Crafting Interfaith Harmony through Ritual and Identity Integration: A Localised Muslim-Hindu Model from Saren, Bali, Indonesia

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Abstract: Indonesia's complex religious landscape presents potential and persistent challenges in cultivating interfaith harmony, particularly in local contexts where theological divergence and structural segregation exacerbate communal divisions. This study examines the intentional construction of interreligious harmony in Saren Village, Bali, by analysing culturally embedded strategies employed by Muslim and Hindu communities. The research adopts a phenomenological approach, incorporating in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. It is theoretically grounded in Émile Durkheim's (1912) theory of social integration and Diana Eck's (2001) concept of religious pluralism. Durkheim highlights the role of shared rituals in generating collective solidarity and a cohesive moral order. At the same time, Eck emphasises active and equal participation across religious traditions as essential for a pluralist society. The findings demonstrate that traditional practices—such as *Subak* (a cooperative irrigation system), *Bale Banjar* (a local consensus forum), and *Burdah* (a Muslim devotional performance incorporated into Hindu ceremonial life)—serve as functional mechanisms for fostering interreligious cooperation, ritual synergy, and hybrid identity formation. Despite enduring challenges such as spatial segregation, cultural dominance, and digital polarisation, the Saren community sustains interfaith harmony through youth engagement, inclusive ritual adaptations, and grassroots digital literacy initiatives. Unlike many Balinese localities that reinforce Hindu cultural hegemony, Saren exemplifies a reciprocal model in which Muslim contributions, particularly the Burdah, are ritually embedded within dominant Hindu frameworks. This two-way assimilation of ritual practice marks a notable departure from conventional patterns of religious accommodation. Beyond applying Durkheim and Eck, this study contributes a contextual model of interfaith harmony grounded in reciprocal ritual integration. It underscores the value of local religious practices as generative sources for interreligious coexistence in plural societies.

Keywords: Cultural syncretism; interfaith harmony; Muslim-Hindu relations; ritual integration; Saren Village

Abstrak: Lanskap keagamaan Indonesia yang kompleks menghadirkan tantangan potensial dan berkelanjutan dalam membangun harmoni antaragama, terutama di konteks lokal di mana perbedaan teologis dan segregasi struktural memperparah perpecahan komunal. Studi ini menganalisis konstruksi sengaja harmoni antaragama di Desa Saren, Bali, dengan mengkaji strategi yang tertanam dalam budaya yang diterapkan oleh komunitas Muslim dan Hindu. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis, yang mencakup wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Penelitian ini didasarkan secara teoritis pada teori integrasi sosial Émile Durkheim (1912) dan konsep pluralisme agama Diana Eck (2001). Durkheim menyoroti peran ritual bersama dalam menghasilkan solidaritas kolektif dan tatanan moral yang kohesif, sementara Eck menekankan partisipasi aktif dan setara antar tradisi agama sebagai esensial bagi masyarakat pluralis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa praktik tradisional—seperti Subak (sistem irigasi kooperatif), Bale Banjar

(forum konsensus lokal), dan Burdah (pertunjukan keagamaan Muslim yang diintegrasikan ke dalam kehidupan upacara Hindu)—berfungsi sebagai mekanisme untuk memfasilitasi kerja sama antaragama, sinergi ritual, dan pembentukan identitas hibrida. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan berkelanjutan seperti segregasi spasial, dominasi budaya, dan polarisasi digital, komunitas Saren mempertahankan harmoni antaragama melalui keterlibatan pemuda, adaptasi ritual inklusif, dan inisiatif literasi digital berbasis masyarakat. Berbeda dengan banyak daerah Bali yang memperkuat hegemoni budaya Hindu, Saren menjadi contoh model timbal balik di mana kontribusi Muslim, terutama Burdah, secara ritual terintegrasi dalam kerangka Hindu yang dominan. Asimilasi dua arah dalam praktik ritual ini menandai pergeseran signifikan dari pola konvensional akomodasi agama. Melampaui penerapan Durkheim dan Eck, studi ini menyajikan model kontekstual harmoni antaragama yang didasarkan pada integrasi ritual timbal balik. Hal ini menyoroti nilai praktik agama lokal sebagai sumber kreatif bagi koeksistensi antaragama dalam masyarakat plural.

Kata kunci: Sinkretisme budaya; harmoni antariman; relasi Muslim-Hindu; integrasi ritual; Desa Saren

1. **Introduction**

   Indonesia is recognised for its vibrant religious diversity, where multiple faith traditions coexist across its vast archipelago. However, this pluralism is accompanied by persistent challenges in sustaining social harmony (Nasution, Irmayani, & Sazali, 2024; Seda, Kurniawan, & Pera, 2022). Historical incidents in regions such as Poso, Ambon, and Sampang illustrate how unresolved theological differences can escalate into communal conflict (Setiawan et al., 2022; Sukamto & Pramono, 2020). Yet, amidst these tensions, communities like Saren in Bali exemplify enduring interfaith coexistence.

   This research highlights coexistence and a deliberate and localised model of harmony wherein community members integrate religious rituals and cultural identities across faith boundaries. In this village, Muslims and Hindus have developed mechanisms of peaceful interaction despite structural barriers such as residential segregation and the polarising influence of digital media. Understanding the strategies behind such resilience is critical to enriching theoretical perspectives on interfaith relations and offering practical models adaptable to other diverse societies in Indonesia.

   Although Bali is often portrayed as a peaceful region, latent tensions and subtle discrimination persist, particularly in Hindu-Muslim relations (Budiwanti, 1995; Hauser-Schäublin & Harnish, 2014; Kristensen, Pedersen, & Williams, 2001). Recent studies highlight how local wisdom plays a vital role in fostering interfaith harmony through principles like *Tri Hita Karana* and *Menyama Braya*, which emphasise empathy, balance, and social cohesion (Eko & Putranto, 2021; Kiriana, Dasih, Widiasih, Supandi, & Sujana, 2025). These values are operationalised in daily life and conflict resolution, supported by the roles of religious leaders and community institutions through mechanisms such as *islah*, interfaith dialogue, and customary law (*awig-awig*) (Darma, Arsawati, & Triwulandari, 2021; Manik & Suharno, 2020; Rasyid et al., 2023). In urban centres like Denpasar and shared religious spaces such as the Puja Mandala Worship Complex, interfaith harmony is sustained through empathetic communication, shared rituals, and traditions like *ngejot* and *male*, which accommodate religious diversity (Masruroh & Yusuf, 2023; Prasetyo & Sofyan, 2023; M. Saihu, 2020; M. Saihu, Anwar, Suhada, Aziz, & Balgis, 2021). It contrasts with contexts like India, where incompatible rituals and politicised religious identities—exacerbated by Hindu nationalism—often trigger exclusion and conflict (Allie, 2023; Tomalin, Dyer, & Choksi, 2024). Such cases underscore the importance of community-led peacebuilding rooted in inclusive cultural frameworks (Kwuelum, 2024).

   Building on these insights, this study investigates how the Saren community operationalises interfaith harmony through a distinctive fusion of local rituals and cultural identities, distinguishing it from other Balinese communities where Muslims are often marginalised or absent from core ritual life. In Saren, Muslims are involved and co-create ritual space, making the village an exceptional case of

Muslim-Hindu ritual synergy in Bali. Traditions such as *Subak*, a Balinese irrigation system managed collectively by Muslims and Hindus, and *Burdah*, a Muslim poetic art performed during Hindu funerals, illustrate a rare level of interreligious cooperation and ritual integration. These practices are further reinforced by hybrid naming customs, mosque architecture that reflects Balinese design, and the inclusive use of communal spaces like the *Bale Banjar*.

This study argues that involving youth in cultural preservation, enhancing interfaith dialogue, and responding to digital challenges are key to social cohesion. Local traditions, rooted in universal values like cooperation and tolerance, can bridge theological divides. For instance, the *Subak* system, a traditional water management method, supports farming and encourages interfaith collaboration. Similarly, the *Burdah* tradition in Saren, which blends Islamic and Hindu practices, shows how local culture fosters inclusive spaces. This study argues that local traditions effectively address contemporary challenges and maintain interfaith harmony, particularly in Bali.

This study explores interfaith harmony in Saren Village, Bali, by analysing challenges and strategies in its sociocultural context. Employing a phenomenological approach, it seeks a deep understanding of local experiences and perspectives. Data are gathered through interviews with leaders, participatory observations, and document analysis. This research employs triangulation data presentation by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) to ensure credibility. Social integration and religious pluralism are utilised as theoretical frameworks. Social integration theory emphasises how individuals and groups are incorporated into a cohesive social structure, fostering mutual respect, cooperation, and shared identity despite differences (Malik & Malik, 2022). In the context of Saren, this theory helps explain how shared rituals and participatory governance structures—such as Subak and Bale Banjar—enable inclusive interaction and strengthen social cohesion across religious boundaries. In parallel, religious pluralism means a framework that acknowledges the coexistence of multiple faith traditions and promotes active engagement and mutual understanding among the adherents. Rather than treating religious differences as a barrier, pluralism encourages the construction of shared cultural spaces through mutual recognition and interfaith collaboration.

These theoretical perspectives (Ansor & Masyhur, 2023; Asadu, Asogwa, & Diara, 2020) provide a comprehensive lens for analysing the dynamics of interfaith harmony in Saren. They help explain how shared rituals, collective identity, and inclusive social structures contribute to long-term coexistence across religious boundaries. By focusing on ritual collaboration and cultural hybridity, this study contributes new insights into the anatomy of interreligious resilience at the grassroots level. It offers an empirically grounded, contextually sensitive model that can inform broader efforts to foster multicultural harmony in religiously diverse societies.

2. Sociocultural Harmony Through Local Traditions

Local traditions in Saren play a central role in fostering social harmony between Muslim and Hindu communities (Pageh, 2018; S. Saihu, 2020; Suprapto, 2017). One prominent example is *Subak*, a traditional irrigation system in Bali that dates back centuries. It is a community-based water management system used primarily for rice cultivation, deeply embedded in Balinese cultural and religious practices. Beyond its agricultural function, *Subak* plays a significant sociocultural role by fostering communal cooperation and inclusive participation among members of different religious backgrounds. As such, it serves as an efficient means of water distribution and a vital platform for nurturing interfaith solidarity through shared responsibilities and mutual respect. This tradition is rooted in the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasises harmonious relationships among humans, nature, and God (Suasih et al., 2024; Vipriyanti, Rustiarini, Andayani, & Sedana, 2024). Individuals from diverse religious backgrounds collaborate to distribute water equitably, ensuring inclusivity.

Additionally, during rituals associated with *Subak*, Hindus and Muslims conduct ceremonies according to their respective beliefs, reinforcing mutual respect and religious diversity (K. A. S. U. Putra, 2021). "We never ask whether someone is Hindu or Muslim when managing water. Everyone is equal in the *Subak*," said Ida Ketut Budhi Brahmandya, a Hindu farmer in Saren (Ida Ketut Budhi

Brahmandya, personal communication, September 14, 2024). A Muslim member, Janurianto echoed this view, "in the fields, what matters is cooperation. We share the same land and the same needs, so we help each other as neighbours first, not as different religions" (Januarianto, personal communication, September 14, 2024). This collaboration enhances interpersonal bonds and underscores the shared commitment to coexistence.

Another key institution is the *Bale Banjar*, a central hub for social and cultural activities, fostering daily interfaith interactions. It provides an inclusive space where Hindu and Muslim residents participate equally in joint decision-making and community rituals. For instance, during *sangkep* (communal deliberations), members from both religious groups come together to address communal challenges—ranging from land use disputes to religious celebrations. These sessions are not merely formal meetings but platforms for restorative dialogue. "In the *sangkep*, we speak as neighbours, not as Hindu or Muslim. When there is tension, like overlapping use of public space for ceremonies, we discuss and compromise directly," explained Ida Bagus, a Hindu community elder in Saren (Ida Bagus, personal communication, September 10, 2024). Similarly, Janurianto, a Muslim youth leader, added, "If something causes friction—say, sound from religious events—we do not let it grow. We bring it up in the Banjar and resolve it calmly." Such interactions actualise the principles of *Tri Hita Karana*, particularly harmony among people, and show how the *Bale Banjar* functions as a grassroots mechanism for conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence (Suwardani, Paramartha, & Suasthi, 2018).

Another compelling example of cultural and religious integration in Saren is the *Burdah* tradition. *Burdah* is a traditional performing art involving thirteen male performers, each playing drums of various sizes. The ensemble includes four large drums, eight medium drums, and one small drum—each crafted locally to reflect the community's strong cultural identity. These size variations create intricate rhythmic patterns, enriching the musical experience. Every player has a distinct role within each performance, such as leading, chanting poetic verses, or crafting drum rhythms (Ahmad Yusuf, personal communication, September 8, 2024).

In the Saren context, *Burdah* takes on a unique interfaith dimension, especially during the funerals of Hindu leaders. On such occasions, Muslim performers recite *Burdah* while Hindus respond with Balinese chants, resulting in a meaningful cultural and religious dialogue. This reciprocal inclusion of Islamic liturgical expression in Hindu ritual life is rarely observed elsewhere in Bali, making Saren a notable deviation from the typical unidirectional cultural accommodation in Hindu-majority villages. This collaboration reflects deep acculturation and mutual respect and also strengthens interfaith solidarity. Preserving this tradition across generations illustrates the community's commitment to using shared cultural expressions as a bridge for coexistence and social cohesion (Syawaludin & Fikri, 2024).

Saren's mosque architecture also reflects the blending of cultural and religious identities. Incorporating distinct Balinese design elements, such as a thatched roof resembling temple structures, the mosque symbolises the Muslim community's embrace of local culture while maintaining their religious identity. Despite the destruction of the original mosque built by Raden Abdul Jalil, its values of harmony persist in traditions like *Burdah* and established social systems (Nazarudin, personal communication, November 10, 2024). This architectural adaptation exemplifies the coexistence of cultural and religious identities.

Community cooperation in shared social activities plays a significant role in reinforcing interfaith harmony in Saren. Collaborative initiatives are concrete expressions of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), reflecting a collective ethic that transcends religious boundaries. These collective actions transcend religious boundaries, allowing individuals from different faiths to work together toward shared goals. In doing so, they strengthen interpersonal bonds and create meaningful spaces for interreligious engagement. Such interactions foster greater appreciation of each other's traditions and deepen mutual respect through lived experience and practical collaboration (Gede, Gede, & Wayan, 2018).

Leadership structures in Saren offer additional support for interfaith harmony. The three primary community leaders, *Kelian Kampung, Kelian Adat,* and *Penghulu* work collaboratively to manage

administrative, customary, and religious affairs (Ahmad Yusuf, personal communication, November 7, 2024). This inclusive leadership arrangement ensures that no single religious group dominates decision-making, promoting fairness and trust across the community. It also facilitates proactive problem-solving, particularly in addressing shared concerns such as land use, ritual scheduling, and conflict resolution. Through this model, Saren demonstrates how integrated governance can support peaceful coexistence in a religiously diverse society.

Cultural adaptation is also evident in the Muslim community's use of the Balinese language and traditional Balinese names. They have integrated the Balinese naming system based on birth order—*Wayan*, *Made*, *Nyoman*, and *Ketut*—while incorporating Islamic names, demonstrating a hybrid identity that blends Balinese, Javanese, and Islamic cultures. Such names are not only used in daily interactions but also appear in official documents like birth certificates (Aliffiati, Wedasantara, & Budarsa, 2023; Maryati, Sri Ariyani, & Atmadja, 2024; I. N. A. J. Putra, 2022; Raya et al., 2023), reinforcing a strong sense of belonging and cultural unity within Saren.

Thus, the cultural integration observed in Saren highlights the role of local traditions in bridging theological and social differences (S. Saihu, 2020). Practices such as *Subak*, the *Bale Banjar*, and *Burdah* demonstrate how local values can serve as instruments of interfaith harmony (Muni & Anand, 2022). Active participation in social and cultural activities and respect for local traditions prove that harmonious coexistence is achievable through sustained collaboration. The Saren community exemplifies how active engagement, rather than passive tolerance, is key to building and maintaining social harmony (Suamba, Windia, Sumiyati, & Arisena, 2020).

3.   Challenges in Maintaining Harmony

Religious-based residential segregation poses a significant challenge to maintaining interfaith harmony in Saren. The physical separation between Hindu and Muslim communities creates distinct social spaces, limiting the depth and quality of interactions between the groups. This separation can potentially reinforce stereotypes and negative prejudices, ultimately harming both parties. The issue becomes even more complex when environmental factors, such as unequal access to resources and public services, are involved.

Importantly, such segregation is observed in conflict-prone areas and regions typically understood as peaceful. In Canada, for instance, residential segregation among religious groups is comparable to racial and ethnic segregation. Research suggests that such segregation can intensify intergroup tensions by fostering social distance, which hinders meaningful interfaith interactions (Badrun, 2018). Similarly, in Central Maluku, residential segregation emerged because of the conflict between Muslims and Christians. While viewed as a temporary solution to prevent further conflict, this segregation potentially provokes future social tensions. Religious counsellors in the area have pointed out that the social distance created by this segregation may worsen intergroup relations (Ruagadi, Nursinah, Bunga, Pelima, & Taariwuan, 2024).

Post-conflict segregation in Ambon also illustrates the persistent effects of spatial separation, where Muslim and Christian communities remain divided in their social, economic, and cultural activities (Hasaniy & Azisurrohman, 2024; Weldemina & Wenno, 2023). In Palopo, religious, ethnic, and class-based segregation has contributed to systemic inequality and exacerbated socio-economic disparities between groups (Badrun, 2018). Despite these challenges, empirical evidence suggests that intentional interfaith engagement can help mitigate the adverse effects of segregation. A study in Nigeria demonstrated that interactions at Sobi Hill fostered a strong community identity and reduced intergroup stereotypes (Ogunbiyi, Fahm, & Akande, 2023). This finding highlights that, despite the challenges of residential segregation, deliberate efforts such as joint activities can help bridge divides and promote unity.

In the context of Saren, traditional practices such as *Subak* function as a crucial bridge between religious communities. Komang Asmuni emphasised *Subak*'s unifying role by stating, "*Subak* has never discriminated between Hindus and Muslims; every farmer has the water right, and we manage it together based on mutual agreement" (Personal communication, September 10, 2024). He explained

that since most community members are farmers, participation in *Subak* is widespread and deeply ingrained. Importantly, he noted that there has never been an incident of religious-based discrimination within the water distribution system. The irrigation process is guided by principles of fairness and collective regulation established by all *Subak* members. Supporting this view, Wisarja & Sudarsana (2023) affirmed, "This organisation [*Subak*] serves as a means of interaction among citizens, both Hindu and Muslim." This direct testimony validates the integrative function of *Subak* and reinforces the importance of indigenous institutions in promoting religious inclusion. Nevertheless, *Subak*'s integrative impact alone has not yet sufficed to dismantle the entrenched barriers imposed by residential segregation. It highlights the urgency of implementing more deliberate and inclusive initiatives to build sustained inter-communal relationships and foster shared social spaces.

The educational system in Saren similarly faces structural challenges in cultivating interfaith understanding. Religious-affiliated schools predominantly enrol students from the same faith background, significantly reducing opportunities for interreligious interaction among children. Consequently, students often grow up with limited exposure to religious diversity, and stereotypes frequently shape their perceptions of other beliefs. As Ida Ketut Budhi Brahmandya remarked, "In Hindu schools, there are hardly any Muslim children. These students do not get used to interacting with peers of different faiths" (Personal communication, November 14, 2024). He stressed that a curriculum lacking pluralistic content tends to reinforce exclusive and insular mindsets among learners. Education plays a vital role in nurturing tolerance early; if diversity is not managed well within the educational framework, future social friction becomes increasingly inevitable. Therefore, designing an inclusive educational environment that actively facilitates experiential learning about diversity and fosters mutual understanding and acceptance is imperative.

Furthermore, the rise of social media in Saren, as observed by Komang Asmuni and Ida Ketut Budhi Brahmandya, presents a growing challenge to sustaining interfaith harmony. Popular platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp are frequently exploited to disseminate unverified information, including provocative narratives exacerbating religious tensions. Komang Asmuni reflected on this issue, stating, "We often receive forwarded messages targeting certain groups, and sometimes these messages come from our friends. This creates mutual suspicion" (personal communication, September 10, 2024). Such dynamics reveal how digital religious discourse often fosters polarisation and entrenches prejudices between faith communities. In this context, social media becomes a space that mirrors societal divisions and can intensify them through algorithmic reinforcement and emotional provocation.

Although digital platforms possess the potential to promote tolerance and interfaith understanding, they are more often employed to disseminate hate speech and intolerance. Research by Mishol-Shauli and Golan found that ultra-Orthodox communities use social media to negotiate and present their identities, which can either strengthen or weaken interfaith harmony. Similarly, Yuliawati and Asri (2024) note that exposure to social media can influence an individual's moderation; those more active on social media tend to hold less moderate views than those less engaged online. Algorithmic bias further narrows users' exposure to alternative perspectives, reducing opportunities for dialogue and increasing the risk of echo chambers. Wibisono and Darmalaksana (2022) also demonstrate how religious ideologies, especially in electoral politics, are amplified through social media in ways that intensify interreligious antagonism. Despite these risks, efforts to moderate harmful discourse and promote constructive interfaith dialogue online remain minimal. Consequently, social media functions more often as a space of division than a platform for building interreligious solidarity.

4.   Strategies for Maintaining Harmony

The community of Saren has developed a range of strategic interventions to address interreligious challenges and promote long-term social cohesion. These strategies are rooted in civic engagement, cultural continuity, inclusive governance, education, equitable resource distribution, and digital literacy. Together, they constitute a locally grounded model for cultivating sustainable interfaith harmony.

Strengthening civic engagement

Various formal and informal organisations have been established in Saren to support interreligious cooperation. These include the PKK (Family Welfare Movement), *Subak* (traditional irrigation organisation), and *Burcek* (community-based youth groups), all of which provide platforms for Muslims and Hindus to collaborate. As Komang Asmuni expressed, "In Saren, we always involve all residents, regardless of religion. In PKK, Burcek, *Subak*—everyone can join. What matters is the intention for unity and mutual support" (Personal communication, September 10, 2024).

In addition to organisational involvement, communal activities such as *gotong royong* (cooperation) remain integral in fostering interfaith relationships. As I Wayan Suradnya described, "Whenever there is a cemetery or temple clean-up, everyone shows up. Hindus and Muslims work together. That is just how it is" (Personal communication, September 12, 2024). These events not only enhance the physical environment but also solidify social cohesion. Community cooperation extends to preparations for major religious celebrations, where Muslims and Hindus assist each other. This shared responsibility cultivates a sense of belonging and mutual care (Gede et al., 2018; Parimartha, Putra, & Ririen, 2012). Furthermore, these programs provide informal spaces for interaction, allowing community members to better understand each other's traditions and religious values. This way, *gotong-royong* is an effective medium for promoting sustainable social harmony (Suprapto, 2020).

Civic engagement in Saren is further reinforced through interreligious dialogue. Known locally as *Sangkep*, these communal gatherings provide a space for discussing socio-religious issues and building consensus. Ketut Janurianto noted, "*Sangkep* is important because everyone can speak there. Traditional leaders, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens sit together to find solutions. If there is a religious or social issue, we discuss it respectfully so it does not escalate"(Personal communication, September 15, 2024).

Regular interfaith dialogues also play a key role in nurturing harmonious relationships in Saren. These dialogues bring together religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community members to address issues that may lead to tensions, as observed in Kalibago, Indonesia (Muslim & Mujab, 2020). In these forums, stereotypes, and prejudices are confronted through open discussions about each community's religious values (Le Duc, 2023; Rahawarin, 2023). Moreover, these dialogues serve as a platform to find solutions to shared problems, such as resource distribution and the influence of social media. By creating inclusive communication spaces, these dialogues facilitate mutual understanding and trust-building among the communities, helping to reduce conflict potential and strengthen inter-community collaboration.

Reinforcing local traditions

Engaging the youth in local traditions is another vital strategy for sustaining interfaith harmony in Saren. Young people are actively encouraged to participate in cultural activities such as *Burdah* and *Rudat* performances and interfaith religious events. As customary leader Ahmad Yusuf noted, "We invite the youth here to participate in *Burdah* and *Rudat* practice sessions so they understand the importance of mutual respect. Through art, they learn religion and culture together" (Personal communication, September 8, 2024).

These activities serve as informal educational platforms that instil cultural literacy and social values in younger generations. By fostering awareness of religious diversity from an early age, the community nurtures future custodians of social harmony. Moreover, such participation not only

preserves the cultural heritage of the village but also reinforces intergenerational bonds, ensuring that the principles of coexistence are passed on sustainably (Desfitri, Hefni, Sriwahyuni, Afnita, & Wandi, 2024; Pamuji, Roqib, Basit, & Yahya, 2024).

Tradition is also embedded in interfaith ritual collaboration. Another essential strategy involves embedding tradition into daily life. One notable example is the *Burdah* recitation performed by the Muslim community during Hindu funeral processions. Ahmad Yusuf remarked, "During *ngaben* ceremonies, we from the Muslim community usually join by reciting the *Burdah* as a sign of respect. It is already a tradition here" (Personal communication, September 8, 2024). This practice illustrates how shared rituals foster mutual acknowledgment and spiritual solidarity. Similarly, the active involvement of Muslims in the *Subak* irrigation system demonstrates the integrative power of local traditions. Komang Asmuni affirmed, "*Subak* is not just for Hindus. Muslims also take part because we are all farmers. Water is a shared need, so we manage it together" (Personal communication, September 10, 2024). Guided by the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, Subak offers a concrete and spiritually rooted model of religious coexistence (K. A. S. U. Putra, 2021).

Educational approaches

Education in Saren plays an essential role in cultivating and maintaining interfaith harmony. While formal education still grapples with the full integration of pluralistic values, informal educational platforms—particularly those rooted in traditional arts like *Burdah* and *Rudat*—offer effective interim strategies. These artistic practices introduce children and adolescents to their cultural heritage and provide experiential learning environments that foster an appreciation for religious and cultural diversity.

Ahmad Yusuf emphasised "the significance of informal education through the arts, when children are invited to practice *Burdah* or *Rudat*, they do not just learn about art—they learn how to live together. They understand that differences are not meant to cause conflict" (Ahmad Yusuf, personal communication, September 8, 2024). These community-based learning environments instil values of empathy and cooperation, compensating for the lack of pluralist content in the formal curriculum.

However, sustainable interfaith harmony requires deeper reform within the education system itself. "Our education must be more open. Children need to learn about religions other than their own. That is important so they can live peacefully in a diverse society," explained Ida Ketut Budhi Brahmandya (personal communication, November 14, 2024). A more inclusive curriculum that integrates lessons on tolerance, religious diversity, and cultural empathy is necessary to prepare future generations to navigate a pluralistic society (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024).

Equitable social aid distribution and inclusive social space management

The equitable distribution of social aid is key to fostering interfaith harmony in Saren. Aid programs covering basic needs—such as food, healthcare, and education—are administered without regard to religious affiliation. This principle of fairness strengthens community solidarity and mitigates potential social jealousy. Komang Asmuni explained, "When government or village aid is distributed, we make sure every resident receives it, regardless of religion. Everyone has needs, and we divide it equally to prevent jealousy" (Personal communication, September 10, 2024).

These fair practices foster mutual trust and prevent perceptions of marginalisation. Equally important is the management of inclusive public spaces, such as the Bale Banjar. These spaces function as neutral venues for social interaction, civic dialogue, and cultural expression. "At the Bale Banjar, everyone can gather—meetings, events, and social activities include everyone," said I Wayan Suradnya (Personal communication, September 12, 2024). Maintaining inclusive environments affirms the village's commitment to openness and egalitarianism while strengthening everyday interfaith interaction (Segara, 2019b, 2019a).

The role of religious leaders and local government

The involvement of religious and traditional leaders plays a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony in Saren. These figures serve not only as spiritual guides but also as mediators and community unifiers. Their ability to draw upon religious teachings and local wisdom makes them influential in resolving tensions between Muslim and Hindu residents. Ketut Janurianto emphasised, "When a problem arises, religious and traditional leaders are the first to step in. They know how to speak wisely to all parties. Usually, when they speak, the community listens" (Personal communication, September 15, 2024). Such trusted leadership reinforces the perception that differences can be addressed constructively without threatening the community's cohesion. These leaders promote a sense of collective responsibility and reconciliation by framing conflict resolution within shared cultural and ethical values (Nasution et al., 2024).

The local government also plays a critical supporting role in institutionalising social harmony. Through initiatives such as financial support, training programs, and capacity-building workshops, the government helps sustain long-term peacebuilding efforts. Komang Asmuni noted, "The village government often helps through training or activity funding. If there is a *gotong royong* event or interfaith dialogue, they usually facilitate it" (Personal communication, September 10, 2024). This collaborative governance model allows community initiatives to thrive while ensuring inclusivity and representation across religious lines (Ansor & Masyhur, 2023). Furthermore, by adopting inclusive policies and supporting grassroots engagement, the local government enhances the durability of interfaith cooperation. Their proactive involvement not only legitimises community-led peace efforts but also strengthens social resilience in Saren over the long term.

Enhancing digital literacy

Digital literacy has emerged as a vital strategy in countering the divisive potential of social media. As access to digital platforms expands, so does the risk of misinformation and religious provocation. Community-based training sessions have been implemented to promote critical digital engagement. "Many residents still tend to believe information on social media too easily. That is why we conduct training so they can verify it before sharing," explained Komang Asmuni (personal communication, September 10, 2024).

Workshops on fact-checking, source verification, and digital ethics are delivered in collaboration with local authorities and community organisations. In parallel, youth-led campaigns have produced content promoting tolerance, local wisdom, and interfaith understanding. "The youth here are now actively creating positive content—about tolerance, cooperation, and local culture. This is their way of combating hate speech," shared Ida Ketut Budhi Brahmandya (personal communication, November 14, 2024). These efforts help counteract harmful narratives and foster a digitally literate, socially conscious generation. In doing so, the Saren community enhances its resilience to online provocation and builds a stronger, more unified society (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024).

5. **Discussion: Cultural Mechanisms, Interfaith Resilience, and the Digital Challenge in Plural Societies**

This study has examined how interfaith harmony is actively sustained in Saren Village, Bali, despite persistent structural, cultural, and technological challenges. By employing a phenomenological approach, the research illustrates how local traditions—*Subak* (traditional irrigation), *Bale Banjar* (communal assembly hall), and *Burdah* (Islamic devotional performance)—function not only as expressions of cultural heritage but as dynamic instruments for promoting religious tolerance and social cohesion. These practices provide inclusive spaces for shared rituals, dialogue, and mutual assistance, facilitating sustained collaboration between Muslim and Hindu communities. The findings show that civic engagement, youth participation in traditional arts, inclusive religious customs, and digital literacy initiatives collectively contribute to interfaith resilience in Saren.

While challenges such as residential segregation, cultural dominance, and digital algorithmic bias persist, the community continues to respond through culturally grounded strategies. These include joint rituals, informal educational platforms, and local leadership mediation. As a result, Saren offers a scalable, community-based model of interfaith coexistence that balances tradition with adaptation to contemporary social dynamics.

The case of Saren builds upon and extends current scholarship on interfaith harmony by shifting analytical focus from formal, top-down peacebuilding initiatives to grassroots cultural mechanisms. In contrast to contexts like Ambon, where reconciliation processes rely heavily on state-led interventions (Rahawarin, 2023; Sugi, Rahman, & Kamarzaman, 2023), Saren demonstrates how indigenous institutions can foster durable coexistence through everyday practice. While ritual coexistence in other Balinese villages often takes the form of symbolic parallelism, Saren exemplifies ritual convergence, where Islamic and Hindu traditions are integrated into shared ceremonial contexts—most notably through Burdah performances at *Ngaben* (Hindu cremation) ceremonies.

This bottom-up approach also contrasts with the context of India, where politicised religious identities and majoritarian nationalism exacerbate exclusion and conflict (Allie, 2023; Tomalin et al., 2024). In Saren, inclusive values such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Menyama Braya* (Eko & Putranto, 2021; Kiriana et al., 2025) are not merely abstract ideals but are enacted in institutional practices, including participatory governance and interfaith water management. The active role of Muslim youth in Burdah performances during Hindu funerals further underscores the depth of cultural interweaving and spiritual solidarity. As observed by Afdhal (2024), localised ritual practices effectively bridge theological divides—an insight vividly illustrated in the Saren experience.

Theoretically, this study affirms the relevance of social integration and religious pluralism frameworks (Ansor & Masyhur, 2023; Asadu et al., 2020) while demonstrating their contextual application in culturally embedded settings. Local traditions in Saren function as adaptive mediators that encourage relational trust and interreligious dialogue. Rather than perceiving religious differences as inherently conflictual, the Saren model treats diversity as a resource for moral and civic formation. These findings echo the theoretical assertions of Moreau (2025), who contends that interfaith dialogue fosters shared moral values in pluralistic societies.

Practically, the findings offer a transferable framework for other plural societies seeking to address latent intergroup tensions. *Subak* and *Bale Banjar* are embedded infrastructures for inclusive governance and deliberation. Simultaneously, Burdah performances act as affective and spiritual conduits that strengthen cross-religious bonds. At the policy level, the study calls for the institutional recognition of local traditions within broader peacebuilding strategies. Educational curricula should integrate pluralism and interfaith understanding as core competencies, resonating with the insights of Moritz et al. (2018) and Halafoff (2018) regarding educational approaches that reduce religious stereotypes. Moreover, digital platforms must be addressed through community-based literacy programs that counteract disinformation, hate speech, and ideological polarisation (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024).

Several interrelated factors contribute to the resilience of interfaith harmony in Saren. First, local philosophical frameworks such as *Tri Hita Karana* and *Menyama Braya* are not only embraced as cultural ideals but also enacted in daily practices. These principles manifest through cooperative irrigation systems (*Subak*), participatory governance (*Bale Banjar*), and shared religious and artistic expressions such as *Burdah* (Kiriana et al., 2025; K. A. S. U. Putra, 2021). Second, the historical coexistence of Hindu and Muslim communities in Bali has fostered hybrid cultural-religious identities that weaken rigid exclusivism and foster cross-boundary solidarity (Asadu et al., 2020; Maryati et al., 2024). Third, the legitimacy of customary, religious, and administrative leaders enables effective conflict mediation and collective decision-making rooted in shared moral authority (Nasution et al., 2024). Finally, informal cultural education—particularly through youth engagement in traditional performances like Rudat and Burdah—plays a key role in cultivating tolerance, empathy, and pluralist values among the younger generation (Desfitri et al., 2024).

Despite these strengths, the research also identifies several dysfunctions and limitations that constrain the long-term sustainability of interfaith harmony in Saren. Most notably, residential

segregation between Hindu and Muslim communities limits spontaneous social interaction and may inadvertently reinforce intergroup stereotypes. While traditional institutions like Subak provide cooperative spaces, they remain insufficient in bridging deeper social divides rooted in physical separation. Moreover, educational segregation, wherein religiously affiliated schools primarily serve homogenous populations, restricts children's exposure to religious diversity and perpetuates narrow social imaginaries. These findings align with the observations of Susanto (2025) and Thoyib et al. (2024), who emphasise the significance of integrative communal and educational efforts. The influence of social media further compounds these vulnerabilities, as misinformation, hate speech, and algorithmic echo chambers threaten to destabilise community trust—especially among digitally active youth (Mernissi, 2023). These structural and informational challenges underscore the need for more intentional, cross-sectoral interventions to complement existing cultural mechanisms with systemic, future-oriented solutions.

Building on insights from the Saren model, this study offers several forward-looking recommendations. Educational systems at all levels should institutionalise pluralism through experiential learning and interfaith engagement. Local cultural practices, including Subak and Burdah, should receive formal recognition and structural support as essential components of community-based peace infrastructure. Interfaith dialogue initiatives must be democratised to include grassroots stakeholders—particularly youth and women—who are often disproportionately affected by identity-based polarisation (Doci, 2019; MacDonald, 2024). Digital literacy programs should be expanded to promote critical engagement and content creation that reflects inclusive local values. These initiatives echo the necessity of inclusive policies and civic engagement identified by Cox & Sisk (2017) and Lamine (2005).

Furthermore, interdisciplinary research must explore how tradition-based harmony models like those observed in Saren can be contextually adapted across diverse cultural and technological environments. Harmony as a social ideal is deeply rooted in a range of global traditions—including Javanese, African, and Caribbean contexts—where it is cultivated through cultural rituals and serves as a foundation for mutual respect, conflict resolution, and community resilience (Corbin, 2021; Waston et al., 2024). In these settings, traditions provide not only symbolic value but also tangible social capital that sustains intergroup cooperation (Yau & Chow, 2007). Understanding how these models can be translated or scaled across varying cultural settings requires interdisciplinary collaboration between religion, anthropology, and peace studies scholars.

Simultaneously, the algorithmic dynamics of digital platforms demand careful examination as they increasingly shape intergroup perceptions and influence trust formation in online environments. Studies show that while algorithms can facilitate connection, their opacity and potential for bias can erode intergroup trust by undermining perceptions of fairness, transparency, and goodwill (Das, 2020; Shin & Park, 2019). In professional and social contexts alike, algorithmic governance has been shown to centralise control, limit user agency, and even amplify ideological polarisation—posing a serious challenge to communal cohesion (Korogodsky, 2025; Schreyer, 2024). When applied to interfaith interactions, these algorithmic patterns may further entrench echo chambers and foster digital segregation, weakening the social bonds that local traditions like Subak or Bale Banjar work to strengthen offline.

To address these emerging complexities, research must bridge cultural theory, digital ethics, and computational social science, developing adaptive models that preserve the integrity of tradition-based harmony while navigating the risks posed by algorithmic manipulation (Yan, Guo, & Cheng, 2025). This integrative approach aligns with calls for a more ethically grounded algorithmic architecture that promotes fairness, accountability, and trust in human-computer interactions (Das, 2023; Shin & Park, 2019). Accordingly, international organisations and interfaith networks should not only preserve locally grounded peace mechanisms like those in Saren, but also incorporate them into global strategies for conflict prevention and pluralism promotion. When linked with digital literacy and equitable platform design, these traditions can evolve into globally relevant tools for sustainable, culturally responsive peacebuilding.

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that interfaith harmony in Saren Village, Bali, is not an incidental occurrence but the result of sustained, intentional, and community-driven efforts. The key finding reveals that local traditions—*Subak* (communal irrigation), *Bale Banjar* (deliberative gathering hall), and *Burdah* (devotional Islamic performance)—serve as culturally embedded mechanisms that foster religious tolerance and social cohesion. These traditions operate not only as expressions of heritage but also as inclusive frameworks for shared ritual practices and mutual assistance. Particularly noteworthy is the incorporation of Muslim cultural elements into Hindu ceremonial life, exemplifying a form of ritual convergence that distinguishes Saren from other multicultural settings. This convergence underscores the community's ability to transform cultural plurality into a shared social identity rooted in local wisdom.

This research's primary contribution lies in developing a holistic model for grassroots peacebuilding that integrates cultural, religious, and digital dimensions. The study extends existing religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation frameworks by demonstrating how Indigenous traditions can be operationalised to sustain interreligious coexistence. It also contributes empirical evidence to support the notion that harmony is an actively maintained process that requires ongoing civic participation, intergenerational transmission of values, and adaptive strategies in response to digital disruption. In particular, initiatives involving youth engagement in traditional arts and community-led digital literacy programs emerge as critical interventions for building resilience against ideological polarisation and misinformation.

Nevertheless, this study acknowledges key limitations. The persistence of residential and educational segregation constrains spontaneous intergroup interaction, limiting the reach of everyday pluralism. Additionally, while community-led digital literacy efforts are promising, their scalability and long-term impact require further assessment. Given the single-case focus, future research should explore the model's adaptability to other multicultural contexts and examine how digital algorithms shape interfaith dynamics and pluralism education.

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