

## CULTURAL VALUES REPRESENTED IN THE METATAH (TOOTH FILING) RITUAL: AN ETHNOPHOTOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract:

The Metatah ceremony, also known as tooth cutting, is a significant event in Balinese society, imbued with intellectual and spiritual significance. This study seeks to elucidate the portrayal of cultural values in the Metatah ceremonial utilizing an ethnographic methodology. This study use qualitative methodologies and visual ethnographic analysis to examine the manifestation of cultural meanings within the visual components of the Metatah ceremonial. This study demonstrates that ethnography effectively depicts the sacred and transformational aspects of the Metatah ceremony, while also functioning as a viable medium for cultural preservation. This collection of images of the traditional ceremonial illustrates several narratives within Balinese culture, characterized by simplicity yet rich in both explicit and implicit connotations. These discoveries significantly enhance the field of visual anthropology, particularly in relation to coming-of-age rites in Bali.

**Keywords:** *Ethnography, Metatah, Dental Modification, Balinese Culture, Visual Anthropology*

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation abundant in cultural diversity, with each tribe and ethnic group possessing distinct customs rooted in esteemed values. The Metatah (teeth cutting) ceremony in Bali is a tradition that continues to be upheld today. This event transcends a mere physical rite, embodying profound philosophical and spiritual significance within the context of the human experience, as per Balinese Hindu teachings. Metatah represents self-enhancement, mastery over impulses, and the purification of primal characteristics, hence signifying an individual's spiritual maturity.

The Metatah or Mepandes rite is a tooth-cutting ritual that Balinese Hindus must undertake as a symbol of personal development and maturation. This ceremony embodies profound philosophical principles regarding the mastery of primal instincts (Sad Ripu) inherent in humanity. In the contemporary setting, when globalization undermines traditions, visual documenting via ethnophotography is crucial for conserving and conveying cultural values.

In contemporary society, traditional ceremonies like metatah encounter difficulties stemming from globalization and evolving social ideals. Nonetheless, these events continue to be a significant aspect of Balinese cultural identity. Ethnophotography is an effective method for recording and examining the persistence of this custom. Ethnophotography not only documents the visual elements of the ceremony but also elucidates the symbolic significances, cultural values, and social interactions inherent in each phase of the ritual.

This work seeks to illustrate the cultural values inherent in the Metatah ceremony using ethnophotographic analysis. The researcher integrates visual and anthropological methodologies by examining the manifestation of ideals such as purity, balance, and reverence for ancestors within the ritual. This study will examine photography's significance as a documentary medium that preserves cultural heritage in the face of industrialization.

This research aims to enhance awareness of the cultural relevance of the Metatah ceremony and its role in conserving Balinese customs. The findings of this study may also act as a resource for scholars, cultural analysts, and the youth in comprehending and safeguarding the local wisdom inherent in traditional rites.

This study seeks to analyze and discern the cultural meanings embedded in the photographic series of the Metatah ceremony via ethnophotography. The author examines the visual depiction of these principles using ethnophotographic works from the photographic series captured during the ceremony. It examines the function of ethnophotography in safeguarding Balinese culture across different cultures and generations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ethnophotography is a method or approach that utilizes the intersection of the visual language of photography and the reflective approach of anthropology. Ethnophotography offers visual images that reflect the thin line between subjectivity and cultural context. The position of photography in ethnophotography can also be understood as a visual narrative constructed by a series of photographs, recorded over a certain period of time and carrying a

certain point of view. This point of view is expected to help readers better understand the culture of a particular ethnic group. The Concept of Ethnophotography.

Ethnophotography is a visual documentation approach in anthropological research that combines photography with ethnographic methods to systematically record, analyze, and interpret culture. Unlike journalistic or fine art photography, ethnophotography emphasizes three aspects. First, cultural contextualization, where photos are not only aesthetic images but also anthropological data tied to social contexts, rituals, or daily life. Second, subject participation, where photographers involve the community being studied in the photo-taking process to minimize bias. Third is symbolic analysis, which reveals the hidden meanings of objects, gestures, or spatial arrangements in a particular culture. (Collier & Collier, 1989).

The subsequent topic is photography, which pertains to the arrangement of angles and composition in capturing images. Photography is a medium for communication and artistic expression that merges technology and visual perception to capture, interpret, and show the world in two-dimensional images.

Photography amalgamates technical procedures and creativity, highlighting the synthesis of instruments like cameras, lenses, and lighting with the photographer's subjective choices, including composition, timing, and the visual narrative to be communicated. In ethnophotography, the slow shutter speed approach can effectively capture motions in ritual procedures, such as the Metatah ceremony, producing a dynamic impression that embodies the spiritual significance of the activity. Moreover, the selection of shooting angle significantly influences the representation of the cultural perspective and worldview of the community being captured. Photography has a dual purpose: as a documentary media and as an expressive tool. Photography serves a documentary function by objectively recording visual facts, such as capturing each phase of a traditional ceremony for archival or historical and anthropological study. In its expressive capacity, photography conveys the photographer's subjective perception, exemplified by the employment of shadows and particular lighting to enhance spiritual symbolism inside a ceremony. Consequently, photography serves not only as a means of documenting reality but also as a medium for artistically expressing meaning and emotion. In photography, light serves not merely as a technical instrument but also as a crucial element that constructs visual significance. The application of backlighting in capturing images of offerings during traditional rites can evoke a hallowed aura, so enhancing the spiritual aspect of the topic depicted.

The materiality of photography, whether digital or analog, affects the production, interpretation, and reception of an image by the audience. The variations in medium influence not only the technical process of photography but also the visual perception and aesthetic experience of the photographic output. The evolution of digital technology has transformed the paradigm of photography from only documenting reality to fabricating reality. In this context, the post-production process is crucial in molding the visual message the photographer intends to communicate. Color editing can emphasize certain cultural nuances, allowing photographs to communicate not only the visible but also underlying symbolic and aesthetic qualities. Consequently, digital photography is no longer impartial; it has become an active medium in the creation of visual tales.

## METHOD

The study employs a qualitative methodology utilizing visual ethnography or ethnophotography techniques.

Data was acquired via:

1. Participatory observation during a ceremony in Kuta, Kuta District, Badung-Bali. (Family Of Bli I Wayan Wijana and his Daughter Ni Komang Sabrina Jayanti Wijana)
2. Photographic documentation of key moments in the ritual
3. In-depth interviews with traditional leaders, families of ceremony participants, and cultural photographers
4. Visual analysis of photographs: Visual analysis is a systematic process of understanding, interpreting, and evaluating the meaning of visual elements in a work or visual media, such as photos, videos, advertisements, paintings, and graphic designs. This analysis not only looks at “what is visible,” but also explores how messages are conveyed through form, color, composition, symbols, and socio-cultural context. According to Gillian Rose (2016), in her book *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, visual analysis includes approaches to uncovering the cultural and ideological meanings contained in visual media, both explicitly and implicitly.

As The Key informant of all the ceremonies, Bli Wijana gives an explanation with general. In addition, the researcher conducted an interview with a local priest, Ida Nak Lingsir, who provided substantial insights regarding the metatah ceremony. Furthermore, the researcher also obtained information from one of the

participants, Ni Komang Sabrina, particularly concerning her personal feelings and experiences during the performance of this traditional ritual.

In classifying his photos, the author also uses the EDFAT method. EDFAT is an acronym for Entire, Details, Frame, Angle, Time, which was developed in the world of photojournalism, specifically as a tool to aid in the process of visual observation and storytelling through photos. This concept was first introduced by Cornell Capa and then popularized by David L. Larson in the late 1960s to 1970s. Cornell Capa sought to create a systematic approach for photographers to train their visual sensitivity when covering an event. Meanwhile, Larson, a photography educator in the United States, refined this method into a learning tool for journalism and visual communication students.

The EDFAT method is also a visual analysis framework consisting of:

1. Entire: understand the context of events as a whole.
2. Details: capture small but meaningful things.
3. Frame: choose a composition that reinforces the message.
4. Angle: determine a unique perspective.
5. Time: pay attention to moments that determine meaning

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the author selected five photos from several photos that the author produced. These five photos were selected based on the EDFAT method of categorizing story photos. The Entire category, or understanding the overall context, is found in photo 1, which shows parents taking their child to the ceremony from the bridal chamber.



**Photo 1.** *Metatah participants accompanied by their parents to the metatah hall.*

Participants leave the room (where they are staying) and go to the bale where the metatah/tooth cutting ceremony will take place, accompanied by their parents. The ngekeb ceremony is held in a meten or gedong or undergoes pingitan in bed, which means that the metatah participant must promise to control the sad ripu within themselves. In Balinese Hindu tradition, Sad Ripu (from Sanskrit: ṣaḍ-ripu, meaning six enemies) are the six bad traits or main enemies that exist within humans. Sad Ripu is considered the main obstacle for a person to achieve purity, inner peace, and spiritual freedom (mokṣa). (Pendeta Ida Nak Lingsir). The six traits are: Kāma → lust or excessive desire, Lobha → greed, the desire to possess without limits, Krodha → uncontrolled anger, Moha → confusion, ignorance, or attachment to worldly things, Mada → arrogance, pride, and Mātsarya → envy or jealousy.

This photo represents a visual narrative of a socio-religious transition process, namely the shift from the private space of the ngekeb (seclusion) tradition to the public space of the ceremony. There is a clear symbolic contrast between the ngekeb room as a personal and closed space and the ceremonial hall as a communal sacred space, which also marks the transition of the participants' social status from adolescence to adulthood. Ceremonial ornaments, traditional attire, and the facial expressions of ritual participants serve as visual indicators that convey how Balinese society imbues values of self-control, purity, and maturity through a framework of cultural symbols internalized in religious rituals. This photograph features visual meaning through the attire and headdresses of the female participants, who don traditional Balinese garments complemented with exquisite gelungan (headdresses). This ornament is both aesthetically pleasing and emblematic of purity, status, and spiritual preparedness for a new era. The depiction of parents on the participant's side represents moral and spiritual support, along with the transmission of traditional and religious beliefs from the older to the younger generation. This underscores the notion of communal unity within Balinese civilization. The decorative elements on the table, including banten (offerings) at the forefront, symbolize human interaction with the universe and Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (God). The hues of the offerings (yellow, red, white, green) symbolize the five colors, representing harmony with the cardinal directions and cosmic energies.

The initial photograph is part of the complete sequence. The image depicts an overview of the Metatah ceremony in Bali, during which participants are escorted by their parents to the bale where the ritual takes place. This comprehensive graphic underscores that the Metatah procession transcends an individual

occurrence, representing a socio-religious event that encompasses family, community, and sacred symbols. Essential components, like the participants' traditional attire, gelungan (headdresses), parental presence, and meticulously prepared offerings on the ceremony table, create a thorough visual representation of the ceremonial atmosphere. This photograph encapsulates the atmosphere in its totality, symbolizing the shift from private space (ngekeb/pingitan) to community space (ceremonial hall), which in Balinese Hindu tradition signifies the transfer in social standing from youth to maturity. The inclusion of ceremonial decorations and parental involvement in the photograph enhances the story of unity, moral support, and the conveyance of religious beliefs from the elder generation to the younger generation. This photograph encapsulates the intricate intricacies and interrelations of the ceremonial components, encompassing the individuals, traditional adornments, and the hallowed setting of the procession. The participation of parents with the participants not only promotes the concept of unity but also symbolizes the transmission of values and social validity from one generation to the next. The presence of banten (offerings) in the front chamber signifies the relationship between humanity and the cosmic realm, wherein harmony between the microcosm (self and family) and the macrocosm (the universe and divinity) is expressed through a succession of visual symbols.



**Photo 2:** *The author captures a prayer ceremony before the participants begin the metatah procession.*

This second photo shows the process of participants performing the ceremony in a room (bale). Participants pray to God and their ancestors for safety. They pray to Bethara Surya (the Sun God) to be given a bright path to live their next life (in adulthood). Prayers are also offered to Bhatara Sang Hyang Semara

Ratih (the God and Goddess of Love), symbols of love filled with loyalty and sacrifice. The hope is that after the tooth cutting ceremony, the participants will be able to build good relationships with their partners, other people, their environment, and themselves. This photograph captures the participants of the metatah rite praying in the hay during the procession. This prayer is directed to Bethara Surya (the Sun God) as a representation of enlightenment, while also seeking protection from Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (God) and the blessings of the ancestors. In this context, metatah is not merely a physical act of teeth cutting, but also a transforming ritual signifying the transition from adolescent to adulthood, encompassing spiritual, moral, and social preparedness (Pendeta Ida Nak Lingsir).

The metatah ritual procession employs visual symbolism to represent the cultural and spiritual values of Balinese civilization. The gesture of sembah or matur piuning, executed by participants with their hands clasped at their breast (anjali mudra), symbolizes humility and submission to divine authority. This action visually confirms humanity's acknowledgment of its limitations and seeks assistance for transitioning into a new era of existence. The symbolism is accentuated by the traditional attire and gold-adorned headdresses worn by participants, representing purity, majesty, and spiritual preparedness for adulthood. Moreover, the inclusion of banten (offerings) within the ceremonial arena signifies symbolic interaction between the tangible realm (sekala) and the intangible realm (niskala). The vibrant palm fronds, blossoms, and sacred fabric on the banten represent cosmic equilibrium and supplications for life's balance. The ceremony's setting, characterized by a thatched-roof bale and intricate wooden carvings, accentuates the sanctity of the ritual space as a connection between the sekala and niskala realms. The involvement of parents, relatives, and elders in this procession underscores the social and communal aspects of the metatah rite, illustrating that the event transcends individual experience and embodies the collective obligation of the family and indigenous community.

This photograph illustrates diverse visual indicators that signify the multifaceted cultural meanings inherent in the metatah ritual procession. Initially, there exists a sign of status transition, wherein ritual participants undergo a transformation from adolescent to maturity, equipped with spiritual ideals acquired during the rite. Secondly, symbols of enlightenment are evident through prayers to Bethara Surya, representing aspirations that life following the rite will be imbued with illumination, clarity, and harmony. The involvement of parents and traditional authorities in the procession exemplifies social cohesion, highlighting the significance of family and community in assisting those experiencing life



transitions. This photograph functions as both visual documentation and anthropological evidence, reinforcing Balinese Hindu principles of the equilibrium among the self, others, nature, and the divine.

This photograph illustrates how the bale room, characterized by its thatched ceiling, wooden pillars, and traditional ornamentation, serves as a natural framing that accentuates the sanctity of the ceremony. The arrangement of the room positions the participants as the focal topic, but the presence of family, relatives, and guardians surrounding them contributes to the social context that underscores the community essence of the Metatah procession. The foreground features an offering table, symbolically setting the acts of worship within the context of human interaction with the cosmic realm. The visual frame in this photograph not only creates an aesthetic framework but also symbolizes the connection of individuals, communities, and the spiritual dimension inside a singular ritual unity.



**Image 3**, *the engraving procedure. Guided by the sangging.*

The third photograph depicts the Ngrajah parade, a significant phase of the Manusa Yadnya celebration in Bali, particularly during the metatah or teeth cutting ritual. During this procession, a sangging (a tooth sharpener) does a symbolic act of incision on the participant's flesh. The instruments employed include a ring adorned with a mirah stone and a betel leaf stem covered in honey, each with distinct philosophical significance. The mirah stone epitomizes purity, strength, and determination, whilst the betel leaf and honey signify the sweetness of life, harmony, and balance.

The tattooed bodily parts encompass the eyebrows, teeth, right shoulder, left shoulder, and chest. The eyebrows are tattooed as a symbol of fidelity, ensuring

individuals remain resolute in upholding their commitments and ethical principles in life. The teeth represent happiness, anticipated to foster joy and inner tranquility along life's path. The right and left shoulders represent luck and wealth, signifying that individuals possess the resilience to endure life's challenges and experience ease in their pursuits. Simultaneously, the chest symbolizes action, encompassing not just physical activity but also the realm of interaction between an individual's personality and a transcendent spiritual dimension. This procession embodies significant philosophical concepts, highlighting that each component of the human body has a symbolic connection to the spiritual and social dimensions of existence.

This photograph captures the instant when the sangging contacts the participant's teeth with a ceremonial implement. The participant's grave and earnest demeanor underscores the sanctity of the ceremony being conducted. The participant's traditional Balinese garb, embellished with floral hair adornments and gold decorations, enhances the magnificence and emphasizes the sacredness of the procession. This indicates that the rite transcends a mere ceremonial performance, embodying visual symbolism that encapsulates Balinese cultural identity. This photograph can be viewed as a depiction of symbolic metamorphosis within the realm of visual ethnography. The initial symbol represents self-purification, wherein tooth filing is conducted to imbue qualities of loyalty, happiness, good fortune, and behaviors aligned with spirituality.

Second, there is also a symbol of transcendence, because the chest, as the center of human action, is placed as a meeting space between personality and spiritual power. Third, this procession presents a symbol of social integration, because the ritual is not only experienced as an individual experience, but also part of the collective responsibility of the family and traditional community.

The third photo is included in Time, which shows a crucial moment in the Metatah ceremony, namely the Ngrajah procession led by the sangging. From a time perspective, this photo captures the sacred moments when the carving tool is touched to the participant's teeth. The timing of the photograph is crucial, since it encapsulates the zenith of the activity, replete with symbolism, specifically the moment of direct engagement between the sangging and the participant in the purifying rite. The sanctity of this moment is apparent in the grave expressions of the participants, indicating their earnestness in receiving the symbols of purity upon their bodies. This photograph shows how a fleeting moment may embody extensive spiritual qualities, like loyalty, happiness, luck, and the preparedness to embrace a new life following the rite. Consequently, the temporal element in this

photograph transcends mere chronology, highlighting the impetus of the participant's spiritual evolution. Every touch of the carving, recorded by the camera, symbolizes the transformation in social-religious position from adolescent to adulthood. The photographer's selection of the opportune moment creates a compelling visual narrative, wherein a fleeting sight of the ceremony effectively conveys the tremendous significance of the entire Metatah procession.



**Image 4, dental excision ritual (Metatah)**

The fourth photograph depicts the tooth filing ceremony, referred to as mepandes/metatah. At this step, the sangging files the participant's teeth with a specialized tool that possesses profound symbolic significance. This procedure is perceived not merely as a physical act of dental cleansing, but also as a symbol of self-purification from human vices. In Balinese Hinduism, teeth filing symbolizes mastery over the six principal adversaries of humanity, referred to as Sad Ripu: wrath (krodha), greed (lobha), lust (kama), hatred (dvesha), jealousy (matsarya), and ignorance (moha). Each application of the file instrument on the participant's teeth signifies a symbolic liberation from the constraints of Sad Ripu, historically regarded as a barrier to attaining wisdom, spiritual purity, and a harmonious existence. Consequently, teeth filing transcends a mere medical or aesthetic surgery; it embodies a sign of spiritual metamorphosis, wherein individuals dedicate themselves to mastering their desires and cultivating self-discipline for a more harmonious existence.

This photograph depicts participants reclining in traditional Balinese attire, as a sangging meticulously polishes their teeth. Their submissive postures highlight their humility and readiness for self-transformation. They are encircled by ceremonial artifacts, including banten offerings, ritual implements, as well as family members and traditional leaders, so emphasizing the social and religious aspects of the procession. Traditional attire adorned with gold and floral

embellishments enhances the sacred aura and signifies the participant's spiritual preparedness. This photograph illustrates the significant symbolism of the metatah rite from a visual anthropological viewpoint. The act of tooth filing symbolizes self-control, representing the relinquishment of negative tendencies and the enhancement of patience and wisdom. Secondly, this procession symbolizes spiritual transformation, signifying the journey from adolescent to adulthood with moral and spiritual preparedness. Third, the symbol of social connectedness is evident in the involvement of family, friends, and traditional leaders who provide communal support to participants during their life transformation.

The fourth photograph depicts the specifics of the main procession of the Metatah rite, specifically when the sangging files the attendees' teeth. This photograph intricately depicts subtle yet significant elements: the friction of the filing tool against the teeth symbolizes the mastery over Sad Ripu, the six detrimental human qualities that must be subdued to attain equilibrium in life. The close-up shot highlights the participants' resigned expressions, their composed postures, and the precision of the sangging in executing the procession, so accentuating the sacredness of the occasion, which is both physical and spiritually transformational. Furthermore, the intricacies of the traditional attire, adorned with gold and floral embellishments, impart a dimension of significance representing purity and spiritual preparedness. The inclusion of offerings and ritual implements, some depicted within the frame, functions as a corroborative feature, indicating the link between corporeal deeds and the spiritual realm.

Thus, this photograph presents details that are not only visual but also narrative: every small element in it functions as a signifier of the philosophical meaning of the ritual of self-purification and transformation towards maturity.



**Photo 5**, participants were asked to taste 6 different flavors.

This fifth photo shows the Ngerajah activity, which is the stage when metatah participants are asked to taste six different flavors after the tooth filing procession is complete. In this activity, a traditional elder or sangging gives each flavor to the participants in turn. The participants sit cross-legged in full traditional attire, while the traditional elder feeds them or gives them the flavors using simple tools or directly with their hands. This activity is an important moment, because through the sensory experience of tasting bitter, sour, spicy, astringent, salty, and sweet flavors, participants are invited to understand the values of life inherent in each flavor (Bli Wijana).

The process of giving the six flavors is not done randomly, but follows a symbolic order. Bitter and sour flavors are given first, as a symbol of practicing perseverance in facing the harshness of life. Next, the spicy flavor reflects a warning against anger, so that participants are able to manage their emotions with patience. The salty taste is given to instill the value of obedience, so that individuals comply with the norms and rules that apply in social life. After that, the salty taste becomes a symbol of wisdom, signifying maturity of thought in every decision made. Finally, the sweet taste is given as a conclusion, symbolizing the happiness and balance in life that is expected to accompany the participants' journey after undergoing the metatah procession (Bli Wijana).

This Ngerajah activity symbolically teaches that human life is not only filled with pleasure, but also bitterness, pain, and even trials. All of these must be accepted with an open heart and endured with patience and wisdom. Therefore, the activity of tasting six flavors in the metatah procession is understood not merely as a formal ritual, but also as a form of spiritual education that instills mental, moral, and emotional readiness to face the next phase of life.

Visually, this photo shows a traditional elder offering a taste to the ceremony participants. The participants are seated in full traditional attire, adorned with flower garlands, and their solemn posture shows their surrender and acceptance of the teachings that have been passed down from generation to generation. The earnest expression of the traditional elder emphasizes that this ritual is not merely a formal tradition, but a moment of spiritual education that is rich in moral values. The presence of relatives around the procession adds a social dimension that emphasizes the importance of collective support in every stage of life. From a visual ethnographic perspective, this photo contains symbolism about the human journey in facing the complexities of life. First, it symbolizes moral education, where each taste is a lesson in virtue. Second, it symbolizes balance in life, because humans are required to accept bitterness, spiciness, and happiness as a unified life

experience. Third, it symbolizes spiritual transformation, because this ritual marks the participants' readiness to live a new life with full awareness of the values that must be upheld.

In terms of angle, this photo was taken from a slightly close side position, highlighting the direct interaction between the traditional elders and the participants. This angle focuses the visual attention on the gestures of the traditional elder's hands as he feeds the participants and their solemn expressions, revealing the intensity of the spiritual moment. The choice of angle clearly shows the hierarchical relationship between the giver (traditional elder) and the recipients (participants), illustrating the transfer of moral and spiritual values from the older generation to the younger generation. In addition, the side angle with a slight closeness presents an intimate feel, as if the audience is present to witness a personal moment in the ritual. The presence of relatives in the foreground and side is also framed, adding a social layer to the visual composition. Thus, this point of view not only emphasizes the ritual gestures, but also shows the collective and symbolic dimensions of the Ngerajah procession.



**Image 6, apparatus for the metatah ceremonial procession**

The sixth photograph depicts the apparatus utilized in the Metatah or tooth-cutting ceremony. The ceremonial table displays several significant things, including a bowl of tirta (holy water) for purification, a clay vessel typically carrying herbs or ceremonial water, and a container loaded with traditional snacks and meals that constitute the banten (offerings). Furthermore, banana leaves serve as a foundation for the offerings, while honey or coconut water symbolizes

purification, accompanied by basic implements like cotton and white cloth for dental cleansing. The inclusion of these artifacts is not only supplementary to the procession, but a fundamental component that underpins the rite both symbolically and practically (Pendeta Ida Nak Lingsir).

Every object in this photograph possesses interconnected philosophical significances. Tirta is seen as a source of both physical and spiritual purity, whereas the clay vessel represents simplicity and the connection between humanity and nature. The diverse flavors in the banten evoke the necessity of balancing life's dynamics, while honey or coconut water represents purity and spiritual rejuvenation. All of these things function as a conduit linking the physical and spiritual realms, demonstrating that the Metatah ceremony encompasses not only the physical part but also a profound spiritual depth. This snapshot illustrates, from a visual anthropological standpoint, how material things in rituals serve as visual symbols representing the cultural values and beliefs of Balinese society. Ceremonial artifacts underscore the significance of cosmic equilibrium, with each item serving a symbolic role in preserving harmony among humanity, nature, and the divine. Secondly, visual elements like the organization of offerings, sacred liquids, and basic equipment highlight the connection between material customs and spiritual significance. Third, the inclusion of these artifacts reinforces the visual narrative that the Metatah ceremony is a communal exercise imbued with symbolism, wherein each object serves as a medium of ritual communication between the physical and spiritual realms. This snapshot serves as both a documentation of ceremonial goods and anthropological data that elucidates the symbolic aspects of Balinese Hindu culture.

This photograph belongs to the Details section, showcasing the Metatah procession equipment from a close perspective, ensuring that each thing is distinctly visible within the frame. The visual arrangement features a basin of holy water, a clay vessel, a water bottle, a typical snack tray, and various basic utensils on an intricately carved wooden table. This confined frame directs the viewer's focus only to the intricacies of the artifacts, devoid of distractions from surrounding events throughout the ceremony. The choice of a precise frame shifts the focus from the overall ambiance to the symbolic significance of each object. The texture of the clay vessel, the luster of the metal bowl, and the juxtaposition of snacks and water bottles exemplify a fusion of traditional and contemporary functional aspects. The inclusion of these elements in the frame demonstrates the

thorough execution of the ritual with significant apparatus, while also highlighting the balance between the material and spiritual realms.

## DISCUSSION

### Visual Symbolism in Ritual Processions

Ethno-photography has effectively documented several significant phases in the visual symbolism of the metatah ritual procession: Mesangih (the tooth-cutting process), employing traditional instruments that signify the severance of animalistic tendencies; Mapandes: the cutting of canine teeth symbolizes the triumph over lust; Matatah: the scraping of teeth represents self-improvement. Ethnophotography, as a visual methodology in cultural anthropology, functions to both chronicle an event and understand the meaning inherent in the ritual. Within the framework of the metatah ceremony in Bali, ethnophotography is crucial in documenting and elucidating the philosophical significance of the procession's stages. The three primary stages, namely mesangih, mapandes, and matatah, exhibit visual representations abundant in religious, moral, and social symbolism.

The initial stage, mesangih, involves the act of dental cutting with conventional instruments, symbolically representing the endeavor to diminish and sever the primal instincts inherent in humanity. Acute canine teeth are regarded as symbols of primal instincts associated with violence, avarice, and want. This phase highlights the significance of human evolution from primal instincts to self-regulation grounded in dharma values through the visual representation of ethnophotography.

Moreover, the mapandes stage emphasizes the particular action of excising the canine teeth. This action represents the triumph against lust, categorized in Balinese Hindu doctrine as one of the Sad Ripu, the six principal adversaries within humanity, including kama (lust), lobha (greed), and krodha (anger) (Wiana, 2007). The ethnographic images at this point exhibit features that are both technical and symbolically significant, linking the physical human body to moral and spiritual dimensions.

The third stage, matatah, is seen as the practice of tooth filing, symbolizing self-improvement. This filing represents an individual's spiritual dedication to relinquish detrimental characteristics and evolve into a more mature and balanced individual. Within a visual framework, ethnophotography demonstrates that this process transcends a mere physical act; it serves as a symbolic endeavor to cultivate human character in alignment with the principles of purity and maturity. Ethnophotography offers a dual perspective in the metatah procession: it serves both as historical documentation capturing the ritual's specifics and as an



interpretive tool uncovering layers of symbolic significance. This approach elucidates the mesangih, mapandes, and matatah processes as not merely artistic traditions, but also as vehicles for moral, spiritual, and social education transmitted over generations.

### **Representation of Philosophical Values**

An examination of the metatah procession reveals the embodiment of philosophical principles acquired through the cultural symbols inherent in each component of the rite. This procession is not only a traditional activity inherited through generations but also a conduit for articulating the spiritual, ethical, and social ideals embedded in the belief system of the Balinese Hindu community. A notable representation is the predominance of white in the contestants' attire. In Balinese Hindu tradition, white symbolizes holiness, sincerity, and inner purity, which guide religious life (Titib, 2003). White attire in this rite underscores the necessity of self-purification that each individual must experience, particularly while transitioning into maturity during the metatah procession. The representation of the color white may also signify an affirmation of religious and ethical identity, underscoring human consciousness to consistently adhere to the path of dharma.

The presence of offerings or banten symbolizes the notion of Tri Hita Karana. This concept underscores the significance of sustaining harmony and equilibrium across three principal dimensions of existence: the relationship between humans and the divine (parahyangan), the relationship among humans (pawongan), and the relationship between humans and the natural world (palemahan) (Wiana, 2007). Visual examination reveals that banten is not merely a ritual offering, but also serves as an integrative symbol that connects human consciousness to the preservation of cosmic equilibrium.

The cross-legged sitting position exhibited by the ritual participants underscores the ethical and spiritual dimensions of this procession. Sitting cross-legged in a ritual context signifies not just physical respect but also embodies equilibrium, inner stability, and a link to the transcendental realm (Geertz, 1973). This body position image underscores that the metatah procession is not solely a symbolic rite, but also a method for internalizing moral ideals that instill humility, respect, and personal preparedness for a new life phase.

Ethnographic photography of the metatah procession unveils a profound philosophical aspect of the visual symbols inside the rite. The color white, the presence of offerings, and the cross-legged sitting position possess aesthetic

significance and function as visual symbols representing the core tenets of Balinese Hinduism. This indicates that symbols in ceremonial processions are not only cultural embellishments, but epistemic instruments that embody the enduring religious, ethical, and social ideals within Balinese culture.

### **Dimensions of Social Transformation**

The visual analysis of the metatah procession elucidates symbolic meanings at the individual level while also revealing aspects of social transformation that illustrate the connections among individuals, families, communities, and spiritual elements. The visual data indicates that this procession serves as a vehicle for the shift of social status, wherein an adolescent, previously deemed immature by tradition, attains recognition as an adult within the social hierarchy of Balinese culture. This alteration in status signifies a crucial stage in the life cycle, simultaneously affirming the role of the ritual as a source of social and spiritual legitimacy (Geertz, 1973).

This metamorphosis occurs collectively, not individually. The inclusion of the extended family in the procession underscores the vital importance of the family institution as a social and religious cornerstone. Family involvement serves as both a source of moral support and a manifestation of social solidarity inherent in Balinese culture. The family's engagement is visually evident at every stage of the march, whether as escorts, logistical supports, or participants in communal prayers. The metatah procession is intrinsically linked to the concept of collectivity, as the social identity of individuals within Balinese society is invariably connected to their familial and communal ties (Wiana, 2007). Moreover, this procession symbolizes the interplay between humanity and nature, as well as the spiritual aspect. The ceremonial offerings, including banten and other ritual implements, unequivocally demonstrate the relationship between humanity and nature, as each component of the offering originates from the earth and is returned to the cosmic forces. The prayers and offerings conducted illustrate humanity's transcending connection with heavenly energies, reinforcing the notion of cosmic equilibrium as elucidated in the concept of Tri Hita Karana (Titib, 2003).

The metatah procession serves as a platform for social transformation, integrating individual, societal, ecological, and spiritual aspects. Ethnophotography provides a visual study that chronicles ceremonial occurrences and demonstrates that this procession embodies the continuance of cultural values, social solidarity, and cosmic harmony important to Balinese civilization.

### **Ethno-photography as a Medium of Preservation**

Ethnophotography serves as a crucial medium for cultural preservation, particularly in documenting traditional ritual practices imbued with intellectual, symbolic, and spiritual significance. Ethnophotography serves as a visual depiction that documents significant ritual occasions and acts as a cultural archive, preserving essential nuances that are frequently challenging to convey through verbal descriptions alone. The face expressions of participants, body gestures, placement of offerings, and spatial utilization in ceremonies are visual aspects that elucidate the significance of these rites. Photographs serve as visual evidence that preserves cultural elements susceptible to being forgotten over time and through societal change (Pink, 2007).

Moreover, ethnophotography significantly contributes to the transmission of information across generations. Photography facilitates the comprehension of ancestral traditions for younger generations, as it provides tangible images that may be interpreted more directly than textual or oral histories (Collier & Collier, 1986). In civilizations experiencing industrialization and globalization, ethnophotography aids in the preservation of traditions by revitalizing cultural symbols in a readily accessible visual medium.

In addition to serving as a medium for education and cultural transmission, photographic photography of traditional rites can be regarded as dynamic historical evidence. Photographs not only validate the persistence of a tradition but also elucidate social dynamics, intergenerational relationships, and interactions among humans, nature, and the spiritual realm within a wider cultural context (Geertz, 1973). Consequently, ethnophotography can be seen as a vital tool for preserving cultural identity, reinforcing societal collective memory, and facilitating contemplation of the values that influence the community's social and spiritual existence

### **CONCLUSION**

This study validates the ethnophotography methodology as an excellent method for conveying the cultural values inherent in the Metatah ceremony. The visual analysis indicated that this ritual is perceived not merely as a physical traditional practice, but also as a process of spiritual transformation imbued with profound philosophical significance for the Balinese people. Consequently, ethnophotography fulfills a dual role: it both as a documentary instrument that captures the specifics of the procession and as a medium of interpretation that elucidates the symbolic, social, and spiritual aspects of the custom.

This study demonstrates that ethnography-based visual documenting can enhance collective memory and expand intergenerational comprehension of the Metatah ceremony's significance. These discoveries advance the fields of visual anthropology, cultural studies, and the preservation of local traditional heritage within an academic framework. It is advisable to conduct comparative studies on coming-of-age rituals in various cultures to enhance cross-cultural perspectives, alongside investigating the application of immersive technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality as advancements in ethnographic documentation methods.

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