

Mysticism among the Pedandas of Bali

June McDaniel

Department of Religious Studies, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424, USA; McdanielJ@cofc.edu

Received: 15 September 2020; Accepted: 30 October 2020; Published: 5 November 2020



Abstract: On the island of Bali in Indonesia, the traditional Hindu religious leaders are the *pedandas*, or brahmin high priests. Their religious status is largely based on their mystical states, during which they create the highest and most valuable form of holy water, which is needed for all religious rituals on the island. It is one of the rare examples in world religions where mysticism is not only integrated into the daily life of the community but is vital to it. These are the religious authorities who maintain the ancient forms of Indonesian Hinduism, standing against the encroachment of Westernization, Islamization and modernization. Little ethnographic research has been done on them—there are no books about their lives and experiences in any Western languages, and only a few biographies in Indonesian. In this paper, we examine the lives of some Shiva pedandas, discussing their mystical experiences, and the ways that their states fit in with other sorts of mystical experiences in Bali. These other sorts of experiences include those of Buddhist priests, local healers or *balians*, and the debatably mystical experiences of possession trance.

Keywords: mysticism; Bali; Indonesia; pedanda; trance; religious experience; ethnography; tantra; mahabhava; suryasevana

1. On the Topic of Mysticism

The study of religious experience, especially mystical experience, is full of debates about language, the influence of tradition and culture, the roles of emotion, vision and imagination, and its impact on individuals, history and culture. There are many books which discuss the long history of debates about mysticism, and it is difficult to even find a definition with which all scholars agree.¹ The history of the study of mysticism has been primarily focused on texts, and the anthropological study of mystical states is relatively rare.

There are many definitions of mysticism. Some scholars find it a path, others a goal. Mystical states may be induced by ritual or occur spontaneously, they may be traditional or non-traditional, an ultimate merger with a deity or a close relationship with Him or Her, theistic or non-theistic, in people who are trained or untrained. I find that the most useful descriptions for Hindu mystical states deal with mysticism as a union with a divine person or state of being, an experience which involves an altered sense of identity, emotion, or perception.² Within various Hindu traditions, we find altered states of consciousness, with full and partial union of identity, altered feelings with degrees of emotional intensity, and altered perception, especially visual and auditory perceptions. Trance states

¹ Some examples of these debates may be found in Schmidt (2003), “The Making of Modern Mysticism,” Wexler (2013), *Mystical Sociology*, Parsons (2011), *Teaching Mysticism*, Katz (1978), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, and Taves (2009), *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Debates on mysticism and comparative religion can be found in Patton and Ray (2000), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Post-Modern Age*. I will not go into my own views on these various approaches to mysticism here, as I have written a book on the topic. See McDaniel (2018), *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion*.

² McDaniel (2018).

are often considered to be partial mystical states, in which a deity is understood to be present within the person, but he or she is unable to stay conscious during this process.

As an example, in Indian Hinduism, especially Bengali Shaktism, the highest trance states are those in which the person stays conscious during the experience. These states are often called *bhava* or *mahabhava*, while those in which the person is overcome by the deity or ancestral spirit are less valued, called *bhar* or *bhor*. In the higher states, the person can be aware of the deity at the time and often retains a memory of the experience, while in the lower states of possession trance, the person blacks out, and often has no memory of what happened. Those who enter the state of *mahabhava* are highly respected, and often initiated and trained in meditation according to a lineage, and focused on a high god. Those who are simply possessed at festivals or as a job (being a medium is a popular village vocation, especially for women) tend not to be trained or initiated, and they can often go into public trances and be possessed by several deities.³

We see this same distinction between higher and lower forms of religious experience in Bali. In this paper, our focus will be the mysticism of the Shiva pedandas, the brahmin priests who are highly respected in the culture. However, there are many other forms of mystical states in Bali. So, in order to contextualize these states, I will also briefly examine the experiences of Buddhist pedandas, local shamans or *balians*, and the ‘possession disorders’ which are sometimes called mystical. For our definition here, we will define Balinese Hindu mysticism as the alterations in identity, emotion and perception which occur in meditation and deep trance in Bali.

2. Background: Hinduism in Bali

Balinese Hinduism is widely known for its elaborate ritual, stylized religious imagery, and chiming gamelan music. It is often associated with both animism and polytheism, though its more modern and official form is monotheism. Estimates of the Hindu population of the island of Bali range from 83% to 93%, with a current total population of over four million people.⁴ The early Balinese had relationships with regional deities who existed in hills, trees, and rivers. The Balinese writer I Nyoman Singgih Wikarman uses the term Bali Mula for this type of Balinese religion, and in his book *Leluhur Orang Bali* (Ancestors of the Balinese) he describes the worship of local deities in the early life of the people of Bali.⁵ He notes that as Hindu deities were incorporated into ritual practices, and equated with local deities, the religion came to be understood as Hinduism. We should note that there is scholarly debate about the development of Hinduism in Bali, which is tied into colonialism and the history of Indonesian politics.⁶ However, some ideas are widely believed by practitioners and informants, and we shall include these here.

According to Balinese folklore, the Rishi Markandeya was reported to have come to Bali at some time between the fifth and the eighth centuries CE, visiting Mt Agung and the Besakih temple, and bringing ritual worship of the sun god Surya. He also said to have originated the ritual worship of the god Shiva on the island. The first Sanskrit inscriptions in Bali date from about the ninth century CE.

We also see an early Buddhist presence. Some kings practiced tantra, and we can see this in the case of the thirteenth-century King Kertenegara of Singasari, who was an initiate of the rituals of the Hevajra Tantra. He called himself an avatar of both Shiva and Buddha (Kinney et al. 2003). He was said

³ For more data on the Bengali case (see McDaniel 1989).

⁴ The Hindu population percentages are disputed; the estimate of 83% comes from the 2010 census of Indonesia. However, according to the 2018 demographics of ‘Bali Today’, the percentage is 93%. See <https://www.thebaliitoday.com/bali/demographics/>.

⁵ I Nyoman Singgih Wikarman, *Leluhur Orang Bali: Dari Dunia Babad dan Sejarah*. Surabaya: Penerbit Paramita, 1998. He includes among the values of the early Balinese animism, value on ancestors, kinship and dynastic leadership.

⁶ For some good descriptions of history and colonialist influence in Bali, see Margaret Wiener (1995), *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1200 (4th ed.)*, Red Globe Press, 2008, and Adrian Vickers (2014), *A History of Modern Indonesia (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press.

to have been slain during a tantric ritual, after getting drunk on ritual wine. His descendants became important rulers of the Majapahit dynasty, centered on the island of Java, and Hinduism became widespread under the Majapahit empire (1293–1520 CE). The Majapahit religious culture worshipped Shiva as its primary god, though it also included elements of Vajrayana Buddhism; there are some statues which show both Shaiva and Buddhist imagery. There is some debate as to whether the religion at this time can legitimately be called a syncretism.⁷

When the Majapahit empire declined due to invasions of Muslim sultanates in the fifteenth century, writers, artists, priests, and musicians fled from Java to Bali, bringing further Hindu influence to the island. In 1540, a Javanese Hindu leader, Dang Hyang Nirartha, came to Bali. He elaborated the worship of the god Shiva, founding the Shaiva priesthood there, as well as the *padmasana* style of temple architecture. He is considered by Balinese practitioners to be the ancestor of all Shiva *pedandas*. Later forms of Balinese Hinduism came to emphasize the role of Shiva in the form of Ardhanarishwara, a deity who shows the perfect harmony of male and female, and the balance of all opposites. It is through meditation on Shiva that the *pedanda* or high priest is able to create holy water for purification and blessing (Hooykaas 1973b, p. 27).

There are also variants of Hinduism on other islands as well, where Indonesian groups have adopted Hindu deities along with local ones. The requirement for official religious affiliation by the current Indonesian government (which includes the six accepted monotheistic religions: Islam, Catholic Christianity, Protestant Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) has motivated many local systems to officially adopt the category of Hinduism.⁸ Recent examples of indigenous religions claiming Hindu status include the Batak Malim, the Dayaks of Borneo (called Hindu Kaharingan), and the Sundanese Sunda Wiwitan. As an example, this last group believes in a universe of three realms with eighteen intermediate worlds, ruled by Sanghyang Kersa, the powerful one, who lives in Buana Nyuncung (the one-pointed world). Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are his subordinates. These groups are legally classified as Hindu by the government.⁹

We can loosely divide Balinese Hinduism into categories of classical and folk Hinduism, keeping in mind that there are many overlapping areas of belief and practice. Balinese folk religion survives today partly as oral stories about the lives of deities, heroes, ancestors, and supernatural creatures, and it is also expressed in shadow puppet plays, temple rituals, festivals and dances. Local Balinese deities like Twalen, the god and clown,¹⁰ the snake Anantaboga, the cow Lembu, and Rambut Sedana, god of prosperity, are found as minor characters in stories in dramas today.¹¹ They are popularly known as *hyangs*, both local and transcendent deities (the category of *hyang* also includes ancestors). They are worshipped in sacred places, *kahyangan*, which are often in mountains.¹² The most popular deity in ritual dance, the protector Barong, eternally fights the demoness and witch Rangda, and these dances of conflict may involve possession trance. These figures came to be understood as Hindu as they were associated or equated with Hindu deities. Balinese folk Hinduism includes mediumship, spiritual healing, and group possession, and its religious specialists are *balian*s and *dukun*s, who go into trance states. Balinese folk Hinduism includes the use of Kris daggers, which have *sakti*, and may be

⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between Shaivism and Buddhism (see Acri 2015).

⁸ For a discussion of this necessity, (see McDaniel 2010).

⁹ “In the early seventies, the Toraja people of Sulawesi were the first to realize this opportunity by seeking shelter for their indigenous ancestor religion under the broad umbrella of ‘Hinduism’, followed by the Karo Batak of Sumatra in 1977. In central and southern Kalimantan, a large Hindu movement has grown among the local indigenous Dayak population which lead to a mass declaration of ‘Hinduism’ on this island in 1980.” For a general discussion, see Wikipedia, “Hinduism in Indonesia”, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Indonesia.

¹⁰ Twalen is now interpreted by Hindus as the older brother of the god Shiva, and he is associated with the Javanese god Semar.

¹¹ See the stories in (Tantrayana 1997).

¹² The term *hyang* is a root word for several terms still used in modern Bahasa Indonesia; if there are prefixes such as *Sang-* and *Dang-*, the terms are meant to honor gods and ancestors. Sanghyang Widhi is a title for a god, while the title Danghyang refers to guardian spirits and ancestors.

inhabited by ancestral spirits. The Dalang performs shadow plays and informally acts as both priest and guru.

A later form of Hinduism came with the influence of Indian high culture into Indonesia, which brought three major gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (or Brahma, Wisnu and Siwa, in Balinese pronunciation), the Trimurti. Local beliefs were influenced over the centuries by South Indian priests and sages who visited Bali, and Balinese classical Hinduism developed through teachings by gurus and sages, and through *lontars* with sacred texts.

While the details of the initial influences of Hinduism in Bali are debated, a popular origin story describes a negotiated synthesis. Nine Hindu sects are said to have existed in Bali: the Pasupata, Bhairawa, Siwa Siddhanta, Waisnawa, Bodha (Buddhist), Brahma, Resi, Sora (Surya) and Ganapatya schools. Each group worshipped a specific deity as the primary god. It was said these sects competed with each other to be the dominant one, trying to make their respective gods the ultimate deity of the island. Under the leadership of Mpu Kuturan, there was a gathering at Samuantiga temple in the late tenth or early eleventh century which gave birth to the belief system later known as Balinese Hinduism. The participants agreed to unite the principles and teachings of their belief systems into a single philosophical and ritualistic entity, with Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as the highest gods. The pantheon, rituals, offerings, and cosmology of this “new” religion included the main elements of every group, and it also included elements of Balinese folk religion. It provided a single, syncretistic form of Hinduism which could be broadly accepted.¹³ Today, this form of Balinese Hinduism is sometimes called Agama Tirtha, as all groups agreed on the importance of holy water.¹⁴

Agama Tirtha focuses on the worship of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as goddesses, such as Dewi Sri, Saraswati, and a Kali-esque form of Durga (sometimes spelled Dhurga). There are temples and *pujas* which would be recognizable in India, religious statues and paintings, priests, and offerings of fruits and flowers. It holds several ritual calendars simultaneously for holidays and processions, and it emphasizes a balance between the physical world and the spiritual world, between *sekala* and *niskala*. However, there is no establishment of *murtis*—the gods visit, but do not stay in the statues (thus the major worship is *amurti puja*). As one informant noted, statues are like hotel rooms for gods rather than homes. The large statues popularly seen are decorative—the statues in which the gods and ancestors visit are small, and generally locked away in shrine cabinets at the temples. Agama Tirtha has local temple priests or *pemangkus* who organize rituals and distribute the holy water which is necessary for rituals.

However, the *pemangku* priests cannot create this holy water themselves. This Hindu form of transubstantiation, in which ordinary water is transformed into Ganges water, can only be performed by a *pedanda*.

3. The Hindu Shiva Pedandas

Pedandas are rarely encountered by visitors, for they live a strict life which includes rules against travel, many forms of leisure and the use of money. They live in house temples, and generally speak a cross between high Balinese and Old Javanese (a language which uses many Sanskrit terms). They are trained by a *nabe* or spiritual master in the classical form of Balinese Hinduism, which Ida Bagus Putu Suamba calls “Javanese Saivism,” as the tradition originated many centuries ago in Java during the

¹³ The major reference for the term “Bali Kuna” is the work of R. Goris, *Sedjarah Bali Kuna*. Singaradja: Pertjetakan Bili, 1948. The issue was discussed in the popular newspaper *Jakarta Post*. See Luh De Suriyani and I Wayan Juniarta, “The Birthplace of Balinese Hinduism”, *Jakarta Post*, 2 July 2011, at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/04/28/the-birthplace-balinese-hinduism.html>.

¹⁴ There are many types of holy water in Bali. Water temples are found spread over irrigation systems and there are festivals held in these which celebrate “water openings” to flood fields downstream. Later festivals come at important times in the agricultural calendar, such as planting, transplanting, and the appearance of certain stages of grain. Special holy water is transformed for ritual use. For further discussion of Agama Tirtha and modern forms of Balinese Hinduism, see Howe (2001), Ramstedt (2004), Bakker (1993) and Picard (2011).

Majapahit dynasty.¹⁵ Pedanda Shivas are mystics, whose rituals involve identification with Shiva, and bringing the goddess Ganga down to earth to dwell in the holy water during the *suryasevana* ritual. With the sacred river of India present in the water, Hinduism in exile always has access to Ganges water.

Creation of holy water is mandatory for the high priests each morning, and the ritual involves such tantric elements as *nyasa*, *mantra*, *mudra*, and visualization of mandalas, as well as identification with Paramashiva and Ardhanarishvara (the form of Shiva which is half Shakti or female). The Hindu *pedanda* priests are trained in tantric rituals as a part of their study for initiation and worship. There is some disagreement between pedandas on the moment of transformation of ordinary water into holy water, which is variously understood to occur at the moment of identification with Shiva, at the identification with Ardhanarishvara, at the invocation to the goddess Ganga, and at the end of the ritual. Once the water is transformed, it is then taken to the priests of the other castes for distribution.

The brahmin high priests study metaphysics, ethics and ritual as a part of their training, and scholarship is required. As Raechelle Rubinstein (2000) notes, they are the only priests allowed to create *kakawins*, and that ability to create this form of religious poetry is hereditary in brahmin priestly families. These esoteric texts in Kawi include the magic of letters, rituals of literacy and alphabet mysticism. Indeed, much of Balinese literacy is focused on religion.

Pedandas are considered to be following *sannyasa*, but they are married and live in community—there are no renunciant sadhus in Bali. Renunciation only means renouncing attachment, not family or community. As brahmins, they are taught Sanskrit and high Javanese languages, and the use of mantras, mudras and mandalas by their gurus. Their most important ability is the performance of the ritual of *suryasevana*, in which the god Shiva/Surya is invoked to transform ordinary water into holy water. This ritual is performed each morning by Balinese priests. Holy water is used to purify, cleanse, and prevent evil forces from polluting a body or space. Water has a central place in the Balinese religion and all water is sacred to some degree in daily life.¹⁶ There are different types of holy water used by priests and healers for purification purposes. Holy water is commonly referred to as *toya* and is made holy through ritual. When it comes from a sacred water source, it is classified as *tirtha* (Eiseman 2009).

We should note that there are other types of priest in Bali, including non-*triwangsa* priests who can have brahmin initiations (such as the *Rishi Dukuh* and *Rishi Pinatih*.) This means that though they are not of the upper three castes, they can have upper-caste initiations. As Hooykaas notes, if one is a brahmin by birth, on ordination, he or she becomes a pedanda; if one is *sengguhu* by birth, after ordination, a he or she becomes a *resi bhujaangga* (Hooykaas 1964). The *sengguhu* priests traditionally specialize in issues of the underworld and afterlife, while the brahmin priests focus on the gods. These roles are dependent on the Balinese caste system, which follows the Indian system of four castes: Brahmana, Satria, Wesia and Sudra. Ideally, the Brahmins are in charge of religion, the Satria in charge of politics, the Wesia in charge of trade, and the Sudra are the workers in other areas. This caste status, called *wangsa*, is ascribed and inherited at birth. The three higher castes (Brahmana, Satria and Wesia) are said to make up the *Triwangsa*, or the *Menak* (aristocrats), whereas the commoners are the *Sudrawangsa*, or *Jaba* (the lower caste group or outsiders). As much as 90% of the population is made up of the Sudras, themselves subdivided into many clans and subclans, with many types of temples. The focus of this differentiation is not primarily purity, as it is in India, but status, language and tradition. Over time, the distinctions have blurred, with the lower-caste members becoming wealthier through trade and tourism, and the upper-caste members losing money in expensive cremation ceremonies, which have traditionally been a sign of status. As Indonesia is no longer ruled by princely kingdoms, the Balinese of royal status have lost political power. There are fluctuations of belief between clan networks, between

¹⁵ For a discussion of Javanese Saivism (see Ida Bagus Putu Suamba 2016).

¹⁶ For a discussion of the details of the *suryasevana* ritual (see Hooykaas 1966; also Stephen 2015).

modernization and tradition, and between different understandings of religion in the modern world. The brahmin pedandas are voices of tradition, literate priests who try to apply traditional knowledge to their followers today. All of the pedandas mentioned here were interviewed over the last ten years, during research trips to Bali.

Dr. Ida Bagus Putu Adriana is a teacher of pedandas in contemporary Bali. He notes that the social role of the pedanda is to be a leader, to perform ceremonies, to pray for people and the universe, and to represent balance and harmony. They are taught skills in reading and interpreting texts, especially scriptures and *lontars* (palm-leaf manuscripts), and they also have verbal training, with oral final exams. In modern Indonesia, pedandas must be registered with the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia, the body within the national Ministry of Religion which oversees Hindu religious events. It is the highest religious body in Bali and has official sanction by the government to look into matters of Hindu law. As he states,

No classes are needed to become pedandas, but the priestly community has suggested that classes might be useful. The pedandas of the Campuhan group were much in favor of classes, and they negotiated to create a short course on how to become a pedanda, focusing on the *guru nabe* as final authority. In response to this interest, in the year 2000 we created community classes, with 10–20 students each. These classes last for 3–6 months, and students could repeat the course if they failed. The future pedandas are taught rules and responsibilities, and some go to the six big temples in Bali to get blessings. These are not required, though- the future pedandas only need blessings from local temples. It can get expensive at the final ritual, which is the public testing, when villagers and government officials are present as witnesses and they all need to be fed. The witnesses are important for Parisada registration. The Parisada official asks, ‘Are you ready?’ The Pedanda says ‘Yes,’ so the Parisada representative gives him a permit, and the *guru nabe* signs it. The pedanda is then accepted officially by the government.

As to the reason for people becoming pedandas, most come from a bloodline, and becoming a pedanda is hereditary. However, we also often see inner calls, and the desire of the community for a person to take that role. Sometimes people get sick if they reject the job, or they wait until they get signs that tell them whether they should follow the profession, which can come in dreams. Male and female pedandas get the same training, they just have different responsibilities in ritual. The married couple shares the same *nabe*, and both are taught by the same *guru waktra*. Currently there are 450 pedanda couples in Bali, with 600 couples total in Indonesia.¹⁷

Pedandas are specialists, and their training is very different from that of folk healers such as the *balian* and the *dukun*, who are more well known in the West (from such films as “Eat, Pray, Love”). As Anthony Forge notes in his article, “Balinese Religion and Indonesian Identity,” the religion of the pedandas is “in many respects a different religion from that of the majority of the Balinese.” (Forge 1980, p. 223). It is more literate, with libraries of texts or *lontars* that require study. It might be compared to Catholicism, where the knowledge of priests is different from most laypeople.

In order to understand this religion, I interviewed practitioners over the course of several years, initially with my colleague Dr. Ida Bagus Putu Suamba, and later with Dr. Andrea Acri. All pedandas

¹⁷ This data comes from an interview in 2018 with Dr. Ida Bagus Putu Adriana, who is a teacher of pedandas, and formerly taught Religion (*Agama*) at Hindu University in Denpasar. We should note that there is some factionalism among pedandas. The major representative religious group for Balinese Hinduism, the Hindu Parisada Dharma Indonesia, is split currently between the older and more traditional Parisada Campuhan, which emphasizes Balinese tradition, caste, priestly leadership and regional autonomy, and the newer Besakih Parisada, a pro-India reform group with an international focus, which is interested in modernization, egalitarianism and equal representation for all groups. In July 2003 this liberal group was voted in as the dominant Parisada position, and one of their first recommendations was to end the Balinese caste system and its privileges. The role of caste in Bali is an ongoing debate.

were given the option of having their information remain anonymous, but most were willing to be named. They were extraordinarily open and willing to discuss issues that are challenging for many religious practitioners.

I first interviewed Ida Pedanda Pemaron Mandhara in Denpasar, Bali, and observed the ritual of creating holy water. To perform *suryasevana*, he puts on new white cloth only used for worship, and he wears heavy gold rings with astrological stones. He has offerings in his hands during the *mudras*, and places water on flowers. Surya is considered to be a form of Shiva, but his Buddhist-style vajra bell is circled with flowers, and his mantras have the monotonous, uninflected sound of Tibetan chants. He lifts a lotus tray, and creates an inner, visualized channel for Ganga's waters to flow down. The bell rings continuously during the ritual, sometimes with a flowing sound. At other times, he plays the Tibetan vajra bell like an instrument, with hypnotic rhythms, like a drum. First the goddess Ganga is invoked, then there is worship of the god Surya as Paramashiva. Then the ancestors, parents, guru, and all gods are worshipped, using *mantra*, *mudra* and *yantra*. The priest apologizes for any errors, and also asks for Shiva's grace. The holy water that he has created is equated with Ganges water, which is itself identical to the water of all of India's sacred rivers.¹⁸ The ritual generally takes about an hour, and the holy water is later distributed to temples and individuals.

In terms of mystical experience, he states:

One can speak with Shiva in samadhi, during yogic meditation. There is a direct encounter, it is very personal. If a person is impure, he cannot see god. If he is pure, he can sense the presence of the lord. If he is very pure, he can sense the presence of the god, and also see him. But sometimes there is illusion or fantasy in meditation, one must be certain that *jnana* or wisdom is present to determine the truth of the experience.

Another priest interviewed was Ida Pedanda Putra Yoga, who also came of a priestly family. He noted that a desire for purity and wisdom often influences the choice of becoming a pedanda:

The path of practice begins with *diksa* by a guru. It is a journey inward, a process of becoming purified through ritual action. The goal is to become Shiva, who is ultimate purity, and he is found in emptiness (*sunya*). From birth, we are entangled in impurity, and mantras help us to become pure. Those who hope to become Shiva have feelings of *bhakti* devotion in the heart. They focus on his symbol, such as the *bijaksara mantra*, and Shiva's *rudraksas*. Every morning they perform the *suryasevana* ritual and identify with the god.

He mentioned the role of tantric meditation in Balinese Shaivism, which may involve inner mandalas which are visualized and outer mandalas which may be drawn, and there are also gods who are ritually placed within the body:

In meditation on Shiva, the body is equated with the universe, and we recognize that gods live in parts of the body. Using visualization and *bija* mantras, gods come to dwell in every part of the body. We learn these mantras through oral tradition, they are given at initiation (*diksa*) and then there are later teachings by the guru. They are secret, and not written down—mantras are only oral. The bodies of the gods are made of mantras.

He noted that mystical states were hard to describe in words, but poetry can give insight about them. Poems can show that Siva is not outside, but within. He is the essence of everything, like the liquid in a mango. He pervades the world, and the three bodies (*sthula*, *suksma*, *antahkarana*) of the person. There is a poem that expresses this state:

¹⁸ Interview, Ida Pedanda Pemaron Mandhara, Denpasar, Bali, 2012.

In the midst of the fire is the sun
 In the midst of the sun is the moon
 In the midst of the moon is pure light
 In the midst of pure light is Shiva.

This state is pure awareness, not clouded by emotions like *prema*, the passionate love found in the Vaishnava tradition. It is also monotheistic:

The pedanda may worship many gods, but they are all emanations of Shiva. This worship could be called *bhakti*, but in the Balinese tradition, *bhakti* is always under the guidance of *jnana*. Otherwise, emotions could become uncontrolled and chaotic. *Manas* or mind may not always be able to control love, but *jnana* or deeper wisdom can control it. Then the mind controls the heart and emotion is rational. There is no Balinese word *prema*, and no equivalent concept.

There are also internal gods that the person may experience, a union between the self and the bodily gods:

There are gods that can dwell in the body, and we also see the Kanda Empat within the body. They are bodily guardians, both internal and external, and they influence the organs of the body. They are found at birth, with the placenta, amniotic fluid, fat layer and blood that allow the baby to live. They grow along with the child, starting out biologically, developing souls, eventually becoming gods and accompanying the soul to the heavens. The four Kanda Empat protect the person through life, from illness and evil spirits, if they are invited during ceremonies and honored. They exist invisibly, influencing the person's life. They are guardians who reflect the person's spiritual growth—they can evolve into gods, or they can become degenerate. If you forget them, they will not help you. They should be remembered during the daily *banten* (offering) rituals. They should be felt as an important part of life.

He had experienced Shiva inwardly through visualization and mantra, but also was aware of bodily gods. Both are needed for a successful spiritual life.¹⁹

Ida Pedanda Gde Tarukan taught economics and accounting during his professional life, but he had a strong religious leaning since childhood. He would ask questions like, "Why are we born? What should we do while alive? Where do we go afterwards?" He felt that people are given a mission when they incarnate, they must purify karma in this life in order to ultimately unite with Shiva. Gaining *subha karma* would lead to *moksha* as the highest goal. In terms of mystical experience, he states,

Shiva is felt inwardly, through *rasa*, the priest visualizes a figure to represent the god, through the medium of yoga. This helps him to focus on Shiva or Sanghyang Widhi. Shiva becomes his guru, and the priest is born from him and returns to him; the priest must manifest Shiva. *Rasa* is the feeling of Shiva's presence, through *shakti* and *siddhi* . . . these are evidence of theories about God, who may be felt as the Trimurti.

For him, the best part of being a pedanda is learning to focus, and not be distracted. One gets satisfaction in doing *puja*, sometimes it feels better than sex. It is a feeling or *rasa* which creates happiness and is the path to *samadhi*. The only problem is that sometimes it only lasts for a short time. He likes everything about the job, but primarily he must fulfill the desires of the community.²⁰

¹⁹ Interview, Ida Pedanda Putra Yoga, Tabanen, Bali, 2012, 2014.

²⁰ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gde Tarukan, Manuaba, Tabanan, Bali, 2018.

For Ida Pedanda Made Paketan, pedandas also had a royal function. He is descended from royal priests, who would give education, offerings, and advice to kings, and act as *puri yajamana* to lead large ceremonies. Each generation needed at least one royal priest, and there have been six generations from Klungkum area. The pedanda needed to know the Balinese language, ethics (*sasana*), Sanskrit, Kawi, meditation, mudras, astrology, and politics (Nitisastra). In earlier times, the royal pedanda gave advice on how to be a good king, and how the king could best support the welfare of the state. In terms of mysticism, he states,

One feels Shiva inwardly. When one is in deep meditation, deep *puja*, there is a sense of the presence of the god. It is empty, *niskala*, *sunya*, but it is peaceful and full of light. Shiva is not seen a person, with a body, but he is a presence that can be felt. Sometimes one can sense other deities, but they are all really Shiva.

He notes that some priests can see ancestors, and they can guide souls after death. This is a special type of religious experience. They use rituals to free the soul from the body, so that the person can die consciously through the process of *jnana moksha*. There are different types of *moksha* at death. When a person dies a high death (*adimoksha*), there is only ash remaining at death, while if the person dies the highest death (*paramamoksha*), there is nothing left at death.²¹

Another pedanda, who wishes to remain anonymous, noted that he became a pedanda to follow a family lineage, and to please his ancestors. He wanted to continue this tradition. He had an inner call to become pedanda—he wished to have a pure heart, to be close to Shiva and serve people. He started early—he used to follow pedandas around as a child, learning informally from them at temples and rituals, and he learned Sanskrit from an Indian guru. He worked in communication to support his family, then became a university teacher in the Balinese language. He read *lontars*, started studying for the pedanda role at 40 years old, and took initiation at 50 years old. In terms of mystical experience, he notes,

Shiva feels like light, his presence gives one a sense of being clean and concentrated. Sometimes the world is gone for a moment, and instead the world is full of silence and emptiness. This is personal experience, it is a *rasa* of emptiness, for both Shiva and Ardhanareshvara. It gives a sense of great depth, but it is hard to imagine and to remember. All deities feel this way inwardly.

As a pedanda, he can communicate with the spirit world during *ngaben* death ritual. He states that there are two stages of ritual. One stage purifies the gross body, thus letting the soul out of the cage of the body. In the next stage, the soul (*suksma sarira*) must be purified from ego, senses and passions. For this, he does *praline puja*. The newly purified spirit approaches him for blessings, and he does offerings and meditations for the spirit (*atma*). He gives it guidance, and a walking stick and directions. He opens the gates of the afterlife so soul can enter, hopefully going towards heaven or *moksha*. He uses mantras to open the gates, which usually appear round, and whose shape is dependent on the person's karma.²²

For Ida Pedanda Gde Made Putra Kekeran, the major social role of the pedanda is to help the community, protect the world, give advice and guidance, and help suffering people by rituals and counseling. He was part of a family tradition of pedandas, which included his father, uncle, and grandfather. He was urged by the community to begin study at 35 years old, and he became a priest at 55 years old. He is now retired with his son and grandchildren.

His guru (*nabe*) was from Singharaja, and he learned Sanskrit, Javanese, theology, ethics, mantra, and many ceremonies. He took *diksha*, and he described in detail his exam by the Hindu Parishad,

²¹ Interview, Ida Pedanda Made Paketan, Tabanan, Bali, 2018.

²² Interview, Anonymous Pedanda, Timpag, Bali, 2018.

in which three people ask questions at a very large public event. The aspiring priest and his wife (for husband and wife take the test together) need to know many texts, and they learn their deeper meanings over years of study, with the help of both outer and inner guru. He notes that,

Shiva feels like wholeness, beauty, truth, and holiness. The presence of Shiva is best shown in obedience to the guru. Shiva is present both externally and internally, and the best way to know him is through mantra. He is real, and a part of real world, he is not illusory (*maya*).

People can unite with Shiva at death, but they must overcome the problem of attachment. He told a story of being ill in the hospital, and there he fully accepted Shiva's will, to live or to die. He then had a miraculous cure, which showed the god's presence and blessings.²³

Ida Pedanda Istri Stiti Yogi is a female pedanda, who works with her husband in a shared priesthood. She is now 65 years old, and she studied together with her husband, learning Sanskrit and high Balinese, and the other skills that pedandas need. Usually male priests focus on organizing ritual events, while female priests organize the creation of offerings (*banten*), and making offerings is her major work. She did not originally wish to become a pedanda. When she was young, she saw so many jobs done by pedandas, helping people at all hours of the day and night, and being unable to say no. A pedanda cannot refuse a sincere request. So she decided that she never wanted to become one. But later there were family obligations, and she said that a spirit came to someone in her family, and it said that someone must be a priest. Also, a sick child was a sign that the house needed a priest. Her son was unsuccessful in business, under stress due to lack of money, and he wanted his parents to become priests so that his business would be more successful (they did, and his business did become more successful).

She wishes to be practical, so she tells people not to have expensive rituals, but they do not listen and go into debt. There are three degrees of ritual: *uttama* (highest and most expensive), *madhya* (middle, partially expensive), and *nishta* (usually sufficient, but least expensive). Pedandas learn all three styles of ritual, and often encourage people to pay jointly, to make the rituals more affordable. She noted that pedandas do not make much money on rituals, even though people spend much money on food and decorations and offerings. In terms of mysticism, her experiences have been limited. She says,

I have experienced Shiva in my heart, as emptiness. He is like the wind- you cannot see it, but you can feel it. Shiva does not talk or appear, you just have a feeling about him. You know that he is there in meditation and worship.

She has not encountered other gods or ancestors. She has taken this role because it is what Shiva and her family want, to serve others and help them heal illnesses, for she believes that God that gives a cure for many diseases. The job is still relatively new for her, and while she is not entirely comfortable with it, at least she can do good with it.²⁴ As a female pedanda, she would not do the *suryasevana* ritual and organize celebrations unless her husband died. At that point, she could take over for him. We may note that there are also *kanya pedandas*, unmarried women who are able to perform both male and female ritual roles.

For Ida Pedanda Gede Ratu Gunung, there was an unusual call to become a pedanda. He came from a brahmin pedanda family, and in his earlier life he did hotel work. He became a *pemangku* (temple priest) before he became a pedanda, and then he became an official 'hotel *pemangku*', doing *puja* rituals for guests at the hotel, as well as local village *pujas*. But one day he started feeling faint, he describes it feeling "half-dead," and he went to doctors who could not help him. He also went to local healers, *bali*ans, but they also could not help. He finally took holy water, and got a blessing from an ancestor, and then the fainting stopped. He described it:

²³ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gde Made Putra Kekeran, Ubud, Bali, 2018.

²⁴ Interview, Ida Pedanda Istri Stiti Yogi, Denpasar, 2018.

One night, I came back from work, lay down, and an ancestor came and asked me to undergo purification, and I agreed. My soul was transported out of my body, and I received supernatural holy water, and the ancestor wrote mantras on my hands (in the form of sacred letters or aksaras). I heard the mantras in my mind, and recognized the ancestor to be Danghyang Nirartha, (the founder of the Shaiva priesthood in Bali, thus the lineage ancestor of all pedandas).

Then shortly afterwards, in a dream, it seemed that somebody pulled a hair from my head, and my soul was thrown from his body three times, out onto the sea and returned. I then went in the northeast direction, and I saw a river flowing to the sea. In the river was a beautiful woman with long hair. She was sitting on the sea, calling me to come closer. There was a strong current in the sea and I was afraid. She asked me to say Yes, to become a pedanda. This was Devi Ganga, and Shiva was also present in the sea. I then decided to become a pedanda. In dreams since then I would see naked people in the sea, they were with Shiva as a naked yogi.

In meditation, he said that he feels Shiva as a vibration in his head, and his body feels ice cold, especially during *suryasevana*. He states that Shiva/Widhi is everything, macrocosm and microcosm, and that he is also Narayana and other deities. He notes that Hinduism can change due to the different yugas, and each era has different forms of religion. But Hindus in Bali should be careful of globalization, for their identities can be lost with modernity.²⁵

For Ida Pedanda Gde Putra Manuaba, the priestly role is his duty. He came from a priestly family, and he wanted to fulfill his obligations and continue the pedanda lineage. He worked in a hotel until his retirement in 2005, at which point he took diksha from a *nabe*, and learned about scriptures and *lontars*. He also studied Old Javanese, Balinese, and Sanskrit languages, and poems and *kakawins*, as well as how to play the gamelan. He noted that playing music is good for the hand positions of *mudras*, for it makes hands strong and graceful. In terms of mystical experience, he stated,

During deep puja, something rises inside of the body. It is a feeling of light, happiness, and admiration, it is like a son looking up to father. Shiva touches me inside, and he makes me feel thankful and devoted. I surrender to God's will, and often this gives a sense of artistic inspiration. When the puja runs well, the presence of God is shared, and everybody is happy.

He noted that the pedanda can help purify the soul after death, but he cannot control karma. The soul can be purified, and purification is part of *ngaben* death ritual of *pitriyajna*, but the pedanda cannot control where a soul will go.²⁶ It is the person's karma that will determine rebirth.

Some pedandas were more modern and chose to emphasize their personal backgrounds. Ida Pedanda Gde Putra Tlabah had a Western education and travelled around the world. But he ultimately chose to return to his family tradition. He was the son of a priest, who had known the writer Covarrubias, and he went into medicine and became a physician. He worked at Udayana University in Bali as a lecturer on public health and went to Honolulu on a cultural exchange from the East-West Center. He was a senator in the Indonesia parliament for several years, but he found a growing interest in religion. He studied Transcendental Meditation in Jakarta and Catholicism in the Philippines. In 1981, he took his father to India for death rituals.

On the topic of mystical experience, he said,

The most important ritual we perform is for holy water. It is like 'metaphysical shampoo,' it cleanses all environments. In the ritual, the priest asks Shiva to bring the goddess Ganga

²⁵ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gede Ratu Gunung, Badung, Bali, 2018.

²⁶ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gde Putra Manuaba, Sanur, Bali, 2018.

here to transform the water. The priest makes a mental request to Shiva. Really, he brings all of the sacred rivers of India down into the holy water, Ganga represents all of them. The mantras chanted by the priest motivate Shiva to do this.²⁷

He stated the importance of the older tradition of fusion between Shaivism and Buddhism:

Here, we practice Shiva/Buddha tantra. The vision of Shiva is like a ‘shared cosmic smile.’ We have the search for moksha as a part of daily life, there is no terminology for renunciation. We have temporary separation during prayer, and we seek to become a part of the huge cosmic soul which is Shiva. The only real separation that we have is at death, when the soul flows out of the body like a river.

He noted that *sannyasa* is understood differently than in India, where people actually separate themselves from society. Here, there is only separation within the family house, and during prayer and meditation.²⁸ Freedom comes at death when the soul leaves the body.

Attitudes towards the past vary among pedandas. Some see their earlier lives as chapters that have ended, others see it as a part of the current story, and a way to express their experiences today. But their lives are a continuity, moving from married life and daily work, to becoming a priestly couple with the shared religious responsibilities of Shiva pedandas. As such they are community resources, usually with a line of people waiting for advice.

There are some pedandas whose emphasis is on the social rather than on the mystical. Ida Pedanda Gede Bang Buruan was a ‘political pedanda,’ whose emphasis was on action in the world. He had a greater focus on supernatural powers than on union with Shiva—indeed, he understood Shiva’s will to be shown through such powers. He had events in his life that he understood as miraculous, including signs at birth that predicted his becoming a pedanda. During his life, he experienced unusual events; he was pursued by a *kris* knife, and he made *tirtha* water boil without heat. He understood that these powers were gained from holy water, and he wished to use the powers that he had for the community. Not all pedandas had a focus on mysticism.²⁹

4. The Case of the Buddhist Pedandas

A much smaller group of pedandas also exists, the Pedanda Buddha group. Their doctrines originate from Javanese Buddhism, where Shiva and Buddha were worshipped together, and some of their ideas can be found sculpted on the famous stupa at Borobudur. They are also able to perform rituals for Hindus and are considered to be a parallel form of priesthood to Hindu pedandas. Shiva and Buddha are understood as identical deities, just called by different names. Shiva pedandas and Buddha pedandas can act together, or they can focus on different rituals.

C. Hooykaas notes that their texts are Purvaka Veda Bauddha ones, which include instructions on mantra and pranayama practice (Hooykaas 1973a, p. 19). The high priest of Buddha Veda is sometimes called Yogishvara, and he creates holy water by praising Bhattari Ganga and welcoming her. She represents all seven sacred rivers of India.

While the Hindu form of the *suryasevana* ritual has the priest invite the god Shiva to enter his body, in the Buddhist form there is no entry of the deity. The priest visualizes Sanghyang Buddha at the top of the head, invisible and void. There is purification through mantras, and invocation of both Buddhist and Hindu deities for the process of *nyasa*, when these deities are ritually placed in the body.³⁰ Blessings come down from Bhattara Parama Buddha and the Panchatathagata (the five celestial

²⁷ Note- the term ‘metaphysical shampoo’ is a direct quote, and was spoken in English.

²⁸ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gde Putra Tlabah, Denpasar, Bali, 2012.

²⁹ Interview, Ida Pedanda Gede Bang Buruan, which was done by Andrea Acri (I was not present), in 2018.

³⁰ Hooykaas, Ibid. p. 55.

buddhas). These buddhas are associated with colors: the buddha Vairocana is white, Aksobhya is blue, Ratnasambhava is yellow, Amitabha is red, and Amoghasiddhi is green.³¹

Ritual objects include the water vessel, double vajra, bell, incense, and flowers. The vajra is used to bless the water, and the appropriate colors of *prana* or breath are visualized. Buddhist holy water is *suddhamrita* (pure nectar), and it is also blessed by Prajnaparamita. The priest honors both Parama Shiva and Parama Buddha.

There is only one Brahmin Buddhist village remaining in Bali, called Budakeling. There I spoke with Ida Pedanda Jlantik Duaja, of the Griya Jlantik. Most of the Pedanda Buddha priests of Bali, who worship both Buddha and Shiva, live there. It is the last town where Buddhist pedandas are the majority, and there is both Buddhism and Shaivism in the village. He stated that there are perhaps fifteen remaining Buddha pedandas from what was once an important Buddhist tradition; this is a tradition that is dying off.

Ida Pedanda Jlantik Duaja wears gold and white clothing. He says, “Buddha and Shiva are one, *nirvana* and *moksha* are one. Heaven (*svarga*) is temporary, we seek the highest state. In early Buddhism, there was no soul, but later we have come to accept the mind as soul (*atma*). The form of Buddhism that came to us was Mahayana, with links to Vajrayana. There are really three types of Buddhism here—Mantrayana, Kalachakra, and Vajrayana, with three areas of practices—word (*vak*), body (*kaya*) and mind (*citta*).” On the question of mysticism, he states:

“We worship the panchatathagata, the five dhyani buddhas.³² We could say that we love them, but it is love without attachment. We honor all buddhas, but there is no worship of the individual tathagathas. We worship them as a group. Each one has different mantras and mudras (with some mantras in Pali, but mostly in Old Javanese). They are visualized after purification, as sitting on lotuses. The central image of Buddha used in worship can be understood as both Parama Buddha or Shunya, and Parama Shiva. We can ask for grace (*anugraha*) from Parama Buddha, who is in the center of all mandalas. He can give grace as Parama Shiva can.

There are both inner and outer mandalas in meditation. People need initiation (*diksha*) to learn about the inner mandala, but the outer mandalas can be learned from texts (*lontars*). Priests learn about the inner mandalas at initiation, when the guru draws pictures of them on the ground, and then quickly erases them. They are never written down in any permanent way. There are three spiritual levels, which we call the Tripurusha levels, we have three levels of Buddhahood as there are three levels of Shiva (Shiva, Sadashiva, and Paramashiva). For us, these are the levels where we have the historical Buddha, the Adibuddha (the five dhyani buddhas), and finally the Parama Buddha. The major ritual is *puja agung*, in which we use Buddhist mantras, and the vajra for purification and perfection. We practice *suryasevana* to create holy water, and we worship Surya, Giripati, Ganga and other deities. During the holy water ritual, I sit in *padmasana* (with crossed legs), and meditate on purity. I then become the ritual embodiment of the Buddha, and meditate upon the highest aspect of Buddhahood, Parama Buddha or Shunya. This is a deep state.

He states that Shaivism and Buddhism are linked because of Danghyang Nirartha. According to the priest’s story, Nirartha came to Bali with his brother from Java in the fourteenth century. He had been in the court of a king who patronized both Buddhism and Shaiva Hinduism, and he was Hindu, while his brother Danghyang Soka was Buddhist. He came to Bali under royal patronage, and he practiced both Buddhism and Hinduism. Later on his brother stayed with Buddhism, while Nirartha

³¹ Hooykaas, Ibid. p. 95. These are incidentally the same color associations that we see in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism.

³² Note. Hooykaas says in his book that the Buddhist pedandas use the term ‘jnani buddhas’ rather than ‘dhyani buddhas,’ but here my informant used the term ‘dhyani buddhas.’

organized Hinduism in Bali, with eleven forms of Rudra Shiva for Ekadasa Rudra, the great ceremonial sacrifice (*yagya*), where he and his brother officiated together. Danghyang Niratha originated Balinese Hinduism, while Danghyang Soka organized Balinese Buddhism. They would officiate at rituals together, and both originated lineages of priests.

He notes that in the beginning, the (historical) Buddha rejected the concept of a god and sacrifices, but later these ideas came to be accepted, with the rise of *puja* rituals, purification, and the creation of holy water. Because the early focus on philosophy was not appealing to the Balinese, the focus of the religion changed to ritual, as can be seen in *lontar* texts like the Old Javanese *Para Ratan*. He noted that this change started during the Majapahit dynasty. On death and afterlife, he states:

You ask about death. At that time, the atma can go to many worlds. But there are no yidam guides, or ishtadevata figures, in our form of Buddhism. The future worlds of incarnation are due to karma, but rituals can influence rebirth. We believe in the importance of cremation and respect for ancestors.

He also discussed religious education. He stated that in Java and Bali, the house was the center of education for the priest. Teachings would be handed down in the family, from father to son. In earlier times, the king's house was connected to the priest's house, and there was learning at the temple (*pura*). Many topics were studied; there was training in theology, ethics, literature (*shastra*), and the arts. In the family tradition of education, there was chanting of poetry (*kidung*) and gamelan music. Students needed both intelligence and ritual purity, and family members had priority in becoming priests. They would learn from the guru and read sacred texts, especially the *Sanghyang Kamahayanikan*, which can only be understood through the teachings of the guru. There were also hymns like the *Sapta Ganga*, *Surya Stava*, and *Samudra Stava* that were sung. The study of *lontars* was very important.

Thus we have a dual lineage or *sampradaya*, with Balinese Hinduism and Balinese Buddhism originally united, and later descending in different lineages from two brothers. However, while the Buddhist priests will often do Shaiva ritual, I heard nothing about Shaiva priests performing Buddhist ritual—but then, the Buddhist community is smaller. Mysticism among Pedanda Buddha priests involves identification with Parama Buddha, and then having the priest become his embodiment on earth. This union with the Buddha is the highest state for these practitioners.

5. Some Other Forms of Balinese Hindu Mysticism

In order to place the experiences of the Shiva pedandas in context, I briefly include some other forms of Balinese religious experience. There are a variety of religious states of consciousness that can be found in Bali, and the most prominent are forms of trance. The local term for trance, *kerauhan*, comes from the word '*rauh*,' which means 'to come,' as in supernatural beings who come down to people in a sacred context. It often occurs during *yadnya* ceremonies of worship and giving offerings to the gods. It is considered as a human link between the physical and divine worlds. As such, we can understand it as mystical or semi-mystical.

We sometimes hear of different styles of trance: 'crawling,' when the body touches the ground; '*ngurek*' or stabbing oneself with weapons, especially the wavy *kris* knives; 'dancing' when the person is possessed by a *widyadhara* or *widyadhari* spirit; and 'silent,' when the person enters a trance and is still and contemplative. Trance is not a black or white affair, there are levels and grades and stages of trance. The *kerauhan* trance state is also used for empowerment, especially when a temple priest (*pemangku*) is ordained or when a mask (especially masks of the characters of Rangda and the Barong) or sculpture (*pratima*) or shadow puppet is sanctified.

Some trance states are individual, and some are shared by a group. The group trances are much more flamboyant and vivid, thus we tend to hear more about them in the popular literature. There are group trances at temples during the Calonarang drama, which is shown during many temple anniversaries, and sometimes at the graveyards of the Pura Dalem temples dedicated to the god Shiva. There are professional dancers who enter trance, such as the young Legong dancers, and many gamelan

musicians enter stages of light trance as they play their music. During the councils of the ancestors during Kuningan, it is believed that their decisions and concerns could only be perceived by human beings when they are in trance states.

Some trances are considered to be therapeutic, and can heal both mental and physical ailments, as well as preventing epidemics and other disasters. The Sanghyang Dedari dance has two young virgin girls in trance states, who dance at temples and occasionally walk on burning coals, to drive out illness. Though their eyes are closed, their actions echo each other. They are often carried on the shoulders of men, and they are possessed by benevolent deities who can chase away the malignant ones. There are also animal trance states to exorcize malignant entities, such as the Sanghyang Jaran possession by ancient horses and warriors.

The brahmin pedanda is considered to be a specialist in the highest trance states. He (or she) contacts Shiva, who is the supreme (and according to some understandings, the only) god. The pedanda's mind merges with Shiva, who may dwell in the heart, or act through the mind. Thus, the highest priest contacts the highest god, blessing holy water and giving divine advice. He is able to remain aware during this process, and this is understood to be due to priestly training.

The *balian ketakson* is also a trance medium, but without training and ordination, he or she cannot contact the highest gods. They work with a range of lower deities, often Hindu or debatably Hindu. Their clients tend to be concerned with family problems: parents are concerned about which ancestors are reincarnating into their baby when it is born, and those ancestors who remain in the afterlife often have requests for special offerings. The balian gives the clients rituals for spirits in afterlife, and tells them which chants, offerings, and sarong colors are desired.

As the balian Jero Sushum noted, balians are chosen by the gods (in her case, she was chosen rather suddenly by the deity Ida Sanghyang Sinun, who showed her how to enter trance states, and how to defend herself against black magic). While in trances later on, rituals came to her spontaneously, which involved mudras, mantras (in Balinese), vajras, and an idiosyncratic form of *suryasevana*. Her trance states are always different, and they give revelations mostly from male gods. However, different gifts can come from the same god. She stated that she talks to ancestors, and recently dead souls, she can see them wearing white sarongs, then they enter and possess her, and she speaks their messages, which often have suggestions about *banten* offerings.³³ She noted that balians with strong trance abilities can see the power of other balians, but she does not spy on them—she would wait for the permission of the god and the other balian. The balian role is carried down in families, and there are other balians among her siblings. Her husband is also a balian, and acts as her assistant, organizing visitors and giving them food while they are waiting in long lines for her.

This sort of trance is ritualized and consciously induced. Indeed, for balians trance is a job description, and they develop skills in locating ancestors and speaking with souls during trance. These souls may be contacted both before they are born and after they have died. The balian Manku Teja Kandel notes that during trance, there is no full possession, just a vision of rays of light and heat, and the presence of the deity. He says that the person in trance must look at the white light and not colors, so concentration is important, for it is easy to get lost or distracted. The social role of those balians able to fall into trance is to bring health and luck, and blessings for success in business, beauty, and love magic.³⁴ He notes that there must be harmony between the balian and the patient. He creates his own form of holy water and does his own version of *suryasevana*. He states that for him, the ultimate goal is the traditional Hindu state of *moksha*.

Most trance states are desired and valued by the community. As the Balinese psychiatrist Luh Ketut Suryani notes, "Almost exclusively, all trance-possession states known to the Balinese are associated with positive possession by gods, spirits, or souls." (Suryani and Jensen 1993, p. 172).

³³ Interview, Jero Sushun, 2018.

³⁴ Interview, Manku Teja Kandel, Bangli, 2018.

They are culturally appropriate, and not considered a problem. However, there are occasional cases of disturbing and involuntary trance, which she has studied in depth. She refers to these as ‘possession disorders’, which are rare but significant. Some are revealed at public events, and they get media coverage, but others are only revealed during therapy with a *balian*, and these remain private within the family. She has knowledge of these because she was a *balian* before she studied medicine and became a psychiatrist.

One of these involuntary trance states is called *kerasukan*, which is understood to be a result of attack by hostile supernatural forces. Then there are the spirit attacks known as *bebainen*. Suryani understands these as pathologies of trance, and she describes *bebainan* as an illness believed to be caused by a malignant *bebai* spirit which is created by black magic (*ilmu pengiwa*). This spirit is created and nurtured by a sorcerer, it is named and given life cycle rituals, until it develops independent consciousness. Then it is sent out to harm others. Its powers can be limited by amulets, but often a priest or *balian* must be called in for a cure. Victims report losing control of themselves, gaining unusual strength, and crying out for no reason. Most attacks are brief, lasting from a half hour to an hour.³⁵

In one case in 1980, Suryani investigated an outbreak of *bebainen* at a set of compounds where 27 people were affected. She interviewed almost three hundred people in the area and gave out questionnaires. Traditional healers had been called in immediately, performing exorcisms and giving offerings. She called this a “community-wide culture-related dissociative disorder with possession.”³⁶ There was also a group attack among schoolchildren in 1984, which fell under the category of *kasurupan*, a mass trance disorder. Victims heard voices, fainted, cried, and sometimes danced wildly. Most saw the figure of a frightening woman, as well as other spirits. It required building a temple on the school grounds and the intervention of a high priest to deal with it.³⁷ There are also rare individual problems like trance-suicide and *amok*, a sudden attack by an individual against people or objects, which is now categorized as a culture-bound syndrome and dissociative disorder, within the broader area of ethnopsychology.

While the trance states which show psychopathology are clearly not mystical, they are sometimes associated with mysticism in popular descriptions. I include them here to clarify the differences. While the shallower trance states of public dance and music would rarely be categorized as mystical, there are deeper states, some with possession by a deity, where the distinctions become less clear.

Suryani notes that the positive trance states often include parapsychological elements, such as predicting the future, knowing personal problems without hearing them, extra sensory perception and clairvoyance. She speculates that these are pan-cultural or universal characteristics of trance possession.³⁸ Trance may be entered for many reasons: religious, artistic, ceremonial, for public health. This is in sharp contrast to Western understandings of trance possession, which are isolated and have no social function, and are understood as pathological and possibly demonic. Rather than ‘dissociative disorder’, she prefers a more neutral term, ‘intracorporeal influence.’ She also suggests a broader view of the self, as a non-unitary personality structure (which is inclusive of supernatural aspects).³⁹ This becomes a part of the debate over cultural organizations of the self.

6. The Mysticism of the Pedandas

One of the most surprising aspects of Balinese mysticism was the presence of *bhakti*, or devotional love of the god or goddess. The form of Hinduism that came to Bali did so before the rise of the popular *bhakti* movements in India, which reached their peak between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries

³⁵ Suryani, *Ibid.* pp 146–48.

³⁶ Suryani, *Ibid.* p. 151.

³⁷ Suryani, *Ibid.* pp. 152–56.

³⁸ Suryani, *Ibid.* p. 174.

³⁹ Hoyt Edge and Luh Ketut Suryani, “Selves in Bali,” Available online: www.astraeasweb.net/plural/baliseselves.html.

CE. Additionally, many informants specifically spoke against bhakti devotion in contrasting Indian and Balinese Hinduism, saying that it was overly emotional, irrational, childish and embarrassing. What mature person could tolerate having adults cry over God like an infant? As one pedanda noted, there is no such word in Balinese as *prema* (the intense and passionate love for a god in bhakti traditions such as Gaudiya Vaishnavism). The concept is so alien that a word for it does not exist.

However, while the passionate form of bhakti is lacking, we do see other understandings of the term. Bhakti in Indian Hinduism is shown through emotional relationships, which are variously called *bhavas* and *primary rasas*. The major five forms of divine–human relationship involved in the Indian devotional traditions are lover and beloved, mother and child (God is the child), friend and friend, master and servant/slave, and the peaceful and impersonal *shanta* bhava. Some bhakti groups have ideal or preferred *bhavas*: in Vaishnavism, the lover and beloved relationship is valued most highly, while in Shaktism, the mother goddess and child relationship is most desired.

In the Hinduism of the pedandas, the *bhava* that appeared most often in interviews was father/son. Shiva was the father, wise and noble, while the priest was the son, who honored and revered the father. This was a mystical relationship that involved emotion, but it was dignified and controlled emotion, involving reverence and appreciation. Bhakti always had to be controlled by *jnana* or wisdom. Some priests could look at Shiva's form and talk to him, showing a very personal relationship. We might perhaps call it a version of the master–servant relationship, but the assumption of a family relationship created a greater sense of union than one would normally see in the *dasya bhava*. In the *vatsalya bhava* of Indian bhakti, it is the god who is the child, and the devotee is the parent (often the mother) who loves the child.

We also have a union between God and pedanda though the sense of presence. This is not as personal, there is no form of a god to speak with and perceive. Instead, there is a sense of some presence within the heart that is formless, pure, silent, and empty. Some priests felt this whenever they performed the *suryasevana* ritual, others only sometimes. We might compare it to the Indian *shanta bhava*, a peaceful and impersonal sense of the divine, or perhaps the *nirguna bhava* of Western India. *Shanta bhava* is peaceful rather than intense, recognizing all things as equal, and God as an aspect of the self. It is comparable to the sort of relationship we see between Arjuna and Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita:

The yogin who, established in oneness, Honors Me as abiding in all beings,
In whatever way he otherwise acts, Dwells in Me.
He who sees equality in everything, In the image of his own Self, Arjuna,
Whether in pleasure or in pain, Is thought to be a supreme yogin ...
Of all yogins, He who has merged his inner Self in Me,
Honors me, full of faith, Is thought to be the most devoted to Me. (Chapple and Sargeantand 2010, pp. 302–3, 318).

Shiva is described as both emptiness and light, and often these come together for the pedandas. The rituals of purification are described as leaving the priest feeling empty and free of impurity, in a state of silence in which the heart fills with light. It is a sort of visionary mysticism, with Shiva's light as white and brilliant. This light evokes feelings of honor and reverence, but it is formless. As one female pedanda described the state of emptiness, it is like the wind, which you can feel but you cannot see. The light, on the other hand, is visible and can fill the universe.

Some pedandas had a sort of literary *bhava*, a state which is not a part of any Indian bhakti tradition. In this state, the books (*lontars*) are alive and speak to them, there is power in the texts themselves. Such texts are valued and have been hidden for generations, and it is only recently that lontar libraries have opened, allowing for public viewing of the palm leaf manuscripts. As one pedanda noted, these texts are alive, they are not antiques that go in museums. We also see this approach in the local healers or *balian usada*, who use these manuscripts both as sources of secret information and as power objects in

themselves. For some pedandas, the information in these manuscripts is too sacred to ever be written down, it is drawn on the ground during initiation and immediately brushed away, so that it cannot be seen afterwards.

We also see pedandas who have experienced an inner call to take on the priestly role. This can be understood as a semi-mystical state, and as an inner link with the ancestors or with the god Shiva. It is different than just feeling an obligation to the family or community. It is an internal command, from a deity who must be obeyed.

Full-fledged shamanic calls are rare in pedandas; they are more common in the local Balinese healers, the *balians* and *dukuns*. But there were shamanic elements in several experiences described by pedandas, and one which could easily be characterized as a shamanic initiatory experience. The future priest had an initial sense of illness, which doctors and local healers could not help, and an ancestor who came in a vision and asked if he was willing to undergo purification. His soul was taken from his body, and he was given mantras with which to travel. He had visions of a goddess who asked him to become a priest, and of the god Shiva, as well as naked ascetics in a cosmic ocean. He returned to become a priest specializing in deities understood to dwell in the body, and in helping souls find their way after death. There is debate over whether shamanic experiences could be called mystical, but here we see travel by the soul, visions of deities, miraculous healing and spiritual transformation.

The more typical understanding of mysticism, the merger with the deity, occurred in some pedandas. Shiva is the “shared cosmic smile” that links the priest and the god, and the universal soul of which each person is a part. He is like the liquid in a mango that pervades everything, whose presence is realized in divine encounter. The initial happiness and admiration that begins the experience turns to a realization of the god as a unity, between the spiritual and physical worlds (*niskala* and *sekala*). Ganga’s waters flow down through the priest to create holy water, and his soul flows up into Shiva, whose full realization is *moksha*.

As we note in the last example, not all pedandas are mystics. There are pedandas who go on television to explain problems (called ‘television pedandas’), who focus on counseling and neighborhood problems, and who act as advisors to politicians and leaders. Then there are the ‘political pedandas’ who are themselves leaders, representing their regions in issues of land management and education. As they are not a renunciant priesthood, they can contribute to discussions of local and national problems.

However, the Balinese culture has an important role for those pedandas who are mystically inclined. In many contemporary religions, the mystical side is dying out or has largely died, as the goal of union with the god has been supplanted by economic and political concerns. Even Indian Hinduism has been shifting towards a concern with politics, to the exclusion of more traditional religious goals of devotional *prema* and *brahman*, with the rise of Saffronization and Hindutva. One can still find Hindu mystics in India, but in this era of politicization it is a challenge.⁴⁰

Bali has maintained the custom of having priests who emphasize ethical behavior, mystically unite with the god Shiva each morning, and focus on serving the community. With the *panchasila* ideology of Indonesia, which guarantees respect between religions (at least for accepted, monotheistic ones), Hinduism and Islam can get along with each other. Muslims come to see plays based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata (more popularly called the Pandava story), respect Hinduism and do not

⁴⁰ I spent two years doing field research on mysticism and trance states in India, interviewing Bengali Hindu practitioners, and have gone back and continued the research during later trips. It was easier to find such informants in the 1980’s and 1990’s in India, and I think that this has to do with the rise of political Hinduism. People often ask me why practitioners are willing to open up about their religious experiences, both in India and in Indonesia. I think that empathy is very important, being willing to value both my informants and their experiences, and not to spend their time discussing social organization and concerns about caste and power. I do not speak the High Balinese that the pedandas use, so my colleague Dr. Ida Bagus Putu Suamba who is a native speaker acted as translator, and he too was sympathetic towards them. Though I only included data from about a dozen pedandas, I actually interviewed many more over the course of years. In both India and Indonesia, Western researchers have tended to focus more on social issues than on mystical ones, and many informants told me that they had not tried to be secretive, they had simply never been asked about these issues.

try to convert Hindus to Islam. Hindus pray three times a day (in the *trisandhya* prayers) to Sanghyang Widi Wasa (also known by the general Indonesian term Tuhan, the one god). They also follow five basic pillars of belief and practice, read from the revealed scriptures, and value pilgrimage. They have found a middle ground, both being “people of the book.”⁴¹

Bali’s uniqueness is seen most clearly in its welcoming attitude towards the various forms of mysticism, which is not only tolerated but respected. There is more to Balinese religiosity than local folk religion, with its trances and performances and ritual conflicts. Here we focus on the quieter, classical forms of mysticism, invisible to tourists, and even to some anthropological observers, but central to the culture. It is the vital daily mysticism which keeps the traditional culture alive.

Funding: This research was funded by the American Academy of Religion, through their International Collaborative Grant. Earlier research on Balinese mysticism was funded by the Spalding Trust. My thanks go to both of them.

Acknowledgments: My thanks to Ida Bagus Putu Suamba and Andrea Acri for their help and advice.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Acri, Andrea. 2015. Revisiting the Cult of “Siva-Buddha” in Java and Bali. In *Buddhist Dynamics in Premodern and Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Edited by D. C. Lammerts. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Bakker, Frederik Lambertus. 1993. *The Struggle of the Hindu Balinese Intellectuals: Developments in Modern Hindu Thinking in Independent Indonesia*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Press.
- Translated and Edited by Christopher Key Chapple, and Winthrop Sargeant. 2010, *The Bhagavad Gita: Twenty-Fifth–Anniversary Edition*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Eiseman, Fred. 2009. *Sekala & Niskala: Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art*. Bali: Tuttle Publishing.
- Forge, Anthony. 1980. Balinese Religion and Indonesian Identity. In *Indonesia: The Making of a Culture*. Edited by James J. Fox. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Hooykaas, Christiaan. 1964. *Weda and Sisya, Rsi and Bhujangga in Present Day Bali*. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. Leiden: Brill Publishers, pp. 231–44.
- Hooykaas, Christiaan. 1966. *Surya-Sevana: The Way to God of a Balinese Siva Priest*. Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitg. Mij.
- Hooykaas, Christiaan. 1973a. *Balinese Bauddha Brahmanas*. Amsterdam: N. Holland Publishing Co.
- Hooykaas, Christiaan. 1973b. *Religion in Bali*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Howe, Leo. 2001. *Hinduism and Hierarchy in Bali*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Ida Bagus Putu Suamba. 2016. *Javanese Saivism: A Philosophical Study of Tattva Texts*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Company.
- Katz, Steven. 1978. *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kinney, Ann R., Lydia Kieven, and Marijke J. Klokke. 2003. *Worshipping Siva and Buddha: The Temple Art of East Java*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- McDaniel, June. 1989. *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McDaniel, June. 2010. Agama Hindu Dharma Indonesia as a New Religious Movement: Hinduism Recreated in the Image of Islam. *Nova Religio* 14: 93–111. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- McDaniel, June. 2013. A Modern Hindu Monotheism: Indonesian Hindus as ‘People of the Book’. *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 6: 333–62. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- McDaniel, June. 2018. *Lost Ecstasy: Its Decline and Transformation in Religion*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parsons, William. 2011. *Teaching Mysticism*. (American Academy of Religion Teaching Religious Studies Series). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, Kimberley Christine, and Benjamin C. Ray, eds. 2000. *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Post-Modern Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴¹ For further discussion of this issue (see [McDaniel 2013](#)).

- Picard, Michel. 2011. Balinese religion in search of recognition: From “Agama Hindu Bali” to “Agama Hindu”. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 167: 482–510. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ramstedt, Martin. 2004. Introduction: Negotiating Identities: Indonesian ‘Hindus’ Between Local, National and Global Interests. In *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: A Minority Religion Between Local, National and Global Interests*. Edited by Martin Ramstedt. New York: Routledge.
- Rubinstein, Raechelle. 2000. *Beyond the Realm of the Senses; the Balinese Ritual of Kekawin Composition*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. 2003. The Making of Modern Mysticism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71: 2. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Stephen, Michele. 2015. Sūrya-Sevana: A Balinese Tantric Practice. *Archipel* 89: 95–124. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Suryani, Luh Ketut, and Gordon Jensen. 1993. *Trance and Possession in Bali: A Window on Western Multiple Personality, Possession Disorder, and Suicide*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Tantrayana, I Nyoman. 1997. *Bali Storylines*. Bali: Tantrayana.
- Taves, Ann. 2009. *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vickers, Adrian. 2014. *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wexler, Philip. 2013. *Mystical Sociology: Toward Cosmic Social Theory*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Wiener, Margaret. 1995. *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).