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## THE SYMBOLIC AND SPIRITUAL ROLE OF FLOWERS IN HINDU RELIGIOUS RITUALS IN BALI: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

*Humans' inability to understand God in metaphysical form often gives rise to the need to use symbolic or representational means in an effort to understand or describe a sublime and unattainable existence, one of which is a vital object as a symbol of God for the Balinese Hindu community is the existence of flowers in Every offering is considered as a condition that increases aesthetic passion or a condition within the spirit of human relationship with God of Flowers in Hindu religious practices in Bali. The research uses qualitative methods with a descriptive approach used to analyze and describe data from literature studies, strengthening understanding about the presence of flowers in rituals. The results of the research are divided into three discussion points (1) The Significance of Flowers in Hindu Religious Rites in Bali (2) Flowers as a Medium of Offerings (3) Spirit and Blessing: The Role of Flowers in Spirituality and the Human Environment, highlighting the importance of flowers in conveying the sincerity of the human heart in religious ceremonies, enrich spirituality, and deepen understanding of God's existence through religious symbols. Based on this, this research attempts to examine in depth the existence of flowers as a means of ritual through depiction or symbolization which allows humans to associate complex and abstract concepts such as God with something more concrete or visible, such as images, symbols, or rituals. This facilitates easier understanding and helps in forming an emotional, spiritual, or even intellectual bond with the concept of God.*

**Keywords:** Flowers, Symbols, Rituals

## I. INTRODUCTION

The various natural contents that are used as offerings in human sincerity towards the center of its creator through various hopes expressed become a concern that invites questions about how each offering is intended to make humans believe that the components offered can be a link between humans and God. Of the various components that exist, one of the vital objects is the presence of flowers in every offering, whether considered as a condition that increases aesthetic passion or a condition within the spirit of human relationship with God. The Balinese Hindu community is very close to the term flower *puspa* or *sekar*. In the religious realm, flowers have their respective uses and functions according to human needs or requirements in carrying out rituals, some are used as a medium or means of worship and some are used for aesthetic purposes. The position of flowers which is considered vital in a *yadnya* (holy offering) carried out by the Balinese people, is very easy to find in every Balinese Hindu prayer or worship, both in *yadnya* at certain times (*naimitika karma*) and in *yadnya* which is done every day (*nitya karma*). The use of flowers or *sekar* in various Hindu religious activities in Bali, it can be seen from the most basic activity, namely prayer, although Hindu prayer media are divided into two non-material and material. However, the use of flowers in Hindu prayers is the main means of getting closer to God, because flowers in prayer activities are also symbolized as various manifestations of God.

Various explanations regarding the function of flowers in various Hindu rituals in Bali are a discussion that must continue to undergo a deepening process in order to generate new knowledge in strengthening the *shraddha* and *bhakti* of the people regarding the function of flowers in a spirit of true connectedness in the context of the use of flowers can play a role in increasing the value of understanding. humans regarding human recognition of their creator, through the symbols offered in Hindu books, especially in Bali. Flowers have a special place as a medium of worship and a medium of beauty which is used to decorate various kinds of ritual symbols such as: decorating *pratima*, *pralingga*, and *petapakan*. It is not surprising, that in

various ritual practices, flowers will always be the main medium in presenting beautiful sincerity to explore the essence of flowers in various Hindu religious rituals in Bali. Based on this, this research attempts to examine in depth the existence of flowers as a ritual tool to flowers as a spirit of connection between humans and God. It is hoped that this study will be able to provide the nectar of more comprehensive knowledge in the field of religious philosophy, especially in the existence of God through religious symbols.

## II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, meaning that this research is carried out by analyzing and describing various data obtained through collecting data that has been collected, then carrying out data synthesis, namely through the process of sorting and selecting various data. By determining which opinions are enriching and which opinions are irrelevant to be synthesized according to ideas in an effort to strengthen research results. The data in this research was obtained using literature study techniques, the data obtained from the literature study will then be combined with the data held by the researcher so that it can provide verification, correction, equipment, detailing and specialization of the data (Bakker & Zubair, 1990). This technique provides the author with the opportunity to carry out in-depth critical analysis of various literature sources, so that they obtain ones that are relevant and supportive of answering the problems in this research.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Significance Of Flowers In Hindu Rites In Bali

The functionality of flowers in the rites of the Hindu community in Bali is very important and significant. In the context of Hinduism in Bali, flowers are used as one of the important elements in religious ceremonies and daily life. Flowers have an important role in the rites of the Hindu community in Bali. In Hindu

religious practice in Bali, flowers are used as symbols and mediums to connect people with the spiritual world. In the rites of worship of the Balinese Hindu community, flowers are seen as spirit objects with various values presented in shape, color, and fragrance produced. Speaking of worship rites in Bali, priests in Bali who are often referred to as *sulinggih* in their daily ritual practices always use flower media in worshipping God with his manifestation as the Solar God. This rite is usually referred to as "*surya sewana*". In Lontar Argha Patra explained:

*Om ghandham samarpayani*

*Om satam samarpayani*

*Om puspam samarpayani*

*Om dupam samarpayani*

*Om agnir agnir jyotir ya namah swaha*

*Om dupam samarpayam*

Translation:

Om Hyang Widhi, the fragrances I present

Om Hyang Widhi, the grain I offer

Om Hyang Widhi, the flowers I present

Om Hyang Widhi, who is a shining agni whom I respect

Om Hyang Widhi, the incense I offer (Wiana, 2022:53)

In the Argha Patra mantra excerpt, it is explained that in worshipping God with his manifestation as Surya, Hindu priests in Bali offer fragrances, seeds, flowers, fire, and incense. In some of the basic elements of the offering, flowers become one of the elements that must be presented in the rite of *surya sewana*. If observed from several aspects of these basic offerings, flowers are the most important element in their function as a means of worship, because in flowers there are fragrances and are formed from seeds or seeds that develop perfectly. Therefore, the existence of flowers is important because they represent aspects of fragrances and grains in the rite of worship.

Flowers in the religious activities of Hindus, have a very high spiritual, religious and sanctity value. Besides being used as a means of sincere worship and offering, flowers are also used as religious symbols. Wiana (2000) explained, flowers have two functions, namely as a symbol of God and function as a means of offering. As a symbol, flowers in prayer are usually placed at

the peak of coverage of both hands. Usually finished worshipping, the flower used will be tucked in the earlobe or tucked into the hair above the head. While in its function as a means of ceremony, flowers are used in various offerings that will be offered to God or the holy spirits of ancestors. In this case, Appadurai (1986) in Space (2003: 18-19) explains that objects have not only social and cultural properties, but social life. The weight and authority of objects have the power to influence beliefs, materials, obligations, appearance, and pleasure even from a meaning, but from a methodological point of movement it is the theoretical angle of man as a perpetrator to mark objects by adorning the social and human context.

In some Hindu texts there are various meanings of flowers that are used as references in the process of offering *yadnya*. Many biblical texts describe the various meanings and symbolism associated with flowers, which are then used as guidelines in the implementation of *yadnya* offering processions. The deep meaning of flowers as objects of offering reflects spiritual values, natural symbolism, and describes different aspects of human existence in relation to the universe, as stated in the quotation of the second mantra of worship to the Sun God as a witness,

*Om Adityasyaparam jyotih,*

*Rakta teja namo'stute,*

*Svetapangkaja madhyasthe*

*Bhaskarayo Namostute*

Means:

Om Sunshine Almighty,

You shine red, servant adores You,

You who sthana in the midst of the white lotus,

We respect You the Creator of Rays (Ngurah, 1995:28).

In the second mantra of Panca Worship, explains the position of flowers as God's sthana. It is mentioned that God in his manifestation as Sang Hyang Aditya bersthana in the middle of a white lotus, which implies that the value of flowers in a theological point of view gets a very central position. This position illustrates that in order to know the existence of God, man must use symbols as a

medium of uniting the abstract into immanent form. The use of flowers as a symbol is a manifestation of human ideas that depict the existence of God with good conditions without blemishes and others. It is also based on ethical considerations in the cult of God as positive energy.

The flower of vital objects in rituals, in this case, becomes a symbol of belief that is synonymous with spirit that makes it easier for humans to understand and gain knowledge about the source from which all this began, the source of *being*, both the existence of objects that are sensed and that cannot be reached by the senses. According to Donder (2006: 113) mapping the guidelines in worshipping God through the concept of *Sagunam Brahman*, namely worship intended for *ajnani* (people still covered by physical consciousness) through this concept, the worship of God who is *Sagunam* (God who has manifested) is allowed to worship Him using *Nyasa* (symbols). God is Nirgunam Brahman where God is in the order of *Acintya* (unthinkable), *Nirakara* (intangible). The Upanishads define the *Nirgunam* God as *Neti-neti* (neither this, nor that). Likewise, God in *Saguna* has a holy ray, God is called God and Goddess who functions according to function is a manifested God called *Cintya* (already conceivable). So that flowers have a very strong connection in understanding the supernatural as a symbol of God in the manifestation of *Hyang Aditya* as a maker of light. This ray is believed to be the existence of God who penetrates all space. This conception is a symbol of God's omnipotence permeating and resides in every object of the world as "*wyapi-wyapaka*". In this sense the use of flowers in the rites of the Hindu community in Bali is not only an integral part of religious practice, but also carries a deep symbolic meaning. The use of flowers in Balinese Hindu rituals is not merely a visual or aesthetic act, but rather reflects a deeper aspect of religious beliefs and practices. In the *concept of Saguna Brahman*, the flower becomes a symbol of the manifested manifestation of God, allowing devotees to honor and purify themselves through concrete symbols. Meanwhile, Brahman's *concept of Nirguna* highlights the unthinkable transcendent aspects

of God, beyond the conceptual reach of man. In rituals, flowers are not only chosen for their beauty, but also because each type of flower carries a special spiritual meaning and connection. Through careful selection of flowers, religious practice becomes more than ceremonial; become a means to feel the shining divine presence, as represented by the concept of *Hyang Aditya's* holy rays, which permeate and illuminate all spaces. The use of flowers in Hindu rituals in Bali strengthens the integrality of religious practice, becoming a medium that connects humans with divine existence, expressing reverence, beauty, purification, and spiritual connection in Hindu beliefs.

### **Flowers As A Medium Of Offering**

Flowers as a medium in carrying out the Path of filial piety to unite oneself with God, produce or bring out a sincere sense of love as outlined in Reg Veda I.10.2. "God Almighty protects those who are devoted, who improve themselves gradually with various activities". The existence of flowers as a medium of offering ontologically will not be separated from how to build historicity through mythology that developed in the Balinese Hindu community. According to Suidiana (2009: 218) mythology is part of the religious community that is closely related to spiritual interests, meaning that through the Balinese Hindu community's perspective on flowers as a medium of offerings has a manifest and latent function. In this case, the latent function as a deep meaning for the Balinese Hindu community towards flowers when used for ceremonies cannot be measured only through empirical dimensions.

The mythological guide is contained in the *Adi Parwa Text*, which tells of two twin giants who are very diligent in their asceticism with the aim of conquering heaven. The perseverance of the two giants in their asceticism, made the gods in heaven feel worried. This condition made Lord Brahma order and commissioned Lord Visvakarma to create a beautiful princess who was able to seduce two giants from her hermitage. Based on his assignment, Lord Visvakarma then made a beautiful princess with the means of flowers "*ratna*" and "*sesame*" which were later named with the

Goddess "Tilotama". With her beautiful face, the Gods became fascinated when they looked at her. It is said that Dewi Tilotama tempted the penance of the two giants, leading to conflicts because they both fought over Dewi Tilotama, and resulted in the two giants dying because of their magic in war. Thanks to her services, ratna flowers as an interpretation of Dewi Tilotama are given waranugraha as the main flower to worship God, as well as the main flower in Hindu religious rituals in Bali. Therefore, the main flowers that can be used as a medium of offering are attractive flowers in the sense of presenting shades of beauty and have allure to charm.

As a medium of offering, there is a reference that the flowers used in the principle of offering are carefully selected which is explained in the Lontar Yama Purwana Tattwa mentions the use of flowers in making "*puspa linga*" (sthana or place for a sacred person), must use flowers that are in good condition. It is also mentioned that flowers that should not be used are flowers that are not "*camah*" which means not holy, namely flowers that have been bitten by grasshoppers, or used to be eaten by caterpillars (Wiana, 2022: 51). *Puspa linga* in question is a form of flower arrangement used in the *Pitra Yadnya* (sacred offering to ancestors) ceremony. It is usually used to symbolize the *atman* that has left one's gross body. In the process of coupling, the selection of sacred flowers is also part of the substance in the *Pitra Yadnya* rite. It is also mentioned in the Siwagama text, in this *Pitra Yadnya* rite it is recommended to use the "white medori" flower as one part of the ritual means. This is because the white medori flower has asked Bhagawan Salukat for wounding or cleansing and then given grace to be a means of worshipping ancestral spirits in the form of *puspa lingga* (Wiana, 2022: 50). In addition to *puspa lingga*, there are also flowers as a symbol of blessing, known as "*gandha kusuma*". In the Old Javanese-Indonesian dictionary, "*gandha*" is interpreted as smell, stench, fragrant smell (Zoetmulder, 1995: 270). In the Kawi-Balinese dictionary (1988: 97), the word "*gandha*" means *ambu (miik)*, *bo fragrance*, which if translated in Indonesian will mean a fragrant smell. Old Indonesian-Javanese dictionary, the word *wangi*

is called "*gandhawasa*" (Mardiwasito, 1992: 169). While the word "*kusuma*" means *sekar* (flower) (Zoetmulder, 1995: 545).

Ismoyowati (2020) states that fragrant aromas have a positive effect because fresh and fragrant aromas stimulate sensory and receptors. Furthermore, this scent affects other organs so that it can have a strong effect on emotions. Scents are captured by receptors in the nose, then provide further information to the brain area in an effort to control emotions and memory and provide information also to the hypothalamus which is a regulator of the body's internal systems. Thus, it can be said that it is a method that is carried out. Based on the explanation above, the term *gandha kusuma* focuses on the condition of human confidence in reflecting belief through offerings made to God through fragrant flowers. So, worship by using this flower is as a conditioned state or conditioning itself through concentration carried out with the medium of flowers in creating a positive connection with God to circumstances and qualities detrimental to himself and nature. In its influence on human emotions and physiology. Aromas play an important role in creating mental states that support concentration and spiritual connectedness. This practice of using flowers as a medium of offering serves not only as a religious ritual, but also as a method to achieve emotional and psychological well-being. The practice of using fragrant flowers in prayer can be seen as an attempt to create an environment that supports concentration and spiritual mediation. With the calming effects of scents, individuals can more easily direct their thoughts, reduce distractions, and achieve a higher state of consciousness.

### **Spirit And Blessings: The Role Of Flowers In Spirituality And The Human Environment**

In the aspect of faith, humans are attracted to flowers because the spirit of flowers is able to build a connection between humans and God. Building a connection and spirit to God is one of them in the form of man's petition to God in order to achieve all his hopes. In Lontar Kala Tattwa, it is explained that the main function of

flowers is to avoid humans from calamity (Bhatara Kala). The mythology relates that Goddess Durga allowed Bhatara Kala to eat people who slept in the afternoon and woke up after sunset, children who cried at night and the last one was the one who chanted hymns or married in the middle of the road for abusing sacred teachings out of place. Meanwhile, if there is a human who covers his hands with flowers in the middle of the road, then Bhatara Kala is not allowed to eat the human (Wiana, 2022: 48)

Man's belief in flowers has to do not only with their physical beauty, but also with spirituality and connectedness with God. Flowers are seen as having a "spirit" that is able to build a spiritual bond between humans and God. One form of expression of this connectedness is through man's plea to God to fulfill his expectations. In this context, Lontar Kala Tattwa describes the primary function of flowers as protectors of man from catastrophe, particularly those represented by Bhatara Kala. The mythology described suggests that Goddess Durga provided protection to humans holding flowers from the threat of Bhatara Kala. It can be related to aspects of the environment in which humans live because it reflects the complexity of human beliefs and relationships with the surrounding nature. The concept of protection from catastrophe represented by the flower in mythology shows how humans associate nature with their spiritual existence and well-being. Efforts to protect themselves from natural and spiritual hazards become part of human interaction with the environment.

The natural environment in which man lives is a reality of intrinsic value in itself. The value of natural intelligence is not determined by man, but has an internal value in itself since God's creation. The intrinsic value of the natural environment has been given by God since the process of creation and continues until now and into the future, to posterity. Humans have no right to determine the value/dignity of the natural environment. The natural environment is a reality given by God to man. Therefore, the natural environment is God's special gift / grace (*gabe*) that humans should thank with a sense of responsibility (*aufgabe*). This form of gratitude

to God should be realized in the form of an attitude of human spiritual responsibility to protect and preserve the natural environment (Fios, 2013: 1240). Based on its intrinsic value, nature actually has an aura or spirit that can make humans interested in its existence. Therefore, not infrequently humans also take the time to enjoy the beauty of nature as an implementation of their interests. That is, the existence of nature actually provides life for all humans in the world and humans should always maintain the existence of nature as a form of gratitude for all the abundance of blessings given by nature through agreements built by humans. Wallace in Ardika (2006: 3) said that religion as a means of worship (*cult institution*). Where a worship institution is a set of rituals that are all supported by the same social group. A set of rituals with flowers as a living spirit and connecting human hope with God through nature is identified through what Hindus offer in Bali with *canang* offerings equipped with five different types of flowers as one form of ritual media that represents several manifestations of God.

The agreement with the use of *canang* in everyday yadnya in Balinese Hindu society is an agreement that was built a long time ago. *Canang* which is arranged with various types of flowers is an interpretive approach between humans and creators, quoting Mayong's explanation in Mariyah (2004: 8) asserts that the expression of natural meanings in this condition is carried out through an interpretive approach, namely an attempt to imagine cultural elements that often seem as if they have nothing to do, departing from the opinion of Maleong flowers as a medium of rite is a condition that enables humans to believe The existence of flowers is able to be a "*signification*" and link between concentrated human expectations and become a strong legitimacy in the spiritual life of the Balinese Hindu community through the values contained in the flowers used. Flowers as one of the elements of nature that can make humans captivated. Vice versa, that even flowers are able to represent the feelings of a man to the glory of God. Flowers actually have a central position in the social life of the world

community, and Bali in particular. Flowers when viewed from a social aspect, are actually able to build human expectations for what they want to achieve. This is evidenced by human activities in conveying feelings through flower symbols.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Man's inability to experience God in metaphysical form often gives rise to the need to use symbolic means or representation in an attempt to understand or describe such a great and unattainable existence. Without depiction or symbolism, people may experience confusion or difficulty in creating an understanding or connection with more abstract concepts of God. Depiction or symbolization allows humans to associate complex and abstract concepts such as God with something more concrete or visible, such as images, symbols, or rituals. It facilitates easier understanding and helps in forming emotional, spiritual, or even intellectual bonds with the concept of God. Nevertheless, this depiction can also carry risks. When representations or symbolizations are not properly understood or misunderstood, this can lead to confusion or skepticism about the concept of God Himself. For example, when images of God are interpreted literally or too narrowly, this can result in a conflict between limited understanding and diversity of views or beliefs about God. Thus, in this context, the use of means of depiction or symbolization plays an important role in man's efforts to understand and respond to the concept of God, but it is important to remember that such depictions need to be seen as representations or clues, not God Himself.

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