

# The Symbolic Meaning of the Banyan Plant in Hindu Rituals

Euis Dewi Yuliana <sup>a,1,\*</sup>, Putu Desiana Wulaning Ayu <sup>b,2</sup>, Gede Angga Pradipta <sup>c,3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Universitas Hindu Indonesia, Jalan Sangalangit Tembau, Denpasar Bali (80236.), Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> ITB Stikom Bali, Jalan Raya Puputan No. 86 Renon, Denpasar Bali80234.), Indonesia

<sup>c</sup> ITB Stikom Bali, Jalan Raya Puputan No. 86 Renon, Denpasar Bali80234.), Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> [dewi.yuliana1966@yahoo.co.id](mailto:dewi.yuliana1966@yahoo.co.id), <sup>2</sup> [wulaning\\_ayu@stikom-bali.ac.id](mailto:wulaning_ayu@stikom-bali.ac.id), <sup>3</sup> [angga\\_pradipta@stikom-bali.ac.id](mailto:angga_pradipta@stikom-bali.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

The philosophical meaning contained in each *upakara* plant is the most important thing that must be known and expressed again, so that Hindus have clear guidance and guidance in offering their *yadnya*. Without knowing clearly and definitely about the philosophical meaning contained in the *upakara* plant, it is suspected that over time there will be deviations in the implementation of Hindu religious rituals. Starting from the problem above, this study have question : (1) What is the form, classification and description of the banyan plant in Hindu religious rituals? (2) What are the uses/benefits of the banyan plant in Hindu religious rituals? (3) What is the mythology of the banyan plant used in Hindu religious rituals? (4) What is the philosophical meaning of the banyan plant used in Hindu religious rituals? Based on study, the following conclusions are drawn. (1) The use of plants as a means of ceremonial ceremonies will continue and be sustainable if the traditions that characterize Balinese society and culture are large traditions that are based on the implementation of various types of ceremonies, of which the *yadnya* ceremony is an important aspect of the Hindu religious belief system. (2) On the other hand, there is a point of view, if Balinese Hindus deepen their philosophy, then all types of ceremonies will fade or at least decrease, because their essence is known. Thus, it is suspected that the use of plants as ceremonial facilities will decrease as the implementation of various types of ceremonies fades or decreases. (3) Apart from the two views above, the use of plants, whether for carrying out ceremonies or to support the continuity of the cycles of the universe, provides a mandate to remind humans to protect plants of whatever type so that they do not experience degradation or even extinction. (4) Based on a literature search, not much has been revealed regarding the philosophical meaning of the *upakara* plant, and efforts in this direction need to be made.

*Keywords: Symbolic Meaning, Banyan Plant, Hindu Rituals*

## I. Introduction

In religious activities for Hindus in Bali, *upakara* plants besides having their use as a means of prayer also contain philosophical meaning. Offerings without using *upakara* plants in Hinduism will reduce the significance, both in terms of symbolism, ritualism and culture, so that *upakara* plants seem to be inseparable from Hindu religious ceremonies. According to Reg. Veda V.11.6 (in Sudiana, 2002:4), states that God who resides in all creation, including forests and trees (*upakara* plants), contains a very deep meaning for religious life.

The philosophical meaning contained in each *upakara* plant is very important to reveal, considering that many Hindus, especially the younger generation of Hindus, do not understand the philosophical meaning contained in each *upakara* plant that they use in their *yadnya*. Hindus tend to adopt the old culture of "*anak mule keto*" without knowing

and understanding the meaning contained in each *upakara* plant used as a means of offering. The philosophical meaning contained in each *upakara* plant is the most important thing that must be known and expressed again, so that Hindus have clear guidance and guidance in offering their *yadnya*. Without knowing clearly and definitely about the philosophical meaning contained in the *upakara* plant, it is suspected that over time there will be deviations in the implementation of Hindu religious rituals. Thus, this is an interesting phenomenon that needs to be studied in more depth regarding the philosophical meaning of *upakara* plants used in Hindu religious.

Starting from the problem above, research on "The Symbolic Meaning of the Banyan Plant in Hindu Religious Rituals" is relevant for further study, which is outlined in the following question. (1) What is the form, classification and description of the banyan plant in Hindu religious rituals? (2) What are

the uses/benefits of the banyan plant in Hindu religious rituals? (3) What is the mythology of the banyan plant used in Hindu religious rituals? (4) What is the philosophical meaning of the banyan plant used in Hindu religious rituals?

### I. Research Methodology

To answer the questions from the problems described above, in-depth research and academic studies were carried out to obtain more complete and comprehensive data, by conducting document studies and field studies. Document studies are very important to be carried out by dissecting the libraries stored in various libraries. Considering that until now, classical texts on Hindu teachings, 682 written in various lontars and other documents, are still widely stored in the library.

## III. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Form, Classification and Description of Banyan Plants in Hindu Rituals

#### 3.1.1 Banyan Plant Shape



Figure 1. Banyan Plant

#### 3.1.2 Banyan Plant Classification

Kingdom	: <i>Plantae</i> (plant)
Subkingdom	: <i>Tracheobionta</i> (vascular plants)
Super Divisi	: <i>Spermatophyta</i> (seed plants)
Divisi	: <i>Magnoliophyta</i> (flowering plants)
Kelas	: <i>Magnoliopsida</i> (split plants/dikotil)
Sub Kelas	: <i>Dilleniidae</i> (single

	flowering)
Ordo	: <i>Urticales</i> (single leaf, crossed oppositely)
Famili	: <i>Moroceae</i> (a kind of jackfruit)
Genus	: <i>Ficus</i> (a close relative of the fig tree)
Spesies	: <i>Ficus benghalensis</i> . L

Ficus means fig tree and Benghalensis is related to Bengal, the Sanskrit word Vata means to surround or encompass. The Banyan Tree, the Ganges River, and the Himalayas are all images of India. For most Indians, the tree is sacred and only in the most dire circumstances (such as famine) are the leaves plucked for livestock food (Anonymous, 2003). Meanwhile, the Banyan tree, in Hindu-Balinese literature, is called Kalpataru, Kalpa means long-lived, and taru means tree (Dwijaja, 2010).

#### 3.1.3 Description of the Banyan Plant

The banyan tree is described as part of the most surprising group of plants on the face of the earth. This tree is evergreen and can grow up to 100 feet tall. Banyan trees can grow well in hemi-epiphytic soil, such as in forest areas. Banyan trees are also plants that have the ability to live and adapt well to various extreme environmental conditions, one of which is on rocks. With a root system that is strong, deep and has lateral roots, the banyan is able to grip the soil well, and the plant is able to grip large rocks and hold them so they don't erode.

An adult banyan tree has a large structure, with a trunk diameter of more than 2 m, and a height of up to 25 m. Stems erect, round, rough surface, blackish brown. The banyan tree has its roots hanging down from its branches, which can penetrate the ground and become pseudo-trunks. At first the stems were slender, but as they stuck into the ground, the roots became thick pillars, which supported the weight of the heavy stems. The banyan tree has a philosophy of being strong and nurturing. Adult banyan trees do not grow upwards but grow wide to the sides, expand and sometimes dangle back down.

The banyan tree has single leaves, located opposite each other, with flat edges, oval to oblong in shape, small in size with a length

of about 3-6 cm, the top is dark green and the bottom is pale green. The leaves are smooth and shiny when young, and then become stiff and rough when old. When crushed, the leaves produce a milky white liquid.

The flowers are single, emerging from the leaf axils, funnel-shaped petals, greenish yellow. Buni fruit, small round, 0.5 - 1 cm long. Propagated by seeds. The fruit is green, firm and emerges from the angle between the leaf stalk and branch, and turns red and soft when ripe. The shape is small round like a boni fruit with a length of 0.5-1 cm, and the fruit is eaten by almost all types of birds. Plant propagation by seeds. Banyan is also a very old plant, this plant can live for hundreds of years.

### 3.2 Uses of Banyan Plants

The importance of the banyan tree for Hindus is because its leaves are often used as a means of *upakara*, both in the *Dewa Yadnya* ceremony, *Pitra Yadnya* and in other *yadnya* ceremonies. More specifically, banyan leaves are used as material for offerings for the *Mawinten*, *Bebangkit*, *Panjang Ilang* and *Nyekah* ceremonies (Dwijaja, 2010).

The *Nyekah/Mamukur* ceremony is nothing more than a continuation of the *Ngaben upacāra*, in the form of purifying the *Atma* so that it is not shackled by subtle bodies, changing and increasing the status of the *Atma* to become a *Pitṛa* or God *Pitṛa* so that after it is *disthanakan*, it can be worshiped by *pratisantana* or its descendants. The implementation of the *Mamukur* ceremony, like other *yadnya* ceremonies, is adjusted to the abilities of the *Yajamana*, namely those who carry out the ceremony. In general, according to the abilities of the people, they are divided into 3 groups, namely the large (*uttama*), medium (*madhya*) and simple (*kanistama*). At the large Mamukur ceremony, the series of ceremonies consisting of, among other things, those related to the use of banyan leaves are as follows. (1) *Ngangget Don Bingin*, namely the ceremony of picking banyan leaves (*kalpataru/kalpavṛiksa*) to be used as material for *puṣpaśarīra* (symbol of the spirit body) which will later be assembled in such a way as a *tumpang* (wrapped in white cloth), equipped with *prerai*

(carving/painting of a human face , male/female) and decorated with pearl flowers. This ceremony takes the form of a procession (*maped*) to the banyan tree starting with *tedung Agung*, *mamas*, *bandrang* and others, as a base for the picked leaves is a *kalasa* mat on which a white cloth is placed to wrap the banyan leaves. (2) *Ngajum*, after the banyan leaves arrive at the ceremony site, for each spirit manifestation, 108 banyan leaves are selected, pierced and arranged in such a way that is then called *Sekah*. The number of *Sekah* is as many as the spirits to be performed, in addition to this number, is also made for the *Lingga* or *Sangge*. After the *Sekah* is decorated like a human body with full clothing (white), the *Ngajum upacāra* is carried out, namely enshrining the spirit in the *Sekah*, and at the same time it is placed on the *upacāra* stage called *Payajñan* (a special *Yajña upacāra* place for this, made from ground betel nut stems). (Anonymous, 2002).

Another benefit of the banyan tree is that it is an indicator plant for the forest succession process. Apart from that, the banyan, with its strong and deep roots, is a plant that can act as a buffer against soil erosion. The banyan also functions as a plant that can increase biodiversity in production areas. Banyan trees always purify the springs around them, so they can function as spring conservation plants and natural slope reinforcements. Apart from that, banyan trees are also a habitat for several birds, reptiles, insects and mammals that consume the fruit. So by planting banyans, you will indirectly conserve the fauna that makes banyans their living place.

In ancient times, when people created villages, they usually destroyed the forest. A large banyan tree was left or deliberately planted in the middle of the village. Villages in India and in general in Bali also have the same pattern. Then this banyan tree became the center of the village, apart from the temple. There the people make offerings or food offerings. Why is it like this? Because it is believed that so many creatures live there and to maintain harmony and balance this is done. Likewise, when the banyan is used as an offering or offering, such as when used in *Saraswati* offerings and during *atmavedana* ceremonies. When banyan trees are cut down

for various purposes, this is done very carefully, while still paying attention to the effects on the environment both at scale and in the future.

### 3.3 Mythology of the Banyan Plant

According to Hindu mythology (Anonymous, 2003), it is said that the Goddess *Amba* took a banyan tree from *Naga Basuki's* garden to bring it to earth. *Basuki* is the name of a dragon from *Patataloka*, the underworld, in its magnificent garden there is a giant banyan tree. The Goddess of Earth, *Amba*, dreamed about this tree, because she was impressed by its majesty, Goddess *Amba* wanted to bring it to earth, but Goddess *Amba* could not find a way to enter *Patataloka*. Then Goddess *Amba* asked all the birds and animals, but no one had ever been there or returned from that place. Of all the insects only the beetles know, because they often fly up and down, looking for a way for those who go to that world, but the beetles have promised to keep it a secret. *Dewi Amba* persuaded and ordered him, but the beetle did not want to tell him his secret. Next, *Dewi Amba* ordered her soldiers to throw the beetle into a crater filled with boiling oil, and finally the beetle gave up and confessed. *Dewi Amba* arrived at *Naga Basuki's* garden, then walked around the tree and circled it with a spell and carried it with her. When *Naga Basuki* saw it, fire radiated from *Naga Basuki's* eyes and *Dewi Amba* immediately fell to the ground and died.

*Mahadewa* and *Dewi Parvati* also went to see *Naga Basuki's* amazing garden and they found *Dewi Amba's* body. Goddess *Parvati* was shocked and sad, then asked *Mahadeva* about what had happened, because he was omniscient. However, ignoring Goddess *Parvati's* frantic questions, Goddess *Parvati* saw *Mahadeva's* indifference. *Dewi Amba* is the incarnation of *Dewi Parvati* herself and seeing *Dewi Amba's* condition, *Dewi Parvati* also experienced deep sadness, *Dewi Parvati* decided to punish *Mahadeva* and disappeared. "Come back *Parvati*" *Mahadeva* called, but the goddess sulked and refused to return. Finally, *Mahadeva* brought Goddess *Amba* back to life.

But Goddess *Amba* was still angry and so was Goddess *Parvati*. "One more blessing, then I will return," said Goddess *Parvati*.

Finally *Mahadewa* agreed to grant *Dewi Amba's* wish "I want revenge on the dragon *Basuki*". *Basuki*, the Snake Dragon had a thousand heads, *Dewi Amba* cut off all his heads except one, and when blood flowed from his wounds *Dewi Amba* brought the banyan tree to earth.

In Hindu mythology it is also stated that Lord *Vishnu* was born under a banyan tree. Furthermore, one of the Indian sculptures is the *Kalpavriksha* or tree that grants wishes from *Besnagar* and is now kept in the Indian museum of *Calcuta*, this sculpture has been identified by *Ananda Cammarasvani* as a banyan tree. Meanwhile, the Aryans depicted the god *Indra* with his queen as shaded by a banyan tree, from whose branches people got jewels, clothes, food and drink. The banyan tree is also called *Agastavata*, which symbolizes eternity, when the whole world was flooded with water, during the great flood, the leaves of the banyan tree saved *Dalmukunda* (Anonymous, 2003).

Furthermore, *Putra* (2009) stated that in Hindu mythology it is also stated that the banyan tree is one of the trees that receives grace. This is told in *Siwa Gama* regarding *Bhagawan Salukat's* journey. During the *Tirta Yatra* journey, *Bhagawan Salukat* arrived at the coast of *Negeri Daha*, he found a *waringin pandak* (banyan) tree. The banyan tree could speak while begging *Bhagawan Salukat*. "Venerable *Bhagawan Salukat* melt away my sins, a plant that grows in a lonely place, is always thin and always becomes food for animals," said the Banyan tree with humility to *Bhagawan Salukat*. *Bhagawan Salukat*, who already understood the nature of life, generously granted the banyan tree. "The banyan tree, now you must become a peacemaker (make the world peaceful), melt away sins, must become the protector of the Gods, grow in every holy place," said *Bhagawan Salukat*, giving a gift to the banyan tree.

The banyan tree is also called the *Shiva-Durga* tree, because of the multifunctionality of this tree for Hindus, especially in *Bali*. This banyan tree is also said to be a heavenly tree, because this banyan tree is a place of recreation or a haven for *pitara-pitari* who have been buried. In accordance with the *Shiva* concept in *Bali*, the banyan tree is said

to be the tree of the gods, especially Lord *Shiva*. Not only do *pitara*s like banyan trees, other creatures also like banyan trees because they have enormous energy power. Functionally, in the concept of Shiva in Bali, the banyan tree is where the Lord Shiva and Goddess *Durga* rest there accompanied by the *widyadara-widyadari*, including the *pitara* (Anonymous, 2003).

#### 4.4 Philosophical Meaning of the Banyan Plant

The banyan tree is a symbol of the Hindu Trinity, Lord Vishnu is the bark, Lord Brahma is the root, and Lord Shiva is the branches. Another name for Dewa Kuwera, the guardian of the wealth of the Gods, namely *Vatashraya*, lives in the banyan tree. According to tradition, the banyan tree is visited by Goddess Lakshmi on Sundays.

In the Puranas it is said that Savitri lost her husband a year after her marriage. Her husband died under a banyan tree, and by worshipping this tree, Savitri was able to bring her husband back to life. This legend began the emergence of a Puja ceremony, especially held on Vat Savitri day, at which time women fasted and walked around a banyan tree.

The banyan tree is considered a symbol of fertility, revered by those who long for children. The Mahabharata tells the story of a mother and her daughter who hugged two banyan trees, and became the mothers of the priest Vishwamitra and the priest Jamadagni. A pilgrimage to one of the major banyan trees is considered equivalent to twenty sacrifices and it is believed that a person who anoints himself with ashes from any part of this tree becomes free from sin. On the other hand, banyan leaves for Hindus have a philosophical meaning as a symbol of purity, a symbol of Agni, and as a base for purity both in the *Dewa Yadnya*, *Manusa Yadnya*, *Pitra Yadnya* ceremonies, and in other *yadnya* ceremonies.

Furthermore, Dwija (2012) stated that the banyan leaves used in the *Pitra Yadnya* ceremony have the meaning of asking for long life if later the *atma* (spirit) is allowed to

incarnate again. By paying attention to the series of implementation of the Mamukur ceremony as described above (on the uses of plants), the philosophical meaning contained in the *Ngangget Don Bingin* ceremony is as follows. The *bingin* or banyan tree in the Vedic scriptures and other Hindu literature is called *Kalpataru* or *Kalpavriksha*. This type of tree is also called *Asvatta*. The banyan tree originally grew in heaven and for the prosperity of mankind, this tree was sent down to earth as a symbol of gaining prosperity. Many *Kalpataru* trees are carved on the outer walls of mandirs or temples, as we can see in the *Prambananan* temple, Central Java. The *Ngangget Don Bingin* ceremony contains the meaning of strengthening the hearts of the *Yajamana* and his family to hold a ceremony to purify ancestral spirits by making banyan leaves (108 sheets) as spiritual bodies for the spirits who will be purified. It is hoped that the purified soul or spirit will eventually reach heaven, also often called "*mungguh ring ron bingin*".

Meanwhile, the *Ngajum Puspaśarīra* or *Puspalingga* ceremony contains the meaning that the ancestor being ceremonialized will be willing to attend and make *Puspaśarīra* the embodiment of his body. The *Atma* will be purified as *puruûa*, while *Puspaśarīra* will be its *prakṛti*.

Furthermore, in the implementation of the *Manusa Yadnya* ceremony, namely *Mewinten*, the banyan leaves which are used as a ceremony tool are philosophically interpreted as a wish to remain healthy and live long (Dwija, 2012). Wiana (2002) further stated that in the Saraswati palm leaf it is also mentioned that the use of banyan leaves in the ceremony to worship the Goddess *Saraswati* is interpreted as a symbol of eternity or protection. This means that science aims to lead to eternal life, science also means protection.

#### IV. Conclusion

Based on what has been described above, the following conclusions are drawn.

1. The use of plants as a means of ceremonial ceremonies will continue and be sustainable if the traditions that characterize Balinese society and culture are large traditions that are based on the implementation of various types of ceremonies, of which the *yadnya* ceremony is an important aspect of the Hindu religious belief system.
  2. On the other hand, there is a point of view, if Balinese Hindus deepen their philosophy, then all types of ceremonies will fade or at least decrease, because their essence is known. Thus, it is suspected that the use of plants as ceremonial facilities will decrease as the implementation of various types of ceremonies fades or decreases.
  3. Apart from the two views above, the use of plants, whether for carrying out ceremonies or to support the continuity of the cycles of the universe, provides a mandate to remind humans to protect plants of whatever type so that they do not experience degradation or even extinction.
  4. Based on a literature search, not much has been revealed regarding the philosophical meaning of the *upakara* plant, and efforts in this direction need to be made.
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