

The Production of Holy Water:

The Service of Puppeteers to Balinese Life Cycle Rituals

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To most of the thousands of tourists that flood the tiny island of Bali every year, the wayang kulit (shadow puppet theatre) is little more than one of many exotic forms of entertainment that nightly provide diversion from a leisurely day of surfing, sunning or sightseeing. In the 1960s the Indonesian government conceived of Bali as a “window to Indonesian culture” and saw the Balinese arts as a way to attract foreign tourists to the country. (Picard, 1996) An organized effort began with the construction of huge five-star hotels and resorts on the southern tip of Bali along the beaches of Sanur, Nusa Dua, Jimbaran, Tuban, Legian, and Seminyak and eventually at the hippie enclave of Kuta. Accompanying this massive effort to attract foreign exchange was a marketing campaign designed to highlight the “exotic” appeal of Balinese culture. As part of the formula, tourists were provided doses of performance experiences at the hotels as dinner entertainment. The tour-bus crowd saw performances at special venues constructed at Batubulan, Bona, and Peliatan. Even the large indoor and outdoor performance venues of the Arts Centre in Denpasar near the STSI state School of the Arts were designed to appeal to tourists. As tourism began to catch hold and grow tourists began to journey deep into the countryside, principally to the villages upcountry, like the village of Ubud, long considered a cultural center of the island. Nowadays, it is possible to see legong dance, Ramayana ballet, barong and kris dance, monkey dance, angel dance, and fire

dance, as well as topeng, the masked dance-drama, and wayang kulit, virtually every night of the year at many locations on the island.

However, there is another side to Balinese arts which was not designed to be marketed to foreign tourists. This side concerns the service that the arts provide to the people of Bali. This is the side which we deal with in this brief paper. We began to explore that service in our paper entitled, "On the Margins of Time and Space: Performance and Performance Sites of Hindu Temples" written for the FIRT International Conference on "Theatrical Space in Postmodern Times" held in conjunction with the 9th Quadrennial of Stage Design and Theatre Architecture held in Prague in 1999. Our paper was subsequently published by the Punjab University Press in 1999 and is shortly to be published in Volume V of the *Puppetry Yearbook International*.

Typically, a wayang performance requires a dalang puppeteer, a special screen, an oil lamp mounted between the dalang's head and the screen, which serves as the only source of illumination. At the base of the screen is a banana log for sticking puppets when they are not in motion. A gamelan orchestra of four musicians provides the musical accompaniment on specially tuned instruments. The puppeteer sits cross-legged behind the screen during performance while the patrons ordinarily sit on the ground or on chairs or benches on the shadow side. Performances last between two and four hours and are normally presented at night. The screen is placed so that the puppeteer is facing in an auspicious direction. Spatial orientation is of primary concern to the Balinese. The dwelling place of the Hindu gods is atop the sacred mountain Gunung Agung, located in

northeast Bali. The most sacred temple in Bali is Pura Besakih, which is situated high on the slopes of Gunung Agung. Virtually all directional orientations in Bali have reference to Gunung Agung. Toward the mountain is known as *kaja*, that is toward the pure and sacred space. Away from *kaja*, or the sacred, is *kelod*, toward the sea or downward. The *kelod* direction is considered less sacred, even at times regarded as impure. The space between *kaja* and *kelod* is the middle world, that is, the space that is appropriate for human beings to inhabit. It is here that we are in the realm of secular space.

Another kind of orientation also abides. Toward the east and the rising sun is known as *kangin* which is the second most sacred direction for the islanders. Toward the west and the setting sun is *kauh*, the less sacred direction. “This *kaja/kelod*, sacred/profane, high/low concept is deeply ingrained in the Balinese psyche.” (Eiseman 1990, 3) For example, the inner courtyard of a temple contains the most sacred shrine which is located in the *kaja* position. The other courtyards and shrines will be oriented in descending order until we come at last to the temple gates which are in the *kelod* direction. The most sacred temple of any village is located in the *kaja* direction of that village. Within a family compound the *taksu*, or shrine honoring the guardian deities worshipped by individual members of the household, is in this same *kaja* relationship to all the other buildings in the compound. The refuse pit is located in the *kelod* direction. A man’s head is considered *kaja*, his feet are *kelod*. When sleeping Balinese Hindus orient their heads toward the sacred mountain and their feet toward the sea.

There is also thought to be symbolic significance of the various items of performance. Hobart quoting her informants says that, “The screen is the sky or face of the world. The

puppets are all the animate and inanimate things which exist. The lamp is the sun which enables there to be day and night. The banana stem into which the puppets are placed is the earth. The dalang is god who is invisible to the audience.” (128) Indeed, the *Dharma Pawayangan*, the sacred treatise used by dalangs as an authority for their mantras and as a source of procedures for conducting the details of a wayang performance, describes the dalang as Kama, the God of Love. When coming to the house of his patron the dalang is instructed to say, “OM The God of Love has arrived.” (Hooykaas, 31) C. Hooykaas, a highly respected Dutch authority on Indonesian arts and culture and editor of a collection of manuscripts entitled, *Kama and Kala: Materials for the Study of Shadow Theatre in Bali*, says of the dalang, “Were we to call him the puppeteer we would wrong him for, though he entertains, much of the time amuses, even edifies, and enlightens, he invariably begins with priestly activities. In many a case he is at the same time supposed to attract benevolent spirits and to chase away the malevolent ones, and in not a few cases ends by acting as an exorcist priest.” (5) It is in this connection as a ritual expert that we shortly will discuss the dalang in the life of the Balinese.

There are several types of wayang performance. Wayang peteng indicates a night performance. Wayang lemah is normally performed during the daytime and is regarded as the most sacred kind of wayang. Wayang lemah is performed without a screen or oil lamp and is one of five genres of performance commissioned by a patron at his residence or by a community temple as part of a major festival occasion (odalan). It is this which we have discussed at some length in our paper, “On the Margins of Time and Space.”

Then there is wayang sapuh leger, which is normally performed at night as part of a manusa yajna sacrifice to protect a boy or girl, man or woman from the demon Kala.

Wayang sapuh leger is performed if a person happens to have been born during the week of wayang, the 27th week of the 30-week Balinese calendar, or when a child or adult falls asleep on a mattress which has no sheet, when a person falls asleep under a roof which has not yet been completed, or if a family happens to have a boy child, followed by the birth of a girl child, followed by the birth of a boy child or if four consecutive children are born to a family all of the same sex, or if twins happen to be born to a family.

Finally, there is wayang suddhamala which may be performed during the day or night. It is appropriate for exorcism and life-cycle rituals at which ancestors are required to be present. It is performed on occasions such as the sixth month after conception, during birth ceremonies, when the umbilical cord fall off, for children at various stages after birth, such as on the 12th and 42nd day of their birth, during their third month of life, on the hundred and fifth day, and on the two hundred and tenth day. It is also needed when adult teeth first appear, when the last milk tooth falls out, at puberty, when the six upper teeth are filed, on the occasion of a marriage, and in connection with purification ceremonies connected with study.

Only certain stories from the wayang repertory are appropriate for the ritual forms of wayang. The story of Kala's misdeeds and his eventual expiation is an appropriate subject of the wayang sapuh leger. The story of Sahadeva's cleansing is ordinarily the subject of wayang suddhamala. And when a dalang is asked to participate in a wayang

lemah he must choose a story that is appropriate to the occasion for which the ceremony is being given.

Normally, the dalang who performs wayang supuh leger or wayang suddhamala has as his ritual obligation to transform ordinary water into holy water. Water may be made holy by Hindu priests (pendandas), or a lay priests (pemangku), or by a dalang, puppet masters. Even an individual may make a kind of holy water. Temple priests are obviously responsible for making holy water for the daily use in the temple and for major temple celebrations. During the wayang lemah, a temple priest is invariably in the most sacred inner shrine of the temple making water holy. Lay priests make holy water for small community temples and for family shrines. Dalangs ordinarily make holy water for rites of passage and exorcism ceremonies.

“Every one of the rites of passage involves the use of holy water. Shrines are sprinkled with it every day. Those who go into trance are brought back from this state with holy water. Those who are sick are made well...with holy water. A Balinese undergoes a cleansing before and after any major trip.” One of the most devastating thing that can happen to a family is to be denied access to holy water from the village temple.”

(Eiseman, 62)

Eiseman also says that, “Holy water is an agent of the power of god, a container of mysterious force. It can cleanse spiritual impurities, fend off evil forces, and render the recipient immune to the attacks of negative, or demonic, influences. In Bali, holy water is

not a symbol, or something abstract—it is a Sekala container of a Niskala power, and, as such is sacred and holy in and of itself. The water strengthens and purifies everything it touches. Although there are many kinds and potencies of holy water, no matter where or by whom it is made and no matter whether its quantity is great or small, holy water is always a sacred and powerful agent.” (Eiseman 1990, 51)

For large major temple ceremonies, waters are brought from sacred springs around the island of Bali. The favorite site is a water hole or small pond at the base of the last rocky ascent of the sacred mountain Gunung Agung, where Bali’s Mother Temple is located. For major exorcism ceremonies waters may be brought from other sacred places. In 1979, water was gathered from Mount Semeru in Java, from Mount Rinjani in Lombok and even from the River Ganges in India. (Eiseman 1990, 56)

Waters from some important temples located at different parts of the island are also desirable and appropriate for some ceremonies. Waters from Pura Sidakarya in South Denpasar, Pura Sakenan on Turtle Island, Pura Luhur Uluwatu and Pura Danu Batura are also thought to be particularly powerful.

During the summer of 2001 Mr. Sedana and Dr. Richmond witnessed the preparation of holy water on three separate occasions. We watched as dalang Sudarma performed the wayang sudamala near the city of Singaraja in North Bali: for a three-month old baby in the village of Ambengan, for newly weds in the village of Bungkulan, and for a tooth-filing ceremony for four teenage boys and a tooth-filing and a name-change ceremony for

a teenage girl in the village of Naga Sepaha. What follows is an account of the process of turning ordinary, clean water brought to the performance site in a clean container into holy water.

Although all the events that were seen were fundamentally the same, there were some slight differences among the different ceremonies which we will not comment on here.

What follows is an account of the wayang sudamala for the tooth-filing and name-change ceremonies. The performance was held in the family courtyard between the several houses of a family compound. Activities were well underway when dalang Sudarma arrived at the compound around 10:30 p.m. on July 25th after having performed another wayang sudamala earlier that evening.

Long tables piled high with trays of ritual food had been set up around the courtyard. A gaily colored tent top had been stretched between the houses of the compound marking the festive nature of the event. At one end of the courtyard a small booth with the puppet screen and oil lamp had been erected. The booth faced in the correct directional orientation to the sacred mountain. The dalang's assistant had seen to the preparation of the performance space earlier that day.

Friends and guests met the dalang's party and welcomed them. Everyone was invited to dine on specially prepared food on the steps of one of the houses. Nearby the five young people for whom the ceremony was being performed were busy playing cards with their friends. Although gambling has recently been prohibited by the police, the youths were playing for money as has been customary in the past during such ceremonies. Game

cocks crowed under their wicker baskets beside the houses. We were spared cock fighting which is sometimes part of such occasions. Virtually everyone wore the appropriate ceremonial attire for the occasion. Bright florescent lights illuminated the whole area. After the meal the dalang, his assistant, and the musicians took their places in the small booth to make ready for the performance. The lights were turned off and the oil lamp was lighted to signal the beginning of the puppet show. All eyes were focused on the puppet screen. It was just after 11 p.m.

Dalang Sudarma performed a story from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Unable to get a job, Bambang Kumbayana decides that he will go to Pancala to meet Sucitra, his classmate with whom he has made an agreement that the first to secure a job will recruit the other to help him. On his way to visit Sucitra Kumbayana has to cross the sea. He vows that anyone who helps him to make the crossing safely will be his brother. If a female helps him, he will take her as his wife. No sooner has he made the proclamation than the celestial nymph Nilotama hears him and transforms herself into a winged-female horse. Kumbayana has to marry the female horse on arriving at his destination. Eventually, a son is born to the couple whom they name Aswatama (he who has nails like a horse's hooves and the mane of a horse).

Kumbayana arrives in the Pancala kingdom but has no way to know that his friend Sucitra has changed his name to King Drupada. King Drupada declared that anyone who dared to call him Sucitra will be severely punished. Once Kumbayana reports to the front office security guard of the palace with his intention to meet Sucitra, Drupada's Prime

Minister, Gana Medana, becomes furious that he has disobeyed the king's edict. He tortures Kumbayana by breaking his knees and elbows. Then he throws Kumbayana's body into the Kenawa forest. Kumbayana is comatose when he is found by Jim Bambang Putri, a cannibal. Jim Bambang Putri rescues and cures Kumbayana with leaves. Jim also changes Kumbayana's name to Drona and gives him an invincible weapon called Brahma Astra. As Jim rightly predicts, Drona eventually reaches a higher state of perfection as a famous teacher who teaches the art of weaponry and war to the five Pandava brothers and to the hundred brothers of Duryodana. As a final test, Drona instructs his students to fight Drupada. After being defeated, Drupada gives Drona part of his kingdom on which Drona builds his home and study center.

The tooth filing ceremony is a ceremony of human maturity and thus a story that relates themes of coming of age are appropriate. In the first meeting scene, Kumbayana tells his father that he has graduated but he feels inferior for being unable to get a job. He feels guilty for begging his parent for money and thus undertakes his journey to join his friend. This is an important message to the audience and particularly to the adults undertaking the tooth filing ceremony that they must prepare to become financially independent of their parents. The Balinese adults are ritually and symbolically educated to understand the importance of the ceremony of filing six of their top center teeth. Those six teeth are symbols of the six internal terrorists/enemies (*sad ripu*) which must be aligned and brought under full control, rather than being destroyed.

At the beginning of the last act of the play Kumbayana recommends the adults of the five Pandava and 100 Korava brothers that playing ball might be less important for their future

than to begin practicing the art of weaponry. To begin the fighting scene, Kumbayana tests his students by telling them to fight the established king Drupada. These all are symbols to fill the requirements for gaining maturity. The main message is, “Don’t beg for a position in life. Be who you are and create your own business according to your own ability.”

Comic servants accompany all the major characters in the story: Kenyot and Tonglang accompany Bambang Kumbayana; Delem and Sangut accompany king Drupada; Ngurah and Nani accompany the demon Jim Bambang Putri; and, Twalen and Wredah accompany the five Pandavas. Through the comic servants Kenyot and Tonglang, the dalang announces that there were five adults participating in the tooth-filing ceremony. The servants also announce the new name of the young girl who henceforth will be called Kadek Ermayanti rather than Luh Pastining.

After the performance of the puppet story is concluded the gamelan orchestra stops playing. Then the dalang quickly clears the screen of the unwanted puppets and places the cast of characters not needed for the ritual of making holy water back in the puppet box to his left. He covers the box with its lid in preparation for the ritual.

Next he assembles the necessary puppets that are required for the ceremony and places them in a prescribed order on the screen. The process of making holy water seems to differ somewhat from one dalang to another. The fundamental explanation about how to make holy water is found in the *Dharma Pawayangan* (Hooykaas 1970, 274-283) In *Dancing Shadows of Bali* Angela Hobart describes the process that she saw during her research stay on the island. She says that nine puppets are prescribed to be present on the screen prior to the activity. Although consistent with the number identified by Hooykaas some of the cast of puppets is slightly different from that mentioned by Hooykaas. Hobart's informants have indicated that the kayon or tree of life puppet is stuck into the banana log at the center of the screen. On the left is the God Siwa who is in a bowing position. At the extreme left-hand side of the screen is Ludramurti underneath which are the puppet characters Durga and Sungsang. To the right of the center are three puppets all in a bowing position. Starting at the center from the right is Tunggal, then Bayu, and finally Tualen. To the extreme right side of the screen is Wisnumurti. Flowers are part of the preparation. A multi-colored flower which represents Siwa is placed in the upper right corner of the kayon. The puppet of Siwa holds a yellow flower representing Mahadewa. Three flowers are placed to the right of the center. Bayu seems to have a white flower in his hair representing Iswara. The puppet of Bayu holds a red flower representing Brahma and Tualen holds a blue flower representing Wisnu. (136)

The puppets and their arrangement in dalang Sudarma's performances we saw in North Bali are somewhat different from those described in the *Dharma Pawayangan* and by Hobart. At the center of the screen are two puppets. Twalen, the court servant is placed to the left of center. Lord Siwa is placed to the right of center. Both face each other and are

in a bowing attitude. To the extreme left of the screen is Bayu, god of the wind. To the right of Siwa in the following order are Brahma, god of fire, Vishnu, god of water, and Iswara, god of wayang. To the extreme right is the kayon, the tree of life. Only two flowers are used for the ritual, a lotus held in Twalen's hands and an unidentified flower in Siwa's hair. The kayon is placed in the banana log at the right side jutting out from the log and not pressed against the screen.

The dalang and his assistant assemble the items of the ceremony and keep them in a proscribed order. Generally, the main food trays of offerings are to the dalang's immediate right, at the edge of the screen. Directly in front of him in a clean beaker of pure water sitting in an offering tray ready to be made into holy water. Closer to the screen and to his right is a small tray used as an initial offering which begins the ceremony. To his left on top of the lid of the puppet box is a special offering to the puppets.

Next the dalang places flowers of a particular color in their respective places on the puppets. A small amount of water is transferred from the beaker to a tiny cup sitting in the tray to the dalang's upper right and the bud of a lotus flower is laid in the water.. The assistant cuts the end of a fresh young coconut which will be used to purify the offerings during the ceremony. The coconut is placed up right of the small tray to the dalang's right close to the screen.

A dalang must be properly dressed for the occasion. He must wear the kind of clothing that is appropriate to be worn when entering the temple. He wears a jacket, a sarong tied with a sash and a cap. During a two hour performance which we saw the dalang had removed his upper garment because it was very hot working so close to the large oil lamp which is only a few inches away from his face the entire two hours of the show. Dalang Sudarma dresses all in white. He resembles a Balinese priest in his dress and demeanor. Before the ceremony he replaces his upper garment and buttons the collar.

Next the dalang removes a small bit of the fiery wick of the large oil lamp and transfers it to a small container in the tray up right of him. He lights a bunch of incense sticks in this fire and begins to arrange them in various trays. First, a few sticks are stuck in the offering tray on top of the puppet box. This tray also contains a coconut, an egg, a length of white Balinese thread, rice, and a few coins. A few sticks of incense are placed in the tray in which the incense sticks were lighted. A few of the sticks are laid against the base of the banana log of the screen and the remaining sticks are given to the attendant to arrange in the other trays to the dalang's right and behind him.

When all is made ready the dalang begins his prayers with "Om" and the gamelan orchestra begins to play a special tune. At this point the formal ritual begins.

Taking a small bowl from the tray with the fire the dalang sprinkles water from the small cup with the bud of the lotus flower. He sprinkles it on all the ritual trays used in the

ceremony. The dalang then makes some minor adjustments to the ritual items and sprinkles water from the young coconut on all the ritual items used in the ceremony.

He takes the tray with the fire which symbolizes the God Agni who serves as witness to the sacrifice and prays. Then he waves the tray in a counterclockwise circle under the oil lamp as he touches his left hand to the back of the oil lamp.

The dalang's assistant gives him what seems to be a bundle of thin twigs the ends of which have been doubled back on themselves and tied. His assistant cuts the binding and separates the end of the twigs and then cuts off the excess ends. At this point the bundle resembles a small hand broom. He separates the bundle and places some fresh leaves of the sacred dap dap tree inside and closes the bundle again. The dalang takes the ends of the bundle and offers another prayer, then he dips the ends of the twigs into the fresh coconut water and sprinkles it liberally on all the offerings used in the ceremony.

Next another small tray with incense sticks is taken up and held under the oil lamp and a prayer is offered. The incense is removed and placed to the left of the dalang near the banana log.

The offering for the puppets is raised and knocked three times against the puppet chest to wake the puppets as though to say that an offering is being made to them and that they too are being honored. At the end of this offering the ends of a dap dap leaf which hangs

from the offering tray is shredded by the dalang signifying that this particular part of the ritual has ended.

Next comes the most important part of the ritual. The dalang touches the banana log and reverently recites a prayer. He makes symbolic gestures with his hands before beginning his prayers to Siwa. He takes the flowers from the puppets and holds them reverently between his hands in front of and above his head as he prays. Then he tosses the flowers into the beaker of water directly in front of him thereby transforming the *niskala* (divine/invisible) power of God into the *secala* (visible) container of holy water.

He takes the Siwa puppet from the banana log and makes several ritual actions with it starting by dipping the end of the stick in the oil of the large oil lamp, then into its flames, then he dips it into the fresh coconut water and turns the puppet and touches the tip of the stick to his forehead. Finally, he offers prayers as he seems to stir the water and flowers in the beaker with the end of the Siwa puppet stick. The dalang recites more prayers at this point, more than at any other time during the ceremony. Other complicated actions involving the Siwa puppet follow. Finally, the dalang sticks the Siwa puppet in the banana log.

The dalang takes the *kayon* puppet and wafts it to the right and to the back, seeming to extend the blessings to those who are witness to the act, the gamelan players and his assistant.

Finally, he pours a small bottle of brem or arak (country rice wine) at the base of the banana log and on the offerings behind and to his right. He takes rice grains from a tray to his right and scatters them to the front and behind him. At this point the gamelan orchestra stops playing and the ceremony ends.

The dalang removes the lid of the puppet box and places the puppets in the box in a prescribed order beginning with the three puppets to the right of Siwa. Then he takes the puppet at the extreme left of the screen and places it in the box. And finally he takes Twalen and Siwa from the banana log waves them three times in a counterclockwise direction around the oil lamp, dips the tips of their sticks in the holy water as he offers a silent prayer before placing them in the puppet box. Then he takes a large puppet from under the bunch of puppets at the top of the box and returns it to the top of the pile. He pulls the kayon from the banana log and places it on top of all the puppets and pulls a cloth cover over the puppets and replaces the lid tightly on top of the box, symbolically putting the puppets to sleep until the next show. At this point the screen is removed by the dalang's assistant and other helpers so that the ritual cleansing and blessing of the patrons may take place. (video segment shown)

The event includes entertainment by the dalang through the puppets with subtle and not so subtle moral instruction meant for the viewers. This is done in the context of a performance site which has deep symbolic significance representing the cosmos. The extension of the sacred world of the gods to the profane world of man is mediated by the dalang, acting as priest. The puppeteer and the puppets are thought to be instruments

through which god accomplishes the goal of purification. Once the holy water is made through recitation of mantras and acts meant to invoke gods blessing and transforming ordinary water to holy water, the screen is removed and the dalang reaches across from the booth to those who are being cleansed and blessed: the young men who have made their spiritual journey from youth to adulthood by having their teeth filing and the young woman who has also become an adult as well as changing her name. In this sense the wayang kulit plays an indispensable role in the life of the ordinary Balinese Hindus who commission a performance and essentially are sustained by god through the dalang.

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