

Research Article

A Symbolic Interaction Analysis of Mapag Toya Ritual in Subak Bali

Maria Wahyuni¹, Iman Sentosa¹, Irfansyah¹, I Noman Larry Julianto²¹Institut Teknologi Bandung, Jalan Ganesha No.10 Lb. Siliwangi, Kecamatan Coblong, Bandung, West Java 40132, Indonesia²Institut Seni Indonesia Denpasar, Jalan Nusa Indah, Sumerta, Kecamatan Denpasar Timur, Kota Denpasar, Bali 80235, Indonesia**Abstract.**

Mapag Toya is a farming ritual that involves gathering water from its source. *Mapag Toya* ritual is the implementation of *Tri Hita Karana* (THK) *Parhyangan* aspect, which is the relationship between humans and God. In this narrative qualitative study, the perspective of symbolic interaction will be used. The symbolic interaction process examines the *Mapag Toya* rituals as it relates to the role of meaning in human life, particularly the use of symbols in interacting with nature, social, cultural, and economic factors.

Corresponding Author: Maria

Wahyuni; email:

37020009@mahasiswa. itb.ac.id

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1. Introduction

Bali is one of Indonesia's tropical islands. Bali, also known as the Gods' Island, is located at 114.26° East Longitude and 8.03° - 8.51° South Latitude. The island of Bali consists of two parts by a mountain range, which divides the island into North Bali and South Bali. As a water source for agricultural irrigation systems in Bali, there are four ex-volcanic caldera lakes: (1) Lake *Batur*, (2) Lake *Beratan*, (3) Lake *Buyan*, and (4) Lake *Tamblingan*. The presence of volcanoes on the island of Bali, specifically Mount *Batur* and Mount *Agung*, provides fertile soil for farming. The island of Bali has the natural beauty of rice fields, beautiful beaches, valleys and hills, canyons covered with forests, and lakes that fill the rest of the crater. The name of Bali was discovered as "*walidwipa*" on a pillar of the *Blanjong* inscription written by *Sri Kesari Warmadewa* in 914 A.D¹. It is also widely known that the *subak* irrigation system is for cultivating rice. Indian, Chinese, and Hindu cultures all strongly influence Balinese culture. Most Balinese people are Hindu, with religious rituals affecting all aspects of life. Balinese people follow the *Tri Hita Karana* (THK) philosophy, which consists of three elements: building a balanced and

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harmonious relationship between humans (*Pawongan*), humans and God (*Parhyangan*), and humans and their environment (*Palemahan*).

Subak is a traditional organization and a rice field irrigation system owned by Balinese farming communities. *Subak* is a manifestation of the philosophical concept of THK as a method of structuring living together. Farmers get their share of water following the provisions determined by the results of community consultations or *krama subak* based on the THK philosophy. Furthermore, the activities of the *Subak* organization include not only farming but also rituals and worship to ask for sustenance and fertility². Rice, paddy fields, and water have a substantial role in the *subak* irrigation system. All three are associated with the power of *Dewi Sri* as a symbol of fertility and prosperity. *Subak* regulates the technique of distributing water in the fields, including social and ritual aspects.

Mapag Toya is an early ritual in *subak* before the rice planting season begins. *Mapag Toya* is a ceremony in which water is collected from its source and channelled into rice fields as an expression of gratitude. It is a prayer to God, made through Lord *Vishnu* and *Dewi Sri*, for an abundance of clean water and fertility. The implementation of the *Parhyangan* aspect in the *Mapag Toya ritual* through the symbolic interaction of humans with the natural, social, cultural, and economic environment. The interaction between humans and the environment as a communication process that influences each other is interpreted through symbols to communicate ideas and values related to celebrations, rituals, and traditions³. Communication is the process of transmitting and interpreting messages in the form of symbols. In addition, symbols will represent an object that contains meaning for others. Communication is a human need in social processes and group life. The meaning's manifestation in the symbolic interaction of the *Mapag Toya* ritual is imploring to study and comprehend every action and mindset practised by the Balinese farming community as a concept of identity.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through observation, literature review, interviews, and other supporting data sources such as translated manuscripts (*lontar*). Qualitative research is to study people's lives, concepts, history, phenomena, and social problems⁴. This article explores and understands the meaning of symbolic interaction in agricultural rituals in *subak*, *Mapag Toya* as a cultural activity and explores understanding the self-concept of Balinese farming communities in the harmonious relationship of humans, God, and nature (THK).

2.1. Mapag Toya as an Agricultural and Balinese Hindu Custom

Bali adheres to animism beliefs that existed in the archipelago for centuries, mixed with Hinduism⁵. This synthesis resulted in a Balinese Hindu belief system based on Indian philosophy, with animism serving as the foundation for various rituals⁶. According to Balinese Hindu belief, natural events are appropriately composed by spirits. As a result, the offerings specifically from agricultural materials are for the ancestral spirits. According to Hindu teachings, a ritual is a solemn religious ceremony referring to a religious system or other rituals or the ceremony in public worship⁶. In the meantime, tradition is the path of specific traditional activities associated with a particular event, place, or time. This custom is passed down from generation to generation, gradually becoming a permanent way of life. Hindu belief is respecting nature in correlation to human life. The plants and animals must also value and worship nature as the giver of life and food. Ritual and pilgrimage sites are grounded in hilly and mountainous terrain near springs.

Subak is a farmer-led organization that manages irrigation water. It is socio-agricultural in nature, religious, located in a specific rice field area with natural boundaries, has one or more irrigation water sources, a *subak* temple, and is self-sufficient⁷. *Mapag Toya* is an agricultural ritual in *Subak* that begins the cycle of rice planting by collecting water from its source. The *Mapag Toya* ritual is performed to express a request for blessing and grace to Lord Vishnu, the God of Life-Sustained manifested in the form of water (*toya*). Requests for plenty of water during the rice planting season, as well as protection from pest disasters. As part of the implementation of the *Parhyangan* element of the philosophical concept of Tri Hita Karana⁸, a series of *Mapag Toya* rituals is carried out from generation to generation. *Subak* members perform the ritual process collectively at *Subak* Temple (*Bedugul* Temple) in each *subak* area, *Ulun Empelan* Temple, and *Ulunsuwi* Temple. Other temples associated with agricultural and *subak* rituals, as well as those located near water sources (*lakes*), are considered sacred sites that must be preserved as a source of life⁹. *Tri Hita Karana* is a Balinese life philosophy based on the harmonious relationship: (1) man and God (*Parhyangan*); (2) humans with one another (*Pawongan*); and (3) humans and their environment (*Palemahan*). The *Mapag Toya* ritual's implementation is linked to a human relationship with God, which is associated with traditions and customs [2].

The *Mapag Toya* ceremony is carried out in three stages in Pakraman Nyanglan Village, Klungkung Regency¹⁰: (1) the preparation stage consists of a meeting to discuss ceremonial activities, making facilities and offerings (*jejahitan* and *bebantenan*

or *sesajen*) by *subak* women (*krama subak wanita*), communal work and preparing *bale pewedaan* at the temple by *subak* men (*krama subak laki-laki*); (2) *Mapag Toya* ceremony conducted in three stages of processions consists of the initial, core, and closing activities. *Sulinggih* (ceremonial leader), *Pemangku* (*Sulinggih*'s assistant), *Bendesa Adat*, *Krama Subak*, and the farming community are the participants in the *Mapag Toya* ritual procession. *Mapag Toya* is observed on *pangelong kaping empat belas tilem sasih kapat* (the day before *tilem kapat*) and *tilem sasih kapat* according to the Balinese calendar. The main offerings and supporting facilities for the *Mapag Toya* ceremony are roasted pork (*babi guling*) for yearly and buffalo every three years, *penjor*, *suci*, *segehan*, *daksina*, *sayut*, *datengan*, *pengambeian*, *pisang guru*, *bayuan*, *canang burat wangi*, *canang genten*, *canang sari*, *jerimpen*, *peras* or *lis*, *bebangkit*³. The facilities and offerings used in each *subak* village are unique, demonstrating that Balinese people are versatile, adhering to the concept of *desa* (place), *kala* (time), *patra* (individual), and in the form of *alit* (small), *madya* (medium), and *utama* (colossal) ceremony according to the individual or group financial capacity. The offerings (*bebanten* or *sesajen*) are compound of three main components: (1) *mataya*, derived from plants (flowers, leaves, fruit); (2) *maharya*, derived from *vivipar* animals (pigs, goats, buffalo, cows); and (3) *mantiga*, derived from *ovipar* animals (chicken, duck, goose, chicken egg, duck egg, goose egg); other complementary elements are water and fire (incense). The philosophical symbolic meanings of the *upakara* or *bebanten* are as representatives (*wali*) of the universe created by God (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Washa*)¹¹. As an expression of gratitude, the offering can take many forms and types. Philosophically, it is interpreted as a guide to a peaceful mind to reach the centre of consciousness in the direction of *Sang Hyang Widhi*. *Bebanten* is a form of devotional service performed by Hindus as sacred offerings (dishes or food) before the prayer ceremony¹².

2.2. Cultural Activities as Symbolic Interaction System

Culture develops from human knowledge. It's influenced by interactions with nature and other humans. Perceptions, instincts, and human thoughts produce knowledge, behavioural ideas, ideas or concepts, manners or rules, and community life agreements. Others can understand a culture's transmission through language or symbols. They employ symbols as expressions of meaning, then interpreted as a cultural reality as a system of ideas.

According to Keesing's Cultural Theories¹³ there are three distinct approaches to culture as a system of ideas: (1) Culture is defined as a cognitive system (a knowledge

system) that is taught or acquired through cognitive processes. Everyone has a different culture because it is inherent in the individual's cognition; (2) culture as a structural system, i.e., every culture influenced by a universal culturally patterned arrangement (cognitive) including language, customs, becomes a local and unique cultural system; (3) culture as a symbolic system, culture is both universal and unique. As a result, culture is a collection of narratives and symbolic systems. It is necessary to read, translate, and interpret cultural processes.

Humans are referred to as animal *symbolicum* because they comprehend and produce symbols¹⁴. Understanding humans' entails comprehending their social behaviours. Human nature, according to the theory of evolution, is a continuous and uninterrupted process that is inextricably linked to human civilization. Humans create symbols as a response to their surroundings and as a means of interacting with them. Language, myth, art, and religion are examples of symbols created by humans in cultural life through a process of practical imagination. Humans, as symbolic creatures, can create new symbols that can be applied to general reality. Human evolution in cultural activities through symbolic interaction is part of the creative and constructive process of collecting, organizing, and seeking synthesis, which leads to a cognitive focus to produce meaning. This continuous stage is defined as using past and present experiences to respond to future situations. Meaning emerges as a result of symbolic interactions with other people. Humans see themselves through the general reflection of others. This is known as self-concept. Understanding a society by learning other people's actions and intentions and responding appropriately¹⁵.

3. Result and Discussion

Ritual, as a custom heritage of cultural traditions, is a way of life associated with religious beliefs as a tribute to God and its manifestations among the Balinese people. The natural environment is viewed as a personification of God's presence in human life, necessitating worship and offerings to maintain harmony in the evolutionary process of living things within it. This concept evolved from the three fundamental frameworks of eternal truth, or *Sanatana Dharma* in Hinduism: *tattwa* (philosophy), *susila* (ethics), and *yadnya* (ceremony). THK's philosophy in all aspects of Balinese life doctrine, including agriculture, is a harmonious balance between humans, God, and the cosmos. *Subak* life includes rituals as a form of life wisdom imparted by God to humans, particularly farmers. The agricultural ceremony proclaims God's manifestation in the form of the Goddess of Fertility.

The *Mapag Toya* ritual is a group ceremony performed by *Subak* at the location of a water source at the first pouring of water. During one cycle of the rice planting season, the *Mapag Toya* ceremony expresses gratitude for the abundance of water while also asking for safety (repelling pests). In ethics and rituals, human relations with God (*Parhyangan* aspect) are conveyed symbolically through a ritual procession from beginning to end and the arrangement of offerings and incantations as an effort to send messages, feelings, prayers, requests, and expressions of gratitude to God. Balinese farming communities believe that they must work to cultivate the land and water, yet the ownership of these two elements is in the hands of the Gods. As a result, they should maintain an abundance of land and water.

Bebantenan or *sesajen* are forms of offers that include implied or visible values and symbols. Its considered sacred offerings of natural resources made in an orderly and sincere manner. The offering of the *Mapag Toya* ritual is a symbol of prayers and expressions of gratitude for safety, strength, abundance, success, victory, and purity of thoughts, words, and deeds; a symbol of human kinship with all of God's creation; a symbol of prosperity and well-being; a symbol of balance and harmony; a symbol of the power of natural law; and a request for grace to benefit others. These symbols usage is in the context of *Subak's* agricultural life. All offerings are symbols of the embodiment of humans and elements of objects that exist in nature, such as water; living things (animals); land (soil) such as nuts and tubers; and air such as prey. The *bebanten*-making process provides an opportunity to fully serve *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi* through hard work and devotion.

The *Mapag Toya* ritual also entails a series of actions performed in groups by the rules. The *Mapag Toya* ritual includes ceremonial stages, incantation chanting, dedicated offerings, a gathering of people participating under the influence of sounds, music, colours, body movements, and efforts to focus on the context of the prayer request. This religious activity is necessary to cultivate good habits using appropriate ceremonies and rituals. The *Mapag Toya* ceremony has significant influences on individual Balinese farmers, such as building enthusiasm, emotional bonds, religious feelings, and experienced and pure thoughts to achieve the success of the rice field processing.

4. Conclusion

The symbolic interaction in the *Mapag Toya* ritual is a self-offering and expressing gratitude to God (as a symbol of humility) to request an abundance of water. The *Mapag Toya* ritual is a living communal tradition that will be carried on. It teaches people about

the meaning of life and to overcome obstacles during the rice cultivation process. The symbolic interaction of the *Mapag Toya* ritual is shown in this study as a pattern of relationships between society and traditions, value systems, thoughts, and culture that cannot be separated from the social structure of Balinese agricultural society based on the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy. The *Mapag Toya* ritual's symbolic interaction is a complex combination of various symbols such as knowledge, traditions, language, rituals, and dynamic social activities associated with the identity of the Balinese farming community. Through the symbolic interaction of *Mapag Toya* agricultural rituals in *subak*, the concept of identity with all expectations and everything that is not seen is explored.

For the Balinese, a ceremony is more than just a series of human actions, it is a concerted effort in all aspects of human life to connect with God Almighty (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*). The harmonious interaction of humans, God, and the cosmos (THK) is a spiritual highway filled with religious activities that produce sacred traditions in various forms. Sacred traditions can also serve as suggestive philosophical means or symbols. The *Mapag Toya* ritual's symbolic interaction system is a sociocultural process that represents the rules of the ideal Balinese agricultural tradition, based on the harmonious relationship of *Tri Hita Karana*. The Balinese farmers' community's knowledge systems and beliefs are a living concept of interaction with God, others, and nature.

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