

Understanding the Tradition of Male Calf Release in Tambakan Village of Bali Island, Indonesia from the Perspective of History, Religion, Environment Sustainability and Food Security

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Abstract

Historically the tradition of male calf release in Tambakan Villlage was initiated from the vow of the defeated soldier of the kingdom of Buleleng over the kingdom of Bangli in the Island of Bali in the region of present day Indonesia. The defeated soldiers of Buleleng were hiding in the forest around the presentday village of Tambakan, Buleleng, Bali. All the soldiers vowed to the Deity dwelling in the forest to hand over a male calf if they survived the pursuit of the enemy. In the end, the enemy could not find them and the soldiers remained in the forest and continued their lives there. The village was named as Tambakan, meaning a buffer of enemy attack. The village was surrounded by a fence made from bamboo during that time. The soldiers then paid their vows by releasing male calves into the forest. This historical incident then developed to become a belief of the local peoples that if they vow to release a male calf to the Deity, then their wish will be fulfilled. Indeed many wishes of the people did come true when they released a male calf to the forest. Consequently, the population of the bulls increased in the forest, and by the influence of the Hindu Tantra sect, about 23 bulls from the forest are taken out every 2 years to be sacrificed in the temples addressed to Goddess of Durga. The meat of the sacrificed bulls is then distributed to the members of the village to be consumed. The releases of male calves gives

benefit to environmental sustainability and the distribution of the meat after sacrificing guarantees food security for the people.

Keywords

tradition, male calf release, Tambakan village, Buleleng, Bali

Introduction

Cows and dairying played an important role in early practice of religion (McCormick, 2012). The cow has been considered as a holy animal from ancient times in eastern philosophy. The Hindu religion placed the cow in the position of mother. The milk of the cow and the mother are similar, so they consider the cow as a mother (Joshi & Adhikari, 2019)

Cows play a prominent role in Hindu society from a source of milk to a provider of labor. The concept of the reincarnation of Vishnu represents in a way the theory of evolution involving animals. Vishnu incarnates in the form of *Mathsya* (fish) in order to indicate the aquatic origin of the life forms, followed by an amphibious *Kurma* (turtle). Some of the human like animals are sacred themselves, such as *Hanuman* the monkey God, *Ganesh* the elephant God, and *Naga* the snake God. Moreover, Hinduism has developed sanctity by association for animals that serve as the vehicles of the Hindu deities, namely the swan for *Brahma*, the creator; the eagle for *Vishnu*, the protector; and the bull for *Shiva*, the regenerator: all three making up the trinity of Hindu Gods. (Agoramoorthy and Hsu, 2012)

Mohandas Gandhi, the father figure of India stated that Hindus will be judged not by their pilgrimages, not by their *tilaks*, not by their most punctilious observance of caste rules, but by their ability to protect the cow. Being a central tenet of Hinduism is, cow protection is considered one of the most wonderful phenomenon in human evolution. The cow represents the entire subhuman world. It takes the human being beyond his species. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity. Hinduism will live as long as Hindus protect the cow. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. (Fox, 1999 and Simoons, 1979).

In other instances, such as many African diasporic religions and Hinduism, rituals offer the life-blood of animals in reverence to deities or spirits. These sacrifices take place at festivals, that can last for days or even weeks annually. Individual devotees might also offer certain spirits or deities an animal sacrifice as gesture of gratitude for fulfillment of a particular prayer, such as conceiving a child, assistance with obtaining employment, passing an exam or finding a spouse. The ritual slaughter of animals is practiced by countless faiths for a variety of reasons: such as with Judaism and Islam, where ritual slaughter is performed with certain guidelines that must be followed, and prayers that must be recited in order for meat to be fit for human consumption (Boaz, 2019). Animal sacrifice, specifically animal blood, is part of various worship and rituals practices in Tantric Hinduism. Blood offerings are predominant for most animal sacrifices and may be perceived as effective means to nourish a deity or to propitiate and pacify the aggressive and dangerous nature of a deity. Animals, specifically their blood or body parts, are sometimes sacrificed in Tantric ritual based on the belief that particular animals hold particular powers, which can be exploited effectively to enhance a ritual (Zeiler, 2019). Bullfighting is a sacrificial ritual, found particularly among Spanish intellectuals of the early 20th century. Anthropological study of Spanish bullfighting concluded that the bull is a “totem” of Spain, which is sacrificed for general consumption (Cohen, 2014).

Within the Mahabharata epic, which is the source of Hindu teaching, are details also regarding horse sacrifice or Asvamedha (Zaroff, 2005), snake sacrifice or *sarpasattra* (Bronkhorst, 2011), and also human sacrifice or *Sati* (Skyprek, 2010) which is no longer practiced in the modern world.

In this paper the tradition of male calf release at Tambakan Village, sub districts Buleleng, Bali, Indonesia is introduced and observed. The historical background of the tradition and religious practiced will be studied. The environmental impact on sustainability will be observed and the guarantee to food security will be explored.

Research method

The location of the research was at Tambakan Village, located at sub district of Buleleng in the Bali province, Indonesia.

This research was conducted quantitatively with sources of both primary and secondary data. The data were collected by observation as well as interviews at the location and also a literature study. The tradition was studied deeply since it was found to be unique. The structure, the function, the meaning, as well as the way of transmission of this tradition to the next generation were studied.

Result and discussion

Male calf release tradition at Tambakan Village

Tambakan Village is a typical mountain village in Bali. The tradition found in the village is still recognized as an ancient belief, which is understood from oral stories from the ancestors. This myth gives instructions for the ritual for a vow to release a male calf which has not the slightest defect from head to tail.

The male calf is recognized from the species of Bali cattle (*Bos javanicus*). Bali cattle are indigenous breeds that have been domesticated from wild *banteng* (*Bos javanicus*) in Java and Bali for hundreds of years. Bali cattle have weaknesses in that their production of milk is low (Sutarno and Setyawan, 2016) and, given that the milk quickly turned sour in the hot climate (McCormick, 2012), milk is not consumed to any great extent by people in Bali.

To be compared with the ancient tradition of Hinduism in other parts of Indonesia as written in the ancient inscriptions, usually cattle were offered to Brahmins. This can be read from the inscription of the Kingdom of Kutai found in Muara Kaman, near Mahakam River, East Kalimantan from the fourth century where it is inscribed that Mulawarman, the king of Kutai, had generously given alms of 20,000 cows to Brahmin priests. The Tugu inscription of Tarumanegara Kingdom that was found in North Jakarta from the fifth century mentioned that the King Purnawarman of Tarumanegara awarded 1,000 cows to Brahmin priests as a gratitude for the completion of the construction of a canal. The Dinaya inscription found in Malang, East Java from 760 AD stated that Gajayana, the king of Kanjuruhan, gave cows and other gifts to Brahmin priests (Sutarno and Setyawan, 2016). The tradition of male calf release in the case of Tambakan Village is not an offering to the Brahmins but just for release into the forest nearby.

Historically the release of male calf tradition in Tambakan village began with the existence of a story which was known by a few senior figures. It began when the war took place in the kingdom of Buleleng with the Kingdom of Bangli. Both of

these kingdoms existed in Bali. During the war, the soldiers of the Buleleng kingdom were defeated and then they took refuge in a forest that is now called Tambakan Village. They vowed to the deity dwelling in the forest that if the enemy could not find them and they were safely reunited with their family, they would offer a male calf. This historical incident then developed to become a belief of the local peoples that if they vowed to release a male calf to the deity their wish would be fulfilled. Indeed many wishes of the people then come true and they released male calves to the forest. The cow is the most sacred of all the animals of Hinduism. It is known as *Kamadhenu*, or the divine cow, and the giver of all desires (Agoramoorthy and Hsu, 2012).

To protect the area, they planted bamboo around the area to prevent enemy attacks, from which the name of the village derived, namely Tambakan (meaning to buffer the enemy). Tambakan village is about 56km from the capital of Buleleng and is located at an altitude of 700-1300 meters above sea level. Most of the lands of Tambakan Village are plantations and forest areas. The population of Tambakan Village is almost entirely Hindu (99.6%) but unlike in India there is no caste system. Tambakan Village area is a mountainous region that has a relatively homogeneous life, both in terms of religion, culture and customs. The people of Tambakan village showed a strong spirit of togetherness, harmony, and mutual affection (brotherhood).

The tradition of male calf release is carried out by the people on the new moon in a temple addressed to Goddess of Durga, the so called Temple of Dalem. The aim is to pay vows, the male calf then released in to the forest around Tambakan Village with a new name attribute to the calf that is "*I Dewa*", a respectful call meaning God because it had been purified. During ritual of releasing the male calf, it is dressed with cloth which is wrapped around the body and also put on its ears with coconut leaf and then released into the forest.

The released male calf is believed to have the power that can provide prosperity and safety, bringing peace to the Tambakan peoples. Another purpose is as an offering to nature and the environment so that nature can be sustainable and well preserved, creating a balance between humans and the environment. The released male calves were left wild and free in the forest and grew to be healthy bulls. The bulls usually go around Tambakan Village, the people welcoming this with joy because they believe the visit of the bull will bring fertility, prosperity, fortune, and security in Tambakan Village. The Hindu religion recognizes the rights of animals to co-exist with humans, therefore people are taught to love, nurture, and worship them (Agoramoorthy and Hsu, 2012). Furthermore, the urine of cows contains antibacterial (Sathasivam, et al, 2010), antifungal (Rakesh 2013), antiviral, and insecticidal (Mohanty et. al. 2014) properties. Cow urine is generally regarded as safe because 95% is water, 2.5% urea and remaining other 2.5% is mixture of minerals, hormones and salts. The dung of the cow also has an antiseptic and antibacterial properties, and is also used as a fuel for cooking foods, as well as the fumes from its burning killing insects, and other harmful organisms, thus cleaning the environment. In Hindu literature, Veda gives great value to the cow, treating as a mother and a greater part of this universe for purifying the devils to impure airs and environments. (Joshi and Adhikari, 2019).

Sacrifice of released male calves after becoming adult bulls

It is clear then that the population of bulls in the forest of Tambakan village will increase because of the tradition of releasing male calves. However, over-population of the bulls in the forest was never allowed to happen. This is because every two years during full moon (between July–August), the people in Tambakan Village conducted the ritual of sacrificing the bull as offerings to the Goddess of Durga. The purpose of offering was in order that people in Tambakan Village might live in safety, harmony, peace, and prosperity.

The ritual slaughter of the bull is usually with the spear which is taken by the regent, after that the spear was stored and ceremony is carried out. About 23 adult bulls were sacrificed every 2 years. Small parts of the flesh and bone of the bulls then is used for offerings. The rest of the beef will be distributed to the peoples of village for consumption to guarantee food security. There are two taboos regarding food which serve as dividing lines. There is one taboo regarding meat-eating that divides Hindus into vegetarians and flesh-eaters. There is another taboo regarding beef-eating. It divides Hindus into those who eat beef and those who do not. (Sathyamala, 2019).

Even though the religion of people in the Tambakan village is Hinduism and the people sacrifice the bull for this tradition, the case of atrocities being carried out against the peoples who perform this tradition are never found. In contrast, within India retribution against a person harming cattle can be found (Gundimeda and Ashwin, 2018).

The sacrifice of the bull every 2 years is also of benefit for controlling the population of the bull in the forest. If the population not controlled, the situation will be like in India by today, where abandoned cattle wander everywhere searching for food, along with other cattle whose urban families are landless. Many are hit by traffic or develop internal injuries from consuming wire, plastic bags, and other trash (Fox, 1999). In Islam there is also cattle sacrifice, but not related with payment of the vow as in this paper. The sacrificing base commemorates the Prophet Ibrahim who demonstrated his faithfulness to God by a willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail. God instead had Ibrahim sacrifice a ram as a substitute. Eid-ul-Adha commemorates this earlier event with the sacrifice of a goat, sheep, or other animal, and the meat is then eaten as part of a communal celebration. The meat of the sacrificed animal is then shared with others including the poor, friends, and members of the family in an event which strengthens communal solidarity (Khan and Watson, 2015).

Conclusion

The male calf release tradition in Tambakan village, Buleleng, Bali, Indonesia, was initiated from the vows of the defeated soldiers of the kingdom of Buleleng over the kingdom of Bangli in the Island of Bali in the region of presentday Indonesia. The defeated soldiers of Buleleng were hiding in the forest around what is now the village of Tambakan, Buleleng, Bali. The soldiers vowed to the deity dwelling in the forest to hand over a male calf if they survived the pursuit of the enemy. In the end, the enemy could not find them and the soldiers stayed in the forest, continuing their lives there. The village was named as a Tambakan, meaning buffer of enemy attack. The village were surrounded by fence made from bamboo during that time. The soldiers then payed their vow by releasing a male calf for to the deity that is believed to dwell in that forest. This historical fact then developed to become a belief of the local peoples that if they vow to release a male calf to the Deity, then their wish will be fulfilled. Indeed many wishes of the peoples then come true as they release male calves to the forest. Certainly the population of bulls increased in the forest, but under the influence of the beliefs of the Hindu Tantra sect, 23 bulls from the forest are culled every 2 years to be sacrificed in the temples addressed to Goddess of Durga. The meat of the sacrificed bull then is distributed to the members of the village to be consumed. The release of male calves gives benefit to the environment and sustainability while the distribution of the meat after sacrifice guarantees food security for the people. The indigenous species of cattle found in Bali Island is Bali cattle (*Bos Javanicus*) and it is only this species that is released. Other species are not found from ancient times and recently the government prohibited the import other species of cattle to Bali. Indigenous Bali cattle do not produce much milk and therefore the milking tradition from cows is not found in this island. Thus, no feelings of motherhood relating to the cow

developed, unlike the Indian tradition where sacrifice is prohibited. However, there is a special case that makes some Bali cattle sacred and protected from being killed for any purpose, that is if the cattle is albino or born white.

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