

# NARRATING THE DIVINE: LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF HINDU FAITH IN BALINESE ORAL TRADITIONS

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Received : 11-06-2025

Revised : 12-07-2025

Accepted : 12-10-2025

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## Abstract :

This article explores the intersections between faith, narrative, and aesthetics in Balinese oral literature as a living expression of Hindu theology. Rooted in the island's syncretic spiritual landscape, oral traditions such as kidung, geguritan, kakawin, and satua function not only as artistic works but also as vehicles for transmitting sacred values, cosmological order, and theological insight. By analyzing their structure, performance, and communal function, this study reveals how Balinese Hindu narratives preserve, reinterpret, and embody the divine through voice and story. Drawing on ethnographic insights and literary hermeneutics, the article argues that Balinese oral traditions constitute a narrative theology that sustains Hindu religiosity in the rhythm of everyday life.

**Key Words :** Balinese Hinduism, oral literature, narrative theology, performance, faith, aesthetics

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## 1. Introduction

Narrative has always been one of humanity's most profound ways of encountering and understanding the divine. Across civilizations, storytelling has served as a medium for expressing faith, transmitting moral wisdom, and sustaining communal identity. In Bali, this narrative impulse finds its sacred embodiment within the island's Hindu tradition, where spirituality is not confined to texts or temples but lives vibrantly in oral performances, songs, and tales that echo through the daily rhythm of life.

The kidung sung within temple courtyards, the geguritan recited during ceremonies, and the satua told by elders around family gatherings are not mere artistic expressions—they are devotional acts that articulate theology through lived experience. Each recitation, chant, and performance becomes an offering (upacara) in itself, a dialogue between the human and the divine mediated through the spoken word. These oral forms transform everyday spaces into sanctified realms of remembrance, teaching, and revelation.

While canonical Hinduism, as found in the śruti and smṛti, places authority in textual transmission—the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas—Balinese Hinduism embodies a distinctive interpretive stance. It locates divine revelation not solely in written scripture but also in the sabda (sound), rasa (aesthetic emotion), and laku (ritual action) of oral expression. The voice becomes the scripture; rhythm becomes theology. Through the uttered word, Balinese Hindus engage directly with sacred reality, enacting devotion through language that breathes.

This integration of art and theology underscores a fundamental principle in Balinese Hindu thought: that the divine (Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa) manifests through all forms of creation, including sound, story, and motion. Thus, narrative performance is not a derivative expression of belief but a constitutive mode of it—a living theology that continually re-creates the sacred within the collective consciousness.

Moreover, Balinese oral traditions serve as pedagogical and social instruments. The *satua-satua* Bali (folktales) teach ethical values grounded in dharma, karma phala, and *tat twam asi*, cultivating moral imagination among the young. The *geguritan* convey philosophical depth and emotional refinement through poetic structure, while the *kidung* reinforce communal harmony and ritual order. Together, they form a spiritual ecosystem in which knowledge, emotion, and devotion coalesce.

In this sense, to narrate the divine in Bali is to sustain theology in motion—to ensure that sacred truth remains alive, not as a static doctrine but as a dynamic conversation between past and present, heaven and earth, word and worship. Balinese oral literature embodies what may be called “performative theology”: a system where faith is sung, recited, and experienced rather than merely read or memorized.

Therefore, this study explores how Balinese oral traditions—rooted in poetic aesthetics and ritual practice—function as vehicles of Hindu faith. By examining their narrative structures, symbolic language, and ritual contexts, this paper aims to reveal how the divine is made audible, visible, and emotionally tangible within Balinese Hindu life. In doing so, it situates Balinese oral expression within broader conversations on narrative theology, performance studies, and the anthropology of religion, demonstrating that in Bali, theology is not confined to temples or texts—it is continuously narrated through living voices that echo the divine.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of Balinese oral traditions occupies a rich intersection between anthropology, literature, and theology. Scholars have long recognized that oral performance in Bali is not simply an art form but a central pillar of religious and cultural life—a living archive of spiritual values, ethical teachings, and cosmological knowledge. The works of Rubinstein (2000), Creese (1998), and Hobart (1975) have been foundational in revealing how oral traditions serve as dynamic cultural forms that bridge the textual world of Hinduism with the local cosmology of the Balinese people. These scholars show that Balinese oral literature is not static folklore but a continually evolving medium through which communities negotiate meaning, identity, and the sacred in changing social contexts.

Rubinstein (2000), in *Beyond the Realm of the Senses*, describes the Balinese *kakawin* and *geguritan* as living extensions of the classical Hindu literary canon, infused with local language, rhythm, and devotional intention. For Rubinstein, the Balinese act of reciting sacred poetry is both an aesthetic and theological event—it embodies *śraddhā* (faith) and *rasa* (feeling) simultaneously, producing a unique synthesis of emotion and understanding. Similarly, Creese (1998) situates Balinese oral narratives within the broader Southeast Asian textual tradition, emphasizing that *babad* (chronicles) and *satua* (folktales) operate as mnemonic devices for sustaining moral order and collective memory. Hobart (1975), on the other hand,

interprets oral storytelling as a performative act of world-making, where speakers and listeners jointly reconstitute cosmic and social balance (Rwa Bhineda).

Clifford Geertz's (1973) influential concept of the "theatre state" and Hildred Geertz's (1994) ethnography of Balinese ritual artistry have further shaped the theoretical framework for understanding Balinese expression. In their view, art and religion in Bali are not separate domains but mutually constitutive realms through which power, order, and devotion are performed. The temple, the stage, and the household are all sites of sacred performance. The act of narrating or chanting is itself a form of worship that reaffirms the unity between aesthetics and ethics, between the visible (sekala) and the invisible (niskala).

From a theological standpoint, scholars of Hindu thought such as Anantanand Rambachan (2006) and Kapila Vatsyayan (1992) illuminate how the integration of aesthetics (rasa) and devotion (bhakti) reflects a uniquely Hindu epistemology of the divine. Rambachan argues that Hindu spirituality transcends the dichotomy between knowledge (jnana) and emotion, affirming instead that aesthetic experience can lead to divine realization. Vatsyayan similarly describes Indian art and performance as a pathway to the sacred—a manifestation of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram (truth, goodness, beauty). Within this framework, Balinese oral performance becomes not merely cultural expression but theological praxis: the sacred is not represented but enacted.

This understanding resonates strongly with Balinese ritual aesthetics. In the recitation of kidung or geguritan, beauty (sundaram) becomes a vehicle for truth (satyam), and devotion (bhakti) transforms performance into prayer. The intertwining of aesthetic and spiritual purpose ensures that oral literature serves both didactic and devotional functions. As a result, every performance is both an offering and a revelation—a reiteration of the eternal dialogue between human and divine.

Local Balinese scholars have further contributed to contextualizing these traditions within indigenous frameworks of thought. Bandem and deBoer (1995) examine Balinese performance traditions as sacred acts rooted in the principle of desa, kala, patra—the adaptation of spiritual expression to place, time, and circumstance. Their research shows that oral performance, like ritual, remains flexible and responsive to contemporary realities while retaining its symbolic core. Putra (2011) extends this discussion by emphasizing the moral and educational functions of oral storytelling, noting that satua Bali transmit values such as dharma (righteousness), satya (truthfulness), and sradha bhakti (faithful devotion). Through these stories, communities internalize Hindu ethics not through abstraction but through emotional and communal experience.

These insights collectively support the argument that Balinese oral literature constitutes a form of narrative theology—a body of performed knowledge that makes the divine intelligible through story, song, and symbol. Rather than separating the sacred and the social, these traditions embody what Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas*: a shared emotional space where aesthetic participation becomes spiritual communion. Oral performances bring theology to life by transforming belief into sound, rhythm, and gesture—turning narrative into worship.

Furthermore, contemporary studies have begun to examine how Balinese oral forms adapt to modernity without losing their spiritual essence. Researchers have observed the rise of digital performances of kidung and geguritan on social media platforms, radio broadcasts, and educational institutions, where they continue to serve as vehicles for devotion and cultural preservation. This transformation demonstrates that oral tradition in Bali is not a relic of the past but an evolving form of sacred communication.

In summary, the literature reveals that Balinese oral traditions operate at the confluence of theology, performance, and pedagogy. They reaffirm the enduring relevance of Hindu philosophical principles—Tri Hita Karana, Rwa Bhineda, and Tat Twam Asi—in lived practice. By merging narrative artistry with spiritual intention, these traditions embody an ongoing act of faith: the divine is not merely narrated but perpetually renewed through the living word.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research approach, grounded in the belief that Balinese oral traditions can best be understood through direct engagement with their performative, social, and theological contexts. Rather than relying solely on textual interpretation, the research emphasizes immersion in living practice—observing, participating in, and interpreting the oral performances as dynamic manifestations of faith. The qualitative approach allows for rich, descriptive insights into how the divine is narrated, experienced, and embodied through Balinese oral expressions such as kidung, geguritan, and satua.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research follows an ethnographic design combined with hermeneutic textual analysis. Ethnography enables the researcher to encounter oral traditions in their natural contexts—temples, community gatherings, and ritual settings—where art and devotion intersect. Hermeneutic analysis, inspired by Ricoeur (1976), provides a means to interpret symbolic meanings beyond surface-level description, treating each oral performance as a theological text open to multiple layers of understanding.

In this design, fieldwork and interpretation function dialectically: observation informs textual analysis, while literary insights guide ethnographic focus. This dual approach ensures that both the poetic form and ritual function of oral literature are analyzed holistically—as inseparable dimensions of religious life.

#### 3.2 Research Sites

Fieldwork was conducted in several regions of Bali known for their preservation of oral traditions, particularly Gianyar and Karangasem.

- Gianyar was selected due to its strong lineage of temple-based kidung and geguritan performances, especially during piodalan (temple anniversary) and odalan desa (village purification) ceremonies.
- Karangasem, by contrast, offers a more rural context in which satua storytelling and geguritan recitations are closely tied to family-based rituals and community gatherings.

These locations were chosen purposively (purposive sampling) based on their cultural vitality, the accessibility of informants, and the continuity of oral traditions as part of Hindu ritual

practice. The diversity of these sites allowed comparative analysis of how oral narratives function across social and spatial contexts.

### 3.3 Data Collection Techniques

The study employed multiple qualitative techniques to achieve data triangulation—ensuring the validity and depth of the findings.

#### 1. Participant Observation:

The researcher attended various temple ceremonies, ritual gatherings, and storytelling events to observe oral performances in situ. Attention was given to the setting, timing, audience interaction, and ritual context in which kidung and geguritan were performed. Field notes documented the aesthetic, emotional, and theological dimensions of each performance.

#### 2. In-depth Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including:

- Juru kidung (ritual singers) who specialize in sacred songs and poetic recitations.
- Pemangku (temple priests) who contextualize the spiritual function of the performances.
- Serati banten and tukang kidung who understand the ritual preparation process.
- Community elders and listeners who provide interpretive perspectives and collective memory of oral traditions.

These interviews explored personal experiences, symbolic interpretations, and perceptions of sacredness associated with oral performances.

#### 3. Documentation and Recording:

Performances were audio-visually recorded with the permission of participants. Transcripts and translations of selected kidung and geguritan were prepared for textual analysis. Photographs of ceremonies, ritual objects, and performance spaces complemented the documentation to provide visual context for interpretation.

#### 4. Textual and Archival Study:

Complementary data were gathered from local manuscripts (lontar), temple records, and academic publications that document traditional kidung and geguritan. These texts were used to trace the continuity between historical literary forms and contemporary oral renditions.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed following the interpretive flow model of Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Observational and interview data were first categorized thematically into domains such as “sacred sound,” “moral narrative,” and “ritual performance.”

The analysis drew primarily on two theoretical frameworks:

- Hermeneutic Literary Analysis (Ricoeur, 1976):

Each oral performance was treated as a “text” that reveals layers of meaning through symbols, metaphors, and structure. The researcher sought to uncover how these narratives communicate theological concepts such as dharma, rwa bhineda, karma phala, and tat twam asi through poetic language.

- Symbolic Anthropology (Turner, 1969):

This perspective emphasized the ritual function of oral performances as “social dramas” that reaffirm collective faith. Symbols embedded in oral texts—such as flowers, weapons, or natural imagery—were interpreted as markers of cosmic and ethical order.

By combining these methods, the study interprets Balinese oral literature not as folklore or entertainment but as narrative theology—a living expression of faith enacted through sound, gesture, and storytelling.

### 3.5 Research Ethics and Reflexivity

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. All informants were informed of the study’s purpose, and participation was entirely voluntary. Cultural sensitivity was maintained by observing ritual propriety and local customs during fieldwork. The researcher’s positionality—as both observer and respectful participant—was acknowledged to minimize interpretive bias and to honor the sacredness of the community’s practices.

### 3.6 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, the research employed triangulation across data sources (observation, interviews, and textual analysis) and member checking by revisiting interpretations with key informants for confirmation. Reflexive journaling was used to track analytical decisions and maintain transparency in interpretation.

### 3.7 Summary of Methodological Framework

In essence, this study integrates ethnographic immersion and hermeneutic reading to illuminate how Balinese oral traditions articulate Hindu faith. By treating the spoken word as sacred performance, the research affirms that oral literature is both a cultural archive and a theological medium—an enduring bridge between divine revelation and human experience.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the interpretive findings derived from field observations, interviews, and textual analysis of Balinese oral traditions as expressions of Hindu faith. The results are organized into four interrelated themes that reveal how the divine is articulated, experienced, and sustained through the living medium of oral performance.

### 4.1 The Oral Voice as Sacred Medium

In Balinese Hinduism, sound (*śabda*) is more than vibration—it is the very substance of divine manifestation, encapsulated in the concept of *Nāda Brahman*, the “sound of God.” This theological principle holds that creation itself begins with vibration, with the cosmic syllable *Om* (Aum) serving as the primordial source of all existence. Within this worldview, the human voice becomes a microcosmic echo of divine sound, capable of invoking and sustaining spiritual power.

The chanting of *kidung* in temple ceremonies exemplifies this cosmological truth. Each tone, each measured syllable, is imbued with *taksu*—spiritual energy that animates the performance. During *piodalan* (temple anniversary) rituals, the *kidung* *Wargasari* or *kidung* *Rare Angon* accompanies the presentation of offerings (*banten*), harmonizing sound, scent, and movement into a unified act of worship. The singer (*juru kidung*) is not merely a

performer but a mediator of divine vibration, whose voice transforms the temple courtyard into a sonic shrine.

Through sound, the unseen (*niskala*) becomes perceptible in the seen world (*sekala*). The audience participates not as passive listeners but as co-creators of the sacred atmosphere. Collective chanting creates resonance that transcends individual devotion, embodying what Turner (1969) calls *communitas*—a shared state of spiritual unity. In this way, the oral voice functions as a ritual offering (*bhakti*) in itself: the articulation of faith through sacred sound.

As one *pemangku* in Karangasem explained, \**“Sabén titiang maca kidung, sane maparab ring Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa”*—every verse is an invocation of the divine. This understanding affirms that *kidung* is not entertainment but theology in motion—a living articulation of *Nada Brahman*, where the act of vocalization becomes a channel for divine presence.

#### 4.2 Narrative as Theological Expression

Balinese oral narratives encapsulate theological and moral principles in vivid symbolic form. They do not merely retell myths but interpret them anew in every performance, transforming abstract doctrine into experiential knowledge. The *satua Calonarang*, for example, dramatizes the eternal polarity of *Rwa Bhineda*—the cosmic principle of duality and balance between destructive and creative forces. The confrontation between *Rangda* and *Barong* represents not the triumph of good over evil, but the perpetual harmony that sustains the universe.

Similarly, in *Geguritan Dharma Prawerti*, moral conflict is presented as an inner journey toward truth (*satya*) and righteousness (*dharma*). The poetic rhythm of the *geguritan*—its cyclical repetition and patterned cadence—mirrors the spiritual discipline required for moral clarity. Reciting or listening to such works becomes a meditative act, where theological reflection is woven into aesthetic experience.

These oral narratives embody what Ricoeur (1976) terms the “surplus of meaning”—the capacity of story to reveal more than it explicitly states. Through symbol, metaphor, and rhythm, the narratives articulate complex theological insights accessible to both learned priests and ordinary villagers. In this sense, storytelling in Bali is a vernacular theology: a mode of faith that emerges from within the lived, spoken, and communal world rather than from institutional authority alone.

By embedding moral principles within narrative performance, Balinese oral literature sustains a continuous moral pedagogy across generations. Stories like *Pan Balang Tamak*, *I Belog*, or *Lubdaka* teach ethical discernment through humor and irony, reaffirming that theology is not a distant abstraction but an everyday guide for righteous living.

#### 4.3 Ritual Performance and Communal Faith

The theological vitality of oral literature lies not only in its content but in its performance. Each *geguritan* recitation, *kidung* chant, or *satua* narration unfolds within a ritual context that binds participants into a sacred community. Performance, in this sense, is both artistic and liturgical—it fuses aesthetic beauty (*sundaram*) with spiritual purpose (*śivam*).



Field observations in Gianyar revealed that during piodalan ceremonies, geguritan recitations often accompany temple dances (tari rejang), while villagers gather to listen attentively in the courtyard. The atmosphere is reverent yet communal—children sit beside elders, priests stand among lay devotees, and the act of listening becomes an act of worship. As one elder expressed, \**“Yening kita ngelingang satua, sami sareng sembahyang”*—when we recall a story, it is also a form of prayer.

This participatory dynamic demonstrates how oral performance embodies Tri Hita Karana, the Balinese philosophy of maintaining harmony between God (parahyangan), humanity (pawongan), and nature (palemahan). Through collective storytelling, social bonds are strengthened, environmental respect is reaffirmed, and divine presence is re-experienced within the community.

Moreover, oral performances often occur in cyclical ritual calendars, ensuring that faith is renewed rhythmically rather than episodically. Each repetition is both remembrance and rebirth—reaffirming the continuity of tradition while allowing subtle reinterpretation. The performance thus serves as an ongoing theological dialogue between ancestors and descendants, between sacred narrative and lived reality.

#### **4.4 Continuity and Adaptation**

One of the most remarkable features of Balinese oral traditions is their adaptability. Despite the pressures of modernization, urbanization, and technological change, these sacred forms continue to evolve without losing their spiritual essence. Contemporary juru kidung and penembang geguritan now use modern media—radio, YouTube, and cultural festivals—to reach new audiences. This transformation does not diminish the sanctity of the oral form; rather, it extends the sacred soundscape into new spaces of devotion.

Digital platforms have become modern shrines where faith finds expression through screen and speaker. Recordings of kidung Wargasari or geguritan Ratu Ayu circulate widely on social media, allowing younger generations to learn and appreciate these traditions even outside temple walls. The technological shift reflects the principle of *desa kala patra*—the adaptability of ritual practice to place, time, and circumstance. By embracing new mediums, Balinese Hinduism demonstrates theological resilience: the message of *bhakti* transcends form, embodying devotion in every era.

However, this adaptation also raises important questions about authenticity, participation, and sacred space. Some elders express concern that digital performances lack the ritual aura of live temple settings. Yet, as younger performers emphasize, the intention of *bhakti*—the sincere offering of voice and faith—remains intact. Whether sung in a temple courtyard or streamed online, the sacred narrative continues to vibrate with divine presence.

Thus, technological mediation becomes an extension of the oral theology itself: faith adapting to context, without losing essence. The continuity of Balinese oral tradition illustrates that theology, when embodied in narrative, is not static doctrine but living praxis—a rhythm that endures across generations, translating the eternal into the contemporary.



In sum, the findings affirm that Balinese oral traditions are both aesthetic and theological embodiments of Hindu faith. They reveal that the divine is not confined to temples or scriptures but lives through the human voice, communal memory, and the creativity of adaptation. Through *kidung*, *geguritan*, and *satua*, Balinese Hinduism narrates its theology in motion—transforming every word, tone, and story into a sacred act of devotion.

### 5. Theological Implications

Balinese oral traditions provide a profound model of immanent theology—a theological framework that locates divinity not in distant abstraction but in the immediacy of lived, sensory, and artistic experience. Within this paradigm, the divine is not merely contemplated but embodied in the sound, rhythm, and imagery of oral performance. Every recited verse, every sung *kidung*, and every told *satua* becomes a moment of divine disclosure, where human creativity and sacred inspiration converge.

In this sense, Balinese Hinduism articulates a theology of presence rather than transcendence. The divine (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*) is not confined to scripture or ritual space; instead, it manifests within the creative act itself. The spoken word becomes mantra, the melody becomes *bhakti*, and storytelling transforms into meditation (*dhyāna*). As performers and listeners participate in these oral acts, they do not merely remember the divine—they recreate it through voice and intention.

This form of theology aligns with what scholars describe as narrative theology, a mode of understanding the divine through story rather than systematic doctrine. Whereas dogmatic theology seeks to define God through concepts, narrative theology reveals God through lived experience, emotional resonance, and communal participation. In the Balinese context, theology unfolds not through intellectual argumentation but through *rasa*—the deeply felt aesthetic emotion that unites beauty (*sundaram*) with truth (*satyam*) and goodness (*śivam*).

Such an approach reflects the Hindu epistemology of *shraddhā*, or faith rooted in the heart. *Shraddhā* is not blind belief but an active trust that engages emotion, reason, and devotion in a single movement of awareness. Through oral performance, *shraddhā* becomes embodied: singers express it through tone, listeners experience it through empathy, and the community reaffirms it through collective participation. The result is a form of embodied knowledge, where learning and worship merge seamlessly.

From this perspective, the *kidung* or *geguritan* can be read as theological enactments rather than texts to be analyzed. When a *juru kidung* chants the *Wargasari* or *Rare Angon*, the act is not representation—it is revelation. The performer's voice mediates between the realms of the human and the divine, serving as a channel for *taksu*, the divine charisma that animates artistic and spiritual power. Theologically, *taksu* symbolizes divine grace made manifest in human expression, affirming that art itself can be a sacred vocation.

Furthermore, Balinese oral traditions embody a sacramental view of language. Words are not neutral signs but potent vibrations charged with metaphysical energy. The Hindu doctrine of *śabda brahman*—the Word as Absolute Reality—finds living expression in the oral recitation of *kidung* and *geguritan*. Each syllable is believed to carry *śakti*, divine potency, capable of

purifying the environment and the heart of the listener. Thus, theology is performed through sound, and the aesthetic act becomes an act of sanctification.

This immanent understanding of divinity also has ethical dimensions. By narrating stories that dramatize dharma (righteousness), karma phala (moral causality), and tat twam asi (the unity of all beings), oral literature transforms abstract theological principles into moral imagination. The listener does not merely learn doctrine but experiences compassion, humility, and reverence as living values. Through rasa and identification, theology becomes pedagogy—it shapes ethical behavior by moving the heart before instructing the mind.

In the Balinese worldview, therefore, theology and art are inseparable. The sacred is experienced aesthetically, and beauty becomes a medium for truth. As Vatsyayan (1992) observes, Hindu aesthetics dissolves the boundaries between devotion, art, and knowledge. The Balinese oral tradition exemplifies this integration perfectly: the act of narration is simultaneously a form of worship, education, and reflection.

Moreover, this theological model challenges the binary between the sacred and the secular. When a *satua* is told at night in the household courtyard, or when a *geguritan* is sung at a community festival, these acts—though seemingly ordinary—carry spiritual significance. They reaffirm what Clifford Geertz (1973) calls the “total religiousness” of Balinese life, where every gesture, sound, and story can be a site of divine encounter.

In the broader context of Hindu theology, Balinese oral traditions exemplify living revelation (*śruti jīvanam*). The divine word continues to speak, not as a static text but as a recurring event within human consciousness. Each performance becomes a renewal of cosmic order (*rta*), a reenactment of creation through voice and rhythm. This continuous act of narration transforms theology from a system of beliefs into a dynamic process of becoming—an ever-renewed dialogue between God, community, and art.

In conclusion, Balinese oral traditions reveal that theology can be sung, spoken, and lived. Through the fusion of *rasa* and *bhakti*, knowledge and devotion, they turn language into liturgy and performance into prayer. The divine is not distant or abstract; it vibrates within every word, tone, and breath of the faithful storyteller. Thus, narrating the divine in Balinese Hinduism is not merely an artistic act—it is a continuous revelation, transforming ordinary speech into sacred manifestation and everyday life into a theatre of the holy.

## 6. Conclusion

Balinese oral traditions stand as luminous examples of living theology—a dynamic interplay between art, faith, and communal life through which the sacred continues to be realized in the present moment. Unlike written doctrines that codify belief into fixed formulations, oral traditions embody a fluid, participatory spirituality where theology is not merely studied but performed, heard, and felt. Within every *kidung*, *geguritan*, or *satua*, the divine is made audible and tangible; the invisible (*niskala*) becomes perceptible through voice, rhythm, and shared emotion.

At the heart of these traditions lies the conviction that divine presence is not distant or abstract but immanent—dwelling in sound, movement, and human creativity. The act of

narrating the divine through oral performance is both an offering (*upacara*) and a revelation (*wahyu*). When the *juru kidung* chants the verses of *Wargasari*, or when elders recount the tale of *Calonarang* around the family compound, they do more than preserve cultural memory—they participate in the sacred process of recreating the cosmos through word and devotion.

In this way, oral literature functions as ritual theology, constantly renewing the connection between human and divine. Each performance is a form of *yajña* (sacrifice), where voice replaces fire, and faith replaces offering. The spoken word becomes a sacred bridge (*setu*) linking the realms of *sekala* (visible world) and *niskala* (spiritual world). The continuity of this tradition ensures that theological reflection does not remain confined to scholars or priests, but lives among farmers, artisans, and children who internalize faith through story and song.

Moreover, these oral traditions play a vital role in preserving and transmitting the ethical and philosophical foundations of Hinduism. Through poetic symbolism, they embody the timeless principles of *dharma* (righteousness), *rwa bhineda* (cosmic balance), *tri hita karana* (harmonious relations), and *tat twam asi* (spiritual unity). Yet, they do so not through didactic exposition, but through aesthetic participation—the experience of beauty (*rasa*) that moves the heart toward moral and spiritual awakening. Thus, art becomes an instrument of theology, and beauty becomes a pathway to truth.

The endurance of Balinese oral traditions amid modernity further attests to their adaptability and vitality. Far from being relics of a pre-modern past, they continue to evolve through contemporary media—radio broadcasts, cultural festivals, and digital platforms—demonstrating that theology can thrive within new technological and social contexts. This adaptability reflects the Balinese principle of *desa kala patra*, which allows sacred expression to harmonize with time, place, and circumstance without losing its essence. Whether performed in temple courtyards or streamed through digital networks, these oral acts continue to resonate as invocations of faith and community.

Theologically, this living tradition challenges rigid separations between the sacred and the profane, the artistic and the religious. It asserts that the divine can dwell within every sound, word, and gesture when infused with intention (*niat suci*) and devotion (*bhakti*). The act of narration, therefore, becomes a theophany—a manifestation of the divine through human expression. Through storytelling, the Balinese people sustain an enduring dialogue with the transcendent, reaffirming that religion is not a static inheritance but a continually enacted experience of the holy.

In a broader sense, Balinese oral traditions remind us that theology is not only what is written but also what is sung, spoken, and lived. They offer a vision of faith that is inclusive, embodied, and participatory—a theology of sound, motion, and memory. Through the rhythmic continuity of narration, faith is renewed, memory is sanctified, and the divine remains ever near.

Ultimately, narrating the divine in Balinese Hinduism is both a literary and theological act—a rhythmic reaffirmation that the sacred speaks through the human voice. In every recitation and every story shared from generation to generation, the Balinese reaffirm their

cosmological unity with the divine order. The oral word thus becomes both *śabda brahman* (the Word as God) and *karma yoga* (action as devotion)—a living testament that art and faith, when intertwined, can transform the ordinary act of storytelling into an eternal expression of divine truth.

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