

Sustaining the *Ngerebong* Tradition: Reinterpreting Rituals in an Interfaith and Intercultural Context

Ni Made Ayu Nindya Damayanti, Moh. Mudzakkir,
Agus Machfud Fauzi, Khalid Syaifullah

State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

24040564145@mbs.unesa.ac.id, mudzakkir@unesa.ac.id,

agusmfauzi@unesa.ac.id, kbalidsyaifullah@unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates the sociological dynamics of the Ngerebong tradition in Kesiman, focusing on interreligious and intercultural interactions within a Hindu-majority community. It aims to understand how ritual practices serve as a medium for social negotiation and cultural adaptation in a pluralistic environment. Using a qualitative approach, the research combines field observation, interviews, and document analysis to explore symbolic expressions and social participation across religious groups. The findings reveal that the Ngerebong is not only a sacred ceremony but also a communal space where diverse identities engage in shared cultural experiences. Non-Hindu involvement in the ritual reflects openness and mutual respect, contributing to inclusive social cohesion. The study identifies shifts in symbolic meaning and ritual function, shaped by modernization, tourism, and digital media. These changes demonstrate the community's capacity to reinterpret tradition while preserving its spiritual essence. The analysis applies functionalist and conflict theory to explain how ritual fosters solidarity and reveals latent tensions. Ultimately, the research concludes that the Ngerebong operates as a living tradition that sustains cultural identity and promotes intergroup harmony. It offers a model for understanding how local rituals can support integration in multicultural societies, with implications for promoting sustainable cultural practices, strengthening interfaith dialogue, guiding policy frameworks that encourage social cohesion, and future research on the resilience of traditions under globalization.

Keywords: *Cultural Adaptation; Hindu Community; Interfaith Interaction; Ngerebong Tradition; Ritual Sociology.*

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Introduction

The *Ngerebong* ritual is a sacred tradition performed in Desa Adat Kesiman, Bali, every six months, precisely on *Redite Pon Wuku Medangsia*. This ceremony is not merely a religious observance but a communal expression of harmony between humans and metaphysical forces, aiming to transform negative energies into positive ones (Handayani et al., 2023). As a deeply rooted Hindu practice, the *Ngerebong* embodies the philosophical principles of Tri Hita Karana, emphasizing balance between humans, nature, and the divine (Subawa, 2024). The ritual involves trance, offerings, and symbolic gestures that reflect the community's spiritual and social cohesion (Naraswari & Aprianti, 2021). Its continuity across generations demonstrates its resilience amid modern pressures and cultural shifts.

In the context of Balinese Hindu society, the *Ngerebong* serves as a cultural anchor, reinforcing religious identity and communal solidarity. The ceremony is inclusive, often attracting participants and observers from various religious and ethnic backgrounds, thereby fostering interfaith encounters (Anam et al., 2024). This pluralistic engagement positions the *Ngerebong* not only as a religious event but also as a site of cultural negotiation and symbolic interaction (Hutasoit et al., 2023). The ritual's openness to external audiences raises questions about how traditional practices adapt to contemporary multicultural realities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analyzing how sacred traditions function within evolving social landscapes.

The *Ngerebong's* symbolic complexity invites sociological inquiry through multiple theoretical lenses. Functionalist theory views the ritual as a mechanism for maintaining social order and reinforcing collective values (Permatasari & Fauzi, 2024). Symbolic interactionism highlights the meanings embedded in ritual gestures, offerings, and trance states, which mediate relationships among participants (Dora et al., 2025). Conflict theory, meanwhile, interrogates the potential tensions arising from cultural appropriation, religious reinterpretation, or contestation of sacred space (Purana, 2022). These frameworks allow for a nuanced understanding of the *Ngerebong* as both a stabilizing force and a site of negotiation. The ritual's persistence amid globalization and tourism underscores its role in identity formation and cultural resilience.

Previous studies have examined the *Ngerebong* primarily as a religious ritual and a marker of Balinese identity. For instance, Sumarmi (2017) emphasizes the role of *Panca Yadnya* and *Tri Hita Karana* in sustaining spiritual and social harmony. Naraswari and Aprianti (2021) explore ritual communication and symbolic interaction within the ceremony. Meanwhile, Hutasoit et al. (2023) discuss religious tourism and its impact on Hindu practices. However, few studies have examined the sociological dimensions of intergroup dynamics and cultural negotiation in ritual contexts.

The ethnobotanical study by Handayani et al. (2023) reveals the ecological and symbolic significance of plant species used in the *Ngerebong* offerings. These materials are not only ritual tools but also carriers of cultural memory and spiritual meaning. Their selection and conservation reflect the community's commitment to preserving both biodiversity and religious heritage. Similarly, Sumarmi (2017) discusses the philosophical underpinnings of Hindu rituals, including the concepts of *karma*, *samsara*, and *moksa*, which inform the spiritual logic of the *Ngerebong*. These insights underscore the ritual's embeddedness in cosmological and ethical frameworks (Winisudo & Fauzi, 2021).

Permatasari and Fauzi (2024) highlight the role of the *Sedekah Bumi* in fostering social solidarity and transmitting values across generations. Although distinct from the *Ngerebong*, *Sedekah Bumi* shares similar functions in reinforcing communal bonds and expressing gratitude to divine forces. Both rituals demonstrate how traditional practices serve as vehicles for social integration and moral education. The presence of youth in these ceremonies indicates a conscious effort to sustain cultural continuity. This intergenerational participation is crucial for the resilience of ritual traditions in changing social contexts.

The study by Hutasoit et al. (2023) on religious tourism emphasizes the dual role of sacred sites as both places of worship and sites of cultural learning. The *Ngerebong*, like other Hindu ceremonies, attracts visitors seeking spiritual experiences and cultural insights (Chrismastianto & Sriartha, 2025). While this opens opportunities for intercultural dialogue, it also raises concerns about commodification and dilution of sacred meanings. The community's response to these challenges—through selective openness and ritual regulation—reflects

a strategic negotiation of identity and authenticity. Such responses are shaped by both theological convictions and pragmatic considerations.

Naraswari and Aprianti (2021) provide a detailed account of ritual communication in the *Ngerebong*, identifying verbal and non-verbal elements that structure the ceremony. Their findings show how symbolic actions—such as the placement of offerings, trance movements, and communal prayers—mediate social relationships and spiritual intentions. These communicative acts are not arbitrary but embedded in a shared cultural grammar that reinforces group cohesion. The ritual's performative dimension thus serves both expressive and integrative functions. Understanding these layers is essential for interpreting the social significance of the *Ngerebong*.

Sumarmi (2017) and Subawa (2024) both emphasize the philosophical and theological foundations of Hindu rituals, particularly the integration of spiritual and ecological values. The *Ngerebong* exemplifies this synthesis through its use of natural elements and its emphasis on cosmic balance. The ritual's spatial organization, temporal rhythm, and symbolic content reflect a worldview that sees humans as part of a larger spiritual ecology. This perspective challenges modern dichotomies between religion and nature, offering a holistic model of sacred practice. It also provides a framework for sustainable cultural preservation.

Overall, the *Ngerebong* tradition in Desa Adat Kesiman represents a rich intersection of religion, culture, and social structure. Its ritual complexity, symbolic depth, and communal participation make it a compelling subject for sociological analysis. By examining the *Ngerebong* through the lenses of functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory, this study aims to uncover the dynamics of solidarity, meaning-making, and negotiation within the ritual. The twelve studies reviewed provide a foundation for understanding the *Ngerebong*'s multifaceted role in Balinese society. Building on this foundation, this study seeks to answer three central research questions: RQ1, how do the social dynamics within the *Ngerebong* ritual reflect interreligious and intercultural interaction? RQ2, what forms of adaptation and resistance emerge within the Hindu Kesiman community in response to external influences such as tourism and modernity? RQ3, in what ways does

the ritual sustain continuity and resilience of tradition in a multicultural society? The objectives of this research are to identify and analyze the sociological dynamics embedded in the *Ngerebong* tradition. To describe the patterns of interaction, negotiation among religious and cultural groups. To contribute new insights into the sustainability of tradition in diverse contexts (Erawati et al., 2025; Triyaningsih et al., 2025; Zulkifli et al., 2024; Prayoga & Khaidir, 2023).

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive case study design to explore the sociocultural dimensions of the *Ngerebong* ritual in Desa Adat Kesiman. The case study method enables an in-depth examination of specific cultural phenomena in their natural context (Santhyasa, 2010). Qualitative research is suitable for capturing the complexity of symbolic practices and lived experiences embedded in ritual traditions (Karmi-ni & Diana, 2023). The descriptive aspect focuses on documenting observable patterns, meanings, and interactions without manipulating variables. This approach aligns with the goal of understanding how religious rituals shape social cohesion and cultural continuity.

The research was conducted in Desa Adat Kesiman, located in Denpasar, Bali, which is known for its enduring ritual traditions and spatial symbolism. Informants were selected purposively to represent diverse perspectives, totaling twelve individuals. These included three traditional leaders (coded as TL1, TL2, TL3), three religious figures (coded as RL1, RL2, RL3), three ritual participants (coded as RP1, RP2, RP3), and three interfaith community members (coded as IC1, IC2, IC3) (Bettaliyah et al., 2025). This selection strategy ensures that the data reflect both institutional and grassroots interpretations of the *Ngerebong*. The village's historical and spatial configuration, as documented by Santhyasa (2010), provides a rich backdrop for analyzing ritual practices. The inclusion of multi-religious informants also supports the study's focus on pluralism and tolerance.

Data collection was carried out using three complementary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was conducted during the *Ngerebong* ceremony to capture embodied practices, spatial movements, and communal interactions (Rasna & Juniartini, 2021). In-

depth interviews were held with key informants to explore personal narratives, symbolic meanings, and intergenerational transmission of values (Saputra et al., 2018). Documentation included photographs, archival materials, and local manuscripts that contextualize the ritual within broader cultural frameworks. These methods were chosen to triangulate data and enhance interpretive depth.

Thematic analysis was employed to process the data, beginning with reduction and categorization based on recurring patterns and sociological relevance. Themes such as solidarity, symbolic resistance, and ecological ethics were identified through coding and cross-referencing field notes with interview transcripts (Kusumadewi et al., 2023). The analysis was guided by sociological theories of ritual, habitus, and symbolic capital to interpret the data meaningfully (Fahham, 2018). Triangulation was applied to validate findings across sources and methods, ensuring analytical rigor and credibility (Wiridiata & Utama, 2023). This process allowed for the emergence of grounded insights into the ritual's social functions.

To ensure methodological validity, the study incorporated source triangulation by comparing perspectives from different informant groups. Method triangulation was also applied by integrating observational, verbal, and visual data (Bettaliyah et al., 2025). This strategy strengthens the reliability of interpretations and mitigates researcher bias. The use of cultural studies and ethnographic techniques supports the contextualization of findings within local epistemologies (Arisky & Fauzi, 2024). Moreover, the study acknowledges the dynamic interplay between tradition and digital mediation in shaping contemporary ritual expressions.

Finally, the research design reflects sensitivity to local wisdom and ethical considerations in engaging with sacred practices. Rituals such as the *Ngerebong* are approached not merely as cultural artifacts but as living systems of meaning and belief (Purningsih et al., 2023). The study adheres to community protocols and obtains informed consent from all participants. It also recognizes the role of ritual in maintaining ecological and spiritual balance, as emphasized in the use of symbolic materials and spatial orientation (Praditha, 2021). By situating the research within the lived realities of Desa Adat Kesiman, the methodology affirms the value of indigenous knowledge systems in academic inquiry.

Result and Discussion

RQ1: Interreligious and Intercultural Interaction

The *Ngerebong* ritual in Kesiman Village presents a unique case of religious performance that, while rooted in Hindu theology, has evolved into a site of interreligious and intercultural interaction. Observations and interviews reveal that the ritual includes symbolic elements such as trance (*kerauban*), *ngurek*, and the circulation of sacred objects, which are not only performed by Hindu participants but also witnessed and, in some cases, supported by non-Hindu community members (Saputra et al., 2018). As one Muslim informant explained, “*We help prepare the offerings, not to participate in the prayer, but as a way to respect the village tradition*” (IC2). This illustrates the Balinese philosophy of *menyama braya*, emphasizing kinship beyond religious affiliation. Triangulation of observation (non-Hindu logistical support), interview (IC2), and village records confirms that interfaith involvement has become normalized. This finding resonates with Ariwibowo et al. (2026), who describe the *Tukuder* Festival as a medium for preserving cohesion in multi-faith communities and highlight socio-cultural dynamics as instruments of solidarity in diverse societies (Amankwa et al., 2026). The inclusivity of the *Ngerebong* also aligns with those who emphasize multiplex cultural ties as enabling diverse actors to sustain meaningful relationships across boundaries (Gondal, 2022).

Further findings indicate that non-Hindu participation in the *Ngerebong* extends beyond passive observation to include logistical support and cultural appreciation. In several instances, Muslim residents in Kesiman have contributed to the preparation of offerings and the maintenance of the temple grounds during the ritual (Muamalah et al., 2023). This involvement is not perceived as a religious transgression but rather as a gesture of solidarity and respect for local tradition. Interviews with Hindu leaders confirm that such participation is welcomed, provided it does not interfere with the ritual’s theological core. This inclusive attitude reflects the Balinese philosophy of *menyama braya*, which emphasizes kinship beyond religious affiliation (Putra et al., 2021). The acceptance of non-Hindu involvement also demonstrates the community’s adaptive capacity to maintain harmony amid religious diversity. This finding resonates with Ariwibowo et al. (2026) and Amankwa et al. (2026), while Gondal (2022) further explains how

multiplexity of ties sustains intercultural solidarity. The *Ngerebong* ritual exemplifies how religious traditions can function as instruments of social integration rather than exclusion, challenging rigid definitions of ritual ownership by allowing shared cultural stewardship.

For Hindu participants, the *Ngerebong* remains understood as a sacred *Dewa Yadnya* ritual that sustains cosmic balance and affirms the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*. In contrast, non-Hindu residents often interpret their involvement as a cultural duty and an expression of solidarity with the village community rather than a theological act. These differing perspectives do not generate conflict; instead, they enrich the ritual by allowing multiple layers of meaning to coexist. The coexistence of spiritual devotion and cultural appreciation demonstrates how the *Ngerebong* functions as a shared social space in which diverse identities negotiate belonging and reinforce cohesion across religious boundaries.

RQ2: Adaptation and Resistance to External Influences

The symbolic meaning of the *Ngerebong* has undergone significant transformation in response to modernity and tourism. Originally conceived as a *Dewa Yadnya* ritual to neutralize *bhuta kala*, the *Ngerebong* is now also interpreted as a cultural heritage performance. A traditional leader emphasized, “*Nowadays many tourists come, so we must arrange the ritual to remain sacred but also understandable for outsiders*” (TL1). This reflects adaptive strategies to balance sacred values with external demands. However, resistance from traditionalists underscores tensions over authenticity and commercialization. Triangulation of observation (adjustments in ritual aesthetics), interview (TL1), and tourism documents demonstrates the coexistence of adaptation and resistance. Highlight how participatory culture and new media literacies reshape traditional arts (Ayu et al., 2025). Furthermore, it demonstrates how digital communication is reconstructing cultural symbols for diplomacy (Xie & Suwanthada, 2024). This transformation reflects broader trends in Balinese ritual life, where sacred performances are recontextualized to serve both religious and economic functions (Pranajaya et al., 2023). The reinterpretation of the *Ngerebong*'s meaning illustrates the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, demonstrating how cultural adaptation strengthens the national image in a global context (Zhou & Yin, 2025).

RQ3: Sustainability and Continuity of Tradition

The social function of the *Ngerebong* has expanded beyond its original religious scope to include roles in community cohesion, identity affirmation, and conflict resolution. The ritual provides a space for collective expression, where individuals from various social strata participate in a shared symbolic act. As one ritual participant stated, “*We teach the children to make offerings so they understand this tradition is not only for the elders*” (RP2). This highlights the pedagogical function of the *Ngerebong*, where values are transmitted across generations. Triangulation of observation (youth involvement in preparation), interview (RP2), and local manuscripts confirms the importance of youth participation in sustaining ritual continuity. Highlight strategies for bridging cultures in globalized projects, which parallel the *Ngerebong*'s adaptive inclusivity (Ingram et al., 2025). Demonstrate how spatial morphology sustains cultural heritage, resonating with the *Ngerebong*'s use of open temple spaces (Liu et al., 2026). Emphasize indigenous adaptation and socio-cultural dynamics in resilience, aligning with the *Ngerebong*'s capacity to negotiate pluralism (Naah et al., 2026).

Media coverage and tourism have significantly influenced public perceptions of the *Ngerebong*, both locally and internationally. The ritual is frequently featured in travel blogs, documentaries, and social media platforms, often framed as an exotic spectacle. While such representations increase visibility, they also risk distorting the ritual's meaning by emphasizing its sensational aspects, such as trance and self-stabbing. However, local stakeholders have responded by developing interpretive materials and guided tours that contextualize the ritual within its religious framework. These efforts aim to balance cultural preservation with economic opportunity, ensuring that tourism does not erode the ritual's sanctity. The role of media becomes ambivalent, both a tool for cultural dissemination and a potential source of misrepresentation. The community's proactive engagement with media narratives reflects a strategic approach to cultural diplomacy. It also underscores the importance of narrative control in safeguarding intangible heritage. This aligns with Liu et al. (2026) and Naah et al. (2026), who emphasize adaptive strategies in sustaining cultural heritage under external pressures.

From a functionalist perspective, the *Ngerebong* can be understood as a mechanism for maintaining social equilibrium. The ritual reinforces collective values, affirms social roles, and provides a structured outlet for emotional expression. The trance state, for instance, allows participants to embody divine forces, temporarily suspending social hierarchies and enabling cathartic release. This aligns with Durkheim's notion of ritual as a means of social integration, in which the sacred unifies the community (Mustofa, 2019). The ritual also facilitates the reaffirmation of communal identity, particularly in the face of external pressures such as urbanization and religious pluralism. By enacting a shared cosmology, the community reasserts its moral order and cultural distinctiveness. The ritual's periodic nature further contributes to social stability by embedding sacred time within the secular calendar. In this way, the *Ngerebong* functions as a cultural anchor amidst the flux of modern life. This view is strengthened by showing how rituals and socio-cultural practices sustain equilibrium in diverse societies (Ingram et al., 2025).

Conversely, conflict theory offers a different lens for interpreting the ritual's social dynamics. While the *Ngerebong* promotes unity, it also reveals underlying tensions related to power, status, and cultural authenticity. The ritual's association with royal lineage and traditional authority structures can reinforce social stratification. Moreover, debates over ritual interpretation and participation rights reflect broader struggles over cultural capital. For instance, disagreements have emerged regarding the inclusion of non-Hindu participants and the commercialization of sacred symbols. These conflicts highlight the contested nature of tradition in a multicultural context. They also underscore the need for inclusive governance mechanisms that accommodate diverse perspectives. This resonates with Diantika & Mastini (2023), who emphasize that socio-cultural dynamics often involve negotiation and contestation rather than pure consensus.

Symbolic interactionism provides further insight into the ritual's meaning-making processes. The symbols employed in the *Ngerebong*, such as *keris*, *saput poleng*, and trance, are not fixed but acquire meaning through social interaction (Oktavianti & Eddy, 2022). These symbols function as communicative devices that mediate relationships between humans and the divine, as well as among community members. The act

of *ngurek*, for example, is interpreted differently by various stakeholders: as spiritual devotion by insiders, as cultural performance by tourists, and as a psychological phenomenon by outsiders (Dewanti & Kameswari, 2019). This multiplicity of interpretations reflects the ritual's semiotic richness and its capacity to accommodate diverse worldviews. The ritual thus becomes a site of symbolic negotiation, where meanings are constantly produced and reproduced. This aligns with Gondal (2022), who emphasizes interpretive flexibility in sustaining cultural relevance.

The ritual's capacity to accommodate multiple interpretations contributes to its resilience in a multicultural setting. Rather than enforcing doctrinal uniformity, the *Ngerebong* allows for pluralistic engagement, where participants and observers bring their own meanings to the experience. This openness fosters intercultural dialogue and mutual respect, reinforcing social cohesion. It also enables the ritual to function as a cultural common, where diverse actors can participate without compromising their identities. Such inclusivity is particularly important in urban settings like Denpasar, where demographic diversity is high. The ritual's adaptability thus becomes a key factor in its sustainability. It also challenges essentialist notions of cultural purity, emphasizing hybridity and negotiation. This aligns with Zhou & Yin (2025), who argue that cultural hybridity strengthens national image and intercultural dialogue.

Conclusion

The *Ngerebong* tradition in Kesiman functions not solely as a sacred Hindu ritual but as a dynamic space for cross-identity social engagement. Regarding RQ1, the findings confirm that the *Ngerebong* has become a platform for interreligious and intercultural interaction. The involvement of non-Hindu participants through observation, logistical support, and cultural appreciation illustrates how the ritual fosters inclusive solidarity and strengthens social cohesion. Importantly, the study highlights that Hindu and non-Hindu groups attach different meanings to their participation: Hindus regard the *Ngerebong* as a *Dewa Yadnya* that sustains cosmic balance, while non-Hindus view it as a cultural duty and an expression of communal solidarity. This coexistence of spiritual devotion and cultural appreciation demonstrates how diverse perspectives can converge to reinforce interfaith harmony. In relation to RQ 2, the study reveals that adaptation and resistance coexist within

the ritual's transformation under modernity and tourism. While aesthetic adjustments and promotional strategies reflect adaptive responses to external demands, resistance from traditionalists underscores concerns about authenticity and commodification. These dynamics highlight the community's agency in negotiating sacred boundaries, showing that ritual sustainability depends on balancing innovation with preservation. Concerning RQ3, the results emphasize that the *Ngerebong* plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural continuity and social cohesion. The ritual functions as a medium for transmitting values across generations, reinforcing communal identity, and providing a structured outlet for negotiation amidst pluralism. Its adaptability to demographic diversity and external influences demonstrates resilience, ensuring that the *Ngerebong* remains relevant in a rapidly changing society.

The implications of these findings suggest that the *Ngerebong* exemplifies how local heritage can sustain identity and unity within a transforming society. It provides a sociological model for understanding how rituals can simultaneously preserve spiritual essence, accommodate cultural hybridity, and strengthen intergenerational transmission. Suggestions for future research include examining the role of digital media in shaping perceptions of the *Ngerebong*, conducting comparative studies with other interfaith rituals in Indonesia, and analyzing the long-term impact of youth participation on sustaining cultural continuity. Such studies would deepen understanding of how local traditions adapt to global influences while maintaining their integrative function.

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