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Animal Cremation Based on Ritual in Banjar Nyelati Kuwum Village, Mengwi Badung

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of ritual-based animal cremation at Bali Animal Cremation in Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency. The research uses a qualitative approach, drawing from both primary and secondary data. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document study. The data were then analysed descriptively, qualitatively, and interpretatively, followed by the presentation of the research findings. The results show that the ideology behind this ritual-based animal cremation practice is based on spiritual respect for animals, belief in the laws of karma and reincarnation, and love and compassion. The cremation process starts with the preparation of offerings and burning equipment, the identification of the animal, the ritual of mapekeling (purification), the ritual of bathing the animal, and, after which, the cremation/burning takes place. Finally, the ashes are collected and placed in a container prepared by the client. We reckon the research findings will provide a deeper understanding of the relationships among tradition, religion, and culture in Balinese society, as well as their contributions to the preservation of local culture.

Keywords: Ritual-Based Animal Cremation; Bali Animal Cremation; Qualitative Research; Bali, Indonesia

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Introduction

A crematorium is a solution for Balinese Hindus to perform the *ngaben* ceremony, which is part of Balinese customs and culture. The existence of the crematorium is lexically understood by the Hindu community in Bali as the ritual process (*ngaben* ceremony), which involves the cremation of a deceased person's body so that the bones become ashes. However, there is a phenomenon of crematoriums for burning various types of animals, such as those conducted by "Bali Animal Cremation" in Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency. In addition to cremation, the burial of animals is also performed like human graves (as practised by Muslims and Christians), where a marker or identification is placed on the burial mound, followed by flower offerings or prayers on specific days.

Animal cremation, as part of religious ceremonies in Bali, holds deep spiritual significance, with every deceased animal treated with respect throughout the cremation process. Animal cremation is not only a cultural tradition but also a part of the *Pitra Yadnya* ceremony, intended to honour the spirits of ancestors and maintain spiritual balance among humans, nature, and God (Arjawa, 2016). In Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency, the ritual-based animal cremation practice is still regularly carried out and has become an integral part of the local community's life. The Balinese people believe that all life, both human and animal, is closely connected to the universe and must be maintained through ceremonies in accordance with the teachings of Balinese Hinduism (Adiprana et al., 2021). However, this practice faces challenges with the passage of time, as modernisation[1] and social changes have influenced the perspectives and execution of these rituals.

In contrast to cremation rituals in Bali, animal burial is a more commonly practised method of disposing of deceased animals in many parts of the world, often reflecting a combination of religious, emotional, and environmental considerations. In the United States, for instance, pet burials have gained popularity, not only as an emotional farewell but also as part of a growing pet aftercare industry. Many pet cemeteries have been established to cater to owners who wish to honour their pets in a dignified manner, a practice supported by the idea that animals are integral family members (Howell, 2015). Some owners even opt for eco-friendly pet burials, aligning their spiritual values with environmental ethics.

In Japan, the death of pets is also treated with deep reverence, particularly within the context of Buddhist traditions. Pet cemeteries are common, and Buddhist temples often offer memorial services for deceased animals. These ceremonies reflect the belief that animals, like humans, possess a spiritual essence and deserve prayers to ensure their peaceful rebirth or afterlife (Ambros, 2012). The integration of animal memorials into religious practice in Japan indicates a broader trend in East Asia where spiritual beliefs transcend species boundaries.

Meanwhile, in ancient Egypt, animal burial was often linked to religious symbolism and spiritual utility in the afterlife. Animals such as cats, dogs, and even sacred bulls like Apis were mummified and buried in elaborate tombs, sometimes alongside their human companions. These burials were not only a mark of affection but also a ritualistic offering to the Gods, reflecting the Egyptian worldview in which animals were considered divine intermediaries (Ikram, 2005). Such cross-cultural practices illustrate the shared human impulse to treat animals with respect in death, whether through cremation or burial. They also reveal the diverse theological and cultural frameworks that guide how

[1] Modernisation in the context of this ritual refers to the influence of contemporary lifestyles, technology, and socio-economic development on traditional practices. It includes changes in community values, reduced participation in ritual activities, and the adaptation of ceremonial procedures to fit modern conditions, such as efficiency, cost, and environmental considerations.

societies understand animal life and its continuation beyond death.

The animals cremated include dogs, cats, birds, chickens, various reptiles, and even bats. A unique phenomenon occurs when some people cry, as if mourning the death of a family member, during the cremation process. The animal's ashes are then placed in a container such as a ceramic jar, or in some cases, scattered into the sea. The cremation process is almost identical to the cremation of human corpses in the *ngaben* ceremony, as it also involves rituals (Pitana, 2020). However, the offerings used are very simple, consisting of *canang meraka* (a type of offering) and prayers according to their beliefs. The animal's body is also thoroughly bathed in a special place and wrapped in white cloth before the cremation process begins.

Bali Animal Cremation is a private socio-religious service that specialises in cremating deceased animals. It was founded by a family located in Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency. This service operates on the basis of structural legitimacy from local institutional elements, including both government and traditional institutions, through environmental impact assessments and considerations.

This research is important to better understand the implementation of ritual-based animal cremation in Bali, particularly in Banjar Nyelati, which has unique traditions and practices. The study also aims to explore the cultural, social, and spiritual meanings behind the ritual and its impact on the preservation of Balinese customs and culture in the midst of global changes. By gaining a deeper understanding of the process and role of animal cremation in Balinese society, this research is expected to enrich the understanding of the diversity of ritual practices in Bali and the importance of preserving these traditions in the modern era.

The crematorium serves as an important facility for Balinese Hindus to perform the *ngaben* ceremony, which is an integral part of Balinese customs and culture. Traditionally, *ngaben* is a cremation ritual that transforms the deceased's body into ashes, symbolizing the liberation of the spirit from its physical form. However, in Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency, a unique practice has emerged, the cremation of animals through "Bali Animal Cremation." This phenomenon extends the scope of cremation rituals beyond human subjects to include beloved animals such as dogs, cats, birds, chickens, reptiles, and bats. This study aims to understand the implementation of ritual-based animal cremation in Bali and explore its cultural, social, and spiritual significance in the preservation of Balinese traditions amid modernisation and global change.

Method

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to understand ritual-based animal cremation practices in Banjar Nyelati, Desa Kuwum, Mengwi District, Badung Regency. Data collection techniques include participatory observation and in-depth interviews with local people, ritual practitioners, and customary and religious leaders involved in the animal cremation process. Additionally, the study analyses documents related to customary ceremonies and the Pitra Yadnya ritual associated with animal cremation. The data obtained are then analysed descriptively (Gulo, 2002) to uncover the ritual's cultural, social, and spiritual meanings and to understand its role in Balinese society. This approach allows the research to reveal the complexities of ongoing ritual practices and the changes occurring in society in line with the times. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout this study, following standard practices in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The interviewees were informed about the research purpose, and the study was conducted ethically, with full respect for participants' privacy and informed consent. All informants were aware that their real names would be used in the publication, and written consent was obtained accordingly. No pseudonyms were employed, as the participants explicitly granted permission for their identities to be cited in

order to maintain the authenticity and cultural accountability of their narratives.

The case study employed in-depth interviews to explore the spiritual, emotional, and cultural meanings of animal cremation. All interviews were conducted in Balinese and Indonesian languages (Bahasa Indonesia). They were transcribed verbatim and subsequently translated into English by the researcher, using a back-translation process to ensure both linguistic precision and contextual fidelity.

Discussion

The Process of Ritual-Based Animal Cremation at Bali Animal Cremation

According to the service provider, animal cremation at the study area is a ceremony that treats animal remains with respect, serving individuals who come according to their own beliefs. These individuals come from various faiths and several countries with their own ideologies. Therefore, the sequence of rituals and offerings differs from that for the cremation of deceased humans. Cremation in the context of *ngaben* is carried out by Hindu (Balinese) people according to guidance from sacred texts and traditions, based on beliefs in mystical (personal relationship with universal freedom) and magical aspects, which form a collective belief sourced from dialectical aspects in an emic perspective (Atmaja, 2016).

While this study references Rational Choice Theory to explain motivations for animal cremation, this framework would benefit from deeper engagement with ethnographic findings. Rational Choice Theory, which posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, can help explain why some people opt for cremation over burial—considering aspects such as space efficiency, hygienic concerns, or emotional closure. However, such an explanation risks oversimplifying the deeply affective and symbolic dimensions of these practices. Emotional attachment to animals, especially pets regarded as family members, often drives owners to select cremation as a ritual of dignity and transcendence rather than merely as a practical choice.

Anthropological theories of ritual and grief offer a richer context for understanding such motivations. For instance, Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* helps illuminate how shared grief and ritual participation generate a liminal space where social norms are temporarily suspended, allowing for deep emotional expression and symbolic transformation (Turner, 1969). Similarly, Robert Hertz's classic theory of death rituals emphasises the social necessity of mediating between the biological fact of death and the spiritual continuity of the deceased within the moral order of the community (Hertz, 1907/1960). In this light, animal cremation becomes not merely an individual choice but a socially meaningful act that reflects evolving relationships between humans, animals, and spiritual cosmologies in a globalised world.

The ritual-based animal cremation carried out in the study area is rooted in beliefs that highlight mystical and personal dimensions of universal freedom. Those who perform animal cremation come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, each guided by their own personal ideology. According to Cakra, one of the research participants with whom we interviewed on 17 June 2024, said:

> People who come here to request cremation are mostly non-Hindus. Till now, we had only three Hindus, from Buleleng and Badung. Most of them bring dogs, but some also bring cats, birds, and bats. While some of these are pets others bring in animals found dead on the roads. All who come here wait until the cremation is completed and take the ashes placed in a ceramic jar or urn. Some scatter them in the sea, while others keep them at home. Once the cremation is finished, I do not follow the next process; my role is only to reduce the bones to ashes.

Furthermore, Cakra explains that the ritualisation of cremation is almost the same for everyone according to their beliefs. It is dominated by the use of many colourful flowers,

and some people also use ceremonial items such as containers, similar to those used in the *ngaben* ceremony, as a place for the animal before bathing and cremation. The following is a description of the cremation ritual process, which is carried out in several stages.

First Stage: Facilities and Infrastructure

Bali Animal Cremation in the study area is equipped with essential facilities such as a cremation stove, a place for bathing the animal's body, burial grounds, a *Padmasana* shrine, and supporting facilities that create a sacred atmosphere, such as banners, umbrellas, and electronic sound media. If requested, the ceremony may also be accompanied by *angklung* or *gong* music using electronic media.

Second Stage: Animal Identification

All animals brought to the cremation service are given a name by their owner, and are referred to with affection as if they were grandchildren. During this process, when the animal's name is called, it is always preceded by the term "grandchild," so both *Mbah* and her husband record and call the animal by its given name during the ritual prayers, according to the identity assigned to it.

Third Stage: *Mapekeling* Ritual

This stage is carried out in two processes. First, the animal's owner conducts a prayer according to their belief system. If the owner brings a container (such as a vessel), a ritual is performed on the container first. Then, the animal is placed in a specially prepared bathing area, equipped according to the owner's belief, including colourful flowers. A prayer is said using flowers, which are then sprinkled on the animal's body. In this process, prayers are also performed by the handlers (Cakra and Kembar) according to their beliefs, accompanied by offerings (*sesajen*) placed at a site believed to serve as a medium for spiritual communication with the animal's spirit, as well as at the *Padmasana* shrine present at the location.

Fourth Stage: Bathing Ritual

The bathing ritual is carried out, like the process of bathing a deceased person before burial or during the *ngaben* ceremony. As requested by the animal's owner, the animal is bathed as thoroughly as possible with fragrant soap, scrubbing several times until it is considered clean. The bathing is performed by Kembar and her husband, with the owner observing to ensure that the process is gentle and careful, without any mishandling. Once the animal is deemed clean, it is dried with a cloth and wrapped in a cloth. This process takes place in a special bathing area measuring 1 by 1.5 meters (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Animal Bathing Area to be Ceremonied
Source: Authors

Fifth Stage: The Cremation Process

The next stage is cremation, in which the animal is placed in an oven at the cremation site (Figure 2). Similar to human cremation, this process also uses an oil-fired stove. During this process, an interesting phenomenon almost always occurs: people, along with others, express profound sadness. Some people wail and cry as if mourning the death of a family member.

Figure 2: Animal Cremation: An Oven in the Cremation Site
Source: Authors

Sixth Stage: The Ash Collection Process

After the bones are reduced to ashes, the ashes are poured, cooled, collected, and placed into a container such as a jar or ceramic pot, then taken by the owner. This process is considered complete, marking the end of the Bali Animal Cremation service's duties.

The Ideology of Bali Animal Cremation in Performing Animal Cremation

Animal cremation in Hindu tradition, particularly in Bali, is performed as a form of respect and honour for animals, which are believed to have a spiritual or emotional connection with humans. In general, this ceremony is less common than human cremation ceremonies, such as the *ngaben* ceremony, but it still reflects respect for other living beings. However, in a religious and spiritual context, some fundamental principles can be applied.

Given that animal cremation is not yet widely practised among the Hindu community in Bali, unlike human cremation during the *ngaben* ceremony, animal cremation can elicit various perceptions in society. Some view this practice as a means to elevate social status, as displayed in emotional outbursts from those who deeply care for their pets, as these animals have been part of their daily social activities for a long time. To address these perceptions, this study aims to provide answers by exploring several ideological aspects underlying the practice of animal cremation, as derived from the relevant texts and context.

As stated by Coleman in the Rational Choice Theory, it is a framework in social science that explains that individuals make decisions or choices based on rational considerations to maximise their benefits or satisfaction. This theory assumes that individuals act rationally. Each individual has clear preferences and acts rationally to achieve their goals (Donder, 2007). The optimisation of benefits suggests that they evaluate all available options and choose the one that provides the best outcome or maximises utility. Considerations of cost and benefit mean that decisions are made by weighing costs (resources, time, or effort) and benefits (results or gains). Based on Coleman's viewpoint, the individuals who perform animal cremation are motivated by several aspects as follows:

Ritual Animal Cremation as Spiritual Compassion

The cremation ceremony (*ngaben*) for sacred or companion animals in Bali is regarded as an expression of spiritual compassion and reverence for all sentient beings (Girinata, 2020). This belief stems from the view that all living beings—humans and animals alike—possess a soul (*atma*) that must be properly returned to the cosmic order after death. Animals such as cows, dogs, and horses that hold special status, either due to their religious symbolism or emotional bond with humans, are sometimes cremated through simplified versions of human *ngaben* rites.

These practices, however, are shaped not only by religious prescriptions but also by regional traditions and personal interpretations of Hinduism. Collectively, ritual acts such as animal cremation are often grounded in customary practices based on mystical-magical beliefs shared within particular Balinese communities (Koentjaraningrat, 1992). For example, certain ceremonies like *Ngaben Jro Ketut* for rats indicate that even animals traditionally seen as pests may receive ritual treatment when infused with symbolic meaning. On the personal level, individuals may choose to bury their animals or perform other rites based on their emotional attachment, ethical values, or philosophical inclinations.

At Bali Animal Cremation in Banjar Nyelati, Mengwi, animals are cremated as a personalised ritual of spiritual reverence. This practice extends beyond the practical domain of after-death services; it represents an act of symbolic purification (*pembersihan*)—an effort to elevate the spiritual quality of both the deceased animal and its human caretaker.

As explained by Dewa Gede (interview was conducted on 09 August 2024), the cremation of his pet dog was an emotional and spiritual response to the deep bond they had developed over years of companionship. His narrative reveals a worldview in which animals are not merely subordinate beings but meaningful participants in human life and cosmology:

> *Tiyang kremasi kuluk tiyang niki ulian sayang mapan sube uli makelo ajak tiyang jumah buine monoh sajaan… mreteka kuluk tiyang mriki mogi ipun yen numitis bindan pang buin ketemu jak tiyang…*
>
> (I cremated my dog out of love, because he had long accompanied me and my family… I hope his soul may reincarnate and one day reunite with me.)

This testimony reflects a belief in *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth) and the *karmic* potential of all beings. While classical Hindu philosophy traditionally classifies animals as possessing only *bayu* (energy) and *sabda* (voice), but lacking *idep* (intellect), many contemporary Balinese reinterpret this triadic concept (Suweda, 1918). They recognise animals' cognitive and emotional intelligence based on lived experience (Suhardana, 2010). Within this interpretative framework, animal cremation becomes an ethical and spiritual responsibility grounded in compassion.

The act of cremating animals in Bali thus transcends mere cultural symbolism; it is a spiritual enactment deeply rooted in the Hindu ethical principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence). *Ahimsa* is a foundational virtue taught in various sacred texts. The *Bhagavad Gita* (X.5:248) enumerates it among the divine qualities:

> *Ahiṁsā satyam akrodhas tyāgaḥ śāntir apaiśunam,*
>
> *dayā bhūteṣv aloluptvaṁ mārdavaṁ hrīr acāpalam.*
>
> (Non-violence, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquillity, compassion for all beings…) (Maswinara, 2004).

Similarly, the *Manusmriti* (10.63) advocates for universal kindness: *"Ahimsa sarvabhutanam"*—non-violence towards all beings (Bühler, 2009). These scriptural references affirm that all forms of life deserve empathy and respect, even in death.

In practice, animal cremation ceremonies in Bali often involve simplified offerings (*banten*), prayers, and recitations of mantras intended to

purify the soul and facilitate its peaceful return to the cosmic order. Although Hindu scriptures do not prescribe specific rites for animal cremation, communities frequently adapt components of human funerary rituals, guided by local traditions and personal conviction.

In rural areas, traditional observances such as *Tumpek Kandang*—a Balinese ceremony honouring animals—reinforce the continuity between life, ritual, and death. As noted in Dewa Gede's account, the cremation of his dog was preceded by years of ritual participation during *Tumpek Kandang*, symbolising ongoing relational care between humans and animals.

The spiritual cremation of animals is not unique to Bali. In Japan, Buddhist temples hold pet memorials that integrate animals into communal ritual life (Ambros, 2012). In ancient Egypt, mummified animals were interred with humans as sacred offerings and guides (Ikram, 2005). In Western societies, the growing pet aftercare industry reflects an emerging view of animals as family members deserving dignified post-mortem treatment (Howell, 2015).

While Rational Choice Theory might interpret animal cremation as a pragmatic decision—linked to convenience, hygiene, or emotional closure—anthropological theories provide deeper insight. Hertz's (1960) work on death rituals emphasises the transition between physical death and spiritual continuity, while Turner's (1969) concept of *liminality* and *communitas* helps explain how animal cremation becomes a threshold experience that renews emotional and spiritual bonds between humans and the sacred.

Thus, the Balinese practice of animal cremation constitutes more than a private act of mourning. It is a culturally embedded expression of spiritual ecology—where compassion, ritual practice, and cosmological belief converge to generate meaning in both life and death.

Belief in the Law of *Karma* and Reincarnation

Hindus believe in reincarnation, in which the soul can be reborn into various forms of life, including animals. Therefore, harming animals can have negative consequences on a person's *karma*, affecting their future life. The *Bhagavad Gita* (5.18) emphasises the equality of all beings in the eyes of God.

> *vidyā-vinaya-sampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini*
> *śuni caiva śvapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ sama-darśinaḥ.*
>
> The wise person sees everything the same, whether it is a learned and humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or a lowly, poor person, without caste (Maswinara, 2004).

The above quote explains that Krishna teaches that the wise person is one who sees equality in all beings, not differentiating between humans, animals, or plants. This view is called *Sama Darshana*, which means to look at all beings with the same perspective. With this principle, Hinduism encourages people to treat animals with love and without discrimination.

The philosophy of the purpose of life in Hinduism is encapsulated in the concept of *Catur Purusartha*, which consists of four parts: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*. *Dharma* is the teaching of truth, the way of life, the guidance for human life. *Artha* refers to material wealth as a support for life. *Kama* represents desires, and *Moksha* is the union of the soul (*Jivatman*) with the Supreme Soul (*Paramatman*). Therefore, it is clear that in life, humans need *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha*. However, in fulfilling *Artha* and *Kama*, one must do so based on Dharma, virtue, and truth, not through unlawful means, as this is akin to *leteh* (impure intent) (Triguna, 2001).

Unity with the Supreme Reality is the ultimate goal for humans to achieve, based on religious ethics and *Dharma* that have been determined. The awakening of awareness that we are part of the essence of this world is something that must be achieved in order for the mind to open and realise the true nature of the self. This hope can be realised by implementing the teachings of *Dharma*. In the sacred Hindu texts, it is stated that being born as a human is a great fortune and a primary goal. With the mind (*manas*) that humans possess, they can help themselves

escape from samsara through *suba karma*, which means performing good deeds. Awareness will straighten the mind, which often prioritises worldly life.

Karma and reincarnation in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* provide a comprehensive explanation of death and reincarnation. The deeds of humans, if good, will lead them to become good individuals; if bad, they will become bad individuals. One becomes pure through holy deeds and impure through evil deeds, as seen in the following quote.

> *yathākārī yathācārī tathā bhavati*
> *sādhukārī sādhuḥ bhavati pāpakārī*
>
> *pāpaḥ bhavati puṇyaḥ puṇyena bhavati*
> *pāpaḥ pāpena.*
>
> Just as one acts, so one becomes. One who does good deeds will become good, and one who does evil deeds will become evil. He who performs good deeds will be reborn as a good being, while he who performs sinful deeds will be reborn as an evil being (Sivananda, 2000).

The above quote illustrates the close relationship between one's *karma* (actions) and their future life. Every action performed by an individual in this world will determine the quality of their rebirth or reincarnation, either as a good being or one who suffers, depending on the deeds or actions that were performed. This teaching emphasises that one's *karma* not only influences one's current life but also affects one's future life through the cycle of birth and death (samsara) (Wirawan, 2013).

According to Hindu philosophy, all living beings aspire to be reborn as humans. Plants wish to evolve into animals, and animals long to attain human birth. Yet there are instances in which, after being born human, individuals lose their humanity and regress into an animal existence. For example, one who commits sinful acts—such as abortion for selfish reasons—accumulates bad *karma* and may be reborn from the womb of a wolf. This is illustrated in *Slokāntara* 16: "*Tan hana nguni tan hana mangke, tan hana mangke tan hana nguni, hana ta pisan tan pagendingan.*"

This *śloka* conveys the profound relationship between the past, present, and future. The phrase "*tan hana nguni tan hana mangke"* means that without the past, the present would not exist—highlighting how past actions shape current realities. Meanwhile, "*tan hana mangke tan hana nguni"* implies that without the present, there can be no past—emphasising that present deeds define how the past and future are perceived. Lastly, "*hana ta pisan tan pagendingan"* signifies the unity of all existence, meaning that the past, present, and future are interdependent, eternally connected, and inseparable.

This quote teaches us that time (the past, present, and future) is closely interconnected, and what happens today is the result of the past and will also affect the future. This teaching also carries a message about the importance of balance and responsibility for our actions in the present.

The ritual practised at Bali Animal Cremation is also viewed as a form of purification for the animals, with the hope that, upon reincarnation, they will be born as humans. This statement reflects an expressive, emotional and spiritual personal form of practice, both by the ritual organisers and the community members who request the cremation. Their expressive actions are spontaneous responses to cognitive processes, including perception, memory, learning, and problem-solving, that they encounter. Therefore, the process of animal death must undergo a ritual to ensure that, in their next birth, the being will be a more noble creature, such as a human.

This aligns with the statement from Cakra (with whom the interview was conducted on 02 July 2024), who explained that Bali Animal Cremation in Banjar Nyelati, the study area receives requests from individuals wishing to have their animals cremated—either simply to reduce them to ashes or to undergo a complete ritual process. Although the requests for cremation are often straightforward, Mbah, the ritual leader, experiences a sense of moral hesitation if the animal is cremated immediately. Mbah believes deeply that everything in the universe

originates from and returns to God (*Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*). The owners often describe their pets as having human-like qualities, which, in their view, justifies performing the cremation as an act of gratitude and spiritual respect. They hope that through reincarnation, the animal may be reborn into a more noble form—perhaps even as a human.

Before performing the cremation, Mbah conducts prayers and offers *canang* (simple floral offerings) at a sacred site to symbolically apologise to the spirit that once inhabited the animal, asking that it peacefully return to its divine origin while also praying for personal protection. Although Mbah is unsure whether there is a specific canonical ritual prescribed for animals, he believes that a sincere *canang* offering is sufficient to express reverence and spiritual responsibility. A passage from a traditional *lontar* (palm-leaf manuscript) cited by Sudarsana (2004) reflects a similar cosmological ethic:

> *Ih sira sang rumaga yajña, rengenen pawarah mami, weruha rumuhun maka hingganing gama kerti ulahing wang kamanusan, rediata jagat kerti, maka sapta bhuana wenang molih pakerti luwirnia, dewa yajña, ṛṣi yajña, pitra yajña, manuṣa yajña, bhūta yajña, aśvamedha yajña. Apan yajña maka panelasing pāpa, petaka, geleh, pateleteh, gering sasab merana, duk ika para kerti apan kabeh dewa, bhatāra, kāla, bhūta, rākṣasa, daitya, dānava, piśāca, dāmya, ātmā, pitṛ, pitara, jinn, śetān, moro, pulung, pemāla, pemali, muah ikang sarwa kabeh pawaking pāpa, pada amrih kamnusan, ya manuṣa juga wenang nyupat sira kabeh, kunang yan ring manuṣa sang brāhmaṇa paṇḍita śiwa buddha juga yogya ingentasaken ika kabeh.*
>
> O you, the performer of the ritual, listen to my words. First, understand the purpose of the ritual, for it is humans who must act. There are ways to maintain the universe, and the seven realms (*sapta bhuvana*) must be preserved through offerings to the gods, the ṛṣi, the ancestors, humans, the bhūtas (elemental beings), and animals. Sacred sacrifices purify sins, suffering, disease, and calamity. Remember, you who perform the ritual: the gods, deities, spirits, demons, and all forms of beings, even animals and plants, are bound by impurity and seek release. Humans have the responsibility to restore them to their divine origin, and only the enlightened—priests, Brahmins, Śaiva and Buddhist sages—can ultimately purify them.

This *lontar* passage conveys that rituals for deceased animals serve a purpose of spiritual purification. Through human action and prayer, the spirit of the animal is guided toward liberation and potential rebirth into a higher state of existence. Thus, animal cremation in Bali is not merely an act of affection but a moral and cosmological responsibility—an expression of *yajña* (sacrifice) and *ahiṁsā* (non-violence) that upholds the harmony between humans, animals, and the divine order.

The Practice of *Ahimsa* in Animal Cremation in Bali

The Hindu teaching of love and compassion is deeply rooted in the principle of *ahimsa*, a foundational tenet of ethical and spiritual life. *Ahimsa* means non-violence—not causing harm physically, mentally, or emotionally to any living being. In Hinduism, love encompasses devotion to God (*bhakti*), affection towards fellow beings, and reverence for the entire cosmos. At its core, *ahimsa* embodies the inseparable bond between love and non-violence.

A contemporary and culturally significant expression of this value can be found in the animal cremation practices at our study area, the Bali Animal Cremation, while not widespread in Hindu tradition, this practice aligns with spiritual teachings, as echoed in the Balinese palm-leaf manuscript *Tutur Sang Hyang Tapeni*, which underscores the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the environment.

Hindu teachings also emphasise *maitri* (universal friendship) and *karuṇā* (compassion) as central

to a life of empathy, kindness, and moral generosity. A person guided by *maitri* and *karuṇā* is moved to help those who suffer—be they human or animal. These concepts are further reinforced by the philosophical dictum *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art that), a spiritual realisation that all beings are interconnected. What we do to others, we essentially do to ourselves.

Hindu belief affirms that both humans and animals possess the same divine essence, the *atman (*soul), which originates from *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*, the Supreme God. According to the doctrine of *punarjanma* (reincarnation), the soul undergoes a cycle of birth and rebirth in various forms. Therefore, animals are not lesser beings but souls on their journey towards spiritual evolution. From this perspective, humans are called to treat animals with the same love and respect afforded to their own kind (Sztompka, 2007).

Pet owners who choose cremation for their beloved animals do so as a final act of love. As explained by Cakra and Kembar (interviews were conducted with these participants on 09 September 2024), people come to Bali Animal Cremation out of sincere affection for their pets, whom they consider family. Interestingly, this practice has also transformed the perspective of the cremation staff—once indifferent to animals, especially dogs. Serving as caretakers for more than 15 dogs, they exemplified compassion and dedication—qualities that align with the ethical and spiritual principles articulated in *Bhagavad Gītā* XII.13.

> *adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānāṁ maitraḥ*
> *karuṇa eva ca,*
> *nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sama-duḥkha-*
> *sukhaḥ kṣamī.*
>
> One who does not hate any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from possessiveness and ego, balanced in pleasure and pain, and forgiving (Maswinara, 2004).

This verse outlines the qualities of the ideal *bhakta* (devotee)—one who exhibits unconditional love, non-hatred, and equanimity. Hindu teachings extend this compassion beyond life, affirming the value of respectful treatment even after death. The cremation of animals thus becomes a sacred expression of deep affection and spiritual dignity.

This ritual also represents an acknowledgement of the spiritual role animals play in human lives. Some owners preserve their pets' ashes at home, while others scatter them into the sea, symbolically aiding the soul's journey through the cycle of *samsāra*. The cremation process follows the same sacred principles as human cremation. The body is returned to the cosmos through fire—an element revered in Hinduism for its purifying power and its capacity to liberate the soul from earthly attachments.

As Erik (with this participant, the interview was conducted on 18 July 2024) shared, animals are believed to carry karmic imprints that must be resolved through birth and death. Animal cremation in the study area is considered a spiritual service that helps the soul attain a better rebirth. For many, it is the final, loving gesture—a way to help their companion transcend suffering and move towards a higher spiritual existence.

Conclusion

The central aim of the study was to critically discuss animal cremation as a ritual in Banjar Nyelati Kuwum Village, Mengwi, Badung. The ideology behind this ritual-based animal cremation includes: (1) spiritual respect for animals, based on the belief that animals are also part of the universe created by God and have the same soul. Animal cremation is the implementation of the *ahimsa* teaching to create a peaceful life by not harming animals, whether they are alive or dead. (2) Belief in the law of *karma,* that there is a strong connection between a person's actions (*karma*) and their future life or reincarnation. One's *karma* is believed to not only affect their present life but also their future life through the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*). (3) As an expression of love and compassion, *Tat Twam Asi* is a spiritual teaching in Hinduism that means 'you are me. This teaching emphasises that all living beings are spiritually interconnected, and what we do

to others is essentially what we are doing to ourselves.

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Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and other relevant ethical guidelines for social and cultural research. All procedures performed in this research involving human participants, including interviews and observations, were carried out with respect for participants' rights, privacy, and cultural sensitivity.

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Universitas Hindu Negeri I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa Denpasar.

Since this study did not involve biomedical experimentation or the use of sensitive personal data, it was exempted from specific medical ethical approval. Nevertheless, informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants prior to interviews and observations, and all information was treated confidentially.

Conflict of Interest and AI Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, whether financial or non-financial, related to the publication of this study. All authors contributed equally to the conception, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. No changes in authorship or order of authorship were made after submission.

The authors also confirm that this manuscript was not prepared using AI-generated text and that no figures or illustrations were produced using AI-assisted tools. All contents, including text and documentation, are the result of the authors' original academic work and field research.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors contributed significantly to the completion of this research and the preparation of the manuscript.

I Made Girinata contributed to the conceptualisation of the study, conducted field observations and interviews, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript.

I Gede Suwantana contributed to the theoretical framework, data interpretation, and critical review of the manuscript in accordance with the principles of Hindu philosophy and ritual studies.

I Putu Agus Aryatnaya Giri contributed to the data analysis, literature review, and refinement of the final manuscript for publication.

I Ketut Sudarsana contributed to the finalisation of the manuscript and its compliance with scientific writing requirements.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article. Additional supporting materials, such as field notes, interview transcripts, and photographic documentation, are available from the corresponding author (I Ketut Sudarsana) upon reasonable request.

No personal or sensitive information has been disclosed in this publication, and all data were handled in compliance with institutional ethical guidelines and participant confidentiality.

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