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Special Feature

Bali

Land of Offerings

Ancient Outpost of Hinduism Thrives in Modern Times

Bali is an intensely Hindu community, perhaps because it is the sole Hindu majority district in an otherwise Muslim country. Hinduism has not just survived here, it has thrived, unscathed by the tumultuous events of India's history over the last thousand years. Though elements of Balinese Hinduism are unique in all the world, most of the daily life of Balinese Hindus is easily recognizable--the rituals, culture, traditions, rites of passage, etc. The main city, Denpasar, is a major tourist destination, but many Hindus live in "custom villages" run in a wonderfully traditional manner.

Sample spread from this article



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By Rajiv Malik, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

From the moment I arrived in Bali in September of 2011, I found myself enveloped in Hinduism. My guide, attired in colorful Balinese traditional dress, greeted me at the airport, his hands in namaskar, with, "Om swasti astu." It means "May God shower grace upon you;" and that's how I felt. The 30-minute drive to my hotel took us past huge sculptures with scenes from the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita. The hotel clerk, with the charming name Vidyawati Devi, likewise greeted me with "Om swasti astu," and as I left for my room, said goodbye with "Om shanti, shanti, shanti"--"peace, peace, peace." Every subsequent meeting for the next two weeks began and ended with such blessings.

In some ways, Balinese Hinduism reflects a deeper philosophic understanding and a fuller incorporation into daily life than found in India. For example, here

cremations are not an occasion for sorrow and mourning, but festive celebrations of the soul's passing on to a better world. Balinese Hindus perform Trikal Sandhya, reciting the Gayatri Mantra and other Sanskrit slokas every day at 6am, noon and 6pm--a practice found in India among brahmins. A third example is Nyepi, the Day of Silence in which the island comes to a complete halt; even the electricity is shut off. Hindus stay indoors, praying and fasting. No vehicles are on the roads, the airport is closed and tourists must remain in their hotels. I cannot imagine such an observance taking place in secular India!

A Balinese Hindu's love for his religion is clearly evident in his home. Each one I visited had an open-air temple, often larger than the main living area. In India, in the huge houses of rich Hindus, I have seen at most a small room used for a temple; in a middle-class home, the temple might be merely a four-foot by four-foot space partitioned off, as an afterthought, from a drawing room, bedroom or kitchen. Every Balinese home temple I saw was well maintained, with flower offerings being made two or three times a day.

I was becoming completely enthralled with the lifestyle--until it came time for dinner. Religious, kind and gentle though Bali's Hindus are, this is a land of meat eaters. Not a single vegetarian main course was available at any of the six restaurants in the Sanur Beach Hotel where I was staying. I took a cab that first evening in a fruitless effort to find a vegetarian restaurant nearby. Finally, I settled for toast and jam with hot chocolate milk back at the hotel. Eventually, with the help of friends, I located the few vegetarian restaurants Denpasar has to offer, but food remained a struggle throughout my stay. Even the sweets were often nonvegetarian. I returned to India a few kilos lighter.

Before we proceed with an account of my two weeks in Bali, a note: Many people have studied the religion and culture of Bali, and reached a variety of conclusions, nearly all based on an academic outsider's point of view. I've also come to Bali to give an account, but do not intend to impose any particular point of view. The people I interviewed will speak for themselves and you, the reader, may draw your own conclusions. That said, let's experience Bali!

Getting Started

I needed a journalist visa to visit Bali and report for Hinduism Today. This was obtained with the kind help of Ngurah Arya Wedakarna Mahendradatta

Wedasteraputra Suyasa III, a well-known local figure with a typically long Balinese formal name. Dr. Arya (for short) was the first person I met for an official interview. Just 36 years old, he is rector of the private 3,000-student Mahendradatta University, president of Sukarno Centre, and is involved with numerous local organizations. His father, who founded the university, was a prominent politician and associate of Sukarno, Indonesia's first president. The family traces their lineage back to the first king of Bali's Badung region.

On the short drive to Dr. Arya's office, I was impressed by Denpasar's well-developed commercial areas and excellent roads crowded with thousands of motor bikes. My cab driver explained that nearly every teenager owns one. Almost everyone on the roads was dressed in Western styles; apparently the traditional Balinese dress is for special occasions, or for the benefit of the tourists.

I spoke at length with Dr. Arya in one of the halls of his spacious campus in the heart of Denpasar city. He was outspoken about the problems and challenges that Hindu society faces in Bali. As an educator, he is pained that many Hindu youth are not pursuing higher education, which leaves them out of the top echelons of the corporate sector, especially in the area of tourism. He is concerned about the future, especially the impact of non-Hindus moving from less prosperous areas of Indonesia to Bali. He is impressed that the youth remain proud of their Balinese culture even under the influence of more than two million tourists arriving yearly.

From the modern campus of Mahendradatta University, we drove to the outskirts of Denpasar and stepped back in time at the home of Ida Pedanda Gede Putra Telabah, one of Bali's best-known priests. Beautifully carved doors and windows adorned his large residential compound which contained a temple. His family is of brahmin lineage--yes, there are castes in Bali, but in different form than in India--and his father was a priest. Telabah was educated as a doctor and taught at Udayana University until his retirement 14 years ago, at which time he took up the priesthood.

He told the story of Maharishi Markandeya who brought Hinduism to Bali around 500ce. In 1500ce, Maharishi Dvijendra came to Bali. And in the last half-century a number of modern Indian spiritual leaders, or their followers, have made an impact. "Originally," he explained, "the religion was known as Teertha, because we use holy water for all kind of rituals." A tirtha (literally, a river ford) is any holy river, mountain or other place made sacred by its association with a Deity. Telabah told

me the Balinese have spoken of Teerth Gango for a long time, even when it was only a name in the scriptures and they had no grasp of the immense river. As in India, one part of the puja is to mystically transform the water being used into Ganga water. This has quite a special meaning in Bali. As I met more and more people, I found that a great common desire is to go to India to bathe in the Ganga, something almost more sacred to them than to Hindus in India who live along its banks.

At one point in our interview, Telabah took a deep breath, closed his eyes and for a few minutes chanted Sanskrit mantras invoking the holy Ganga and praised India's other holy rivers whose banks host the Kumbha Melas. While chanting, the priest went into a meditative frame of mind; the mantras were flowing from him as if he were one with Mother Ganga. I really loved his reciting Ganga as "Gango" in his Balinese Sanskrit accent; it sounded divine and sweet.

Telabah estimates there are 600 priests from the brahmin community in Bali, but he acknowledged that using the word caste, or referencing anyone as "non-brahmin," can cause problems, and he avoids both. Priests come from all castes in Bali, trained in the guru-shishya tradition. Perhaps there will be a formal school established, he said, but it has not happened yet.

Women also can become priests, as has his wife, Ida Pedanda Stri Mayun Telabah. She helps him in the rituals and also performs rituals on her own. She told me there are about 400 priestesses in Bali. In nearly all cases, their husbands are also priests. "Not only do we get equal respect compared to the men, but sometimes we get more. As a woman priest, I also teach the basics of Hinduism to other women and my fellow priests. As well, we take up social work and help the sick and needy."

Telabah explained: "As a priest, we perform five types of yagna (ritual sacrifice): for the Gods, the ancestors, the rishis or gurus, for man himself and for bhoot, the underworld. You could consider animals as the underworld." The puja system is the same all over Bali. He does puja at home and in the community, and at a temple if invited. "The number of temples in Bali cannot be counted," he told me. "The Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are the most popular Gods in Bali for the common man. Even now, Balinese villages have their own way of puja, offerings and rituals."

Here, for the first time, I encountered the Balinese explanation of their practice of animal sacrifice (see p. 63 for a full report). They believe the practice can be justified from the Vedas. Telabah said, "Animal sacrifice is used in almost all the temples for the bhutas, the underworld. It is performed so that the animal gets a better life. The animals say, 'Thank you,' when sacrificed. If you are just killing an animal, it is violence. Sacrifice done with puja is not violence, it is a path to moksha, liberation, for the animal."

Telabah told me the Balinese believe they are still in the Dwapara Yuga and will by-pass the Kali Yuga altogether if priests perform their duties well.

The Power of Tradition

From Telabah's house, we headed for the Dharma Sthapanam Foundation in Tanjung Bungkak to see Prabhu Darmayasa, a well-known spiritual teacher. In front of each store or shopping complex along the way one of the Hindu Gods presided, usually Ganesha. The ashram reminded me of the abodes of saints in Haridwar with its dhuna, sacred fire, burning continuously in the central temple--a place where devotees gather around the fire on mats to hear the spiritual teachings. Darmayasa greeted the devotees with "Radhe, Radhe," a custom brought from Vrindavan, home of his guru, Siddhayoga Acharya Shri Kamal Kishore Goswami, a great kundalini master.

Though I had been in touch with Darmayasa before coming to Bali, he had never seen Hinduism Today until I handed him several copies at this first meeting. He questioned me at some length. After satisfying himself that I was indeed working for the betterment of dharma, he proved most helpful throughout the rest of my stay, even guiding me to the island's two most famous temples, Besakih and Tanah Lot.

In explaining why the religion is so strong in Bali, Darmayasa gave great importance to samskara, or sanskar, as they say here. Literally the Sanskrit term means "impression" or "sanctification" and is used in both senses. A samskara is specifically a rite of passage, such as name-giving, first-feeding or marriage, but in its more general sense it means any experience or impression which has a significant impact in a person's life. "We Hindus have been living here in a peaceful way for centuries due to the sanskars given to us by our ancestors. It is because of them only that we are strong and powerful. In our tradition, a child is given sanskar as soon as he or she comes to the womb of the mother."

"Another way our ancestors made Bali safe was by constructing temples in all directions. These are not ordinary temples, but built through austerities." He went on to explain how five substances, panchadhatus, were placed in the ground in accordance with the Ashtakaushala Kaushala, their scripture on temple building. These five--gold, silver, copper, iron and ruby--are connected to the five elements. A similar procedure is followed in India; scholars believe it is derived from the Saiva Agamas. "We are a very small island, but the spiritual powers have protected us at all corners. Indonesia has more than 80 percent Muslims, but our spiritual powers are saving the whole nation." Balinese attribute their escape from the impact of the 2004 tsunami to the island's spiritual power.

A village in Bali is called a desha, which normally means country. Each desha has three temples, one each for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Brahma temple is placed near the village center, Vishnu's near the farms and Siva's near the cremation grounds. All land belongs to the village, not to any individual. "All have to come and serve the temple," he elucidated. "If you do not follow the code of the village, you will have to leave. But you cannot sell your home, as it belongs to the village." "Also," he went on, "if you convert to another religion, you have to leave the village. This is the tradition which is continuing for centuries and saving us today. It does not survive due to any lectures or speeches. We carry our tradition forward by simple pujas and the simple offering of canang, which you see everywhere. Our simple teaching is karmaphala (literally, "fruit of action"), meaning you will be rewarded as per your action--for example, cheat and you will be cheated. Due to this principle, people are afraid of doing wrong actions, which would only bring them trouble. When I was a child, there were hardly any Balinese prisoners in jail. They were afraid to commit a crime, afraid of the karmaphala." I heard again and again throughout my stay about karmaphala, explained to me in depth by elders and children alike.

Telabah described customs that are also common throughout India, such as daily worship in the home, here called ngejot, or the offering of each meal to God first. He said the caste system has undergone considerable change in Bali, though the family name continues to identify one's caste. "My ancestors were priests to the king, but we were named as sudras later on. I never faced any problem with this in Bali, but in India many eyebrows were raised when I proudly said I am a sudra. We do not feel there is anything wrong with it."

Dharmayasa has great pride in Bali's practice of Hinduism. He pointed out that the

Balinese never underwent the devastating invasions suffered by India, nor the systematic undermining of their culture as occurred under the British Raj. In particular, he told me, "We have huge ceremonies which are performed every five, ten and even 100 years. Millions participate. Other Hindus can learn from us how beautifully we collectively perform our rituals."

Life of a Priest

Later that day I visited the home of Ida Pedanda Sebali Tianyar Arimbawa, 68, chair of the Sabha Pandita, a body of priests affiliated to the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI). He told me he has been to India six times and is close to Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of Bengaluru. He said the Indonesian government supports each religion, and Hinduism is taught from elementary through university level. There are over ten thousand teachers of Hinduism in Indonesia's schools--"maybe more than in India."

Arimbawa told me the life of a priest is not particularly easy or profitable, but priests are highly respected. "We survive on the offerings of devotees, and the devotees understand this. For instance, when I was building my home, my devotees helped me, as they knew I was a man of limited means. Similarly, they help build the temples."

He continued: "Hinduism has survived in Bali for centuries because the essence of our religion is that we are people who have a culture of smiling. Bali was attacked by the terrorists [in 2002 and again in 2005--see p. 67] but the Hindus of Bali answered just with their smiles. We also responded by silence and prayers. We prayed every day to shower blessings on our country. We prayed not just for Hindus, but the whole of Indonesia. Each morning we continue to pray like that. Every day, all the time, there are ceremonies going on in Bali. We are praying for the welfare of all. We are getting the great power of blessing from Him."

Cultural/Religious Affairs

On my second day I went to the Indian Cultural Centre, Bali, in the heart of Denpasar. Accompanying me was Dr. Sara Sastra, also known by his priest name of Ida Rsi Bhujangga Waisnawa Putra Sara Shri Satya Jyoti. The center is a branch of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, an official Indian governmental body headed by Dr. Karan Singh. Its job is to promote Indian culture in the host country. Usually a country has only one such center, but Indonesia has two, one in the

capital, Jakarta, and this one in Bali. The Deputy Director, Bhuvneshwar Sharma, came to Bali two years ago; the center was started in 2006. In addition to Sharma, the Indian staff includes a yoga teacher and a dance instructor. The center participates in all major festivals, conducts classes in yoga, Bharatanatyam dance and Hindi, and issues 30 scholarships a year for Indonesian students to study in India. Sharma said the small expatriate Indian community has successfully promoted Ganesha Chaturthi and other festivals not previously held here.

Sharma is a keen observer of Balinese life and culture, impressing even the knowledgeable Dr. Sastra with his insight. We share his observations in the sidebar on p. 27.

PHDI, the Official Hindu Body

I next visited the offices of the Parisada Hindu Dharma of Indonesia, or PHDI, the body that represents Hinduism to the government and plays an important role with the priesthood and the teaching of Hinduism in the public schools and villages. PHDI issues certificates to people of other religions who convert to Hinduism through the Shuddi Vidani ceremony conducted by the priests. There I met the Bali province head, Dr. Igusti Suidiana Ngurah, a lecturer of sociology, as well as the national head, Dr. Ketut Wiana, a retired lecturer and now full-time teacher of Vedas and Puranas.

Dr. Ngurah explained that PHDI adjudicates issues regarding Hindu practices and culture, including approving the yearly calendar before it goes to print--a complex job requiring input from the priests. In consultation with the government's Institute of Hindu Dharma, PHDI also has a say in the syllabus taught for Hinduism in the schools.

Dr. Wiana told me PHDI helps organize the big festivals such as Neiypi, the day of silence (see p. 56), and Galungan, which occurs every 210 days and lasts for ten days. It is a time the Gods visit the Earth. "Hinduism in Bali," he told me, "is about yagna (sacrifice), sushila (ethics) and philosophy." He explained that conversion ceremonies occur either because a non-Hindu wants to marry a Hindu (the law requires couples to be of the same religion) or because of a person's strong interest in Hinduism. "Even Muslims can become Hindus, and the government has no problem with this." Before 1960, he explained, conversion from Hinduism to Christianity was occurring. "But in the past few years, many Hindus who had converted have come back to Hinduism."

Worship without Murtis

Later that evening we visited the home of Dr. V. Ramesh Sastry, an educational consultant who moved here from India and serves as secretary general of World Hindu Youth Organisation. Our rapport was instant when I gave him a copy of Hinduism Today featuring on the front cover his guru, Sri Bharati Tirtha Swami, 2011 Hindu of the Year.

Sastry is impressed with Bali. "In other places in the world, Hindus live as different families and communities; but here in Bali, Hindus are like one big community living in one big house. The culture of the people is a big bonding force, and it is due to this that they have survived here for centuries."

The biggest difference between India and Bali, according to Sastry, is that in the temples of Bali there are no murtis, no images of God, and therefore no concept of darshan, or sight, of the murti which is popular in India. "During puja, they focus the mind on the temple's pedestal or padmasana and invite the God to come, then they make offerings. They identify the padmasana by putting different colors for each God: red for Brahma, black for Vishnu and white for Siva." One unusual result of this tradition: there is no clash with the Muslims over idol worship, because the Hindus are not worshipping idols.

Sastry says following Hinduism in Bali is expensive, a criticism I also heard from others. In part, the expense is being lessened by holding mass ceremonies for such events as cremations and for the "tooth filing" samskara. This ritual, not done in India, likely predates Hinduism's arrival here.

The custom villages, as they are called, have an ancient form of governance. "Here every person living in the village, including me," Sastry explained, "must report to the banjar, the village leader, as well as pay a fee. There are village programs which are mandatory for the local people, though I do not have to attend. In India, the guardians of society are the police, but here every street and corner of the village is covered by the pachalaks. Pachalaks are ordinary citizens, not police, who keep a vigilant eye on the activities of the community. It is like the neighborhood watch scheme that was implemented in cities like Delhi at one point in time."

"In India, if there is a marriage in your house it is your personal affair. You have the freedom to invite your neighbor or not to invite your neighbor. But here the marriage is not organized by you; it is the neighbors who organize the marriage. Everything here is community-based; nothing is yours. You can only select the date of marriage for your daughter or son. You do not have the authority to invite or not invite. Here it is the banjar who will do everything. If there is a death in your house, it is the banjar which will take care of everything. A death is not your personal problem. It is a problem of the whole community. It is 100 percent community living here."

Sastry praises the Balinese: "The youngsters of Bali are very good at doing prayers. Indian youth today are running after something else and losing their concentration on God. The rest of the Hindu world should look at the Balinese people and thank them for upholding their culture so strongly. The rest of the world prays as individuals and as a family. But the Balinese pray as a person, as a family, as a community, as a society and even as a nation. They pray together on all kinds of good or bad occasions. This integrates the society, binding them together and bringing a strong sense of brotherhood."

Training Teachers of Hinduism

Next I visited the government-run Denpasar State Hindu Dharma Institute, an accredited college which trains Hindu teachers, preachers and priests. The Institute has 4,800 students, four professors and 120 lecturers (equivalent to an associate or assistant professor in the US system); it offers bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees. Instruction is focused on the four subjects taught in the public schools to Hindus: scriptures, faith, ethics and rituals. This is the largest of eleven similar institutes in the country.

At the entrance is a huge, beautifully carved stone Ganesha. The hall where I was taken had paintings of scenes from the Mahabharata all over the walls, plus a colorful Garuda and many other Hindu motifs. Even in India it would be difficult to find a government institution with such a divine touch of Hindu ambience.

The Institute's rector, Professor Titib, is an eminent scholar whose books on Hinduism are taught in universities, colleges and schools all over Indonesia. Titib earned his PhD from Gurukul Kangari University in Haridwar. That venerable college

was set up in 1902 by a disciple of Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayananda Saraswati and is now a government-accredited institution.

In addition to their degree, teachers must also obtain government certification. There are currently 6,000 teachers of Hinduism in the country; 3,000 of those are in Bali. Five hundred new teachers are trained each year. The government has ordered that there be one religion teacher for every 20 to 25 students; presently the ratio is one to 40.

Every Hindu student in Indonesia takes two hours of classes a week in their religion from primary to university level and must pass an exam in Hinduism to graduate. Similar courses are provided for each religion.

Institute students who wish to become priests follow a different course of study. After graduation, they must get further training under an established priest. "You have to follow the guru-shishya parampara," Titib said. "This is the tradition from ancient times. We call it aguron-guron--to come and learn from the guru." I parted sharing my astonishment at the existence of this government-run institution for the preservation of Hinduism, something not found in India. I later returned to lecture to the students about my experience at the Kumbha Melas.

Conversion on the Wane

Surpi Aryadharama, 30, is a university lecturer, journalist and author of a book in Indonesian on conversion in Bali. Between 1930 and 2008, according to her statistics, 27,500 people converted to Christianity or Catholicism (regarded by the Indonesian government as two separate religions). "The target of the missionaries is to make Bali a Christian island," she said; but with the population of Christians and Catholics just two percent, she does not think it possible. "I am optimistic because our youth are interested in learning about Hinduism, and now we have an Institute of Hindu Dharma here." Surpi was inspired by Swami Vivekananda and considers the late Satya Sai Baba to be her guru. She is a brahmacharini: "If I marry, I will not be able to achieve my goal of working for Hinduism."

The Balinese have reduced Christian conversion significantly by opening Hindu orphanages, serving children without parents as well as some from poor families unable to care for them. There are now eight Hindu orphanages (vs. 37 Christian

ones), and they are increasingly popular with the people. The one I visited appeared to be well run.

Later I met with Puneet and Neeta Maholtra, both from India, who run the Queen's restaurant chain in Bali--one of the few places I could get a decent vegetarian meal. They are prominent in the Bali-Indian Friendship Association, set up to bring the small expatriate Indian community closer.

Puneet observed that ancient customs found in village India are still followed here, such as never giving something with the left hand or pointing with a single finger, both considered inauspicious. He admired the Balinese sense of devotion and said, "To put it bluntly, Hinduism in India is contaminated, but here in Indonesia it is still quite pure. They are so loyal to their religion and culture. I think we can all learn a lesson from their high level of commitment."

Bali's Hindu Doctrine

Dr. Somvir, a transplanted Indian who has taken Indonesian citizenship, generously shared with Hinduism Today his wealth of knowledge about Bali.

The Balinese religion had traditionally been known as Agama Tirtham. In response to a strong anti-communist movement in Indonesia, the 1960s the government set up a ministry of religious affairs, promoting the doctrine of Panchashila (see p. 26) and requiring citizens to belong to an officially recognized religion. This was actually a matter of life or death, as the atheist communists were singled out for attack. But Agama Tirtham, though Hindu in origin and essence, was not granted official recognition.

Pandit Narendra Dev Shastri Shastriji was instrumental in devising a solution. Sent to Bali in his early 20s by the Birla Foundation to propagate Hinduism, Shastriji settled here permanently and married a Balinese girl. He helped to articulate Hinduism in a manner consistent with the Panchashila doctrine, while not altering the traditional core Hindu beliefs and practices. (Though of Arya Samaj background, he did not promote its reformist teachings here.) He convinced the Balinese to call themselves Hindus, put forward the Vedas as their holy books and say they believe in one God. He had them adopt the Gayatri Mantra as a main prayer and regularized a set of mantras already in use for puja.

Shastriji developed and implemented the Tri Sandhya , a regimen of six Sanskrit prayers said three times a day, beginning with the Gayatri Mantra. The six prayers are:

1) Lord is the Earth, Sky and the Heavens. Let us meditate on the light of the sun, which represents God, and may our thoughts be inspired by that divine light.

2) Lord, Narayana is all that has been and what will be, free from taint, free from dirt, ever existing and without form, holy god Narayana, He is only one and there is no other.

3) Lord, you are called Shiva, Mahadeva, Iswara, Parameswara, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Purusha, the supreme soul, source of everything.

4) Oh Lord, I am full of sorrow, my action is full of sins, my soul so destitute, and my birth is also so poor. Save me from all this sorrow, purify my body and mind.

5) Lord, forgive me Mahadeva, He who gives salvation to all sentient beings, save me from all this sorrow, guide me, redeem and protect me, O Sada Shiva.

6) Lord, Forgive my sinful deed, forgive my wrong speech, forgive my sinful mind, forgive me for all those misdeeds. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

With these formulations and innovations, "Hinduism was recognized, and a crisis was averted," Somvir concluded.

Bali has benefitted from the recent movie, "Eat, Pray, Love," which ended with star Julia Roberts finding true love in Bali. The resourceful Balinese quickly adjusted their

tourism advertising to include all three goals on their beautiful island, resulting in an increased popularity of yoga for tourists. In Bedugul, North Bali, Dr. Somvir is developing the Maharishi Markandeya Yoga City project, intended to be the biggest center of yoga, meditation and ayurveda in the world. Some Balinese oppose him, thinking he plans to impose the Indian version of Hinduism on them. Shastriji faced similar fears; ultimately, during the later part of his life, he was isolated from the community. Perhaps to avoid a similar fate, Somvir promotes yoga and not Hinduism as such. In addition, his target audience is more international than local.

The Mother Temple

The Mother Temple, holiest in all of Bali, is located at 3,610 feet on the slopes of Bali's highest mountain, Mount Agung, an active volcano rising 10,308 feet. Lava flows from a huge 1962 eruption that killed 2,000 people missed the temple by just a few meters. The Balinese believe Agung is a fragment of India's Mount Meru, brought by the first Hindus.

Darmayasa kindly agreed to be my guide for the day. To reach the temple, we drove two and a half hours through interior villages with spectacular rice terraces, cooperatively maintained and dating back hundreds of years.

Mother Besakih Temple is, in fact, a complex made up of 22 temples. Its numerous courtyards and brick gateways are connected by stepped terraces and flights of stairs which finally lead up to the central shrine, Pura Penataran Agung, built in the 17th century. You can take a quick tour of this and other Balinese temples at bit.ly/balitemples

Arriving at the temple complex, we proceeded to the Pura Goa Raja cave temple, the mandatory first place of worship. I changed into the traditional sarong and head dress required for entrance into any temple in Bali. From the parking area we descended a flight of several hundred stairs to reach the temple. Most temples in Bali are open air, but this one is located inside a cave.

The story is that once there was an evil king who harassed his people. The Gods came to destroy the king, riding three serpents: Brahma from the Earth on Anantabhoga Naag, Vishnu from the water on Basuki Naag and Ishwar from the sky on Takshaka Naag. It is images of these three serpents, or naags, that are

enshrined here. "The idea," Darmayasa explained, "is that if the earth, water and wind maintain a good balance, then the world becomes a peaceful place. This temple balances these three elements for the welfare of the world."

Walking up the stairs, we proceeded to the Lakshmi temple for a short puja and then started up the grand staircase to the main sanctum. By this time it was late afternoon. The weather was extremely pleasant, and we could see the clouds floating just a few hundred feet above us. The area up to the sanctum was landscaped with plants and trees. Beautiful red flowers grew on each side of the stairs.

As I climbed, I was more and more charmed by the majesty and magnificence of this structure. When one set of flights ended, I found myself on a platform where the view--both down below and up to the temple above--was breathtaking. The serenity and divinity of the surroundings brought me to a completely meditative state. I was rendered blissful and speechless.

Scores of devotees in white, carrying yellow and white umbrellas, were coming down the stairs. Darmayasa explained that they had worshiped at the Mother Temple to establish their ancestors as devatas among the Gods.

Passing through a narrow entrance at the top of the stairs, we came into a courtyard dominated by a large platform in front of a row of temples. The three main structures represent Sadasiva, Parasiva and Siva. Puja was in progress for a group of a hundred who had arrived before us. A large number of foreign tourists watched from a distance but did not take part.

Soon it was our turn for puja. As with most pujas in Bali, it began with preparatory prayers by the priest followed by recitation of six slokas as a group. At the conclusion, the priest sprinkled holy water on all of us and gave out rice from the puja. We applied this as a tilak to the forehead, and, in the unique Bali style, also to the temples and earlobes.

The open-air temples of Bali are quite different from the closed-in temples of India

where even forced air circulation may be insufficient. Here the openness to the sky overwhelms your senses and connects you with the divine as the Vedic mantras are chanted and flower offerings are made.

In India you would always leave your shoes at the temple entrance and proceed barefoot, even a long distance, for worship. But here, the Balinese walk about in the temple with their shoes on. Only for puja were their shoes removed and placed by their side.

Our worship complete and evening upon us, we headed back to Denpasar. Our route took us through Ubud, the famed art center, where we stopped briefly for dinner; I would come back in a few days for a much longer visit (see p. 60). We met Ketut Suardana and his Australia-born wife, Janet De Neefe. Together they run a chain of restaurants and guest houses, and Janet, an author, organizes the yearly Ubud Writers and Readers Festival. They are a successful cross-national couple with four children. Janet much of her life here in *Fragrant Rice*, a book of insightful reflections on her own melding with Balinese life, plus her favorite local recipes. (See excerpts on p. 34 and 67.)

Ketuk told me his wife became a Hindu by choice when they married. Janet explained, "I am a Hindu officially. But I am still understanding it, as it is a complex religion. There is a worldwide trend of Westerners taking to Buddhism, I think because it is easier. Hinduism is a very gentle kind of artistic religion here."

Cremations

On my seventh day, from morning to late afternoon, I had the unusual experience of attending a cremation ceremony for a complete stranger, something never done in India (see p. 64 for a full report on cremation in Bali). It was quite an adventure; the Balinese do not mourn, weep or wail as the funeral proceeds, but rather celebrate the person's life and their transition to higher realms.

Developing Hindu Resources

Today Dr. Sara Sastra took me to Denpasar to visit the Dwijendra Foundation's school, a private institution serving 4,000 students. Its mission is to produce "Hindu human resources" to improve the knowledge of the Hindu people of Bali in religion,

culture and literature. The school was founded in 1953 by Shri Dang Hyang Dwijendra, named after an 8th century Javanese priest of the same name who built Besakih Temple.

It was the first such institution in Bali. It was here Pundit Shastri and others developed the concept of Tri Sandhya, the thrice-daily prayer of Gayatri mantra at 6am, noon and 6pm, which has been implemented for Hindus all over Indonesia.

As I entered, I was struck by two things: the huge statues of Goddess Saraswati and Lord Ganesha at the entrance and the hundreds and hundreds of motorbikes parked chockablock in exquisitely precise rows beside the buildings. It seems nearly every older student has one--a testament to the relative prosperity of Balinese Hindus.

The Foundation's vice-chair, Shri M.S. Chandra Jaya, took us on a tour of the neat, clean and well-maintained classrooms. The likes of this Hindu school could hardly be found in all of India. Here I was as much an object of inquiry to the children as they to me; they especially loved to hear about the four Kumbha Melas I'd been to. When I asked if they would like to visit India, nearly every hand went up. All wanted to go to Haridwar to bathe in the Ganga.

The school gives a complete secular education up to college B.A. level. Jaya explained that 99 percent of the students are Hindus. This is their main campus; a few other schools use the Foundation's name but run independently. The government provides funds for books and sponsors a free education for 250 children each year. He said that as a matter of government policy, they cannot call it a Hindu school, even though there are Muslim schools. They are working toward a change so that it can be so designated.

The school has 12 teachers of Hinduism and a yoga instructor. Fees are nominal, only us\$0.56/month for kindergarten and \$1.36 for secondary school, just enough to cover expenses; children from orphanages attend free. "We have a small number of seats compared to the demand for admission," Jaya told me. "Anyone who graduates from here is looked upon as someone who will take care of the future of Hinduism in Bali. They are also considered to have the essential qualities required for a good Hindu priest."

Ketut Wantra, a 9th grade Hinduism teacher, said he was teaching about the avatars, Hindu ethics, ancient philosophy and the history of Hinduism. "We try to teach the children to be humble. For example, if somebody is handsome, he should not be proud of it. We each have to remember that we all have good points and minus points. We teach about karmaphala, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan and Mahabharata. Religion and morality provide guidance to our children on how they should lead their lives in today's times."

Fellow Hinduism teacher, Gusti Ayu Nyoman Kartika, shared: "We try to teach not only theory, but the practice of Hinduism as well. We teach bhajans, yoga, mantras and how to make an offering in the temple. The children go to the school temple every day and make a small offering, called canang. On full-moon day all 4,000 students--each in traditional Balinese dress--make big offerings and perform puja together at the temple."

The teachings clearly have an impact on the students. Luh Putu Citra Dwi, 17, told me, "Hinduism helps us to maintain calmness and peacefulness. My concentration power has improved immensely, and my behavior towards others has become more friendly. Our teachers, such as Mrs. Kartika, are close to us, and they influence our lives in a greater way. What makes our school different is the focus on Hinduism. We learn other subjects to pass our exams, but we learn Hinduism to put it into practice in our lives. In general Hinduism makes all of us wiser and develops our power to judge what is good and what is bad. My aim is to become a doctor and a good human being who is useful to society."

Class 9 student, A.A. Ngr. Satria, 15, said, "I love my religion and am proud of it. Hinduism has inspired me to become a better human being. According to the Gita, we must protect those who are weak. I love the Mother Besakih temple. In my normal life, I wear Western clothes, but I don traditional Balinese dress for the temples. I was never taught to be a vegetarian while practicing Hinduism. I love meat, have it every day, and will never be a vegetarian."

Insights Into a Remarkable Culture

During my last few days in Bali, I attended personal ceremonies at Dr. Sastra's house (see p. 54-55). I also accompanied him to the large campus of Bali's Hindu University, where he teaches ayurveda. Despite its name, this is a private, secular

institution; Hinduism is taught only as part of its regular course of study, as in any other university here.

On an auspicious day at Dr. Sastra's home I attended a ceremony for another family. On a second visit to Ubud, Bali's art center, I met P. T. Damar Wayan of the erstwhile royal family of Ubud. He offered explanations about Bali's culture, philosophy and art, especially how it is all preserved as an obligation of the entire community, not just a few individuals. Finally, I met again with Dr. Arya and his Bali Youth Forum and made a good-bye visit to Darmayasa ashram.

During my flight home, images of my wonderful time in Bali came one by one before my eyes. Bali, I had learned, had one extra samskara, tooth-filing, over and above the sixteen samskaras delineated in scripture. I was pondering how to have this samskara and obtain an edge over all my Indian Hindu brethren. In a quick vision, I saw the high priest wearing his diamond-studded headgear performing the tooth filing ceremony on me. Just then I opened my eyes and took a sip of the chilled lemon juice the stewardess had served. Unexpectedly, some of my teeth were extra sensitive to the cold. I convinced myself it was due to the tooth filing completed a few seconds back by the high priest. I smiled and felt blessed that I was now carrying a lasting touch of Balinese Hinduism to India. Plpi

Panchashila: Indonesia's national ideology

Indonesia follows an ideology called Panchashila, "Five Principles." According to the government explanation, Panchashila are the five inseparable and interrelated principles at the heart of Indonesia. Each is depicted on the national seal, a Garuda, the courageous, divine, golden eagle of the Ramayana, whose image is found in many ancient Indonesian temples.

The principles are 1) Belief in the one and only God (represented by the star in the shield); 2) Just and civilized humanity (chain); 3) The unity of Indonesia (banyan tree); 4) Democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives (bull); and 5) Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia (rice and cotton). These are often generalized to refer to: religious devotion, humanitarianism, nationalism, consultative democracy and social justice. The country's motto (from a 14th century poem) is held in Garuda's talons: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, "Unity in Diversity."

Voices: Bhuvneshwar Sharma on what makes Bali different

My experience in Bali has been very sweet. Here Hindus do not do any murti (image) worship. In their temples they have constructed three pillars, and they say these are for Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. In Bali, Hindus are living with great dignity. Every house in Bali has a temple.

These people have a lot of love and affection for Indians, for they feel their ancestors came from India. Now they are curious to learn Sanskrit language. That is the reason we are establishing a chair in collaboration with Mahendradatta University, so that Sanskrit can be easily taught here.

The caste system is strong here; but for the Shudra it is not like India. There is no concept of untouchability here.

Muslims in Bali have Hindu names. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are a part of their normal lives, a part of their ancient culture. Some of them even believe that the Ramayana happened here. Muslims in Bali play the roles of different characters in Ramayana and Mahabharata. In their social life also, Hindus and Muslims do not have many differences. Even marriages are acceptable between the two religions. "Five hundred years ago, when Hindus came to Bali to save their religion, they started to eat pork because they felt then the Muslims would not try to convert them to Islam. The strategy worked; conversions were rare.

The priests here will use different mudras when they are performing a ceremony. One priest seated on a throne is the chief of the ceremony. He wears many rings in his fingers. He will hold the bell in various mudras while chanting the mantras. You will see a lot of energy on the face of the priest while he is doing the chanting.

When a ceremony is performed, both men and women have to be in traditional dress. They deeply meditate while doing the prayers and making the offerings. They do not keep any murtis in their homes, nor even calendars with pictures of Gods. Perhaps their system does not allow them to do so. They pray directly to the

Formless.

In India we often hear about sattvic food and its affect on our bodies and minds. But in Bali, even though the people have nonvegetarian food, which is said to be non-sattvic, they are very peaceful and calm, not agitated in any way. In India the meat-eaters are more aggressive and short tempered, but it is not like that here.

Balinese have tantra vidya, or black magic, to destroy their enemies. They have the eye to see the objects floating in the sky. It is because of the prevalence of black magic that they focus so much on the evil powers. Just as in the villages in India, mothers here do not allow their children to go out after dark. They also have the system of lemon and green spices being used to prevent the evil forces from acting on their dear ones.

Parents here do not worry about their daughter's marriage. The children just go home and inform their parents about their choice. Mostly the parents accept it, regardless of the caste and religion of the proposed match. Occasionally there is resentment, but ultimately the marriage is accepted. This system has been going on here for many generations. There is no dowry here; most of the expense of the marriage is incurred by the parents of the boy. The whole system of marriage is simplified. A daughter is not considered a liability.

Voices: Dr. Sara Sastra on Balinese Hindu philosophy

The first Hindu empire in Indonesia was the Kulavarman Kingdom, around the 4th century ce. It is said that our ancestors came from both South India and Orissa. During the Muslim period, our link with India was cut; and we remained out of touch until recently. The Saiva, Shakta, Tantra, Puranic, Vaishnava and Buddhist traditions have all been combined here and called Saiva Siddhanta Indonesia. Vaishnavism is not pure here as it is in India. Here Vaishnavas worship Siva.

Balinese Hinduism is Saiva Siddhanta; we believe in both dvaita and advaita concepts. If you say God is different from the human being, the Balinese will accept it. And if you say God is the same as human, we accept that also. All this makes Balinese very strong.

Balinese people are strong because of their ancient belief, which makes them very flexible. They can adopt anything that is good as their custom. But if something is not good, then it is thrown away.

Balinese people move around with their families. It is not consider good to go alone, for example, to the temple. If you go with your family, it is loved by God.

Mainly there are two types of priests: the high priest and the temple priest or the normal priest. Temple priests are called pemangku or pinanditha. They take care of conducting all the ceremonies in the temples. They are akin to the pujaris in India and are also called assistant to the high priest.

The articles I use as a priest are called Siva upakarana, the utensils for Siva worship, of which the most important is the bell. This ceremony is being done by both my wife and me and is called Ardhanarishwari, after the form of Siva as half-man and half-woman. The mantras jointly recited by us become more sacred than if recited individually. We put water in a special bowl and then pray to Ganga to convert it to holy water. At the beginning of the puja, we wear simple clothes, then in the middle we change, with the idea to protect ourselves. First we purify ourselves, then ask God to sit inside us. The priest becomes Siva. After this we wear a formal dress and crown and proceed with the puja.

There are many restrictions for a high priest. I cannot drive any vehicle. I am not supposed to go shopping. I cannot go to a cinema hall or any place associated with gambling or prostitution. I have to practice vegetarianism. Finally, I have to leave my home accompanied by at least one person."

We have special people here who construct the temples called undagis. We worship Vishwakarma, the divine architect. We do bhumi puja to start a house, building or temple. When the construction is finished, with the ceremony of malapas we bless the physical material of the building to come alive, in a sense, so people feel sheltered and protected in it. We bury five substances, pancha dhatu (gold, silver, copper, iron and ruby), which are connected to the five elements, pancha mahabhutas (earth, air, ether, fire and water) and in turn to the pancha mahadevas,

five Deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Isvara, Mahadeva and Siva). This was taught by our ancestors coming from Maharishi Markandeya. As a high priest, I am qualified to perform the pancha yagnas, the five sacrifices for the Gods, the rishis, the humans, the ghosts and the ancestors. Perhaps these traditions all came from India.

The tooth filing ceremony or samskara is local to Bali, but even it is connected to the Hindu religion through the story of Ganesha's broken tusk. In this ceremony we file the six front teeth on the upper jaw. These represent: kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), mada (pride), irshya (jealousy) and moha (attachment). This is done for all children.

When we deal with an evil spirit, we address it as saumya, "gentle one." We offer it something, and then turn it into a God. There is no killing of evil, we want to recycle. Siva is not the destroyer, Siva recycles and does not destroy.

In Balinese Hinduism, if you were to say something created by God is haram, prohibited and bad, it means God is bad. It is, after all, created by God, and why will God make something bad? It would mean God is bad also. We say that everything created by God is holy.

You have to understand that Indonesia is not an Islamic country. So far as the bhumi putra ('son of the land') concept is concerned, we Balinese Hindus are bhumi putra. We have not come from outside.

Voices: Dr. Litt I Gusti Putu Phagunadi on Balinese Saivism

There is orthodox Hinduism and modern Hinduism. In Indonesia we follow orthodox Hinduism, which may also be called Brahmanism. Modern Hinduism has been influenced by Islam and was subjected to reformation by Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and others. The orthodox interpretation of Hinduism in the Vedas includes animal sacrifice. Our Hinduism in Bali is the most ancient. The level of understanding of Hinduism is higher in Bali than in India.

Hinduism is very flexible. It will develop and adjust itself according to (as we say in

Balinese) desh, kala and patra--region, time and space.

The term Saiva Siddhanta fits us well in Bali because we worship God at three levels: Parama Siva, the highest, called by us Ida Sanghyang Widi Wasa, "Big Almighty Lord;" then Sada Siva and then Siva. Parama Siva is formless. Sada Siva is Ardhanarishwari. Ardhanarishwari is nirguna and saguna both, with form and without form. It is Siva and Shakti. The third form, Siva, is worshipped by us as a king. This is Saiva Siddhanta. No other Hindu sect follows this. Most temples in Bali are Siva temples.

We follow Durga and Siva. Siva and Durga (or Parvati) are two sides of the same coin. If we want something magical, we worship Durga. Every home worships Durga every fifteen days with animal sacrifice.

There are three paths: left, right and middle. The left path has powers like the magical powers of the tantrics of Bengal. Such powers are here in Bali even now. Right now, you see me as a human being, but at night you can see me as an animal. Until today, many Balinese can do this. This is called vama marg, left power. If a person with such powers just touches your hand, your hand may stop moving.

We do not want the tourists to disturb the holiness of our temples. We have a dress code, and they have to follow it. Tourism generates a lot of money for Bali and also for our religion. Many come here to see the yagna worship, which they have never seen before.

In Bali we believe that if we think good, speak good and act good, only then will we go to heaven--this is called Trikaya Parisuddha. Then we have the philosophy of three hitakarana which means good to the nature, good to the human beings and good to the Lord. Finally we have the pancha yagna: sacrifice to human beings, animals, Lord, ancestors and rishis. The whole philosophy of Balinese Hinduism can be summed up in these three precepts. If we follow these, we will attain Sada Siva.