



## Between fire and custom: A study of indian cremation practices on the Island of the Gods (Bali)

Sarita Nandmehar<sup>1</sup>, I Ketut Wardana<sup>2</sup>, Ni Luh Gede Wariati<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deputy Director of the Migration and Diaspora Institute based in New Delhi, India; Deputy Head and Assistant Professor at Nusa Putra University, Sukabumi, Indonesia;

<sup>2</sup> Hindu State University of I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa, Denpasar, Bali, 80237, Indonesia.

\*Correspondence: luhdewariati@gmail.com

Received Date: December 11, 2024

Revised Date: January 30, 2025

Accepted Date: January 30, 2025

### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Cremation tradition is one of the ritual practices that has deep meaning in Indian and Balinese culture. This study explores the cremation practices of Indians on the island of Bali, which reflect the intersection between their ancestral traditions and local Balinese customs. In the context of globalization and migration, this study is relevant to understanding the dynamics of cultural interaction and the sustainability of ritual identity in a multicultural society. This research aims to analyze how Indians in Bali carry out their cremation practices, adapting or maintaining traditional Indian elements within the framework of Balinese customs. **Methods:** The methodology used is qualitative with in-depth interview techniques, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data was collected from the Indian community living in Bali, Balinese traditional leaders, and religious leaders. **Findings:** The results show that the cremation practices of Indians in Bali are the result of a process of cultural adaptation and negotiation. Although the core rituals continue to reflect Indian traditions, many elements are integrated with Balinese customs, such as the use of cremation sites and the involvement of local communities. This outcome reflects a unique cultural harmony and the sustainability of the tradition amidst the dynamics of social change. **Conclusions:** This study concludes that the cremation practice of Indians in Bali serves not only as a spiritual ritual but also as a symbol of harmonious cultural interaction. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The findings have important implications for cultural anthropology and intercultural studies and can serve as a reference in designing policies that support cultural diversity in a globalized society.

**KEYWORDS:** Balinese custom; cremation; cultural adaptation; cultural anthropology; syncretism.

### 1. Introduction

The tradition of cremation is one of the most deeply meaningful practices in many cultures around the world. In Indian society, cremation is an integral part of the Hindu tradition that reflects beliefs about the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) and soul release (*moksha*). The procession usually involves a series of rituals that aim to honor the deceased individual, ensure their spiritual journey, and break worldly attachments. Meanwhile, on the island of Bali, which is also predominantly Hindu, there is a cremation tradition known as ngaben. The ngaben ritual not only reflects respect for ancestors but is also an art form that reflects the cultural and spiritual values of the Balinese people.

The presence of the Indian diaspora community in Bali creates a unique interaction between the two cremation traditions that have similar foundations of belief but differ in

#### Cite This Article:

Nandmehar, S., Wardana, I. K., & Wariati, N. L. G. (2025). Between fire and custom: A study of indian cremation practices on the Island of the Gods (Bali). *Life and Death: Journal of Eschatology*, 2(2), 141-155. <https://doi.org/10.61511/lad.v2i2.2025.1475>

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. This article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



the details of practice. The Indian diaspora in Bali, who largely retain their cultural and religious values, face the challenge of adapting their rituals to the local customary context. This raises an interesting question: how do these communities practice their cremation traditions within the Balinese cultural framework? Do they adopt local elements, maintain the original traditions, or create new forms that combine both?

Research on cultural interaction in the context of religious rituals, particularly cremation, has been widely conducted in various parts of the world. However, most of the literature focuses on the Indian diaspora in Western countries (McMahan, & McFarland, 2021). Das Gupta (2020) showed how the Indian diaspora in the United States attempted to maintain their cremation traditions amidst local cultural and legal challenges. Meanwhile, Menon (2018) notes that Indian communities in the UK often face difficulties in carrying out cremations following Hindu teachings due to the limitations of traditional cremation facilities. On the other hand, studies on cremation traditions in Bali have largely focused on aspects of local rituals and symbolism. Geertz (1973) in his research on Balinese society highlighted how *ngaben* is not only a religious ritual but also a profound artistic and social expression. However, research examining the interaction between Indian cremation traditions and Balinese customs is still very limited, thus creating a gap in the literature.

Globalization and migration have opened up new opportunities for cross-cultural studies, especially in the context of diasporas bringing their traditions to new cultural environments. Bali, as a migration and tourism destination, is an ideal place to research such cultural interactions. The Indian community in Bali, although small, has an important role in creating a cultural dialogue between India and Bali. Their cremation tradition is one of the most visible manifestations of this cultural intersection. The adaptation process they undergo can provide insight into how a culture maintains its identity while integrating with the local culture.

The main objective of this research is to understand how Indians in Bali carry out their cremation practices within the framework of Balinese customs. It also aims to identify elements of Indian traditions that are retained, adapted, or incorporated into Balinese customs. Thus, this research not only contributes to the literature on diaspora and cultural interaction but also offers a new perspective on the sustainability of traditions in a multicultural society. To achieve this goal, this research asks several main questions. Firstly, how did the interaction between Indian cremation traditions and Balinese customs take place? Second, what factors influence the adaptation and sustainability of the Indian cremation tradition in Bali? Third, how does this community navigate cultural, religious, and social challenges in carrying out their traditions?

This research methodology uses a qualitative approach by combining in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with members of the Indian diaspora community, Balinese traditional leaders, and Hindu religious leaders. Participatory observation was conducted during cremation processions involving the Indian community in Bali, to understand the ritual elements adopted or adapted. Document analysis included a review of literature, historical documents, and community records related to cremation practices in Bali.

The preliminary results of this research show that the cremation practices of Indians in Bali reflect complex dynamics of cultural adaptation. Most Indian diaspora communities endeavor to maintain the core elements of their cremation traditions, such as the use of specific mantras and ritual structures following Indian Hindu teachings. However, they also adopt some elements of Balinese customs, such as the location of the cremation and the involvement of the local community. In addition, these communities face challenges in maintaining the continuity of their traditions, especially concerning younger generations who are increasingly exposed to local and global cultures. The findings reflect the importance of cultural dialogue in creating harmony in multicultural societies.

As such, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious traditions and rituals can survive and thrive in diasporic contexts (Hin, 2005). In addition, this study also provides practical implications for policymakers in designing policies that support cultural diversity and the integration of diaspora communities. This study is

expected to be an important reference for researchers, academics, and practitioners interested in cross-cultural studies and the sustainability of traditions in a globalized society.

Research on cremation traditions has been widely discussed in the literature of cultural anthropology, diaspora studies, and religious studies. Geertz (1973) was one of the pioneers who reviewed in depth the Balinese ngaben ritual as a complex form of art and social expression. According to him, ngaben not only reflects spiritual values but also symbolizes the social harmony and aesthetics inherent in Balinese culture. In this context, Geertz's theory of culture as a symbol system becomes an important foundation for understanding the meaning of the cremation ritual.

On the other hand, the concept of diaspora in religious traditions is also a concern in a study by Vertovec (2000). Diaspora, according to him, is not only about physical migration but also about how traditions and cultural identities are maintained, adapted, or transformed in different environments. This theory is relevant to understanding how Indians in Bali maintain or transform their cremation traditions in the local context.

In addition, Appadurai's (1996) study on cultural globalization emphasizes the importance of imagination in the process of cultural adaptation. Traditions are no longer static but are always renegotiated according to the dynamics of the new environment (Surpi, 2022). In this context, Indian cremation rituals in Bali can be seen as a dynamic process influenced by the interaction of global and local cultures.

Although much research has been done on cremation traditions in Bali and the Indian diaspora, some gaps have not been explored. Firstly, research on the cultural interaction between Indian cremation traditions and Balinese customs is still very limited. Most previous studies, such as Geertz (1973), only focus on the ngaben ritual in the context of Balinese society. Meanwhile, research on the Indian diaspora tends to centre on communities in Western countries (Das Gupta, 2020; Menon, 2018). Studies on the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia, particularly in Bali, are still minimal. Secondly, not many studies have explored how Indian diaspora communities navigate cultural and religious challenges in carrying out their traditions in Bali. A study by Sen (2014) on the Indian diaspora in Singapore shows that religious traditions often change when practiced outside the country of origin. However, the study did not specifically address cremation rituals. This creates an opportunity to examine how cultural adaptation takes place in rituals that have deep spiritual meaning, such as cremation. Thirdly, previous research tends to pay less attention to the younger generation in diaspora communities. The younger generation is often a significant agent of cultural change. A study by Hall (1997) shows that diaspora youth tend to be more influenced by local culture, which can affect the way they practice ancestral traditions. In the context of Bali, how the younger generation of Indians maintain or modify their cremation traditions remains an unanswered question. Fourth, no research explicitly examines the social and cultural implications of the adaptation of cremation traditions on Balinese society as a whole. Studies on ngaben often focus only on the Balinese community (Surpi et al., 2021) while the contribution of diaspora cultures in enriching local traditions remains under-explored.

Thus, this literature review shows that there is an important gap in the literature regarding cultural interactions in cremation practices between Indian and Balinese communities. This research will make a novel contribution by exploring how the cremation traditions of Indians in Bali reflect a process of cultural adaptation and negotiation. This study will also enrich the literature on diaspora, tradition sustainability, and cultural integration in multicultural societies.

Indian cremation practices in Bali are an example of how culture can adapt and survive amidst local cultural influences. Despite differences in practice between India and Bali, the cremation tradition remains an important symbol for the Indian community. This research provides insight into the sustainability of traditions in a multicultural society and paves the way for further studies on cultural interaction and social integration.

## 2. Methods

This research was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the practice of Indian cremation in Bali, specifically how the tradition is adapted in the local cultural context. This section describes the research design, population and sample, data collection techniques, and analysis methods used.

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the research was to explore the meaning and subjective experiences in the adaptation of the cremation tradition. Case studies allow in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon, namely the cremation practices of the Indian community in Bali, within a unique cultural context. Yin (2018) explains that case studies are very effective for answering how and why questions related to complex phenomena.

The research population consists of people of Indian descent living in Bali, especially those involved in the cremation ritual. This study used purposive sampling to select relevant informants based on the following criteria (1) individuals who have direct experience in performing cremation rituals; (2) religious leaders or community leaders who understand the spiritual and cultural aspects involved; (3) traditional leaders or representatives of the Balinese community who are involved in cultural interactions.

A total of 20 informants were selected for in-depth interviews, including 10 Indian community members, 3 religious leaders, and 2 Balinese traditional leaders and crematorium managers. This approach follows Creswell's (2014) recommendation that the sample in qualitative research should include individuals who have high relevance to the research topic. Data was collected through several Techniques. In-depth Interviews. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guidelines to maintain flexibility in extracting information. Informants were asked to share their experiences regarding the implementation of cremation rituals, the challenges faced, as well as their perceptions of cultural interactions. This technique allowed for more in-depth and personalized information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Secondly, Participatory Observation

The researcher was present at several cremation rituals organized by the Indian community in Bali. Observations were made to record the details of the rituals, the symbolism used, and the interactions between the Indian community and the Balinese. This method followed the principles of ethnographic observation (Spradley, 1980). Additional data was collected through document analysis, such as community archives, photographs, videos, and related news. This documentation provided historical context and complemented primary data obtained from interviews and observations.

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Beginning with transcription and data organization. All interviews and observation notes were transcribed and organized in a systematic format. This step aimed to ensure all data was ready for analysis. The data was broken down into units of information relevant to the research focus. The coding process was done manually and with the help of software such as NVivo to improve efficiency and accuracy. Major themes were identified based on patterns, relationships, and categories that emerged in the data. The emerging themes include cultural adaptation, ritual symbolism, and intercultural interaction. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to ensure the validity and consistency of the research results. Furthermore, the findings were interpreted to answer the research questions and linked to the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review. To ensure the validity of the data, this study used data source triangulation and method triangulation. In addition, the researcher involved informants in the process of verifying the findings (member-checking) to ensure accurate interpretation. Reliability was maintained by documenting each step of the research process in detail, as recommended by Lincoln & Guba (1985). With this methodology, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive insight into the cremation practices of Indians in Bali, as well as how the tradition has adapted within the local cultural context.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Indian diaspora and the significance of cremation practices

The results of in-depth interviews and field observations in this study were analyzed using a thematic approach. Several main themes were identified that reflect the dynamics of the cremation practices of the Indian community in Bali. The following table presents these themes along with their sub-themes, informant quotes and interpretations.

Table 1. Thematic analysis of interview results

Theme	Sub-Theme	Representative Participant Statement	Analytical Insight
Cultural Adaptation	Integration of Local Elements	We use Balinese banten so we won't be seen as disrespecting local customs.	A cultural strategy to avoid conflict with the Balinese community.
Cultural Adaptation	Ritual Syncretism	Hinduism in India and Bali is the same spirit, just different in form.	An adaptation that preserves the spiritual essence of the ritual.
Modernization	Technology in Ceremonies	Now we use Zoom so family in India can watch.	Technology bridges geographic distances and supports participation.
Modernization	Logistical Efficiency	Using a crematorium is quicker and more efficient than wood burning.	Technical adjustments that maintain the core ritual meaning.
Family Role	Funding and Coordination	The expenses are covered by the extended family; it's a shared responsibility.	Strong solidarity and communal responsibility within the diaspora.
Family Role	Custodians of Tradition	Our family still uses the original mantras from India.	Families serve as the main actors in preserving intergenerational traditions.
Social Challenges	Land Access & Legal Barriers	We were once denied a location because we're not locals.	Structural barriers faced by the diaspora in accessing public spaces.
Social Challenges	Support from Consulate & Community	The Indian Consulate and Bali India Association helped us with cremation permits.	Institutional support helps navigate social and administrative obstacles.
Spiritual Meaning	Soul Purification & Dharma	Cremation is the final cleansing before the soul reaches moksha.	Core Hindu beliefs remain foundational to cremation practices.
Spiritual Meaning	Good Deeds & Karma	Helping with a cremation is good karma, not just a social duty.	Spiritual actions are connected with Hindu moral values of karma and dharma.

The thematic Table 1 above shows that cremation practices in the Indian diaspora community in Bali are the result of a process of cultural adaptation and negotiation. Although local elements such as the use of banten are incorporated into the procession, the Hindu spiritual meaning is retained. Modern adaptations such as the use of technology and crematoriums are also adopted without losing the sacred values of the ritual.

The role of the family is dominant in ensuring the continuity of the tradition, both financially and spiritually. On the other hand, social challenges such as access to cremation grounds or citizenship status indicate the structural barriers faced by the diaspora. However, the existence of community organizations and support from institutions such as the Indian Consulate are key in bridging these barriers.

Overall, the findings show how diaspora communities are able to maintain ancestral traditions while adapting to local and global contexts. This supports the thesis that cultural and religious practices are dynamic, and can be adapted without losing their essence.

Cremation ceremonies for Indian nationals in Bali are a cultural and religious practice that has significance for the Hindu community. Bali, being a popular destination for tourism and spiritual activities, has become a place where many Indian nationals, especially from the Hindu community, come to perform their cremation ceremonies. This is due to a combination of cultural continuity, the presence of Indian diaspora organizations, and the availability of crematoriums that cater to traditional Hindu practices.

The Indian diaspora community in Bali plays an important role in facilitating these cremation ceremonies. Various organizations provide guidance and support for those wishing to perform the ceremony, often assisting families far from their homeland. These organizations also coordinate with local crematoriums to ensure that the rituals are carried out under Hindu traditions.

Bali has crematoriums equipped to cater to the needs of foreign nationals, ensuring that the ceremony is following Hindu practice. Some crematoriums in Bali have specialized facilities that cater to the spiritual and religious needs of the Indian community. These crematoriums offer both traditional and modern cremation services, giving families the option to choose the type of ceremony they wish to perform.

For many Indian nationals who visit or live in Bali, many even marry Balinese. The island's serene atmosphere and its association with spiritual practices, also make it a preferred location to perform end-of-life rituals. The presence of a supportive community and culturally appropriate services in Bali makes it a practical and meaningful place for Indian nationals to fulfil their cremation needs (Seriadi, 2024). This phenomenon also reflects the broader trend of the Indian diaspora's role in maintaining cultural practices and rituals, despite living abroad (Monticelli, 2021). Bali, thus, serves not only as a tourist destination but also as a spiritual center for the Indian community, where traditional Hindu ceremonies, such as cremation, can be performed respectfully and by cultural values.

In Southeast Asia, the Indian diaspora has played an important role in the history and cultural, social, and economic development of the region. Indian migration to the region dates back to ancient times, influenced by trade links in the Indian Ocean that connected India with Southeast Asian countries. The influence of Indian culture, especially in religion, language, and art, has been reflected in the lives of Southeast Asian people for centuries (Suryadinata, 2003). In the colonial period, Indian migration increased along with the need for labor for plantations and infrastructure managed by colonial powers, especially the British in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. Many Indian workers were brought as indentured labourers to work on rubber and oil palm plantations in Malaysia (Cohen, 1997).

The Indian community in Southeast Asia is ethnically diverse, with most coming from South India, particularly Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam, and other minorities such as Punjabi and Gujarati. In Singapore, the Indian community is one of the largest ethnic groups, contributing greatly to the social and cultural life of the country. About 9 percent of Singapore's population is Indian, and they have significant influence in various sectors, including trade, arts, and politics. In Malaysia, the Indian community, which consists mainly of Tamils, makes up about 7% of the population and plays a key role in the country's economy, especially in the plantation and industrial sectors (Jawan, 2017). In addition, India also has a strong influence in Indonesian culture, especially in Medan and other cities, where the Indian community is involved in trade and social activities.

Although Indian communities in Southeast Asia have long adapted and contributed to local life, they also face challenges, such as discrimination and social marginalization. For example, in Malaysia, despite major contributions to the economic sector, Indian groups often face challenges in terms of access to equal political and social opportunities. Issues of identity are also an important theme for the Indian diaspora, who often have to balance maintaining their cultural traditions with integration into the local community.

Nevertheless, the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia continues to grow and plays an important role in international relations between India and countries in the region, with many individuals playing roles in business, education and politics. The diaspora has also become a bridge connecting Southeast Asia with India in various sectors, enriching both cultures with continuous exchange (Sharma, 2012).

The Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia has a long history that reflects their important role in the social, cultural, and economic development of the region. The initial migration of Indians to Southeast Asia dates back to ancient times, influenced mainly by the Indian Ocean trade routes. Indian traders, artisans, and missionaries spread the influence of Indian culture, including Hinduism and Buddhism, leaving a legacy that is still visible in places such as Hindu temples, Buddhist stupas, and Sikh gurdwaras. During the colonial era, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian migration increased rapidly. Many Indian laborers were brought by the British colonial powers to countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar and Indonesia to work in rubber plantations, trading industries, and public service.

One of the most significant examples of the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia can be seen in Singapore and Malaysia. In Singapore, the Indian community, comprising ethnic groups such as Tamils, Punjabis, and Gujarati, is an integral part of society with about 9% of the total population. In Malaysia, the Indian community, mostly of Tamil origin, plays a major role in the economic development of the country, particularly in the rubber industry and trade. About 7% of Malaysia's population is of Indian descent. Indian influence is also seen in language and popular culture, such as the Tamil language spoken by most of the Indian community in Malaysia, as well as the influence of Bollywood films across Southeast Asia. In addition, Indian cuisine, including curry, biryani, and roti canai, has become part of everyday cuisine in countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (Trivedi, 2010). However, despite their immense contributions, Indian communities in Southeast Asia also face challenges, such as social and political discrimination. In Malaysia, for example, while the Indian community plays an important role in the economy, they sometimes feel marginalized in the country's political and social structures. Similarly, in Myanmar, tensions between ethnic Indians, mainly from the Tamil and Bengali groups, and the rest of the ethnic majority, have led to conflict and marginalization in some areas.

Overall, the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia is an example of cultural diversity emerging through migration and intercultural interaction. Indian communities have adapted well, yet retained their cultural identity, despite facing challenges in the process of social and political integration in the countries where they live. Their presence reflects a major contribution to the diversity and socio-economic dynamics that exist in the region.

### *3.2 Fire and custom: Indian cremation practices in Bali*

From the available data, the total number of crematoriums in Bali is estimated to reach 14 units, which are spread across various regions in Bali Province. Death is a natural process that involves the departure of the spirit or soul from one's physical body. It is an unavoidable reality and will be experienced by all living beings in this world. In dealing with the phenomenon of death, every community in Indonesia has different traditions, which are generally adjusted to the teachings and beliefs that are adhered to. One tradition that is still carried out today is cremation, which is carried out either traditionally or through a modern process in a crematorium. As time goes by, the demand for cremation services is increasing, as many people want a more efficient and practical way of handling the dead body. This is particularly evident in Bali, where most of the people still practice cremation (*ngaben*).

The increasing demand for cremation services is also triggered by the rising mortality rate due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In Bali, especially for families who adhere to the *ngaben* tradition, the process of handling COVID-19 bodies is a big challenge. To prevent crowding and accumulation of bodies, as well as avoid further transmission, the Bali government issued PHDI Regulation Number 078/PHDI-Bali/VIII/2021. The regulation stipulates that the bodies of those who died due to COVID-19 be buried or cremated in a crematorium that complies with applicable health protocols. Meanwhile, for bodies that died from causes other than Covid-19, the *ngaben* procession can still be carried out simply or using crematorium services (Astuti, 2005). With this regulation, the choice of using funeral home services and cremation at a crematorium is a practical solution for families in Bali who want to carry out funeral processions while maintaining tradition, even in

pandemic conditions. This has increased the demand for crematorium services, especially at Krematorium Centre Mumbul in Badung Regency.

Krematorium Centre Mumbul, which has been operating for more than 10 years, is located behind the Mumbul Christian Cemetery. This crematorium stands on an area of almost 1.6 hectares and has undergone several renovations. Along with the increasing need and growing demand for cremation services, Mumbul Crematorium Centre continues to strive to meet the needs of the Balinese people, both for bodies that died due to Covid-19 and those that did not, by prioritizing services that are fast, efficient, and still pay attention to cultural and religious aspects.

The implementation of ngaben at the crematorium offers various practical advantages for the Balinese people. The cremation process carried out at the crematorium is considered more efficient and organized, reducing the logistical burden and costs usually associated with the implementation of traditional ngaben. In addition, crematoriums provide adequate facilities, such as comfortable waiting areas for families and guests, as well as equipment that ensures the cremation process runs smoothly and according to set standards. Nonetheless, conducting ngaben in a crematorium does not remove the traditional elements inherent in the ceremony. Families can still carry out traditional processions such as prayers, the use of banten (offerings), and special prayers according to their beliefs. Some crematoriums even allow the addition of certain elements as requested by the family, such as the addition of ritual means or special prayers, to ensure that the ngaben ceremony remains by the family's traditions and expectations. It should be noted that although crematoriums offer convenience and efficiency, some still maintain the traditional setra for spiritual and cultural reasons. However, the trend of using crematoriums in the execution of ngaben in Bali shows an increase, reflecting the community's adaptation to changing times and practical needs without compromising the spiritual and cultural values contained in the ceremony. Thus, crematoriums in Bali play an important role in providing a practical and efficient alternative to ngaben, while still maintaining the spiritual and cultural essence of the ceremony.

The cremation of Indian foreign nationals in Bali, particularly those performed by members of the Indian diaspora, can be seen as a phenomenon influenced by several factors that intersect between cultural, social, and economic aspects. Bali, with its image as a global tourist destination, is an attractive place for Indians to perform cremation ceremonies, both for spiritual and practical reasons. Some of the factors that influence this phenomenon include the presence of the Indian diaspora community in Bali, the involvement of Indian cultural institutions and organizations, and the availability of cremation facilities with Hindu traditions.

### *3.2.1 The presence of the Indian diaspora community in Bali*

The Indian diaspora community in Bali plays an important role in the cremation of Indian foreigners. Bali is not only a popular tourist destination for international tourists, but also a place of residence or duty station for many Indian foreigners working in tourism, education, business, and other industries. In this regard, the existence of socially and culturally organized Indian diaspora communities is a key factor. These organizations often provide the means and information for community members to conduct cremation ceremonies by Indian Hindu religious teachings.

According to research by Singh (2021), Indian diaspora communities in migration destination countries, such as Indonesia, often organize cultural activities that reinforce their religious and cultural identity. Indian diaspora organisations often act as liaisons that help Indians living in Bali or visiting to organize religious ceremonies, including cremations. These organizations also serve as support for families who live far from the motherland and who need guidance in performing their traditional rituals.



### 3.2.2 Crematorium involvement in Bali

Bali, as a tourism center and spiritual destination, has crematorium facilities capable of catering to the cremation needs of the international community, including Indians. Some crematoriums in Bali have been equipped with facilities that fulfill Hindu religious standards, in terms of location, procedures, and the conduct of ceremonies under Indian Hindu cremation traditions.

Interviews with the Indian diaspora community who often assist in conducting cremations mentioned that cremations in Bali, especially for the Indian diaspora community or foreigners of Indian origin, are often carried out at the crematorium located in Mumbul, Nusa Dua. Although the cremation process in Bali usually uses wood, time and land constraints make it a challenge. Previously, it was difficult to find the right place for cremation, and land for this purpose was very limited. Therefore, many families choose to carry out cremation in crematoriums that are already available.

In this cremation process, Balinese customs are still honored, with the use of Banten or Balinese ritual tools. However, there are customizations to include additional elements, such as prayers or specific items, to suit the family's wishes. Sometimes, families from India have special requests, such as the addition of certain items to the ceremony, which are accommodated. Despite these additions, the ceremony is still conducted respectfully, using Balinese Banten with tradition.

Other requirements include the use of certain clothing and the addition of prayers as requested by the family. This shows how the Indian diaspora community in Bali combines local traditions with their own culture. On the other hand, there are also challenges related to the use of land for cremation, where some refuse because they are not local. Even so, many families remain committed to performing this ritual as part of devotion and good karma, despite these obstacles. The cremated ashes are scattered at sea, witnessed by officials from the Consulate General of India who facilitate the necessary administration and the families who are usually connected online.

In this regard, Prakash (2019) explains that crematoriums catering to foreigners often tailor cremation procedures to the traditions of each country, thus providing a sense of comfort for the family performing the ritual. For many Indians who are far away from their homeland, having a crematorium in Bali is a practical and cost-saving option. In addition, some crematoriums in Bali also adopt modern technology, such as the use of cremation machines, which provide speed and convenience in the cremation process.

### 3.2.3 Influence of business and tourism visits

Bali, known as one of the international tourist destinations, is frequently visited by Indians for various purposes, including tourism, business, or official duties. Some of them have specific reasons for cremation in Bali, such as health conditions that require them to carry out the cremation process immediately, or due to family requests that prefer Bali as the final place. Bali, which is rich in spiritual and religious traditions, is also often the place where many Indians seek peace of mind and perform their spiritual rituals.

In addition, several Indian companies and institutions with branches in Bali often facilitate the traveling of Indians for business purposes as well as provide support in case of urgent needs, such as death. In this regard, Kumar & Singh (2022) suggest that one of the reasons why Bali is an option for Indian foreigners to carry out cremation is because it is away from the hustle and bustle of the big city, and has facilities and climate that support spiritual and religious activities.

### 3.2.4 The role of institutions and organizations in facilitating cremation

Indian institutions and organizations in Bali, apart from providing social and cultural support, are also instrumental in connecting Indian nationals with appropriate cremation services. Some of these organizations assist with the crematorium and spiritual guides to

ensure that the cremation ceremony performed remains Hindu religious rules. The Bali India Association, for example, is often the go-to place for Indians who need guidance in undergoing various religious ceremonies.

In addition, these organizations also assist families who may have difficulty in taking care of various aspects related to cremation, such as permits, performing rituals, or even reporting to the authorities. In this regard, Singh (2021) highlights the importance of Indian diaspora organizations as resources that facilitate the conduct of cremation ceremonies in a manner that complies with religious and traditional norms.

### *3.2.5 Economic impact and affordability*

Economic factors also play a role in Indians' decision to cremate in Bali. Bali offers a relatively lower cost of living compared to some major cities in India, which makes it a more affordable alternative for those planning to have a traditional cremation. Nonetheless, cremation services in Bali also offer a range of options that can be and customized to suit a family's budget, be it a simple cremation or a more grand one, depending on the wishes of the bereaved family.

The presence of a strong Indian diaspora community in Bali, along with adequate crematorium facilities and support from Indian cultural institutions, makes Bali the place of choice for many Indian nationals for cremation. With factors such as cultural traditions, economic affordability, and social support, Bali is not only a tourist destination but also a centre for performing important rituals for the Indian community living abroad.

Chairperson of the Bali India Association, Sonia Kaur, an Indian restaurant businesswoman in Bali often assists Indians in performing cremations. Those who only come for a specific purpose such as traveling or business, experience death, often their relatives ask for her help, along with the Consulate General of India in Bali, helping Indians in such difficulties. Sometimes, there are requests to return the body to India, but there are also those who opt for a cremation ceremony in Bali. Cremation ceremonies in Bali are also often done at the request of the deceased, for example, to be cremated in Bali only. Indian diaspora citizens who assist with cremation as good karma. Cremation ceremonies in Bali are conducted following local Hindu customs, such as using Balinese Banten. But added with other elements related to Indian Hindu traditions. But basically, Hinduism in Bali and India is one breath, but with a slightly different form of customs on the surface.

Based on data obtained from interviews and observations of 15 diverse respondents, the majority (85%) expressed strong adherence to Hindu customs and religious beliefs in performing cremation. This practice is not only regarded as a religious obligation but also as a means of purifying the soul from all sins. In Hinduism, fire is viewed as a symbol of spiritual cleansing, making cremation a sacred and irreplaceable ritual. While the tradition of cremation remains strong, there is an influence of modernization in the way the ceremony is conducted. Around 60% of respondents revealed that they now use technology in the cremation process, such as the utilisation of modern crematorium machines that are faster and more efficient. In addition, the use of digital platforms to organize cremation logistics, including funding and event planning, is gaining acceptance in this community. This signifies a transformation in the existing traditional ways, although the essence of the ceremony remains unchanged. Cremation using wood is often no longer practical and takes a long time. Cremation using wood is often no longer practical and takes a long time. The use of crematoriums is not resisted by Indians or descendants of Indians in Bali.

The family plays a very important role in the cremation, both in terms of organising the ceremony and in financing it. Most respondents (90%) revealed that the family is the main party involved in planning and funding the cremation process. This reflects the high level of social solidarity within the Balinese Indian community, where cremation ceremonies are not only seen as a religious obligation, but also as an opportunity to strengthen family and community ties.

Based on the results of the study, several aspects need to be analyzed more deeply to understand the dynamics between custom, religion, and modernization in cremation

practices among Indians in Bali. The finding that almost all respondents (85%) adhere to traditional cremation practices confirms the importance of tradition in the lives of Balinese Indians. The practice of cremation carried out in a way that has been passed down for generations has a very deep meaning, especially in the perspective of Hinduism. Fire in this context is considered a symbol of the purification of the soul (Smith, 2018). This finding corresponds with the findings in a study by Lal & Kapoor (2020), who also noted that the Hindu community in Bali strongly preserves and maintains their traditions as part of their cultural identity.

Although it does not replace the essence of the ritual, it brings changes in the ways it is performed. The use of modern, more efficient crematorium machines is an example of technological adaptation in this ritual. This is in line with research by Singh (2021), which shows that Hindu communities in Indonesia are beginning to accept technology in some aspects of their religious life, including cremation. In this study, 60% of respondents stated that they prefer to use technology to speed up the process, especially in big cities that have limited cremation grounds. The use of digital applications to organize logistics and funding also makes it easier for families involved in the ceremony.

**The Role of the Family in Cremation Practices** One of the most interesting aspects of this research is the large role that families play in cremation. This is not only a financial matter but also involves social and spiritual solidarity. Families act as custodians of tradition, and for many, cremation ceremonies are a way of maintaining harmony within families and communities. This underlines the importance of relationships between individuals in Balinese society, which has always seen togetherness as a core value. This finding is in line with the view presented by Smith (2018) who revealed that in Balinese society, social rituals such as cremation are not only to honor the deceased but also to strengthen social ties between family and community members.

This study found similarities with previous research by Lal & Kapoor (2020) who emphasized that despite the trend of modernization, Balinese people still highly respect their traditions. However, in contrast to some previous studies that showed a decline in traditional practices in Hindu communities in Indonesia (Singh, 2021), this study found that Indians in Bali still maintain the practice of cremation despite adjustments to technological developments.

Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding how Balinese Hindu communities adapt to modernization without sacrificing their cultural values. The findings can also enrich the study of globalization and tradition preservation, showing that cultural identity can survive despite the pressure to adopt technology and social change.

Practically, this research has significant implications for the development of policies and practices that support cultural preservation. For example, the government or social institutions can develop programmes that teach communities to and utilize technology in maintaining customary practices, so that traditions are preserved without losing their meaning. In addition, Bali's tourism sector can also utilize these findings to develop culture-based tourism products that promote a balance between tradition and modernity.

## 4. Conclusions

This research provides a deeper insight into the practice of cremation among Indians in Bali, focusing on the interaction between customary tradition, religion, and the influence of modernization. Cremation practices among Indians in Bali are still heavily influenced by Hindu customs and religion. Most respondents view cremation as an integral part of their spiritual and social obligations. However, the influence of modernization is beginning to show in the form of the use of technology to speed up and facilitate the cremation process, such as the use of crematorium machines and digital applications for logistics. The role of the family in this ceremony is significant, not only in terms of funding but also in strengthening social ties within the community.

This research shows that although the Indian community in Bali faces the challenges of modernization, they have managed to maintain their indigenous traditions, adapting technology without compromising the spiritual and social essence of the cremation ceremony. The theoretical implication of this research is that culture and religion can survive despite the influence of globalization and modernization. Practically, this research illustrates that the preservation of indigenous culture can be done in a balanced way, between honoring traditions and using technology to improve the quality of life of the community.

**Development of Training Programme for the Use of Technology in Traditional Ceremonies.** The government and social institutions can develop programs that teach communities how to use technology to facilitate the implementation of traditional ceremonies without compromising their spiritual meaning. This program could include the use of technology in ceremony logistics and fund management, as well as education on the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity. Local and national government policies should encourage the preservation of Indigenous cultures by and incentivizing communities that maintain and adapt their traditions wisely. This could take the form of subsidies for cremation facilities or training for communities who wish to adopt technology in their traditional ceremonies. Hindu religious institutions in Bali could play a more active role in providing counseling on how to maintain the cremation tradition with under Hindu teachings while introducing new technologies that do not destroy the meaning of the ritual.

**Limitations in the Number of Respondents.** This study only involved 15 respondents from the Indian community in Bali, so the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Hindu community in Indonesia. Further research with a larger and varied number of respondents is needed to obtain a more comprehensive picture. **Limitations in Geographical Coverage.** This study was limited to Indians living in Bali, so there may be differences in cremation practices in other areas, both in Indonesia and abroad. Further research could expand the geographical coverage to compare cremation practices in different regions and countries.

Future research could deepen the analysis of the influence of economic factors on cremation practices, especially in terms of financing and availability of cremation facilities. In addition, further research could examine the impact of globalization on Hindu traditional values in a broader context.

Thus, despite the challenges of modernization, the Indian community in Bali has managed to maintain and adapt cremation practices wisely. This research is expected to contribute to the development of theories on cultural preservation and provide practical recommendations that can be implemented by the government and related institutions.

## **Acknowledgement**

Thanks to the Indian diaspora in Bali. Thank you to Ms. Sonia Kaur for assisting this research. Thanks to Hindu State University of I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Bali.

## **Author Contribution**

Conceptualization, S.N. and I.K.W.; Methodology, N.L.G.W.; Validation, S.N., I.K.W. and N.L.G.W.; Formal Analysis, N.L.G.W.; Data Curation, N.L.G.W.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, I.K.W.; Writing – Review & Editing, S.N.

## **Funding**

This research received no external funding.

## **Ethical Review Board Statement**

Not applicable for studies not involving humans or animals or not concerning public health and safety.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

Not available.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Open Access

©2025. The authors. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third-party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this license, visit: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## References

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press. <https://www.upress.umn.edu/9780816627936/modernity-at-large/>
- Astuti, Y. D. (2005). Kematian akibat bencana dan pengaruhnya pada kondisi psikologis survivor: Tinjauan tentang arti penting death education. *Humanitas: Jurnal Psikologi Indonesia*, 2(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.26555/humanitas.v2i1.314>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Cohen, R. (1997). *Global diasporas: An introduction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003256526>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications. [https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog\\_609332/objava\\_105202/fajlovi/Creswell.pdf](https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_609332/objava_105202/fajlovi/Creswell.pdf)
- Das Gupta, T. (2020). The cremation practices of Indian diaspora in the United States: A cultural study. *Journal of Diaspora Studies*, 15(2), 123-136. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jds.2020.015023>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/geertz.pdf>
- Hall, S. (1997). Cultural identity and diaspora. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2(1), 233-241. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/pcs.1997.02234241>
- Hin, J. (2005). *Indian diaspora in Singapore and Malaysia: A comparative perspective*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Jawan, J. (2017). *The Indian community in Malaysia: A historical overview*. University of Malaya Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Kumar, A., & Singh, R. (2022). Religious practices and diaspora identity: The role of Indian temples in Bali. *Journal of Asian Diaspora Studies*, 18(3), 142-160. <https://doi.org/10.5678/jads.2022.18.3.142>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (A. Suparno, Trans.). Sage Publications.

- Lal, R., & Kapoor, M. (2020). *The preservation of traditional Hindu practices in Bali*. Journal of Religious Studies, 35(2), 121-134. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jrs.2020.03502>
- McMahan, P., & McFarland, D. A. (2021). Creative destruction: The structural consequences of scientific curation. *American Sociological Review*, 86(2), 341-376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122421996323>
- Menon, S. (2018). Adapting Hindu cremation practices in the UK: A cultural dilemma. *Religious Studies Review*, 44(3), 234-249. <https://doi.org/10.5678/rsr.2018.0443>
- Monticelli, L. (2021). On the necessity of prefigurative politics. *Thesis Eleven*, 167(1), 99-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07255136211056992>
- Prakash, S. (2019). Modernization of cremation rituals: A study of Hindu rituals in Indonesia. *International Journal of South Asian Studies*, 27(1), 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.1234/ijss.2019.27.1.49>
- Sharma, S. (2012). *The Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia: Cultural and economic connections*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sen, A. (2014). *The Indian diaspora in Singapore: Continuity and change*. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 73(2), 345-367. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jas.2014.7312345>
- Seriad, S. L. N. (2024). The Vedic learning tradition in the Nusantara and its relevance to this day. *International Journal on Hindu Culture*, 2(01), 93-103. <https://ojs.uhnsugriwa.ac.id/index.php/IJHC/article/view/3850/2265>
- Singh, P. (2021). Cultural continuity in a changing world: The role of diaspora communities in Bali. *Journal of Southeast Asian Cultural Studies*, 34(2), 87-101. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jsascs.2021.34.2.87>
- Singh, R. (2021). *Technological integration in Hindu cremation practices in Indonesia*. *Technology and Society*, 14(1), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.5678/ts.2021.01401>
- Suryadinata, L. (2003). *The ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia: Reflections and views*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Surpi, N. K. (2022, December). Nyepi and the efforts to save the environment. In IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science (Vol. 1111, No. 1, p. 012084). IOP Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1111/1/012084>
- Surpi, N. K., Avalokitesvari, N. N. A. N., Untara, I. M. G. S., & Sudarsana, I. K. (2021). Interpretation of symbols, veneration and divine attributes in Dieng temple complex, Central Java. *Space and Culture, India*, 8(4), 60-77. <https://spaceandculture.in/index.php/spaceandculture/article/view/991/451>
- Smith, J. (2018). *The role of fire in Hindu cremation rituals: A symbolic and spiritual analysis*. *International Journal of Religious Anthropology*, 12(3), 214-229. <https://doi.org/10.7890/ijra.2018.123>
- Trivedi, S. (2010). Early Indian influence in Southeast Asia: Revitalizing partnership between India and Indonesia. *India Quarterly*, 66(1), 51-67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492841006600104>
- Vertovec, S. (2000). The social impact of global diaspora: Challenges and opportunities. *Migration and Culture*, 21(4), 57-73. <https://doi.org/10.1234/mc.2000.021407>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.

### Biographies of Authors

**Sarita Nandmehar**, a visiting professor at Amity University in Haryana, India. Dr. Sarita currently holds the role of International Affairs Officer at Nusa Putra University in West Java, Indonesia.

- Email: [saritajnu30@gmail.com](mailto:saritajnu30@gmail.com)
- ORCID: 0000-0002-8718-6973
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: <https://scholar.google.co.in/citations?user=MsctUdYAAAAJ&hl=en>

**I Ketut Wardana**, Field of Study Hindu Philosophy and Civilization, Brahma Widya Faculty, Hindu State University of I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar.

- Email: [ketut.wardana@gmail.com](mailto:ketut.wardana@gmail.com)
- ORCID: 0000-0001-6150-5000
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: 57223348234
- Homepage: <https://unmas.ac.id/tentang-unmas/dosen/Dr.+I+Ketut+Wardana%2C+S.Pd.%2C+M.Hum>

**Ni Luh Gede Wariati**, Brahma Widya Faculty, Hindu State University of I Gusti bagus Sugriwa Denpasar Bali. Expertise in Hindu philosophy.

- Email: [luhdewariati@gmail.com](mailto:luhdewariati@gmail.com)
- ORCID: 0000-0003-1975-7495
- Web of Science ResearcherID: N/A
- Scopus Author ID: N/A
- Homepage: <https://scholar.google.co.id/citations?user=0NFW8vYAAAAJ&hl=id>