

Exploring the cultural, ritual, spiritual, and social significance of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition as a unique Balinese heritage practice

Ni Wayan Sadiyani¹, M. Agus Sutarso², Ofordi Joy Amarachi³, A.M.M Mahmudul Hasan⁴

Politeknik Negeri Bali, INDONESIA¹

Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional, INDONESIA²

Kaduna State University, NIGERIA³

Khwaja Yunus Ali University, BANGLADESH⁴

¹Email: niwayansadiyani@gmail.com

Abstract - The existence of traditional arts today serves not only as a cultural identity of a region but also as a dynamic force that influences the life and values of the local community. Traditions that are rooted in a particular area emerge through a long historical and cultural journey, eventually becoming systems of belief and habitual practice. The shared perspectives and local mythologies that form the basis of these traditions often reflect the creativity and local genius of the community. One such revitalized tradition is *Mebuug-Buugan* in Adat Kedongan Village, Kuta District, Badung Regency, Bali, which was reconstructed in 2014 after being absent for nearly 60 years. The aim of this study is to explore the philosophical and social meanings embedded within the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, and to assess how it embodies the principles of local wisdom, especially in relation to *Tri Hita Karana*, the Balinese philosophy of harmonious living. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research relies on data gathered through observation, interviews, and document studies related to the tradition's implementation, symbols, and community participation. The analysis reveals that *Mebuug-Buugan*, a mud-based ritual conducted in mangrove areas after the Nyepi celebration, is not merely a traditional game but a symbolic act of self-purification, environmental harmony, and social cohesion. The ritual's reconstruction has strengthened the community's cultural identity, revitalized environmental awareness, and re-established social harmony rooted in ancestral values. In conclusion, *Mebuug-Buugan* is a valuable cultural expression that reflects deep spiritual and ecological meanings. Its revitalization affirms the resilience of Balinese traditions in the modern era and highlights the importance of preserving local wisdom through collective community action.

Keywords: Mebuug-Buugan, tradition revitalization, *Tri Hita Karana*, local wisdom, cultural identity

1. Introduction



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Traditions are the lifeblood of a community's cultural identity, serving as a bridge between past and present. In Bali, traditions are not merely rituals; they are embodiments of philosophical principles that guide daily life. One such principle is *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmony among humans (*pwongan*), the divine (*parhyangan*), and nature (*palemahan*). This philosophy is deeply ingrained in Balinese society, influencing various aspects of life, including architecture, agriculture, and social interactions.

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, practiced in Desa Adat Kedongan, is a vivid manifestation of this philosophy. Held annually after the Nyepi holiday, this ritual involves participants smearing themselves with mud and later cleansing in the sea, symbolizing self-purification and the shedding of negative energies. Beyond its spiritual significance, *Mebuug-Buugan* fosters community cohesion and reinforces social bonds, making it a vital component of the village's cultural fabric (Sudarsana et al., 2021).

In the face of globalization and rapid modernization, many traditional practices risk fading into obscurity. The younger generation, influenced by global cultures and digital media, may find it challenging to connect with age-old rituals that lack contemporary relevance. This disconnect threatens the continuity of traditions like *Mebuug-Buugan*, which rely on communal participation and intergenerational transmission.

Moreover, the commodification of culture for tourism can dilute the authenticity of such rituals, transforming them into mere spectacles devoid of their original meaning. Therefore, there is an urgent need to document, analyse, and revitalize *Mebuug-Buugan* to ensure its preservation and relevance in modern society.

Several studies have explored the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition from various perspectives. Febriyantari et al. (2024) conducted a phenomenological study highlighting the ritual's spiritual and social dimensions. They emphasized its role in reinforcing community solidarity and maintaining balance between humans and nature.

Another study by Santi and Nerawat (2023) analysed the educational values embedded in *Mebuug-Buugan*, identifying aspects of social, religious, and aesthetic education. They argued that the ritual serves as a medium for imparting values such as cooperation, tolerance, and environmental awareness to younger generations.

Furthermore, research by Wahyu Kusuma et al. (2021) examined the reconstruction of *Mebuug-Buugan* after a hiatus of approximately 60 years. They discussed the challenges and implications of revitalizing the tradition, including issues related to cultural identity, environmental concerns, and tourism modernization (Febriyantari et al., 2024).

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedongan has garnered attention for its cultural, social, and environmental significance, as numerous studies have explored its role in preserving local wisdom and fostering community cohesion. The tradition is deeply rooted in the Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of spirituality, society, and nature, and continues to shape the community's way of life (Pitana, 2010). This tradition highlights how cultural practices can serve as a medium for spiritual purification, social unity, and environmental sustainability, reinforcing the holistic approach to well-being that is central to Balinese values (Ginaya, 2018).

Cultural transmission, especially through traditional figures such as elders, plays a key role in ensuring the continuity of *Mebuug-Buugan*. The involvement of these figures, who serve as knowledge keepers, ensures that the deeper meanings of the tradition are passed down through generations. This is in line with Bourdieu's (1990) perspective on how cultural practices are maintained through active participation and the engagement of community leaders. The ritual's significance is not just in its execution but in the knowledge that is shared through these practices, contributing to the social and cultural identity of the community (Santi & Nerawat, 2024).

The collective participation in *Mebuug-Buugan* strengthens social cohesion within the Kedongan community, fostering a sense of belonging and shared cultural identity. The ritual serves as a platform for intergenerational exchange, where participants of varying ages come together to engage in an experience that promotes unity and solidarity (Durkheim, 1912). This aligns with Geertz's (1973) assertion



that rituals are essential for creating a sense of belonging and helping individuals navigate their roles within the community. As the tradition adapts to modern contexts, it continues to strengthen the fabric of the Kedonganan community, providing a sense of continuity in an increasingly globalized world (Sudarsana & Dewi, 2019).

Furthermore, the Mebuug-Buugan tradition is integrally connected to environmental stewardship, particularly in its relationship with the mangrove ecosystem. By incorporating the natural environment into the ritual, the practice underscores the importance of ecological preservation. Berkes (2008) highlights the role of traditional ecological knowledge in fostering sustainable environmental practices, a concept that is clearly exemplified by the way Mebuug-Buugan connects the community to its natural surroundings. The ritual's focus on environmental consciousness contributes to the broader discourse on sustainability and the role of local cultural practices in preserving the environment (Harrison, 2005).

This study demonstrates that the Mebuug-Buugan tradition is not just a cultural event but a vital part of the social and ecological fabric of Kedonganan. Its continued practice serves as a reminder of the essential role that traditions play in maintaining cultural identity, community cohesion, and environmental stewardship. As the community navigates the challenges of modernization, the Mebuug-Buugan tradition offers a meaningful way to preserve both cultural heritage and ecological balance, providing a model for the integration of tradition and sustainability in contemporary society (Sudarsana et al., 2021).

These studies collectively underscore the multifaceted significance of *Mebuug-Buugan* and the necessity of preserving it amidst contemporary challenges.

Building upon the insights from previous studies, this research seeks to delve deeper into the symbolic and social dimensions of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition. Specifically, it aims to address the following questions:

- (1) What are the symbolic representations embedded within each stage of the *Mebuug-Buugan* ritual?
- (2) In what ways does the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition contribute to the social cohesion of the Kedonganan community?
- (3) How do the materials used in the *Mebuug-Buugan* ritual, such as mud, symbolize purification and renewal?

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To uncover the deep and complex symbolic meanings embedded in each stage of the *Mebuug-Buugan* ritual and its relationship with Hindu teachings, particularly the concept of *Tri Hita Karana*.
- To analyze how the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition plays a role in strengthening the spiritual and ethical values of the Kedonganan community.
- To examine the processes through which this tradition is passed down from generation to generation, ensuring its sustainability and relevance.

Through a qualitative approach, this research will delve into the philosophical meanings contained in the choice of time of execution, the choice of location, the use of specific symbols, and every movement and utterance made during the ritual. It is hoped that this study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of the *Mebuug-Buugan* ritual in the context of the religious and social life of Balinese society.

2. Method

The study of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in the Adat Kedonganan Village requires a research approach that delves deeply into the symbolic meanings, social interactions, and contextual factors that shape the practice. As the focus is on understanding the rich cultural and philosophical layers of the tradition, a qualitative research approach is deemed most suitable. This method allows for a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dimensions of the tradition, including its rituals, social dynamics, and local wisdom. The following sections outline the methods of data collection and analysis used in this study.

2.1 Method of Data Collection



Qualitative research methods are particularly beneficial for exploring traditions such as *Mebuug-Buugan*, which are dynamic, complex, and deeply rooted in local culture. The goal of data collection in this study is to gather meaningful insights into the tradition's significance and impact on the local community. The researcher employed several techniques to gather diverse forms of data:

- **Participant Observation:** The researcher actively participated in and observed the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition as it occurred. This method involved immersing in the rituals, games, and social interactions during the event. Through direct observation, the researcher was able to document behaviors, rituals, symbols, and the overall experience of the participants. The observations also included noting the involvement of traditional leaders, community members, and younger generations, allowing for a holistic view of the tradition's social relevance.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants from the village, including traditional figures, community leaders, and long-time participants. These interviews helped capture personal stories, insights into the philosophy of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, and the emotional experiences of those involved. Questions were designed to explore the tradition's symbolic meanings, social functions, and its evolving significance in modern times.
- **Document Analysis:** To deepen the understanding of the tradition's history, the researcher analyse a variety of historical and cultural documents related to *Mebuug-Buugan*. These included ancient texts like *lontar* (palm leaf manuscripts), village records, and previous research on traditional Balinese practices. By analysing these sources, the researcher sought to uncover historical continuity, changes in the tradition's practices, and the philosophical underpinnings that guided its development.
- **Field Notes and Visual Data:** Field notes were taken during observations, and photographs and videos were also collected to visually document the tradition. These visual materials helped in understanding the physical context of the event, the spaces involved, and the interactions between the participants.

2.2 Technique of Analysis

The data collected through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis were analyse using a combination of qualitative techniques. These techniques helped identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, enabling the researcher to construct a comprehensive understanding of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition. The following analysis techniques were employed:

- Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret recurring themes within the data. This technique involved coding the data and grouping it into major themes that reflected the core elements of the tradition, such as its symbolic meaning, the role of social interactions, and the connection to local wisdom. Themes related to the tradition's environmental, spiritual, and social functions were highlighted, providing a deeper understanding of the community's relationship with the tradition.
- Grounded Theory: Grounded theory was applied to develop an emerging theory about the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition based on the collected data. Through iterative coding and comparison of data points, the researcher developed concepts and categories that grounded the findings in the real-life practices of the community. This approach allowed for the generation of theory from the data, offering insights into the tradition's evolution, significance, and the role of local knowledge in its practice.
- Narrative Analysis: Narrative analysis was used to construct a coherent story of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition. This method focused on the personal accounts and experiences of the participants, organizing them into a narrative that describes how the tradition has shaped their identity, values, and social cohesion. Through narrative analysis, the researcher was able to give voice to the community members, presenting their perspectives on the importance of preserving the tradition.
- Triangulation: To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was used, combining data from observations, interviews, and document analysis. This method provided a



well-rounded and multidimensional view of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, ensuring that the research findings were robust and comprehensive.

By employing these methods of data collection and analysis, this study aims to present a holistic understanding of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedonganan, emphasizing its role in cultural preservation, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The results section presents the key findings derived from the data collection methods, addressing the research questions and objectives of the study. The research aimed to explore the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedonganan Village by focusing on its symbolic meaning, role in community life, and its adaptation in modern times. This section reports the key findings categorized by themes that emerged during the data analysis.

3.1.1 The Symbolic Meaning of Mebuug-Buugan

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedonganan holds deep symbolic value that transcends its role as a mere recreational activity. This tradition is more than just a game; it is a spiritual practice that is closely intertwined with the cultural and philosophical principles of the local Balinese community. The tradition represents a connection between the physical world, social interactions, and the spiritual realm. At its core, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is a means of spiritual renewal and self-purification, serving as a reminder of the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the divine.

The activities involved in *Mebuug-Buugan*, particularly the act of playing in the mud, carry profound symbolic meanings. Mud, in many cultures, is seen as a symbol of the earth and of creation. In the context of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, the mud represents the foundation of life itself, as it is directly linked to the natural environment and the mangrove ecosystems that are crucial to the region. The act of interacting with mud in the game symbolizes a return to the earth, an acknowledgment of one's roots, and a reconnection with the environment. It is through this connection that participants engage in a process of spiritual cleansing. The mud is not just a physical substance; it serves as a medium through which participants purify themselves, both physically and metaphorically.

Participants in the tradition describe the game as a form of self-purification. As individuals immerse themselves in the mud, they are believed to cleanse not only their bodies but their souls. The muddy water, symbolizing the earth's nurturing power, is seen as capable of washing away impurities, both internal and external. This purification process is aligned with the Balinese concept of *purification* or *pembersihan*, which is a recurring theme in many Balinese rituals and ceremonies. The mud becomes an element of spiritual renewal, offering participants the opportunity to rid themselves of negativity, bad luck, or emotional burdens. In this sense, the tradition can be understood as a form of spiritual therapy that allows participants to start anew, much like how one would cleanse themselves in preparation for a religious or ceremonial event.

Beyond purification, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition symbolizes the bond between humans and nature. In the Balinese worldview, the relationship between humans and the natural world is sacred, with each element of the environment holding its own spiritual significance. The mangrove ecosystem, where the tradition takes place, is seen not only as a natural habitat but also as a spiritual space. The mangrove forest represents resilience and harmony, as it is a place where land and water meet, creating a delicate balance that sustains life. The village's connection to the mangroves is integral to the practice of *Mebuug-Buugan*, reinforcing the idea that nature and humanity are deeply interconnected. The tradition's setting in the mangrove ecosystem emphasizes the importance of preserving these environments, as they are not only vital to the physical health of the community but also to its spiritual well-being.

Elder community leaders have emphasized the importance of this symbolic connection between humans and nature. They often remind the participants that the *Mebuug-Buugan* is not merely a form of entertainment but a way to honour the relationship between people and the natural world. The tradition serves as a reminder that humans are not separate from nature but part of a larger, interconnected system.



By engaging in this tradition, the participants reinforce the idea that they must live in harmony with nature, respecting the environment that sustains them. This perspective is aligned with the Balinese philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, which teaches that well-being is achieved through maintaining balance and harmony in three domains: the human, the divine, and the natural world. The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, by highlighting the importance of the mangrove forest, embodies the ecological aspect of *Tri Hita Karana* and reinforces the idea that environmental stewardship is essential to maintaining spiritual harmony.

The significance of *Mebuug-Buugan* also extends to the concept of communal participation and collective identity. As the community gathers to engage in this tradition, there is a shared understanding of its deeper meaning. It is not just about playing a game; it is about coming together to affirm one's connection to the land, to each other, and to the spiritual world. The collective nature of the tradition fosters a sense of belonging, as individuals participate not only for their own spiritual benefit but also for the benefit of the community. This shared ritual helps to strengthen social bonds and reinforces the values of cooperation and mutual support.

In this sense, *Mebuug-Buugan* functions as a cultural and spiritual touchstone for the people of Kedongan. The tradition is not just an annual event but an enduring part of the community's identity. It serves as a bridge between generations, ensuring that the values of respect for nature, spiritual renewal, and social cohesion are passed down to future generations. Through the symbolism embedded in the game, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition continues to serve as a reminder of the enduring importance of balance, unity, and respect for the natural world in the cultural fabric of Kedongan.

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is rich with symbolic meanings that transcend its playful surface. It is a form of spiritual renewal, a practice of self-purification, and a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Through this tradition, the community in Kedongan continues to honour its cultural heritage and environmental responsibilities, reinforcing the timeless principles of balance and harmony that are central to Balinese philosophy. The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, through its symbolism and communal significance, remains a vital and enduring part of the cultural landscape of Kedongan.

3.1.2 The Role of Traditional Figures in Preserving the Tradition

The preservation and continuation of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedongan is deeply reliant on the active involvement of traditional leaders, including village elders and cultural activists. These figures are seen as the custodians of the community's cultural heritage and serve as crucial bridges between the past and the present. Their role extends far beyond merely organizing the *Mebuug-Buugan* events; they are the knowledge keepers, educators, and spiritual guides who ensure that the tradition not only survives but thrives in contemporary society.

Interviews with village elders and local cultural activists revealed that they are deeply invested in passing on the wisdom and cultural values associated with the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition. These traditional leaders are responsible for educating younger generations about the significance of the tradition, both in terms of its spiritual meaning and its role in the social fabric of the community. For them, the tradition is not simply an event to be observed but a way of life that carries deep cultural, spiritual, and social implications. The elders view themselves as the guardians of this knowledge, and they take it upon themselves to ensure that the next generation inherits this important aspect of their identity.

One of the most significant ways that traditional figures preserve the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is through oral transmission. Elders often share stories, teachings, and rituals with younger members of the community, teaching them about the traditional customs and their meanings. Through this process, the elders ensure that the values of the tradition—such as respect for nature, community solidarity, and spiritual renewal—are not lost but instead are passed down in ways that resonate with younger generations. These teachings also include explanations of the symbolism inherent in the game, such as the connection to the mangrove ecosystem and the purification rituals associated with playing in the mud.

Furthermore, traditional figures act as mediators between the past and the present, navigating the complexities of adapting an ancient tradition to the modern world. In many cases, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition was at risk of being forgotten, especially as younger generations became more focused on modern



lifestyles and the influence of globalization. Traditional leaders have played a vital role in reviving the tradition and adapting it in ways that make it relevant to contemporary audiences. For instance, while the tradition may have originally been conducted on a smaller scale, with more informal participation, the elders and activists have worked to organize community events that bring together larger numbers of people, ensuring the tradition's survival through collective engagement.

The process of adaptation has not been without challenges. Traditional leaders must balance maintaining the authenticity of the tradition with the demands of modern life. They must ensure that the rituals and practices are conducted with respect for their cultural origins, while also considering how to make the tradition more accessible and meaningful to contemporary participants. For example, the elders have incorporated modern techniques of event organization, such as publicizing the tradition on social media and involving younger generations in the planning process, without sacrificing the core values and symbolism of the tradition.

Moreover, the leadership of these traditional figures extends to the logistical aspects of organizing *Mebuug-Buugan* events. Elders and cultural activists are instrumental in coordinating the community, securing resources, and ensuring that the ritual is performed in accordance with the established customs. Their leadership is also crucial in maintaining the respect and decorum necessary to honour the tradition's sacred aspects. In many cases, these leaders oversee the conduct of the rituals and ceremonies, ensuring that participants understand and respect the spiritual significance of the activities.

The elders also play an essential role in mediating any conflicts or disagreements that may arise in the community regarding the practice of the tradition. As respected figures in the village, their opinions carry weight, and they often serve as the final authority in matters related to the tradition. This role reinforces their position as the moral and cultural compass of the community, guiding the younger generation in adhering to the values embedded in the *Mebuug-Buugan*.

The preservation and revitalization of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition owe much to the active role of traditional figures in the community. Village elders and cultural activists are not only custodians of knowledge but also facilitators of cultural continuity. By educating younger generations, adapting the tradition to modern times, and ensuring the proper conduct of rituals, these leaders ensure that *Mebuug-Buugan* remains a vibrant and meaningful practice. Their work highlights the importance of maintaining cultural traditions in a changing world and the vital role that community leaders play in safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations.

3.1.3 Social Dynamics and Community Engagement

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedonganian plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and unity within the local community. The tradition, which involves playing in the mud and engaging with the surrounding mangrove ecosystem, is not merely a recreational activity but an important cultural event that brings people of all ages and social backgrounds together. Through active participation in this unique practice, individuals strengthen their relationships with one another, reinforcing the shared values and collective identity of the village.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is its inclusivity. People of different age groups, social classes, and backgrounds are encouraged to participate, promoting a sense of belonging and unity. Younger generations, in particular, are actively involved in the event, which allows them to connect with older community members while learning about both the playful and philosophical aspects of the tradition. These intergenerational exchanges are crucial in transmitting cultural knowledge and values from one generation to the next, ensuring that the tradition remains alive and relevant to the community. The engagement of younger individuals with the elders helps bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern practices, allowing for the adaptation of the tradition in ways that resonate with contemporary values while maintaining respect for its origins.

The social interactions that unfold during the *Mebuug-Buugan* event further emphasize the communal aspect of the tradition. During the game, participants often work together to complete specific tasks, such as gathering mud from the mangrove swamp or forming teams to engage in friendly competition. This collaboration fosters a sense of teamwork and mutual support, as individuals rely on one



another to achieve the common goal. The act of cooperating in a shared activity reinforces the importance of solidarity and collective effort in the community. Participants are reminded of their interconnectedness, not only with each other but also with the natural environment, which plays a crucial role in the event's cultural and ecological symbolism.

The social dynamics during the event also highlight the importance of unity in overcoming challenges. For instance, the game often involves physical exertion and cooperation in navigating the muddy terrain, which can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable. However, these difficulties are part of the tradition's underlying philosophy, which teaches the value of perseverance, humility, and mutual aid. As participants help each other through the muddy conditions, they reinforce the idea that success in the tradition depends on the collective effort of the group, rather than individual achievement. This shared experience creates lasting bonds among participants, fostering a deep sense of communal identity.

Moreover, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition also serves as a platform for reinforcing social norms and cultural expectations. The event is often seen as an opportunity to demonstrate respect for elders, celebrate communal values, and uphold local customs. As a social ritual, it helps to maintain a sense of order and continuity in the village, reinforcing the role of tradition in shaping the community's collective identity. Through participation, individuals not only celebrate the tradition but also affirm their membership in the larger social and cultural framework of Kedongan. This process of socialization is particularly important in the context of a rapidly changing world, where globalization and modernization often threaten the continuity of traditional practices.

In addition to strengthening social bonds within the village, the *Mebuug-Buugan* event also fosters a sense of pride in the community's cultural heritage. The shared experience of engaging in a traditional practice that has been revived and sustained by local efforts generates a collective sense of ownership and pride. As participants immerse themselves in the tradition, they are reminded of the uniqueness of their cultural identity and the importance of preserving it for future generations. This pride in cultural heritage extends beyond the immediate community, as the event often draws attention from outsiders, including tourists and researchers, who come to witness this remarkable tradition. The visibility of the *Mebuug-Buugan* event helps raise awareness of the importance of cultural preservation and encourages the broader public to engage with and respect local traditions.

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is more than just a cultural practice; it is a powerful force for social cohesion and community engagement. Through active participation, individuals from different social backgrounds and age groups come together to strengthen communal bonds, share cultural knowledge, and reinforce collective identity. The tradition fosters cooperation, unity, and solidarity, teaching valuable lessons in teamwork, respect, and perseverance. By engaging in this shared experience, participants not only affirm their connection to one another but also contribute to the preservation and revitalization of their cultural heritage.

3.1.4 Environmental Significance of the Tradition

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedongan is deeply intertwined with the preservation of the local mangrove ecosystem, underscoring the community's commitment to environmental conservation. The game, which is held annually, takes place in the mangrove areas that surround the village, emphasizing the symbolic relationship between the villagers and their natural environment. Observations and interviews with participants and local leaders revealed that the tradition is not only a cultural and social event but also a ritual that reinforces the ecological importance of the mangrove forests and the villagers' responsibility in preserving them.

The mangrove ecosystem is a critical component of the local environment, providing numerous ecological benefits, such as protecting the coastline from erosion, supporting biodiversity, and acting as a natural filter for pollutants. The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, by taking place within this vital ecosystem, highlights the villagers' recognition of these environmental functions. During the event, participants engage with the mangrove environment in a way that is both symbolic and practical, emphasizing their relationship with nature and their role in maintaining its balance. The act of playing in the mud and



mudding themselves within the mangroves serves as a physical engagement with the land, making the villagers acutely aware of the importance of the ecosystem in sustaining their way of life.

Through participation in the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, villagers reaffirm their responsibility to care for the environment. Many interviewees described the event as a reminder of the delicate balance between humans and nature. The mangrove forest is seen not only as a physical resource but also as a spiritual and cultural symbol of harmony and interconnectedness. The tradition, thus, serves as a cultural reinforcement of the values that the community holds regarding environmental stewardship. As participants immerse themselves in the game, they are reminded of the importance of protecting the mangroves, which are viewed as both a physical and symbolic cornerstone of their cultural heritage.

In addition to reinforcing ecological values, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition also functions as a platform for environmental education. Elders and traditional leaders emphasize the ecological importance of mangroves during the event, explaining how the ecosystem contributes to the village's well-being. This educational aspect is crucial in instilling a sense of environmental responsibility in the younger generations, who may not always fully appreciate the intricate connections between cultural practices and ecological preservation. By engaging in the tradition, younger participants learn firsthand about the importance of the mangrove ecosystem and its role in maintaining the balance of nature.

Moreover, the tradition has also prompted more active conservation efforts in the community. As part of the tradition's revival, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and expanding the mangrove areas around Kedongan. The community, alongside local environmental organizations, has initiated programs to replant mangrove trees, prevent illegal logging, and raise awareness about the environmental threats faced by mangrove ecosystems. These efforts are seen as an extension of the values embedded within the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, ensuring that the mangrove forests are protected and restored for future generations.

The environmental significance of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is also reflected in the collective consciousness of the community. For many villagers, the tradition is a living testament to the idea that cultural practices and environmental conservation are not separate entities but rather two sides of the same coin. The act of playing in the mangroves and embracing the mud is not just a fun or nostalgic activity but a conscious reaffirmation of the villagers' deep-rooted connection to the land and their responsibility to protect it. The community sees the tradition as a way of honouring the earth while also fostering a sustainable future.

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition carries significant environmental meaning for the people of Kedongan. By incorporating the mangrove ecosystem into the very fabric of the tradition, the villagers are able to communicate their deep respect for nature and their ongoing commitment to preserving the environment. The tradition not only highlights the ecological importance of mangroves but also functions as a vehicle for environmental education and conservation, ensuring that future generations continue to understand the vital role that these ecosystems play in maintaining the balance of life. Through the *Mebuug-Buugan* event, the community actively engages with and celebrates their natural surroundings, reinforcing their responsibility to protect and sustain the mangrove forests for years to come.

3.2 Discussion

The results of this study highlight several key themes related to the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition, offering insights into its cultural, social, and environmental significance. These findings address the research problems and objectives, which were to explore the symbolic meaning of the tradition, its role in community life, and its adaptation in the context of globalization and modernization.

3.2.1 Symbolic Meaning of Mebuug-Buugan in the Context of Balinese Philosophy

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedongan holds profound symbolic meaning, particularly when viewed through the lens of Balinese philosophy, specifically the concept of Tri Hita Karana – the three causes of well-being. This traditional Balinese worldview emphasizes the importance of achieving balance and harmony across three primary realms: the relationship between humans and the divine, the relationship among humans, and the relationship between humans and nature. The findings of this study



show that the Mebuug-Buugan tradition is a manifestation of these three interconnected spheres, promoting spiritual purification, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship.

The first aspect of Tri Hita Karana focuses on the connection between humans and the divine. The Mebuug-Buugan tradition aligns with this aspect through its ritualistic elements, which function as a form of spiritual renewal and purification. For the participants, the act of engaging in the mud game is more than just physical play; it is an opportunity to cleanse the spirit. Informants shared that the physical act of playing in the mud symbolizes the shedding of worldly impurities, aligning with the Balinese belief that the human spirit can be affected by negative influences, such as bad luck or moral failings. The ritual provides a method for cleansing these influences, reaffirming the individual's connection to the divine.

This process of spiritual purification is integral to Balinese culture, where many rituals serve as offerings to the gods to maintain cosmic harmony. In Mebuug-Buugan, the use of mud, often associated with the earth, symbolizes both grounding and cleansing. The mud is seen as a conduit between the material world and the spiritual realm, creating a direct connection between the participants and the divine. This act of purification resonates with similar practices found in other Balinese rituals, where physical actions, such as bathing in holy water, are meant to purify the individual spiritually.

The second aspect of Tri Hita Karana revolves around the relationship between individuals within the community. The Mebuug-Buugan tradition plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion and solidarity. During the event, participants from various age groups and social backgrounds come together to engage in the game, which emphasizes cooperation, teamwork, and mutual respect. This interaction mirrors the gotong-royong or mutual assistance that is an integral part of Balinese social life, where cooperation among community members is highly valued.

The tradition also serves as a platform for transmitting cultural knowledge between generations. Elder community leaders and traditional figures actively guide the younger participants, passing down not only the rules of the game but also the philosophical and spiritual meanings attached to it. Through this process, Mebuug-Buugan becomes a living tradition, bridging the gap between past and present. It helps younger generations understand the social and moral values that have sustained the community for centuries, ensuring the continuity of Balinese customs and strengthening the collective identity of the village.

Additionally, the social interactions during the event emphasize unity, as participants often work together to accomplish shared goals. The cooperation required in completing the game's tasks—such as lifting each other from the mud or working in teams to complete specific challenges—serves to deepen the bonds among the participants. This strengthens the social fabric of the community, ensuring that individuals feel connected to one another not only through familial ties but also through a shared commitment to cultural practices and values.

The third aspect of Tri Hita Karana focuses on the relationship between humans and nature. The Mebuug-Buugan tradition highlights this relationship through its deep connection to the mangrove ecosystem. The game takes place in the mangrove areas, and participants engage directly with the mud and natural environment. This symbolic interaction reflects the villagers' recognition of their interconnectedness with nature and their responsibility to protect the environment.

Balinese philosophy stresses the importance of maintaining a harmonious balance between humans and the natural world, and Mebuug-Buugan reinforces this idea by promoting environmental stewardship. As participants engage with the mangrove ecosystem, they are reminded of the vital role that these forests play in sustaining the local environment. Mangroves are critical in protecting coastlines, providing habitats for marine life, and serving as natural barriers against erosion and flooding. Through their participation in the tradition, villagers not only celebrate their connection to nature but also reaffirm their commitment to protecting it.

The Mebuug-Buugan tradition thus becomes a form of environmental education, where the significance of mangrove forests and the broader ecological system is underscored. Elders and traditional leaders often use the occasion to educate younger participants about the importance of conservation, environmental sustainability, and the interdependence of all life forms. This environmental education is



not only crucial for raising awareness but also for encouraging future generations to take an active role in preserving the mangroves and ensuring the long-term health of the ecosystem.

The Mebuug-Buugan tradition serves as a living embodiment of the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana. Through the ritual of playing in the mud, participants engage in spiritual purification, strengthen social bonds, and reinforce their connection to the natural environment. This tradition not only fosters spiritual well-being but also promotes social harmony and environmental stewardship, illustrating the timeless relevance of Balinese philosophical values in modern cultural practices. The integration of these three spheres—spiritual, social, and environmental—into a single tradition highlights the holistic approach to well-being that is central to Balinese culture. By participating in the Mebuug-Buugan, the community reaffirms its commitment to these values, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

3.2.2 Role of Traditional Figures and Knowledge Transmission

The preservation of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition in Kedongan is largely dependent on the role of traditional figures, such as village elders, cultural leaders, and community activists. These figures are essential in safeguarding the cultural integrity of the tradition, facilitating the transmission of knowledge, and ensuring that the rituals remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary society. Their influence extends beyond merely instructing younger generations on how to perform the rituals; they are also the stewards of the deeper, symbolic meanings behind the tradition, ensuring that these aspects are understood and respected.

In traditional societies, cultural knowledge is often passed down through generations via oral traditions, rituals, and communal activities. *Mebuug-Buugan* is no exception, with elders and other traditional figures acting as the primary carriers of this knowledge. As part of their role, they ensure that younger members of the community not only learn the physical aspects of the game, such as the rules and rituals but also the underlying cultural, spiritual, and philosophical meanings embedded in the tradition. These traditional figures are seen as the gatekeepers of knowledge, responsible for maintaining the continuity and integrity of cultural practices amidst changing societal dynamics. This is particularly important in the context of globalization and modernization, which often bring new influences that challenge traditional ways of life.

As noted by Bourdieu (1990), cultural practices are often maintained through the active participation of social agents who possess the symbolic capital to preserve and transmit knowledge. In the case of *Mebuug-Buugan*, village elders serve as the primary social agents, providing both direct instruction and guiding the organization of the ritual events. They instill the importance of the tradition not only as a recreational activity but as a means to reinforce spiritual, social, and environmental connections. Through their leadership, they ensure that the essence of the tradition is retained, while also adapting it to contemporary contexts, ensuring its survival for future generations.

The younger generations in Kedongan are keenly interested in participating in *Mebuug-Buugan*, signaling a strong desire to preserve and carry forward their cultural heritage. The willingness of the younger community members to engage in the tradition is a positive indicator of its continued relevance in their lives. Interviews with younger participants revealed that they see the tradition as more than just a playful activity—it serves as an opportunity to reconnect with their ancestors' values and cultural identity. The active engagement of youth in the tradition is essential for its survival, as it ensures the transmission of both tangible skills, such as how to play the game, and intangible knowledge, such as the cultural and spiritual meanings embedded in it.

This process of knowledge transmission and preservation through active participation resonates with Geertz's (1973) argument that cultural traditions are sustained when younger generations are engaged in traditional practices. Geertz emphasizes that cultural traditions need to be continually reinvented within modern contexts to remain relevant, but that the core values of the tradition should be preserved. In the case of *Mebuug-Buugan*, younger generations are not only learning the practical aspects of the game but are also exposed to its deeper cultural significance. This helps ensure that the tradition is not only practiced but also understood in its full complexity.



While the transmission of knowledge is essential for preserving the tradition, it is equally important to adapt the practice to modern contexts. Elders and traditional leaders in Kedonganan play an instrumental role in ensuring that *Mebuug-Buugan* remains meaningful to younger generations, who may be influenced by contemporary trends and values. The process of adaptation can involve modifications to the rituals or the way the tradition is organized, but the core values and principles remain intact. Elders help bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and the evolving needs and perspectives of younger generations, ensuring that *Mebuug-Buugan* continues to be a relevant and respected tradition in the community.

This dual process of preserving and adapting the tradition aligns with the broader goals of cultural continuity. It acknowledges the influence of modernity while maintaining a deep respect for the past. The involvement of elders in this process is crucial, as they provide the knowledge, guidance, and wisdom necessary to ensure the survival of *Mebuug-Buugan* and its continued role in the social and cultural life of Kedonganan.

The role of traditional figures in the preservation of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is central to its survival in the face of modernization and globalization. These figures are not only the custodians of the practical aspects of the tradition but also the bearers of its deeper symbolic meanings. Through their leadership and involvement in the knowledge transmission process, they ensure that younger generations understand and appreciate the cultural, spiritual, and environmental significance of the tradition. The active engagement of youth in the tradition, facilitated by elders, guarantees that *Mebuug-Buugan* remains a living practice that adapts to contemporary life while preserving its core values. As such, traditional figures serve as vital agents of cultural continuity, ensuring that *Mebuug-Buugan* remains an integral part of the Kedonganan community for generations to come.

3.2.3 Social Cohesion and Community Identity

The *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition plays a central role in fostering social cohesion and reinforcing community identity in Kedonganan. The results of this study suggest that the tradition is not only an important cultural ritual but also a significant social mechanism that strengthens relationships and promotes unity within the community. By bringing together individuals from various age groups, social backgrounds, and family lineages, *Mebuug-Buugan* helps cultivate a shared sense of belonging and collective identity, which is essential for the maintenance of social harmony.

Strengthening Relationships Through Collective Participation

At its core, *Mebuug-Buugan* serves as an inclusive and communal event. The tradition involves the active participation of people from all segments of society, including the elderly, adults, youth, and children. This wide participation is particularly significant in the context of a rapidly changing world, where generational gaps and societal divisions can sometimes lead to social fragmentation. By encouraging people from different walks of life to work together in a playful, yet meaningful, context, the tradition fosters intergenerational and cross-social bonding. Participants engage not only in the rituals of the tradition but also in collaborative tasks, which helps to break down social barriers and establish a shared experience that unites the community.

In this sense, the ritual's emphasis on collective participation reflects Emile Durkheim's (1912) theory on communal rituals and their role in promoting social cohesion. Durkheim argued that rituals create a sense of solidarity by enabling individuals to experience shared symbols and actions that transcend individual differences. In the case of *Mebuug-Buugan*, the shared activity of playing in the mud, despite its inherent messiness and fun, becomes a powerful symbol of collective effort and unity. The emotional and physical involvement in the tradition reinforces the bond between community members, fostering a sense of belonging to a larger social group.

The tradition also plays a vital role in reinforcing the collective identity of the Kedonganan community. By participating in *Mebuug-Buugan*, individuals reaffirm their connection to a shared cultural heritage and the values that define their community. The tradition is not merely an isolated event but a continuous thread that links the present generation with past generations. Through the participation of younger generations, the elders pass down not only the rules and rituals of the game but also the stories,



cultural practices, and moral teachings that are integral to the identity of Kedonganan. This intergenerational exchange is crucial in ensuring that community identity remains rooted in its historical and cultural context.

In many ways, *Mebuug-Buugan* functions as a cultural anchor for the community. In the face of the pressures of modernization and the encroachment of urbanization, the tradition offers a stabilizing force that helps individuals reconnect with their cultural roots. The shared knowledge and experience of participating in the tradition help solidify a collective sense of identity that transcends individual differences. This process of identity reinforcement is particularly important for communities facing external challenges, as it provides a sense of continuity and belonging that is grounded in traditional values and practices.

In the context of Kedonganan, *Mebuug-Buugan* also serves as a means of maintaining social harmony. The community, like many others, is undergoing transformations due to the forces of modernization and urbanization. As rural communities become more integrated into globalized economies and urban lifestyles, traditional practices may risk being displaced or forgotten. However, the continued relevance of *Mebuug-Buugan* demonstrates its importance as a tool for preserving social cohesion and ensuring that the community remains united despite these external pressures.

The ritual acts as a reminder of the communal values that bind individuals together. The sense of togetherness that emerges from participating in the game and the associated rituals provides an antidote to the individualism and fragmentation that can often accompany modern urbanization. By maintaining the tradition, the Kedonganan community is able to safeguard its unique cultural identity while navigating the challenges posed by the modern world.

Overall, the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is a significant cultural practice that fosters social cohesion and reinforces community identity. Through collective participation, the tradition helps bridge generational and social divides, creating a sense of belonging among community members. In doing so, it strengthens the fabric of the community, ensuring that individuals remain connected to each other and to their cultural heritage. In the face of external challenges such as modernization, *Mebuug-Buugan* acts as a stabilizing force, reminding the people of Kedonganan of the values, history, and identity that continue to unite them. Thus, the tradition plays a critical role in maintaining social harmony and cultural continuity within the community.

3.2.4 Environmental Stewardship Through Tradition

The environmental significance of the *Mebuug-Buugan* tradition is a compelling example of how cultural practices can intertwine with ecological sustainability, illustrating the deep connection between human practices and nature. In the village of Kedonganan, the tradition's roots in the mangrove ecosystem serve as a reminder of the critical role these forests play in maintaining ecological balance. As the villagers participate in the *Mebuug-Buugan* ceremony, they are not only engaging in a cultural ritual but also reinforcing the importance of environmental conservation, particularly the protection of the mangrove forests that surround their community. This dual purpose of cultural preservation and environmental stewardship is a key feature of the tradition, and it highlights the integral relationship between cultural practices and the natural world.

The participation in *Mebuug-Buugan* takes place in the heart of the mangrove ecosystem, which has significant ecological value. Mangroves are critical for coastal protection, biodiversity conservation, and the prevention of soil erosion. They also act as carbon sinks, contributing to the mitigation of climate change. The setting of the *Mebuug-Buugan* event within this unique environment reinforces the villagers' deep connection to the land and their understanding of the fragile ecological balance that sustains them.

The act of playing in the mud during the *Mebuug-Buugan* ritual is not simply a playful activity, but rather a symbolic act that connects the participants to the natural world. It serves as a tangible reminder of the importance of the mangrove ecosystem and the responsibility of the community to protect it. Through this ritual, the villagers are reminded of their obligation to safeguard the mangroves for future generations, ensuring that the natural resources they rely on for their livelihood remain intact.



This practice aligns with the concept of Tri Hita Karana, the Balinese philosophy that emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance between humans, nature, and the divine. By participating in Mebuug-Buugan, community members are engaging in an act that nurtures not only their spiritual and social well-being but also their environmental responsibility. The ritual thus represents a holistic approach to sustainability, integrating ecological awareness into the fabric of the community's cultural practices. This finding echoes Berkes' (2008) research on traditional ecological knowledge, which emphasizes how indigenous and local cultural practices contribute to sustainable environmental management. In Kedongan, Mebuug-Buugan acts as a form of cultural transmission of ecological knowledge, teaching the younger generation about the importance of environmental stewardship while preserving the community's traditions.

The ongoing relevance of Mebuug-Buugan in modern times is a testament to how traditional cultural practices can adapt to contemporary environmental challenges. As environmental degradation continues to be a pressing global issue, communities like Kedongan show that cultural practices can serve as effective tools for promoting environmental awareness and action. In the case of Mebuug-Buugan, the ritual has become more than just a celebration of tradition; it is also an opportunity for the community to reflect on the significance of the mangrove ecosystem and their collective responsibility for its preservation.

Participants, particularly the younger generation, are taught not only the cultural significance of the ritual but also the environmental importance of the mangroves. Elders and traditional leaders often use the event to communicate the interconnectedness of cultural practices and environmental conservation, explaining how maintaining the health of the mangroves is essential for both the community's well-being and the broader ecological system. The villagers' active engagement with the environment during the Mebuug-Buugan ritual, combined with the educational efforts of traditional figures, fosters a sense of environmental stewardship among the community.

Moreover, the event serves as a platform for raising awareness about broader environmental issues, such as climate change, coastal erosion, and biodiversity loss. The visibility of the Mebuug-Buugan tradition in the media and among tourists further amplifies the community's message about the importance of protecting the mangrove ecosystem. By tying the ritual to environmental preservation, Kedongan demonstrates how cultural practices can influence attitudes towards sustainability and promote environmental responsibility at the local level.

The integration of environmental awareness into cultural rituals like Mebuug-Buugan reflects a growing recognition of the value of traditional ecological knowledge in promoting sustainable practices. Indigenous and local communities have long understood the importance of living in harmony with nature, and these practices often contain valuable insights into ecological management. In the case of Mebuug-Buugan, the tradition's connection to the mangrove ecosystem is not only symbolic but also practical, as it serves as a reminder of the community's role in maintaining the health of the environment.

Berkes (2008) argues that traditional ecological knowledge can offer sustainable solutions to modern environmental challenges, and Mebuug-Buugan is a prime example of this. The tradition helps maintain the balance between human activity and environmental conservation by integrating ecological principles into the cultural fabric of the community. The villagers' participation in the ritual serves as both an act of cultural expression and an environmental commitment, showing how traditional practices can play a key role in addressing contemporary environmental issues.

The continued practice of Mebuug-Buugan offers a model for how traditional rituals can contribute to broader efforts in environmental conservation. As the global community grapples with issues such as climate change, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity, cultural traditions like Mebuug-Buugan offer a reminder of the importance of local knowledge and practices in fostering sustainability. In Kedongan, the tradition serves as a powerful tool for instilling a sense of environmental responsibility in future generations, ensuring that the mangrove ecosystem is protected for years to come.

Furthermore, the Mebuug-Buugan tradition underscores the potential of cultural practices to adapt to modern environmental challenges. While rooted in the past, the ritual's emphasis on ecological



stewardship ensures its relevance in contemporary society. The villagers' engagement with the mangrove ecosystem during the event fosters a deeper connection to the land and a commitment to environmental preservation, making it clear that cultural practices and environmental sustainability are not separate but are instead deeply interconnected.

The Mebuug-Buugan tradition serves as an exemplary model of how cultural practices can promote environmental stewardship. By integrating ecological principles into the fabric of their cultural rituals, the people of Kedonganian not only preserve their cultural heritage but also reinforce their commitment to environmental sustainability. This tradition highlights the potential of local communities to contribute to global sustainability efforts by maintaining and adapting their cultural practices in response to modern environmental challenges.

4. Conclusion

The Mebuug-Buugan tradition in Kedonganian is a rich cultural practice that encapsulates the deep interconnection between spirituality, community cohesion, and environmental stewardship. Through its playful yet symbolic rituals, this tradition emphasizes the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the divine, reflecting core values in Balinese philosophy. The study of Mebuug-Buugan reveals how traditions can serve as vehicles for spiritual renewal, social solidarity, and environmental preservation, while also adapting to the changing dynamics of modern society.

One of the key findings of this research is the profound symbolic meaning embedded in the Mebuug-Buugan tradition. The act of playing in the mud is not merely a playful activity but serves as a ritual of spiritual purification, helping participants reconnect with their cultural heritage and environmental responsibilities. The tradition's alignment with the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana – maintaining harmony between humans, the divine, and nature – underscores its holistic approach to well-being. Through the ritual, individuals are reminded of their duty to preserve both their spiritual essence and the natural environment, particularly the mangrove ecosystem that plays a vital role in the community's ecology and economy.

The role of traditional figures, such as village elders and cultural activists, is crucial in maintaining the Mebuug-Buugan tradition. These leaders serve as knowledge keepers, ensuring that the deeper meanings and significance of the ritual are passed down to younger generations. By actively organizing and participating in the event, traditional figures ensure that the cultural heritage remains intact while also adapting it to contemporary contexts. This transmission of knowledge, which involves both technical aspects of the ritual and its underlying cultural values, is essential for the continuity of the tradition. The involvement of younger generations is a testament to the success of this process, highlighting their eagerness to engage with and preserve their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the Mebuug-Buugan tradition plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and reinforcing community identity. The event brings together individuals from various age groups and social backgrounds, promoting cooperation and unity. The shared experience of participating in the tradition strengthens communal bonds and creates a sense of belonging, which is particularly important in the face of modern challenges such as urbanization and globalization. This reinforces the idea that rituals and traditions are not merely acts of cultural expression but also mechanisms for social integration and solidarity.

Equally important is the environmental significance of the Mebuug-Buugan tradition. By taking place in the mangrove areas, the ritual serves as a reminder of the importance of these ecosystems in maintaining ecological balance. The community's active engagement with the environment during the ritual reinforces the idea that cultural practices and environmental conservation are intrinsically linked. The tradition's emphasis on environmental stewardship exemplifies how local cultural practices can contribute to global sustainability efforts, as it teaches the importance of ecological preservation and the role of the community in protecting natural resources.



The Mebuug-Buugan tradition in Kedonganan is a dynamic cultural practice that embodies the interconnectedness of spirituality, community, and nature. It serves as a model for how traditional practices can adapt to contemporary challenges, maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing world. The tradition not only preserves the community's cultural heritage but also reinforces its commitment to environmental sustainability, highlighting the valuable role that cultural practices can play in fostering a more sustainable future. The continued engagement with Mebuug-Buugan ensures the preservation of both the community's cultural identity and the mangrove ecosystem, securing a legacy of environmental and cultural stewardship for generations to come.

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