The *Metuakan* Tradition: Surviving Amid Uncertain Stigma; An Interview with *Metuakan Sekaa* in Bali

Dewa Agung Gede Agung[1*], Donny Maulana[2], Moch Nizam Alfahmi[3], Eko Hasumi Aditya[4], Muchammad Fahri[5], Muhammad Mirza Hibatullah[6], Setia Ningrum[7], Arif Subekti[8]

[1,2,3, 5,6,7,8]Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia
[4]SMA Negeri 1 Talun, Blitar, Indonesia
dewa.agung.fis@um.ac.id

Abstract. Tuak is a traditional beverage widely found across various regions of Indonesia. It is produced through the fermentation of a base lliqui typically sap derived from coconut, sugar palm (aren or enau), or lontar palms. As an alcoholic beverage resulting from fermentation, tuak is often subject to the same negative stigma associated with other alcoholic drinks. However, in certain parts of Indonesia particularly Bali tuak proves to be more than just a traditional alcoholic beverage. This study does not aim to document the history of tuak; rather, it delves into the stories, identities, and ethical values embodied by the drink elements that stand in stark contrast to the common negative stigma attached to alcohol. Interviews conducted with members of the tuak drinking community at Sekaa Demen (Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi District, Badung Regency, Bali) reveal that the tradition of metuakan (tuak drinking) preserves collective memories and identities. These are transmitted through stories and practices deeply rooted in the Tri Hita Karana philosophy a way of life that upholds values and ethics regarding the maintenance of harmony and balance among humans (pawongan), between humans and nature (palemahan), and between humans and the Sang Hyang (parhyangan).

Keywords: Tuak, Metuakan Tradition, Sekaa Metuakan, Identity, Ethics, Tri Hita Karana, Bali.

1 Introduction

Tuak is a traditional fermented beverage found in many regions of Indonesia. It is generally produced from nira a sweet sap extracted from the flower clusters (mayang) of palm species such as sugar palm (aren), coconut, and lontar palm (siwalan). The sap extraction process is carried out by a specialist known as a pemangku tuak, who manages the tree from the initial care stage until the sap is ready for harvest a process requiring approximately three to four months. To become a ready-to-drink beverage, the sap harvested from the palm must first undergo fermentation. Fermentation is a natural process in which microorganisms such as bacteria or fungi convert the carbohydrates present in the sap into acids, gases, or alcohol. It is through this process

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that alcohol develops in the tuak. The alcohol content of fermented tuak typically ranges from 12 to 15 percent. [1], [2], [3].

Tuak, a traditional alcoholic beverage, can be found in several regions of Indonesia. This is, of course, closely tied to the availability of the raw materials used to make tuak, which can be found in many places. In each region, the tuak-making process involves distinct, vernacular ingredients and fermentation techniques. The Toba Batak people produce tuak from the sap of the aren palm, which is then mixed with the bark of the raru tree (an additive that facilitates the fermentation process to produce alcohol). Raru is the local name for the genus Cotylelobium sp., which grows and is widespread in North Sumatra. Among the people of Tuban, East Java, tuak/tuwak is produced by fermenting the sap of the siwalan or tal palm. Before being fermented into tuak, the sweet sap tapped from the siwalan palm is known as legen. In East Nusa Tenggara, tuak is known as moke putih, made from the sap of the tal or aren palm and consumed directly without further processing. In Toraja, South Sulawesi, tuak is known as ballo, made from the sap of the aren palm. In the production process, the Toraja people use an additional ingredient—shavings from the sulo tree which are added to the container holding the sap. The sulo wood imparts a bitter flavor and a distinctive aroma, and acts as a natural preservative to prevent the sap from turning into vinegar (acid). Among the Dayak people of Kalimantan, the raw materials for tuak come from the aren palm, coconut, and glutinous rice. The Dayak people also use traditional yeast made from a mixture of rice flour and various forest spices such as galangal, chili peppers, garlic, and the roots of certain plants. In Bali, tuak is made from palm sap tapped from the aren, tal, and coconut trees. The Balinese also use a traditional additive made from the bark of the kutat tree and certain roots, which is called lau. In some parts of Bali, lau is made from coconut husks. Lau functions as a natural yeast that initiates the tuak fermentation process. In addition to aiding fermentation, lau also imparts a reddish color and a distinctive bitter taste, and most importantly, it slows down the sap's transformation into acid or vinegar. Traditionally, tuak is best consumed within 3 days after the sap is tapped from the tree [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [1], [9], [10]

Tuak, a traditional alcoholic beverage, actually serves several functions within the communities that still preserve it. These functions are imbued with various values and meanings, both spiritual and social. Among the Toraja people, tuak is an essential component of traditional celebrations and ceremonies, such as funeral rites (Rambu Solo') and harvest festivals (Rambu Tuka'). Tuak is also regarded as a means of strengthening bonds of kinship and showing respect to guests attending traditional feasts. Among the communities of East Nusa Tenggara, particularly the indigenous people of Waerebo Village, there is a tradition known as "inung tuak." This term refers to the custom of drinking tuak, which is an integral part of Manggarai ethnic culture. Inung tuak serves spiritual and symbolic functions, where tuak is used in traditional ceremonies as well as in daily social interactions as a symbol of harmonious relationships between people, between people and nature, and as an expression of respect for ancestors [11], [8].

The Toba Batak people practice the tradition of drinking tuak at a place called a lapo tuak, a small shop that sells tuak and serves as a vital public space for fostering social interaction within the community. Tuak holds deep sociocultural significance here, as it is an integral part of daily life and community interactions. Among the

Dayak Tomun and Dayak Muara communities in Kalimantan, the process of making tuak is not merely seen as the production of an alcoholic beverage; rather, it is a form of preserving local knowledge that defines the gastronomic identity of the local community. Among the people of Bali, tuak is not only believed by its drinkers to be beneficial for maintaining physical fitness and health when consumed wisely and in moderation, but it is also associated with spiritual and ritual functions. In the religious ceremonies of Balinese Hindus, tuak is used as an offering (yadnya) in the tetabuhan or tabuh tuak ritual. In this context, tuak is considered a sacred liquid that is sprinkled onto the ground as an offering to spirits in this case, Bhuta Kala so that they do not disturb humans in the upper world. In addition to its spiritual function, tuak also serves a social purpose. The tradition of drinking tuak together (metuakan) often serves as a means of fostering communication and social bonds within Balinese society [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17].

From the perspective of certain religious moral views, the consumption of tuak is considered haram because it falls under the category of khamr that is, a type of beverage or substance that is intoxicating and can cloud or impair one's sound judgment. In other belief systems, however, consuming tuak is viewed as having health benefits and is permitted as long as it does not lead to intoxication. Views on tuak are indeed heavily influenced by religious and cultural backgrounds. In practice, this often creates a dichotomy between local traditions and religious norms. Furthermore, as a beverage that contains alcohol, tuak is not immune to the negative stigma frequently associated with alcoholic beverages in general. Socially, there is a stigma that tuak consumption is often linked to various social problems that cause public concern. The concerns in question here include rising crime rates, disturbances of public order, and the potential to trigger social conflict [18], [19].

A review of the literature on how the tradition of drinking tuak is practiced and passed down from generation to generation in various regions reveals a function that is entirely different from this stigma. In traditional tuak-drinking customs, tuak is actually often used as a means to foster relationships and camaraderie among community members within small village communities, rather than triggering social conflict or public order disturbances. Tuak is also used as a prerequisite in certain religious or spiritual practices, such as in Bali. How can something that, on one hand, serves as a spiritual prerequisite yet, on the other hand, is labeled as a source of public unrest and a contributor to rising crime rates? Indeed, in any culture, religious teaching, or belief system, excess is never good, and this principle also applies to tuak consumption [20].

By examining a case study of a tuak-drinking community (sekaa metuakan) in the village of Mengwi, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali Province, this study seeks to discuss the ambiguous stigma surrounding tuak and the tradition of drinking tuak within the community, how the culture of drinking tuak, or "metuakan," persists amidst this ambiguous stigma, and to delve deeper into how tuak also embodies various stories, identities, ethics, spirituality, and social values that are, in fact, at odds with the negative stigma commonly associated with alcoholic beverages [4], [19].

2 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design. The researcher not only acted as an observer but also participated in the metuakan activities to build a relationship of mutual trust with the members of the sekaa metuakan. The research was conducted at Sekaa Demen, located in Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali Province. The informants who served as research subjects were the Pemangku Tuak (Head of the Sekaa) and the members of the sekaa. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in which the researcher participated in metuakan sessions (sitting together, engaging in conversation, and tasting tuak as a gesture of respect and to foster a sense of unity with the informants). Through this participatory observation technique, the researcher was able to document nonverbal behavior, the social atmosphere, and the tuak-making process. Data collection was also conducted through in-depth interviews. The interviews were not conducted rigidly using a questionnaire but rather through informal conversations. Questions were asked naturally as the metuakan session unfolded. The results of the participatory observation and in-depth interviews were documented in detailed notes describing what was seen, heard, and felt. The instrument used was an interview guide consisting of a list of key topics rather than rigid questions. Recording devices and cameras were also used during the data collection process. The data obtained consisting of observation notes and interview recordings were analyzed by reducing the data relevant to the research topic, coding the data by labeling interview excerpts, and categorizing the codes into broad themes. The validation/triangulation process was conducted by comparing statements made by one member with those of another, between members and the sekaa leader, and by comparing what sekaa members said during interviews with what they did during observations. The researcher also adhered to research ethics in this regard, specifically by obtaining permission from the informants and confirming their willingness to have the data presented as a publication in the public domain [21].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 The Metuakan Tradition in the Tuak Drinkers' Association

Sekaa and Tuak-Drinking Activities

Bali, July 6, 2026 a research team from Malang State University visited one of the tuak-drinking communities known in the local Balinese language as a sekaa tuak (a group of people with a special interest in consuming the traditional drink tuak) in Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali Province. This group, which has been active for decades, holds a wealth of knowledge, particularly regarding the tradition of drinking tuak (metuakan), the motivations behind the metuakan tradition, the values underlying the traditions they still practice, and stories about tuak [4].

A metuakan sekaa is generally led by one person, who is then referred to as the "empu" of the tuak or the "pe-mangku tuak." In some areas of Bali, the naming of a sekaa is often based on the name of the banjar, an administrative unit under the

village's jurisdiction. On average, there are many sekaa in a single village. There are dozens of sekaa in Mengwi Village, with an average of 2 to 3 sekaa per banjar. Each sekaa has its own set of rules that share similarities with one another. Of course, the "rules" referred to here are not formal administrative regulations, but rather a shared understanding agreed upon by the sekaa members through shared values, verbal agreements, and actions. Among these numerous sekaa, the relationships between them are fluid and based on friendships and kinship ties. In certain circumstances, sekaa members may transfer to another sekaa through the friendships and kinship ties they share [19]

We spoke with the tuak keeper at one of the sekaa in Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali Province. His name is I Made Suarka though he's often called Made Kumplir in his daily life within the sekaa. The sekaa doesn't have a specific name; its members simply refer to it as the "sekaa demen," a community centered on having fun, with tuak serving as the medium that brings them together. Membership in the sekaa is not a formal affiliation within a modern organization or community that requires members to create or possess membership cards; rather, it is a cultural membership based on bonds of kinship or friendship [19].

In his account, Made Suarka has been active in the sekaa metuakan at least as a tradition passed down from his parents. In fact, he has no hesitation in passing this activity on to his son. Rather than worrying that his son will become a drinker like him, Made Kumplir is actually grateful that his son does not use drugs or, at the very least, drinks outside the sekaa under unclear circumstances and with strangers; rather than drinking at modern drinking spots where the frequency of consumption varies among the people there, it's better to drink at home, with family, within the sekaa, because if something happens, family, relatives, or friends will be aware of it. This may sound quite simple and somewhat cliché, but on the other hand, it demonstrates that the existence of the sekaa actually serves as a cultural safety net against the rampant, uncontrolled drinking culture that has the potential to create social problems that alarm the community as a result of excessive drinking and ultimately losing control (getting drunk) [19].

Membership in a sekaa metuakan typically consists of dozens of people who do not all come from the same banjar. Due to the frequency of gatherings within the sekaa, the bonds among members are akin to those of siblings. In a sekaa, outsiders cannot simply join to drink tuak, let alone become members. The tuak custodian screens and determines who is permitted to drink tuak within the sekaa, as the place where members typically gather to enjoy tuak is usually the custodian's home. For outsiders wishing to enjoy tuak, they are served via a take-out system. This is done to protect the community from undesirable situations, particularly to maintain the frequency of conversation and communication among its members. Made Kumplir, in addition to being the tuak custodian, is also a tuak seller and owns a small shop. If someone outside the sekaa wishes to enjoy tuak, they will be served at the shop, while sekaa members are invited to drink inside his home [19].

One of the rules within the sekaa metuakan is a limit on the amount of tuak members can drink and the time allotted for enjoying it. There is an allocation system for each sekaa member, based on personal awareness and discretion knowing one's limits in consuming tuak—for example, if one person can only handle one bottle, they

must and will say “enough,” and the other sekaa members will understand. Here, the role of the tuak steward is not only to organize and serve the sekaa members but also to control their tuak consumption. For example, if a person’s quota is one bottle per day, no matter how much they pay, the steward will not provide more or allow them to exceed it. Thus, in the practice of the metuakan tradition within the sekaa, the distribution of the drink is not done haphazardly; it is not excessive, and quotas are strictly enforced. In a “sekaa demen,” the general allowance for members during a single gathering is two bottles of tuak. This is why there is only one tuak steward in a sekaa; if there were more than one leader in a group, this control process would not function properly [19].

Metuakan gatherings are held every day, but they do not last late into the night; by 9:30 p.m. at the latest, members must disperse and return to their respective homes. Seka members usually begin gathering at 7:00 p.m. They do this because the purpose of drinking tuak is to help them relax after a day of work or other activities, including socializing with other members to unwind, so that when they return home, they can fall asleep immediately and wake up feeling refreshed and ready to work the next day. Indeed, sekaa members firmly believe that moderate and reasonable consumption of tuak brings positive benefits to the body. In fact, this belief may have even been medically proven [19].

Shifting slightly to the perspective of the general public, Made Kumplir noted that he often hears about the negative stigma outside the group that the culture of drinking alcohol is synonymous with something bad. This stigma isn’t entirely unfounded, as in many cases, alcohol consumption does lead to various effects that tend to be counterproductive. However, he also feels that this stigma is often misplaced when directed at traditional drinkers in the sekaa metuakan. To support this argument, he shared several aspects of his activities within the sekaa metuakan that contradict this negative stigma [19].

Metuakan activities, in addition to taking place daily through gatherings, are also frequently accompanied by communal meals or “megibung.” Megibung is deeply rooted in the values of togetherness, equality, and mutual cooperation, where everyone eats the same portion regardless of social status. Metuakan is also often conducted alongside “ngelawar” the tradition of preparing and cooking a traditional Balinese dish called lawar. Generally, ngelawar is carried out collectively by Balinese men as an act of mutual aid. Even within the “sekaa demen,” on certain occasions such as once a week or once a month sekaa members slaughter an animal to be shared among the group. In preparation for specific holidays such as Galungan, sekaa members also collect a collective fund of one hundred thousand rupiah each month to slaughter a pig during Galungan. The meat from this collective fund is also taken home to be shared with their wives and families. These activities and forms of community networking tend to strengthen social bonds rather than create social problems that unsettle the community and potentially trigger social conflict. In another story, Made Kumplir shared that the bonds of friendship within the sekaa metuakan are also very warm. On one occasion, a member of the sekaa a invited a friend to drink at the sekaa demen. Unfortunately, the supply of tuak had run out, so the friend was given some from the rations of another member present at the sekaa, and that person did not object at all [19].

3.1.2 Why Drink Tuak?

"A person is what they think, not what they eat or drink" that's roughly the argument presented to us by one of the "sekaa demen" members, I Ketut Permana, affectionately known as Bli Gogong, during our discussion regarding the tension between the negative stigma surrounding alcohol drinkers and the belief in the benefits of the tuak-drinking tradition he has practiced for decades. Gogong said that he has been drinking tuak since 1985, when his parents first introduced him to it. Speaking about his habit of consuming tuak, he explained that relaxation is the main reason why he continues to drink it to this day. This desire for relaxation was also expressed by several other members of the "sekaa metuakan demen" group. None of them said that their reason for drinking tuak was as a way to escape their problems [4].

The wisdom to consume tuak in moderation is key to ensuring that the benefits of tuak do not backfire and become something harmful to one's health. The courage and awareness to know when to stop also apply in every aspect of life. Indeed, excess is never good, whatever it may be, in the realm of any religious or spiritual belief system. Because he believes that what a person receives aligns with what they think, the foundation of his awareness regarding his habit of drinking tuak is the hope for better health, a relaxed physical state, and a happy inner state [4].

Made Kumplir, who stated that he has been drinking tuak for at least 40 years every day in the morning and evening also said that he has never been hospitalized because of this habit. Occasionally, when he runs out of tuak and cannot drink it, he actually has trouble sleeping. His account continued with the health issues he had suffered from. Once, during his junior high school years, he frequently suffered from illness, swollen legs, and chills, so his parents took him to the doctor. The doctor advised him to consume something warm. His parents encouraged him to drink tuak, and eventually, the pain subsided. As an adult, he was diagnosed by a doctor with rheumatism and hemorrhoids. The doctor said his only option was surgery. He then chose to undergo therapy by drinking tuak, and the results were quite surprising the pain he suffered eventually went away without him having to undergo surgery [19].

The kinship ties among seka members are another reason why some people still drink tuak as part of the communal sekaa metuakan tradition. Made Kumplir and Bli Gogong have a rather unique story to share about this. In the generation before them, the parents of Made Kumplir and Bli Gogong apparently knew each other. This friendship was passed down to the two of them, who eventually got to know each other through the sekaa metuakan. From there, the bond continued when one of Made Kumplir's siblings eventually married Bli Gogong [4], [19].

Tuak is more than just an alcoholic beverage. The members of the sekaa believe that tuak serves as a medium that can create harmony and strengthen brotherly bonds. This is because, within the sekaa metuakan, tuak is not consumed with the intention of getting drunk [19].

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The Traditional Tuak-Making Process

Tuak is generally produced from nira, a sweet liquid extracted from the flower clusters (mayang) of palm trees such as the aren, coconut, and siwalan. In the sekaa metuakan in Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali Province, they make tuak using nira from the aren palm. Aren, or enau, is also known locally in Bali as jake. According to Made Kumplir, the type of jake also affects the alcohol content in the tuak. When tuak is made from ordinary jake, the effect is not as potent as that from jake slem (or black-flowered aren). Members of the

sekaa say that this type of jake is stronger; consuming just one bottle is enough to create a warming sensation in the body. In addition to the plant variety, the growing location of the plant also influences the flavor. Furthermore, the height of the palm tree affects the quality of the tuak. The taller the palm tree used as the base for tuak, the better the quality of the resulting tuak [19].

The tuak in the sekaa metuakan is produced by Made Kumplir, who serves as the group's tuak custodian. He owns several trees that produce sap. Additionally, to meet the sekaa's needs, he sources tuak from other people's jake trees through a buy/profit-sharing arrangement with the tree owners. He typically buys one bottle of standard-quality tuak from a tree owner for 6,000 rupiah. He then sells it for 12,000 rupiah to drinkers at the sekaa metuakan. This price would be higher at a warung, but at the sekaa it is sold for 12,000 because there are regular customers every day (namely the sekaa members), and the tuak custodian—who in this case is also the tuak seller—does not focus solely on making a profit. As Made Kumplir puts it, "as long as the kitchen is steaming, that's enough" [19].

When purchasing tuak ingredients from jake tree owners, he is also very selective, choosing only the most delicious and high-quality sap. For this reason, if he is unable to find a good sap seller for some time, and there is no sap available from his own trees, he does not hesitate to suspend the sekaa's tuak-making activities a measure taken to maintain the satisfaction and quality of the beverage he provides. In addition to purchasing tuak ingredients directly from farmers or jake tree owners, there's another method he often uses to source ingredients for tuak: the tree-leasing system. He leases trees from jake tree owners, with a 2-to-1 profit split (for every 3 bottles) when the sap is harvested 2 bottles for the lessee and 1 bottle for the tree owner [19].

In terms of quality, members of the sekaa metuakan also explained that there are several characteristics that distinguish good tuak from bad tuak. Good tuak can be identified by its taste—it isn't too sweet, has a slight bitterness, and doesn't cause heartburn (stomachache) after consumption. If the tuak is poor perhaps because it's been mixed with other ingredients or adulterated a person might drink up to five bottles, but the usual result is stomach pain and diarrhea. On the other hand, when consuming good-quality tuak unadulterated drinking just two bottles typically induces a sense of relaxation and allows for a sound sleep. The tuak steward, in addition to serving as the sekaa leader, supervisor, and attendant for sekaa members, as well as a caretaker and sap harvester, also acts as the tuak quality controller in this context. Before tuak is served within the sekaa, the tuak steward will taste it first; if the quality is good, he will offer it to the sekaa members, and if not, he will not serve it [4].

Tuak in the sekaa demen is a beverage obtained from the fermentation of sap from the jake palm. Before the tuak is served in bottles, there is actually a series of distinctive processes that show deep respect for nature specifically the jake palm, which is the primary source of the sap. The sap used to make tuak is tapped from the flower clusters (mayang) of the jake palm, rather than from the fruit itself. The process of obtaining this sap is also no easy task. A jake palm tree that has begun to show signs of flower buds must be left undisturbed for approximately 3 months until the flowers bloom. During those 3 months, the tuak caretaker must tend to the jake palm tree with great care and sensitivity. Every day, the tree must be cleared of dry leaves and fronds. Then there are two processes called "notok" and "ngayun."

"Notok" involves tapping the base of the jake's flower cluster, while "ngayun" involves gently swaying the growing flower cluster. These steps serve a specific purpose: according to the tuak caretakers, "notok" and "ngayun" increase the quantity of sap when it's ready to be tapped [19].

When the flower buds have fully opened or bloomed, it means the sap is ready to be harvested. The signs are butterflies and beetles flitting among the blooming flowers. Additionally, there is a distinctive sweet fragrance. The flowers are then cut, leaving only the base and the jake flower stem. Next, the tuak caretaker must rub the cut surface with salt to widen the pores. This is done to allow the sap to flow more freely. Next, the tuak maker will look for a "bene" the leftover "lau" from a jake that has successfully produced sap. The bene is placed over the cut base of the flower to act as both a filter and a natural fermentation agent for the palm sap, turning it into tuak. Once a tree has successfully produced sap, the tuak maker will create a new "lau" [19].

The function of the lau here is to enhance the drink's flavor and absorb some of the sugar so that the tuak isn't too sweet. The lau also acts as a natural yeast that converts sugar into alcohol. The lau is placed inside a container for palm sap, which is hung from a tree to collect the dripping sap. Lau is made from coconut fibers in some regions, it is made from kutat bark. Every day, the lau must be replaced with a fresh one to ensure optimal fermentation. Made Kumplir, a tuak master, also explained that the used coconut fibers are placed over a fire for several days, imparting a woody or smoky flavor to the resulting tuak. This certainly enhances the flavor of traditional Balinese tuak. The surface of a jake tree that is successfully producing sap is sliced and rubbed with salt daily to enlarge the pores. Sap collection is carried out once every 24 hours at the same time usually in the morning or evening. This process must be carried out consistently and with discipline. Otherwise, the worst-case scenario is that the jake tree will stop producing sap. If this happens, the base of the flower must be cut off to wait for the next flowering cycle (which will, of course, take time)[22].

Tuak naturally ferments continuously. Tuak is at its best for drinking if consumed no more than 3 days after being harvested from the jake tree. After 3 days, the tuak will turn into vinegar. According to Bli Gogong, the alcohol content in tuak ranges from 12–14% [4].

3.2 Persevering Amid Uncertain Stigma: Ethics, Identity, Spirituality

In the metuakan tradition, tuak is not merely viewed as a traditionally processed alcoholic beverage. Similarly, the metuakan tradition itself is not merely seen as a routine for enjoying alcohol let alone as an escape from life's current problems. Perhaps there are instances like that, but they likely apply only to a small fraction of sekaa members, and such narratives are almost never voiced within the metuakan sekaas, including the "sekaa demen." The metuakan tradition is, in fact, connected to several values concerning collective identity, ethics, and spiritual practices within Balinese society. Through an oral tradition that has been passed down across generations, these values continue to be upheld through the practice of the metuakan tradition [19].

There are ethical principles that are consistently upheld within the sekaa demen and other metuakan groups in Banjar Munggu, Mengwi Village, Mengwi

Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali. One of these values is the ethical obligation to show respect for the jake palm tree by ensuring that not just anyone can or is allowed to harvest the sap, and that the tuak produced from the sap of the jake palm must not be mixed with other substances such as alcohol [19].

According to Made Kumplir, a tuak caretaker in the sekaa demen, the jake tree is, one might say, a rather strange tree or perhaps, in a more positive sense, a sensitive tree. In his decades of experience as a tuak keeper, he has been very careful in handling the jake tree, based on the stories he's heard as well as his own personal experiences. On one occasion, while he was seriously ill, he was unable to perform his duties of tapping the jake tree for palm sap. Someone else took his place at that time, and eventually the amount of sap produced decreased day by day. As discussed earlier, a tuak caretaker's duties aren't limited to tapping sap from the jake tree; they're also responsible for caring for the jake for at least 2 to 3 months before the sap is ready for harvest (by performing the "notok" and "ngayun" practices daily). Made Kumplir continued, suggesting that there might be a resonance or connection between the jake tree and its caretaker. Naturally, because of this, in the metuakan groups, the caretakers and group members have no choice but to treat the jake tree as they would treat a human: by caring for it and respecting it [19].

Once, while Bli Gogong was drinking tuak at a sekaa in the neighboring village, the tuak supply ran out. He then asked the tuak caretaker to collect palm sap at 8 p.m. (outside the usual collection time, which is in the morning). On their way home, Bli Gogong and Made Kumplir were in an accident. He was convinced that the incident occurred because of what he had done earlier. Another story took place when he was in junior high school (SMP). At that time, he really wanted to enjoy some tuak from his grandfather's tree (who was also the tuak caretaker). The very next day, the jake tree stopped producing sap. Although neither of these stories can be immediately proven logically, in a broader context, the values of caution and respect in treating the jake tree should be considered as wise values or ethics especially regarding the relationship between humans and other elements of nature. In a broader context, perhaps this can also serve as an example of "local genius" practices that can address today's environmental crises stemming from humanity's lack of respect for nature (illegal logging, deforestation, etc.) [4].

Beyond its connection to humans, the jake tree is also highly sensitive to its surrounding conditions. According to Made Kumplir, the jake tree is also highly sensitive to heavy rain accompanied by lightning or thunder. Sap production tends to decrease during the rainy season. He has observed this over many years. From his experience, when a day brings heavy rain accompanied by thunder, everyone knows that sap production will drop the following day. Under normal conditions, a jake tree can produce an average of 20 bottles per harvest. After heavy rain accompanied by a storm, that amount drops by nearly a quarter (a decrease of about 5 bottles). In even more extreme conditions (such as frequent lightning for several days in a row), the jake tree may stop producing sap altogether or even die [19].

We were curious when we heard the story of how the sekaa members' beliefs regarding the jake tree, and why they do not produce tuak from other types of palm trees, such as the coconut palm. Bli Gogong shared a story that is still believed and held true by most sekaa members to this day. "One day, there was a time when all plants were to receive a blessing from the One True God/Sanghyang. There was a

competition between the coconut tree and the jake tree without meaning to downplay the importance of other trees in which only those two trees (the coconut and the jake) were eligible to win the blessing. This was because these two trees were (considered) superior to the others, as every part of them from the roots to the tips of the leaves could be used. To make a long story short, the coconut tree deceived the jake tree by not providing accurate information regarding the time of the blessing ceremony. The award ceremony for the plants was originally scheduled for the morning, but the coconut tree told Jake to come later in the day. In the end, Jake arrived after all the awards had already been given out. During the ceremony, various plants received their own special honors; for example, the cinnamon leaf was awarded for its benefits to digestion and stomach health. Jake was teased for arriving far too late, as the award ceremony had already concluded and the winner was the coconut tree. Jake was shocked to find the event had ended. Finally, Jake cursed the coconut tree, declaring that it would never stand straight and would forever remain subservient to the Jake tree possessing no higher function than Jake himself: [4].

Members of the sekaa metuakan believe that the origin of the lau, which is made from coconut fiber, is also a manifestation of this story passed down through generations. The function of the lau is nothing more than to catch the drips of nira collected from the jake tree. Meanwhile, the sap from the jake tree which serves as the raw material for tuak is a liquid also considered sacred by the indigenous communities of Bali; it is, at the very least, used in traditional ceremonial activities (such as mecaru and metabuh). Through this story, they also believe that no matter how lofty the coconut tree may be, the jake tree is even loftier as exemplified by the use of fibers from the jake tree to thatch the roofs of temples. Interestingly, because in the story of the divine bestowal mentioned above, the jake tree was tricked into arriving late in the morning, they also associate this with the habit of sekaa metuakan members who tend to wake up later if they've consumed excessive amounts of tuak the night before. "Anyone close to us (jake) will wake up late." [14] [4].

The kinship ties, bonds of brotherhood, and sense of togetherness fostered through sekaa metuakan activities position tuak as the primary force that unites everyone within the sekaa metuakan. This practice can be explained within the framework of social ethics and the philosophy of life in Balinese society, where tuak and the metuakan culture have become a medium for "menyama braya" a concept that teaches living in harmony, mutual aid, and treating others without regard to differences, just as one would treat one's own family or siblings in both joy and sorrow. Within a sekaa metuakan, various activities are carried out collectively. Preparing for religious ceremonies, sharing meals (megibung), and visiting one another among sekaa members during times of grief (illness or death) or during specific celebrations are common practices found in these sekaa metuakan. This is also connected to the philosophical framework of Tri Hita Karana, one aspect of which emphasizes balanced and harmonious relationships among people (pawongan) [23][24].

Within the philosophical framework of Tri Hita Karana, the ideal conception and way of life in a social order is achieved when a balance is established between human relationships with one another (pawongan), humans and nature (palemahan), and humans and God Almighty/Sang Hyang (parhyangan). In addition to being a social practice that reflects pawongan, the metuakan tradition also embodies values

and ethics regarding the preservation of and respect for nature and the environment (palemahan), as well as religious rituals (parhyangan). Environmental ethics (palemahan) are practiced through respect and careful conduct in the process of tending the jake palm, collecting palm sap, and processing the sap into tuak without mixing it with other ingredients. The practice of harmony and balance with nature is carried out not only through stories passed down from generation to generation but also through the embodiment of these stories in the daily lives of sekaa members. Meanwhile, the representation of a harmonious relationship between humans and God in the Metuakan tradition is also evident in the spiritual function of tuak as an offering (yadnya) in the tetabuhan ritual. In the context of Balinese society, "tetabuhan" refers to the offering of special, sacred liquids such as tuak and arak to the Bhuta Kala (entities that govern the underworld) to foster harmony between the cosmos (the underworld and the human world). Tetabuhan is performed by sprinkling or dripping a small amount of tuak onto the ground [4], [19], [25].

4 Conclusion

Tuak, the sekaa, and the metuakan culture as a practice passed down through generations among the community of Sekaa Demen, Munggu Hamlet, Mengwi Village, Mengwi Subdistrict, Badung Regency, Bali cannot be adequately understood merely as a practice for consuming alcoholic beverages. Several values, ethics, and behaviors practiced by sekaa members in the metuakan tradition whether consciously or unconsciously are in fact aligned with a philosophy of life that requires harmonious and balanced relationships among the three elements of existence (humans, nature, and God) within the concept of Tri Hita Karana. Amid the negative stigma surrounding drinking culture a stigma also faced by those who still practice communal tuak drinking within the sekaa metuakan the values outlined above can serve as a counter-narrative and a balancing argument: if negative views about alcohol consumption are rigidly applied to the metuakan tradition, such assumptions or perspectives appear rather unfounded. The metuakan tradition has become a collective identity rich in values and ethics, practiced with the awareness that they (the tuak drinkers) are drinkers, not drunkards.

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