (Giddens, 2003).

Bali and tradition become a source of literature that is increasingly being explored without limits, on the contrary, it leads to a transparent and universal space. Illustrate every life story that tells about the social life of Balinese Hindu traditions, religion and religious rites as well as exploring the universe with the majestic energy of *Ida Sang Hyang*

*Widhi*, God of the Creator. The way of expressing each Balinese Hindu in the perception of social life of tradition, religion and religious rituals is colorful and complements each other.

The way of expressing visual language in the rituals of Hindu religious traditions in Bali is full of art. Art is the lifeblood of the community which is implemented in the social life of Balinese Hindu traditions, religions and religious rituals. Refers to Pichard (1995) which states that

*"....as the homeland of a traditional culture insulated from the modern world and its vicissitudes, whose bearers, endowed with exceptional artistic talents, devote an outstanding amount of time and wealth to staging sumptuous ceremonies for their own pleasure and that of their gods."*

So that in its journey, Bali maintains tradition by carrying out every step of the arts. Eastern Bali produces a lot of art by expressing visual language in the form of textiles, the two most widely known are *gringsing* and *endek* weaving. However, if traced through the activities of *Panca Yadnya*, there are many types of cloth used as a means of ceremony, the cloth belongs to the *wastra bebali*.

Viewed from the meaning of the word "*wastra bebali*" consists of two words, namely "*wastra*" is a woven product that is used to cover the body, while "*bebali*" means ceremony. So *wastra bebali* is a woven product that is used for ceremonial purposes. The existence of *wastra bebali* is closely related to Hindu religious ceremonies in

Bali. *Wastra bebal* can be said to be a sign of the cycle of human life, where every stage of ceremonies and ceremonies is accompanied by the use of *wastra bebal* which has a sacred touch and is full of meaning

There is not much literacy that narrates the function, philosophical meaning and reveals the dominant geometric forms in *wastra bebal*, in contrast to gringsing and endek fabrics which have been studied by many researchers both from within and outside the country, like works of Briggita Hauser-Schaublin, Marie Louise Nabholz-Kartaschoff and Urs Ramseyer in a book titled Textiles in Bali, also Ayami Nakatani in a book titled Cloth Tradition as "Women's Handwork", Not only the lack of literacy and research results, even the majority of Balinese people do not know the existence of this meaningful weaving. Since 2018, the author has intensively explored the existence of *wastra bebal*, the phenomenon of the unpopularity of Balinese cloth among the Balinese people itself has inspired the author to explore further and in depth about the thoughts of the *sulinggih* (pedanda) who intensely describe Balinese Hindu religious teachings through visual art in the medium of textiles called *wastra bebal*, as well as what makes it not widely known even by the people themselves,

Method

Case study research and cultural studies approach used to uncover the causes of the unpopularity of *wastra bebal* in Balinese society. The methods involve in this study are interviewing artisans/weaver, *sulinggih*, documentation of local literature such as lontar and books about *wastra bebal*, along with analyzing the *wastra bebal* itself. The location of the study is Sidemen Village, Karangasem Bali, this research has been carried out since 2019 until 2021. This location selected because in Sidemen Village the practice of making and using *wastra bebal* still be found nowadays, there are some people in Sidemen who keep hundred of years old *wastra bebal*.

Then, the interviewed are transcribed to describe the meaning, uses, and philosophy of *wastra bebal*, also formulated the causes of the unpopularity of *wastra bebal* among the Balinese society.

#### Result and Discussion

*Wastra bebal* is hand-woven art textile that goes through the process of spinning yarn from the local area (Bali) to natural coloring (using local materials, such as: noni roots or *secang* wood for red color, indigofera leaves for blue color, and mango leaves for brown color) with the following provisions: Women weavers are before puberty or after reaching menopause (*baki*) which are not in dirty phase or in Bali called *cuntaka* are believed to have the power of prayer and hope when making *wastra bebal*.

*Wastra bebal* was created as a means of Balinese Hindu religious ceremonies, the *Panca Yadnya*, namely: *Dewa Yadnya*, *Rsi Yadnya*, *Pitra Yadnya*, *Manusa Yadnya* and *Butha Yadnya*. *Dewa Yadnya* is a sacred sacrifice made by Hindus and is aimed at Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa and the Gods. The *Manusa Yadnya* ceremony is a sacred sacrifice that aims to cleanse the inner and outer and spiritually maintain human life starting from the realization of the body in the womb until the end of human life. *Pitra yadnya* consists of two syllables, namely: *Pitra* (*pitara*) means Father, Mother and Ancestor, while *Yadnya* is the distribution of energy on a sacred basis for mutual safety, or sacrifice. So *Pitra Yadnya* is a distribution of energy (attitudes, behavior and deeds) on a sacred basis (sincere) aimed at the ancestors for mutual safety. Carrying out *pitra yadnya* is a child's life obligation. *Bhuta yadnya* is a sacred sacrifice that aims to clean the place (nature and its contents) to maintain and provide condolences to the *bhuta kala* and creatures that are considered lower than humans. *Rsi yadnya* means to offering sacred sacrifice to the sages or *sulinggih* in both material and non-material form.



Figure 1. *Wastra bebal* in Manusa Yadnya  
Source: Puniari



Figure 2. *Wastra bebal Sekordi Barak* (red) usually used in  
*Manusa Yadnya*  
Source: Ratna C.S., 2019

In the use of *wastra bebal* determined by the elements of each of these fabrics, such as: the material used, the color and pattern of the fabric. *Wastra bebal* has an important meaning in Balinese Hindu society, because it contains certain values, namely: use value, artistic value including aesthetic value in it, the meaning of cloth in socio-cultural life (Seraya, 1980).

The existence of *wastra bebal* is closely related to Hindu religious ceremonies in Bali. *Wastra bebal* can be said to be a sign of the cycle of human life, where every stage of ceremonies and ceremonies is accompanied by the use of *wastra bebal* which has a sacred touch and is full of meaning. On the other hand, only members of the three highest castes or *triwangsa* know that the process of making *wastra bebal* used in a ritual ceremony causes *wastra bebal* to be exclusive. So it can be said that only they can determine where and when exactly *wastra bebal* is used. In addition to the three highest castes, namely: brahmin, ksatria, wesia, artisan offerings or women who arrange the composition of an offering which will be used in conjunction with *wastra bebal*.

The limited scope that controls both the process and placement of *wastra bebal* causes *wastra bebal* not to be thoroughly socialized in Bali. *Wastra bebal* is still used intensely until now in the Karangasem area, such as: Sidemen village, Budakeling, Bungaya, etc.

Quoting what was written by an anthropologist, Dr. Urs Ramseyer, about the art of *wastra bebal*, namely: the art of *wastra bebal* is widely used for important rituals of Panca Yadnya, is a concrete example of how the process of disappearing elements of material culture goes so fast. as a result of the scourge of cultural globalization, even though their importance and spiritual significance have been widely recognized (Urs Ramsayer, 2005 in Ratna C.S., 2019).

Furthermore, the art of *wastra bebal* is an excellent example to show how units of material culture have a function as messengers for the communication of cultural knowledge (wisdom); about the symbolic meaning of colors and numbers right and left, sacred and profane, and about birth, life, death and rebirth. By studying the art of *wastra bebal* weaving and how to read its iconography, we can get a lot of important information about the relationship between humans and God, humans with others and with nature (Tri Hita Karana).

The thoughts of the previous *sulinggih* (pedanda) were expressed through one of the successor generations, namely: Ida Bagus Made Adnyana (55) and Ida Ayu Ngurah Puniari (54 years),

*"In the past, East Bali or Karangasem were geographically steep and difficult to reach each other, thus triggering the sulinggih to look for ways to spread*

*the teachings of Dharma in Balinese Hinduism and maintain positive energy and believe in Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. On this basis, one of the ways for the sulinggih (pedanda) to maintain the teachings of dharma in Balinese Hinduism is by making ceremonial facilities in the medium of textiles that contained prayer and hope, the prayer and hope are transferred by meditative activity in form of weaving. By using textile as medium of teaching dharma, so that the Balinese Hindu community can carry them from generation to generation"*.

The notion of rite/relic is a stereotype of regularly ordered action which includes a number of movements, words, and objects performed in a particular place and designed to influence natural entities or to influence the intended forces (Turner, 1997: 83).

Reflecting on the thoughts of the *sulinggih* (pedanda) in the past who were so persistent in defending the teachings of the Dharma through contemplative textile art, it teaches us how traditions can survive and thrive. Although in reality, along with the development of the era, modernity has replaced tradition and is interpreted according to the times and beliefs that have a fairly wide range (adaptive). This adaptive attitude sometimes backfires on some traditions themselves. As in the art of *wastra bebal*, dilemmas arise due to the age rules of the weavers, raw materials and flexible attitudes towards the use of *wastra bebal*.

Reflexivity towards tradition is closely related to the development of the times as a dynamic feature of modernity. The characteristics of modernity intend to develop institutions by carrying out cultural transformations in order to realize the values of efficiency, economy, effectiveness, timeliness, and rationality (in making decisions) that are free from traditions, customs, and communalism ties (Rich, 1999: 276). This requires modern humans to always reflect on the traditions they have.

According to Giddens (2003), reflexivity means "continuous social practice, tested and modified on the basis of newly entered, most practical information". It is not surprising that much of the knowledge of the rural people regarding the use of *wastra bebal* in Balinese Hindu communities is affected by reflexivity, then replaced with something more practical so that the enjoyment of life increases optimally. As a result, the Balinese Hindu community lost valuable cultural and social capital. This condition can cause problems, because not all cultural and social capital hinders development. On the other hand, not a few are relevant for development (Colletta, 1987).

In addition to the use of the art of *wastra bebal*, which is the cultural and social capital of the Balinese Hindu community that should be maintained, the horizon of thinking and embodiment of the Dharma teachings of

the *sulinggih* to their people is intelligence, a genius attitude that becomes cultural and social capital. The *sulinggih* are the guardians of the tradition who are tasked with protecting and interpreting so that they are easy to understand and contextualize. The *sulinggih* act as liaisons with their people accompanied by a filtering process on Hindu religious ethics so that they are understood and accepted.

## CONCLUSION

The limited scope that controls both the process and placement of *wastra bebal* causes *wastra bebal* not to be thoroughly socialized in Bali. *Wastra bebal* is still used intensely until now in the Sidemen Village, Karangasem regency in east Bali, but it did not happen in other regency in Bali island.

The exclusivity of the *griya* as a center for the production of lontar literacy which contains ceremonial procedures and ceremonies for Hindus in Bali, including textile-medium ceremonial facilities such as *wastra bebal*, is limited by the three highest castes or *triwangsa*, namely: *brahmanas*, *ksatria* and *wesias*. The process of making *wastra bebal* is done by women and children. Women who have entered the menopause phase, or are not menstruating, in Balinese terms are called *Baki*. Elders of women and children who have not yet entered the stage of puberty weaving *wastra bebal*, which is a cloth to be used in connection with religion, women who are still experiencing menstruation are prohibited from weaving *wastra bebal*.

After knowing the cause of the unpopularity of *wastra bebal* by the Balinese themselves due to the cultural exclusivity applied by the *geriya*, now the researcher's task is to examine more deeply the tangible and intangible aspects of *wastra bebal* so that the research results can be disseminated to the wider community and Bali as the origin from *wastra bebal* can have literacy about this cultural heritage.

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