

Reaffirmation of Identity Through Ritual Practices in Tenganan Balinese Old Village, Bali

I Wayan Suyadnya^{1*}

¹ Center for Culture and Frontier Studies & Department of Sociology Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: iway.s@ub.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how ritual practices working on identity issues at the Balinese old villages. Ritual practices are an important part of a lifespan of community. These activities that structure the whole lives of the community are relevant on shared by and to a member of the community. Specifically, I ask whether these activities inform the extent to which individual experience of the practices as a meaningful factor for expressing their social identities. This paper believed that habitual practices are significant to reaffirm their identity in a globalized world, both in their group or what they performed in public. In the indigenous community more of those habitual practices are closely linked to important events. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews in Tenganan Pegringsingan Bali, Indonesia, the paper is dealing with how the local institution are, ritual and festive practices help reinforce a sense of identity. By considering the ritual such as *meteruna nyoman* (the young non-formal education), the paper present that these practices are strongly affected by the change of community because they depend so much on the participation of others. My research shows that processes such as the introduction of formal education, migrations, and the spread of Agama Hindu Bali have a particular effect on their ritual practices. My findings resonate with the sociological and anthropological literature on identity theories that the ritual practices as a meaningful experience in negotiating their identity. The paper concludes that ritual in practices is strongly serve as a socialization process and reaffirmation of identity

Keywords: Affirmation, Identity, Ritual Practices, Culture, Bali

1. INTRODUCTION

Several young boys, with bald heads, came out of their houses. They walked hand in hand past several sacred buildings in Tenganan Pegringsingan, Bali. They lined up neatly, walking in line in a row guided by one of the eldest of them. Their ages are between 14-23 years. From behind, the parents let them go to follow traditional rituals. On that day, the boys will enter the “academy” held by customary village (*desa adat*), a ritual education terminology where they will learn a full year about the villages structure, socio-cultural life, rituals, and all things related to responsibilities as members of the group (*krama desa adat*). For this purpose, they must follow the customary rules strictly enforced by the village council. This is a very important basis in their life cycle before they will join the village youth association. It also became a momentum to test their readiness as an important part of the “republic” autonomous village government in Bali old villages [1].

During the development of modernity, this village is returning to a ritual that most outsiders might question. Tenganan people, although their image was built up as traditional (*kuno*), actually most of them are open-minded people. In the many literature about the village, they are commonly seen life in two world, modern and traditional [2]. Their children, some of who participated in a ritual were those who had a college education. Two of them worked and settled in another city, choosing to return ‘home’ of their community to follow some of ritual initiated by village council. This phenomenon develops a meaning of ritual explanation but also as an experience of individuals to engage with the community.

Ritual has a pivotal position because it has full meaning experience for the continuity of the community [3]. Ritual is a symbol of the value and meaning of community, it is the collection of myths, tales, and explicit beliefs which it supposedly enacts [4]. A ritual can not only be understood as a regular activity repeated by a group of people that emphasizes the continuity of tradition in society. Some literature in anthropological

and sociological studies emphasizes that ritual is a historical chapter in a society. In the ritual there is a fragment depicting the life drama of the ritual of passages from the culture. Such rituals often describe self-affirmation of a motivation or need to maintain self-integration in community groups [5]. Ritual in this context becomes part of a group's socio-cultural identity [6].

In sociology and anthropology studies, the concept has received little attention because it considers more inclined to explain the psychological aspects of identity. This means that the degree of analysis leads to the individual's experience in responding to rituals [7]. In the context of sociology, Erving Goffman, for example, sees that ritual is not just an individual experience in acting, but also represents emotions and attention that produce reality, solidarity, and a symbol of group membership [8].

Based on this description, this article attempts to explain how rituals become the basis of self-integration for individuals when they accept challenges in their culture. By positioning the culture and rituals of Tenganan Pegringsingan under the threat of commodification because of capitalism penetration driven by tourism, this article asks in which ways how their rituals can contribute to the affirmation of their identity. This assumption posits flexibility in how the self-system copes with such threats so that people can respond to threats in one domain by reaffirming self-integrity in another completely different domain. Although people may react defensively to information or events that threaten their integrity, they need not do so if they can secure their integrity.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Tenganan Pegringsingan was conducted at the *desa adat* Tenganan Pegringsingan in Bali. The village is geographically located in the southern part of Bali Island. The geographical location is marked by the border areas, which are forests owned by *desa adat* Tenganan Pegringsingan (hereinafter is called Tenganan) [9]. The forests are a forest as an eastern border (*bukit kangin*), a forest on the northern part (*bukit kaja*) and a forest on the west (*bukit kauh*). Meanwhile, the southern part of Tenganan is bordered by Pasadehan village and Nyuh Tebel [10]. Although they physically live among three forests or *bukit*, they are not an isolated community. Tenganan is a dynamic community and it is marked by their interaction and internal relationship with others – some examples are *Desa Adat* Tenganan Dauh Tukad (some of their custom activities are like those of Tenganan Pegringsingan), and the relation with *Desa Kestala* (a group of land cultivators owned by *Desa Adat* Tenganan Pegringsingan). The relationship between Tenganan community and residents of *desa Kestala* is like patron-client relationship that has been existed since hundreds of years ago.

The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in 2011-2012 and supported by short visited of research in periods of 2014-2020. Specifically, for doing this article, I conducted more than 20 interviews of young from the age of 14-23 years old. Interview were conducted to 20 participants as informant. Other members of village council such as head of community, the leader of youth organizations, and villagers has interviewed as interlocutors. The interviews were unstructured models and asked the respondent who were participated in the ritual of *meteruna nyoman*. I asked for my interlocutors, the group of youths who are a pre member of traditional youth group in Tenganan called as *sekeha teruna*, to identify what is the meaning of the ritual, explain why they considered some activities and to what extents they have sense of meaning that ritual link to their identity affirmation.

The interviews ranged in length from 50 minutes to one and half hours. I asked interlocutors for described their experience to participated in the ritual. The description of theses interviews was followed up by specific question of their sense of belonging of culture. All of interviews recorded by digital recorder and coded it by identifying the narration of responded described. The analysis of research is started by coding, determination of themes and evaluated the themes based on literature are linked to affirmation theory of identity.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *Desa Adat* Tenganan Pegringsingan is a traditional village with 13.8 km² territory that is located on the south-eastern part of the Bali island. Tenganan's specific location is on the foothill and near the famous tourism object Candidasa in Karangasem regency. It is 65 kilometres away from the capital of Bali, Denpasar, and 17 kilometres from the district of Karangasem. It was one of eastern Bali's major landowning communities and was located in the midst of Karangasem's royal domain and wet-rice producing region.[11] The community is considered unique by foreigners and for that reason the government has promoted it as one of tourism destinations in Bali [12].

This old and unique village has a tradition, not only different from Balinese common tradition, but also distinctive tradition, ritual and social organization structure (*Desa Adat*). This is largely due to the village's unique *double-ikat* cloth production as its general cultural conservatism [13] The residents, who were once farmers, recently tend to work in tourism sectors [11]. As a matter of fact, they have never experienced living as real farmers. The land and wood owned by *Desa Adat* Tenganan guarantee them welfare. Promotion of global tourism stated that their culture is old and unique has made them try to get additional income from this sector.

Traditions and rituals took place previously just exclusively for Tenganan people are now opened for public. It is solely because of the sake of international tourism. Travel agents start to adjust their promotion programmes with the traditional schedules of Tenganan people. Culturally and steadily, the people in Tenganan apparently try to adjust their cultural rhythm with global demands. Gradually, modernization takes place in this traditional region. It is indicated using televisions, radio, electric stoves, motorcycle, mobile phone, and Internet. Those technological devices are utilized in their daily lives and to fulfil their needs.

Symptoms of co-modification in globalization or global culture are effects frequently occur in a culture. The symptoms give a picture that tourism culture is something legal for being commercialized. Tourism gradually becomes a sector that drives Tenganan's economy [14]. Behaviours of Tenganan people show that they are as if living in two different worlds: traditional world driven by tradition and rituals and modern world moved by tourism and economy (globalization). The situation caused the rise of some parties' anxiety about the continuity of Tenganan people's culture. Their questions are whether Tenganan people manage to keep their traditions and rituals and how the essence and meaning of their culture in the future. The core of these questions is pointed to the issue of Tenganan people's identity. In the middle of globalization issue, the question of identity in a hybrid culture that comes up in the intersection of global and local becomes relevant to be discussed.

Villagers in their kinship pattern profess endogamy marriage. It can be said that Tenganan is like a very big family. What is meant by Tenganan people are those who live in Tenganan (*Banjar Kauh*, *Banjar Tengah* and *Banjar Pande*). However, *Banjar Tengah* and *Banjar Pande* are the core of *adat* community in Tenganan Pegringsingan who run the activities of *adat* government. In general, rights and obligations of Tenganan people are arranged in the village's *awig-awig*. They obtain rights such as the yard, are entitled to the yield of lands owned by *adat* (*sarin tahun*) and of course can be actively involved in every customary activity. Meanwhile, their obligations are fully arranged by *desa adat*. Penalties are given to all violations of *adat* regulations in forms of warning, punishment, expulsion to *Banjar Pande* and even to the place outside Tenganan Pegringsingan. In endogamy marriage system, either men or women have the same rights and obligations, or equal social status [15]. Therefore, the inheritance system is bilateral, in which men and women have the same share of inheritance (usually the youngest child will stay longer in the family resident).

In this village, villagers carry out many ritual activities in daily life. The ritual is performed every day, once in three or five days, and particular days of

celebration based on their own calendar system. One of the rituals studied in this article is the *meteruna nyoman*. The ritual performed for a year. The *meteruna nyoman* begins by going alone to the temple at night every three days starting from right at the time of *Kajeng Kliwon*, to the temple in the village area of Tenganan for prayer asking for safety to the ancestor. Within a year they are obliged to learn how to align and various things in the life of the Tenganan peoples. A year later, the ninth *Sasih* arrived and could perform ceremonies and prayers to the temples that were above the Tenganan hills 3 times, then to the temples around the hill 2 times and once to Candi Dasa Temple. This is the stage for the introduction of a wide area or environment.

Based on the findings, most of the subjects participated in ritual activities with diverse age variations, between 14-23 years old. Most of them are still studying in junior high school, the rest is they are currently studying in high school. 6 of them are still in college and 2 of them are already working. Most of them said that the *meteruna nyoman* ritual was a very important ritual for them because of participating in the activity. Because this ritual does not have a special time, the participants have various ages.

The ritual held by the village council was conducted in 2016 based on the consideration that 34 participants want to participate. This forced village councils to hold this activity after 14 years had not been held. The 14 years of waiting for this ritual to be carried out seemed slow, so there was a lot of build-up in the number of participants. However, the customary council has its reasons that the accumulation of participants occurs to match the time held by the participants. The *adat* council realizes that most of the Tenganan people live outside the village because of working or following their parents' work. This is a situation nowadays often encountered by customary councils, that the timing of rituals must be adjusted according to various considerations.

The *meteruna nyoman* is one of the important rituals for children in Tenganan who are about to enter the teenage phase [16]. The ritual in the Tenganan is one of the important events and must be followed by the Tenganan people. This ritual is one of the requirements for teenagers to take part in a youth organization in Tenganan called *sekeha teruna*. *Sekeha* means group and *teruna* mean youth. In the social structure of the Tenganan community, youth groups hold an important position in their rituals [13]. Rituals in Tenganan, besides involving the role of customary members (parents, namely a husband-wife joint) in the process, young men and women are also involved not only as a compliment but also in a special position. For example, the pandan (*Pandanus tectorius*) war ritual, a symbol of the offering of the Tenganan people to the Gods of Indra, fully positions them as the most important actors.

In this ritual, they learn about moral knowledge, ethics, the basic nature of life, guidelines for life, and some simple rituals that they must follow when they join the youth group. The Tenganan people hope that their children, the heirs of the traditional village, will have the basic skills to learn about their customary village. This is a basic mechanism for the Tenganan people to introduce themselves into their environment. By knowing themselves, they can show their role and position based on written customary laws called *awig-awig*. In this aspect, the main purpose that is built is not only to understand their rights as part of the group members but also to recognize their obligations.

However, one of the challenges that participants felt when participating in this activity was their maturity to participate. Most of them admitted that they participated in this activity because of the pressure from their parents. For example, as stated by Putu Y (19 years), a participant of ritual,

For the ritual, I have to adjust to my lecture. At first, I felt uncomfortable that I had to go to the campus with my bare head. This is not me. But I must do it anyway. If I don't participate, it will be difficult for me to determine when this activity will be again.

Several participants admitted that at first, they were also hesitant to participate in this activity in the middle of other activities that they had to participate in. For example, Made A (21 years),

My parents insisted me to join the *meteruna* this year. They reasoned that they feel they still owe me if I haven't participated. I want this to be delayed. I still have to finish college. This takes a special time. However, I gave in. For the sake of my parents, I finally joined, even though I had to commute between Denpasar and Tenganan. For lectures and rituals. There are times, this choice must be made.

The illustration above actually shows that this ritual began to get challenges from their own internal. Their busyness, especially for people who work or stay in other cities, for example, they began to ask about the procession of this activity. For those who works outside the village, for example, this situation is quite difficult, especially in terms of obtaining permission from their superiors where they work. However, as they say, choices must be made. That meant participation in the ritual had to be done, even if they lived in another city.

However, for the children who live in Tenganan, they do not have the burdens experienced by children who grow up in outside of village. For example, Nyoman A, (15 years), admitted that he was ready to follow this ritual. He wanted to immediately catch up with his two brothers who had joined first by becoming junior

secondary members. His main motivation is to get to know himself and youth life in Tenganan. Respondents indicated that the activities carried out in the *meteruna nyoman* were fun activities. However, one of them also began to question that his hesitation in this activity was because their teachers at school were unable to explain this ritual. Some people, for example, are ashamed of being ridiculed by their schoolmates because they think they are licks.

A change in ritual becomes inevitable. The entry of Hinduism into the primary and secondary education system accepted by their children in Tenganan has given a different colour in seeing the outside world. Komang J (49 years old, my friend in Tenganan) told me that between 1980-1990s, there was an effort to harmonise Tenganan values with Hindu Bali in general. It was conducting by the government of regency through development project of religious life. In the project, the religion department provided a wide range of counselling regarding the procedure of religion to the society, including to Tenganan community. For people in Tenganan, what have done by PHDI Karangasem and *Dinas Agama* at that time was just for of a project. They tended to listen without openly confronting them. For Komang, the effort of PHDI to spread Balinese Hindu in Tenganan is in vain. He argued that Tenganan had existed long before other Balinese. He likens the activity done by PHDI as "*ngentungan uyah ka pasih*" (throwing the salt to the sea – a Balinese proverb means doing something in vain).

In the counselling, Tenganan people were taught how to do *tri sandya* (the basic mantra of Hindu) that they have never done before in their rituals. Their children who are elementary school students had got the lesson at schools because it is taught at all grades of schools from elementary to university. There are only a few teachers with broader minds, and at least like what has been experienced by I Putu W, the previous head of youth organization. For villagers, *tri sandya* is like a cooking spice or flavouring "like a food, if there is a *Masako* (the brand of famous flavouring in Indonesia), it will make the food more delicious. The same as *tri sandya*, it shows that we are Hindu. But if we are going out, we are asked by the outsiders about *tri sandya* and we don't know what it is, we will be ashamed). Before *tri sandya* was introduced in Tenganan, they do not recognise *tri sandya* in their rituals. Their prayers adhere to the principle of *samodhana*, that is "what we need/ask is what we say, what we deliver is what we say". The pronunciation process is also in the common language, not high-level language as well as speech by the higher priests of Bali

Based on these findings, the ritual may not only be the arena in which identity is negotiated but also rediscover new forms. At an early stage, I will look at the forms of negotiation that result from the above ritual encounters with modernity. Of course, identity is

presented not as something rigid or unchanging, but it is present as a form of contact with outside cultures. In this case, the new values of Hinduism are instilled in their formal schools encounters with modernity. Of course, identity is presented not as something rigid or unchanging, but it is present as a form of contact with outside cultures. In this case, the new values of Hinduism are instilled in their formal schools.

For these children, pride as Tenganan people in the end overcame such modernity logic. By following this ritual, in the end there is a demand for identity that results from a learning process and a strong interaction between the actors involved in the activity. There are shared values that emerge, this initiates a view of their culture. These shared values such as basic principles, minimalist ethics, and rules of behaviour that are based on local values. This is of course a simple interaction requirement built in adapting to a changing environment. This provides a new perspective for them to legitimize or help them navigate the outside world [17]. This indicates that an identity has been formed and shaped not only by the outside world (global transcultural values), the place where they are daily, but also their local values. This identity requirement includes a self-affirmation, image, and cooperation in seeing the world.

The assumption above provides a belief that social or cultural identity is the key to affirming the culture of society. The rituals have shaped their self-esteem as Tenganan people. Rituals have returned their pride, and this of course warded off any challenges or threats to their culture that they fear will disappear under the flow of modernization. This ritual has placed them into a sacred bond with respect for the values passed on by their ancestors, life, outlook on nature, and group solidarity.

When ritual forms the identity of a culture. This of course has implications for the continuous rolling of discourses in forming new identities. This is something that cannot be avoided in society. With rituals and traditions, cultural differences are emphasized, and this means that social ties are released, maintained, and renewed to find new meanings in contemporary life.

4. CONCLUSION

I conclude that this research resonates with the sociological and anthropological literature on identity theories that the ritual practices as a meaningful experience in negotiating their identity. By considering the ritual such as *meteruna nyoman* (the young non-formal education), the paper present that these practices are strongly affected by the change of community because they depend so much on the participation of others. My research shows that processes such as the introduction of formal education, migrations, and the spread of Agama Hindu Bali have a particular effect on

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