

## TRADITIONAL HEALING OF BALI: REVITALIZING TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTICES THROUGH MODERN SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores efforts to revitalize Balinese traditional healing through modern scientific approaches, including the documentation of indigenous knowledge, pharmacological research on medicinal plants, and the integration of traditional practices into formal healthcare systems. Balinese traditional healing is a cultural legacy rich in spiritual values, life philosophy, and local knowledge of physical and mental well-being. Practices such as *usada*, healing, and the use of herbal remedies have been passed down through generations and have played a significant role in maintaining holistic health. However, amid the dominance of modern medical systems, these traditional practices face challenges in terms of legitimacy and continuity. Using qualitative methods and literature analysis, this study highlights the importance of preserving local wisdom while ensuring the safety and efficacy of traditional practices through scientific validation. Findings suggest that a collaborative approach between traditional knowledge and modern science offers a pathway to a more holistic and context-sensitive healthcare model. This revitalization effort is not only an act of cultural preservation but also a strategy for empowering local communities and enriching national healthcare systems. Thus, Balinese traditional healing holds great potential to become an integral part of future sustainable health solutions rooted in indigenous wisdom.

**Keywords:** Balinese traditional healing, *usada*, *balian*, indigenous knowledge, scientific validation, health integration, cultural preservation

### I. Introduction

Traditional Balinese healing has a long and rich history, practiced by the Balinese people for centuries. This form of healing is based on a deep understanding of the human body, nature, and spiritual connections. Various techniques, such as herbal remedies, traditional massage, and spiritual ceremonies, are used to treat a range of physical and mental illnesses. In Balinese culture, health is seen as a balance between the body, mind, and spirit, all of which interact to achieve a state of well-being. These practices rely not only on physical approaches but also on the mental and spiritual aspects, which play an essential role in the healing process.

However, with the advancement of time and modern medical technology, many traditional Balinese healing practices have begun to be forgotten or marginalized. Society tends to rely more on modern medicine, which is based on conventional medical science. Nevertheless, there are still many individuals who believe in the effectiveness of Balinese traditional healing and the spiritual values embedded in it. Therefore, there is a need to preserve and revive this knowledge so that it does not disappear, while at the same time finding ways to integrate these traditional elements with modern scientific approaches.

This paper aims to explore how traditional Balinese healing can be revitalized through a modern scientific approach. By utilizing the latest techniques and technologies in health sciences, such as research on herbal contents, health data analysis, and evidence-based psychological approaches, it is hoped that the validity and effectiveness of Balinese traditional healing practices can be strengthened. Furthermore, this research also focuses on addressing the challenges that arise in integrating these

two worlds and finding effective ways to educate the public about the benefits and important role of traditional healing in the context of holistic health.

## II. Traditional Balinese Healing Techniques

Traditional healing techniques in Bali are diverse, including both herbal remedies and supernatural practices. This healing method is known as *Usada*, and the practitioners are called *Balian*, so those who practice traditional healing in Bali are referred to as *Balian Usada*. Balian Usada primarily focuses on the use of knowledge about healing techniques, preparing various types of medicine (Nala, 89: 2006) made from different medicinal plants. While other types of Balian often use mantras and similar supernatural practices, which are believed to be highly effective in healing. This form of healing relies more on spiritual practices rather than herbal ingredients. It is not uncommon for a Balian to diagnose a person's illness through touch or by scanning their aura. In some cases, simply mentioning a person's name over the phone allows a healer to detect the illness from a distance and then proceed with treatment.

Traditional healing is highly sought after today, both by domestic and international patients. One of the most popular forms of tourism for foreign visitors is health tourism. They specifically come for retreats that involve various activities related to healing and spiritual practices. Many visitors also go to a *griya* (healing center) or seek out healers for *melukat* (ritual purification) and other activities for medical treatment, spiritual consultations, and more. The trend of traditional Balinese healing is currently very popular. For instance, traditional healing practiced within the Bahung Tringan community in Karangasem attracts many international tourists who come for both medical treatment and spiritual consultations. Many also participate in the spiritual practices conducted within this community (Suwantana, 2019).

Healing practices are also commonly held in hotels such as those in Candidasa and Sidemen. Tourists participate in intensive multi-day activities focused on mental healing and spiritual practices. Yoga asanas and meditation are central components. There are also rituals like *melukat* (water purification), spiritual therapy by healers, *agni hotra*, and other spiritual practices. These participants often follow a strict diet with specific foods for detoxification, and some even undergo fasting or refrain from speaking. This trend is increasingly popular, leading to the growth of retreat packages.

This situation is certainly very beneficial in terms of health, spiritual awareness, social interaction, and economically. The attraction of traditional Balinese healing can certainly be offered as an alternative to attract tourists to return to Bali. Karangasem, a sacred and mystical location where traditional healers develop, is certainly an interesting place to offer. These healers must be introduced so that it becomes mutually beneficial in many aspects. Tourists who come benefit from both healing and spiritual growth, while healers can dedicate their abilities for the well-being of the community. Of course, there are both social and financial transactions involved, which leads to stronger social relationships, and over time, there is an improvement in the economy, both for the healers directly and the surrounding areas that provide related facilities.

There have been several studies conducted by Balinese scholars related to Balinese traditional medicine. I Ketut Jirnaya, in his work *Lontar Usada Buduh: A Traditional Approach to Treating Mental Illness Based on Balinese Local Wisdom*, states that Bali has lontar (palm-leaf manuscripts) that are still sanctified in the form of *lontar usada*. The number of *lontar usada* is in the thousands due to the process of transcription or adaptation. The lontar studied in his work is related to *Usada Buduh* (treatment for mental illness). According to him, *lontar Usada Buduh* offers traditional Balinese healing methods to treat those suffering from mental illness. In *Usada Buduh* healing, in addition to providing natural medicines, mantras are also used. This means that healers, often called *dukun* in Bali, not only provide herbal concoctions but also use chants or mantras, and in certain cases, pray to God through these mantras for the patient's immediate recovery.

Suwantana, in his research (2019) titled "Prinsip Semesta Cair dalam Teknik Penyembuhan pada Komunitas Bahung Tringan, Bebandem, Karangasem," states that the healing techniques practiced by the Bahung Tringan community in Bebandem Village, Karangasem, with the principle of liquid universe, encompass the healing of medical, non-medical diseases, and the balancing of spiritual energy. Medical diseases refer to physical or mental illnesses that naturally occur in a person's body, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, kidney issues, and others. These diseases can be healed through a process of creation within the healer's self. Healing medical diseases usually cannot be immediate as it depends on the patient's body condition. However, active participation in meditation using the Bahung Tringan Buddha consciousness technique, regular Homa Jnana practices, and following Yoga asanas training can help accelerate the healing process.

Non-medical diseases, which are illnesses caused by the intent of others through black magic, are the core of the healing technique in the Bahung Tringan community. Since this community works within the spiritual energy domain, diseases related to this are within their scope. So far, nearly 80 percent of non-medical diseases treated by the community have been healed, such as curses, illnesses sent by others, and more. The principle of liquid universe is widely used in non-medical healing. This healing is often done remotely as it requires immediate action, and with the liquid universe principle, remote healing is very easy to perform.

The principle of the liquid universe, according to Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka, the elder of the Bahung Tringan community, involves managing the energy within the body due to the unity of thought and feeling. The energy managed within the body is called the liquid universe. Outside the body, there is also energy or the liquid universe. The connection between the liquid universe inside and outside the body allows the healer's intention to perform remote healing by instructing the liquid universe to deliver the intention to the intended location. By knowing the name of the person to be healed, the healer's intention is directed to the patient's exact location, enabling healing from a distance.

The way the liquid universe works is simple and natural. What is needed, which may be difficult, is understanding the energy properly managed within the body. Once this can be accessed, the healing process using this principle will proceed naturally. The first step is to connect the liquid universe inside the body with the liquid universe outside. Second, the intention then directs the liquid universe to deliver the intention to the target. Third, with the name of the patient, the healer's intention is clear, and it can begin the healing process. Fourth, after the intention has been carried out, the patient is asked about their condition. Therefore, the liquid universe works by bridging the distance between the healer and the patient.

### III. Efforts for Revitalization

Revitalizing traditional Balinese health practices through a modern scientific approach can be done in several ways by combining traditional knowledge with the latest medical findings and technologies. This process aims not only to preserve the tradition but also to improve the effectiveness and validity of Balinese traditional healing in the context of modern times. Some examples of efforts that have been made to revitalize Balinese traditional health practices through a modern scientific approach are as follows:

#### **Research on Balinese Herbal Remedies by Udayana University**

Udayana University in Bali has conducted various studies on the benefits of herbal remedies used in Balinese traditional healing practices. One important study is on Balinese medicinal plants, such as *temu lawak* (*Curcuma xanthorrhiza*) and *kunir* (*Curcuma longa*), which are used in traditional therapies to treat conditions like digestive disorders and inflammation. This research focuses on identifying the active compounds in these plants and conducting clinical trials to assess their therapeutic effects. The results of this research provide scientific support for the use of Balinese herbal

remedies as a safe and effective alternative treatment, which can be integrated with modern medicine (Trapika et al., 2023).

Udayana University in Bali conducts research on the benefits of traditional herbal remedies by identifying medicinal plants used in Balinese healing practices, such as *temu lawak* (*Curcuma xanthorrhiza*) and *kunir* (*Curcuma longa*). Researchers collect plant samples from various regions in Bali known for their biodiversity, then conduct chemical analyses to identify active compounds, such as curcumin, which play a role in therapeutic treatment. In addition, clinical trials are carried out to test the effectiveness of these plants in addressing digestive disorders, inflammation, and other health conditions, through both pre-clinical animal studies and clinical trials on humans.

This research also involves collaboration with Balinese traditional healers, such as Balian Usada, to understand how these remedies are used in traditional healing contexts. The findings of this research provide scientific evidence supporting the use of Balinese herbal remedies as a safe and effective alternative treatment that can complement modern medicine. Additionally, Udayana University has developed guidelines or recommendations for the use of these herbal remedies, which can help both the public and medical professionals utilize traditional therapies based on scientific evidence.

### **Spiritual and Healing Retreat Programs at Hotels and Resorts**

In Bali, many hotels and resorts have integrated retreat programs that combine traditional healing therapies with scientific approaches. For instance, in the Ubud, Candidasa, Sidemen, and other areas, there are retreat programs that combine yoga, meditation, and spiritual therapies such as *melukat* (water purification) with modern methods for stress management and mental health. These programs are often accompanied by monitoring of physical and mental health by medical staff or professional therapists, allowing visitors to experience the holistic benefits of traditional healing with a more measurable and evidence-based approach (<https://omhamretreat.com>). Spiritual and healing retreat programs at hotels and resorts in Bali have become a major attraction for tourists seeking holistic and healing experiences. These programs generally offer a combination of physical, mental, and spiritual therapies, designed to help participants achieve a better life balance. In Bali, many hotels and resorts integrate traditional healing practices like yoga, meditation, and water therapy (*melukat*) with modern health services such as detox therapy, massage, and counseling. Additionally, spiritual activities such as purification rituals and contemplation often become part of these programs, providing a deeper experience in the healing process. Tourists from around the world come to join these retreat programs, seeking peace and recovery from the pressures of daily life.

### **Collaboration Between Balian Usada and Medical Professionals**

Some well-known Balian Usada (traditional healers) in Bali are now collaborating with doctors and medical professionals in providing healing services. For example, Balian Usada in the Karangasem area have teamed up with medical practitioners to design healing programs that combine herbal therapies with modern medical techniques such as acupuncture or physical therapy. This collaboration allows patients to receive a more holistic approach, where both medical and traditional treatments complement each other. This partnership also provides opportunities for the community to benefit from both healing systems, with a more structured form of supervision (Suatama, 2019).

Collaboration between Balian Usada and medical professionals can be achieved by fostering mutual understanding and respect for each other's roles in healing. Medical professionals, such as doctors or therapists, can work together with Balian Usada in integrating traditional therapies with modern treatments. This begins with open dialogue and sharing of knowledge between the two parties regarding their healing methods. Balian Usada, who are experts in herbal remedies and spiritual healing techniques, can provide guidance on the use of traditional medicinal plants that have been proven through generations. On the other hand, medical professionals can offer scientific information

and knowledge about health, medical diagnoses, and modern treatment techniques. With this collaboration, patients can experience the benefits of both approaches at the same time, complementing each other.

In practice, this partnership can be realized through holistic care programs that combine medical treatments with traditional Balinese therapy. For example, a patient receiving medical treatment for a particular illness can continue with traditional therapies such as herbal remedies or spiritual healing. Additionally, joint education between Balian Usada and medical professionals can be carried out through training or workshops focused on understanding and techniques that can be adapted by both parties. With an approach based on mutual respect and complementarity, this collaboration will create a more inclusive healthcare system, blending the strengths of both modern and traditional medicine for the overall well-being of the patients.

### **Detoxification and Healing Services at Spas and Wellness Centers**

Several spa and wellness centers in Bali have also integrated traditional Balinese healing in their services. For example, detoxification packages that include herbal diets, treatments with local remedies, and relaxation techniques such as meditation and yoga are combined with modern medical therapies to support the detoxification process. This has attracted many international tourists who wish to benefit from healing rooted in Balinese tradition but with a more measured and scientific approach (Meikassandra et al., 2020).

Detoxification and healing services at spas and wellness centers in Bali generally combine traditional healing practices with modern health services, offering a holistic experience for tourists. Detoxification programs begin with a series of therapies such as detox diets, food fasting, and consumption of juice or herbal remedies designed to cleanse the body of toxins. In addition, therapies such as traditional Balinese massage, herbal saunas, and steam baths are used to improve blood circulation and accelerate the process of toxin elimination through the skin. These activities are designed to help the body and mind reduce stress, improve digestion, and enhance overall energy. Guests are also often given the opportunity to participate in yoga or meditation to calm the mind and achieve body balance.

In addition to physical detoxification, many wellness centers in Bali also offer spiritual healing therapies, which are an important part of Balinese culture. Services such as *melukat* rituals (purification with holy water), energy therapy by local healers, and other spiritual practices are often part of the retreat programs. Balinese practitioners, such as Balian Usada, are typically invited to provide spiritual healing therapies that can help address emotional issues or trauma that may affect a person's well-being. All these services, which combine traditional and modern elements, aim to provide a comprehensive experience and help participants achieve physical, mental, and spiritual healing.

### **Development of Standards and Quality Testing for Traditional Herbal Remedies**

Several institutions in Bali, including the National Agency of Drug and Food Control (BPOM), have collaborated with traditional healing practitioners to develop quality standards for herbal remedies used in Balinese traditional medicine. This initiative aims to ensure that the remedies are safe and effective for patients. In addition, laboratory testing is conducted to verify that the remedies do not contain harmful substances or contaminants, and that they contain active compounds with therapeutic potential (Yuslianti, 2016).

The development of standards and quality testing for traditional herbal remedies in Bali can be achieved through collaboration between the government, educational institutions, pharmaceutical experts, and traditional healing practitioners. The first step is mapping the types of herbal remedies used by Balinese practitioners, such as Balian Usada. This includes documenting the ingredients, preparation methods, and therapeutic indications for each remedy. Afterward, the standards are



developed by formulating guidelines that cover preparation methods, dosages, medical indications, and safe usage procedures. These standards must also include hygiene and safety aspects to ensure that the remedies produced are safe for public use.

Once the standards are established, quality testing of traditional herbal remedies can be conducted through laboratory tests to analyze the chemical composition and the active compounds in the remedies. These tests include verifying that the remedies are free from contaminants or harmful substances, and assessing the concentration of active ingredients in the remedy. Research institutions such as Universitas Udayana or the BPOM may be involved in this process to ensure that the quality of the remedies meets the established standards. The results of these tests will provide scientific evidence to guarantee the effectiveness and safety of the remedies, as well as ensure quality assurance for consumers using Balinese traditional medicine.

These examples demonstrate that modern scientific approaches can be applied to various aspects of Balinese traditional healing, from scientific research, professional training, to integration with modern medicine. These steps open the way for the development of more holistic, evidence-based, and globally accepted traditional Balinese healing practices.

## VI. Conclusion

Balinese traditional healing, which has developed over centuries through practices such as the use of herbal remedies, spiritual therapies, and other healing techniques, holds great potential to be integrated with modern scientific approaches. Through in-depth scientific research, such as testing the active compounds in Balinese medicinal plants and conducting clinical trials to evaluate the effectiveness of therapies, scientific evidence can be obtained to support the efficacy of traditional medicine. This approach not only enriches the medical world with safe and natural alternative treatments but also enables Balinese traditional healing to be more widely accepted at the global level.

The revitalization of traditional Balinese health practices through modern scientific approaches allows for the development of more holistic treatment methods, combining the power of herbal and spiritual healing with the latest medical technologies. By collaborating between traditional practitioners and medical professionals, as well as developing quality standards and certifications for herbal remedies, Balinese traditional healing can be effectively integrated into modern healthcare systems. This opens up great opportunities for the development of the wellness and healthcare sector in Bali, improving the well-being of the community, and contributing positively to the economy through the development of health-based tourism.

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