Diaspora
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Anchored to its own lichen-covered, Hindu/Buddhist/Balinese way of life, this tiny island of rice Goddesses and gamelan folk music absorbs the flux of tourists, T-shirts and titillations of Western science ideas with a magical immunity.

A few years ago, Balinese Goddess Dewi Danu had a problem. A team of government scientists decided Her 1,000-year-old system of "water temples," which controls the Indonesian island's entire irrigation system, was superstitious humbuggery. They told villagers to ignore the temples and shun Her. But for centuries, farmfolk had worshipped Goddess Dewi Danu to assure abundant harvests.

Everyone knew She communicated through the high priest at the uppermost water temple, Ulun Danu Batur, perched on a sacred volcanic lake. He oversees the intricate network of downstream water shrines at each juncture and gateway that snake together 64-square miles of paddy fields. Blending Dewi Danu's shakti, agriculture savvy, and mellow, roadside diplomacy, he and his fellow priests assured high yields, year after year. As the government scientists bulldogged ahead with Western pesticides mentality, Goddess Dewi Danu (a feminine form of Vishnu) carefully choreographed Her solution.

As if from a storybook, one day, high priest Gero Gde got an inspiration to contact a young Californian he had met on the inland 17 yeas earlier. Steve, now Dr. Lansing, a distinguished scientist and chairman of the Anthropology Department at the University of Southern California, got the urgent invitation to help from his old Bali priest friend. In no time, he recruited scientist buddy Dr. James Kramer, associate professor of biology at USC, packed a few T-shirts and flew off to Bali - with the latest in Apple's Macintosh computer technology - to enlighten the misguided scientist about the agricultural powers of the Goddess. They sensed Her Presence. As Dr. Kramer later confessed, "I would be the last to deny that the Goddess brought me. The circuitous route by which I found myself involved in this

project is something less than rational."

Goddess' Team Arrives

Dr. Lansing knew Bali's temple system worked, but he didn't know how. Fluent in Balinese, he tied on a sarong skirt, flower shirt and attended water temple rituals, observed, studied and compiled water temple data. Soon he and Dr. Kramer revealed how the complex Balinese calendar system accurately set the optimum rice planting times each year. (An earlier scientist had dismissed the calendar as, "completely divorced from the flow of observable natural events." He also confirmed the priests' personal presence is invaluable. For example, in settling a dispute, second high priest, Jero Gde Alitan related: "I said to the two farmers, 'Who created this water? Who decides if this spring is full or dries up? Do you understand that if we fight over this gift from the Goddess, Her spring might just dry up? Completely vanish?' I brought them all up to the temple here, and when we had it settled, work began. The new canal ran off below the spring, and took off a lot of water. But - now this the point - not 200 meters further downstream, the flow was back to normal. In fact, [the water supply] actually increased after everything was finished!"

Dr. Kramer's Macintosh computer program took into account the important variables of Bali's agriculture, such as rainfall, predators, pest outbreaks, etc. In a meeting held at the Ulun Danu temple, they demonstrated for scientists, priests and government officials the value of the water temples - through fancy computer simulations and graphs. Everyone was convinced. The government abandoned its plan to dismantle the ancient religious system. And no one at the meeting brought up the "efficacy quotient" of the farmers daily flower pujas to Her at hundreds of small paddy shrines. No one had to.

Today

For many years, Bali has been cast as the weekend party stop for Aussie beerbusters, a photo paradise for Japanese shutter-bugs and an open-air massage parlor for the prurient. Actually, that picture is unfair. "The government has contained that sort of stuff to one area, Kuta Beach in the south," Zeyba Rahman shared with HINDUISM TODAY. Zeyba is a Bharata Natyam dancer. Khayals

songster, writer and jewelry maker and returned form her second stay in Bali last December. She shared that more and more, spiritual groups are pilgrimaging to Bali, sensitive to its extraordinary culture and eager simply to bask in its tangible rays of effective cultural warmth. Bali's amorphous fountain of colorful religious expression appeals to Hindu, Buddhist and New Ager alike. Zeyba journeyed there a few years ago with The Naropa Institute, a Colorado Buddhist organization. But there are many others - a Sufi group, the California Institute of Noetic Sciences and the Experiment in International Living to name a few. On her recent visit, Bali greeted her with open arms. "My very first morning, outside our guest house, a beautiful procession came down the road. In the dawn sunlight - a gamelan (music group), women in kebayas, their tight-fitting blouses and sarongs, carrying baskets of fruit offerings, incense, children and the priests chanting in Kawi, the ancient half-Sanskrit Javanese tongue. A few nights later my husband and I were taken to a Hindu temple of a Goddess for a ceremony. They dressed me all up in a sarong and my husband in a sarong, too, and kurta…But most of the time, men, women, girls and boys all wear the unisex T-shirts and jeans outfit. We asked our young male driver who was singing an American hit tune one day: 'What about Legong, your traditional music?' He quickly stopped and started swaying his whole body so subtly to Legong rhythms. 'But western music is like this,' and he jerked his head up and down. "There is no comparison. I feel the Balinese cultural core is very much intact. Western influence has not touched it. I think that is because their way of life is so seamless, no cracks, no division made between religious life and regular life for foreign ideas to penetrate."

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