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FEMALE DEITIES IN BALINESE SOCIETY: LOCAL GENIUS, INDIAN INFLUENCES, AND THEIR WORSHIP

I Ketut Ardhana

*Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Udayana
Universitas Hindu Indonesia (UHHI), Denpasar-Bali
< phejpsdrtpi@yahoo.com >*

Abstract

One of the main issues that has been discussed in Indonesia regarding the democracy process in a modern world is about the feminism and gender issues. On the one hand, women are considered to play limited roles, whilst on the other hand, the men have always been considered to play a significant role. This can be traced back in the long process of the Balinese history only in terms of political aspect, but also in the context of socio-cultural aspects. It is important to look at what has happened in the Balinese societies, since Bali is known as a Hindu in Southeast Asia. The Balinese society has its own culture based on local culture that is strongly influenced by the Indian or Indic culture. The Balinese society is a patrilineal system, in which a man has a higher position, but in fact it was even Bali had a woman princess, who was of mixed Javanese and Balinese heritage, a wife of King Udayana of Bali between the 10th and 11th centuries. Both of them were considered as the Balinese kings at the same time, in the era of these kings they were successful in integrating between Hinduism and Buddhism. Until now, the Balinese believe the soul of Mahendradatta as Durga. The main questions will be addressed in this paper are firstly: how do the Balinese interpret the female deities? Secondly, how do they worship them? Thirdly, what is the meaning of this worship in terms of religious and cultural aspects in the modern and postmodern time? By discussing these issues it is expected that we will have a better understanding on how the Balinese worship the female deities in the prehistoric, classical, and modern times in the context of a global or universal culture.

Keywords: Local genius, women and feminism deities, Hinduism, Balinese culture.

Introduction

One main issue that has been discussed in Indonesia regarding the democracy process in a modern world revolves around feminism and gender issues. This can be understood since there are many differences between the social roles and expectations of men and women. On the one hand, the women are considered to play a limited role while on the other, the men play a significant role. This development can be traced back to the long process of Indonesian history in the context of its political and social cultural aspects. It is important to look at what happened in the Minangkabau and the Balinese societies, since these societies are renowned to be strongly concerned about their cultural heritage in comparison to other societies in Indonesia. In the case of the predominantly Islamic Minangkabau society in West Sumatra, which was influenced by Hinduism in an earlier period, women hold a higher social position than men under the matrilineal system. In Bali, where most of the population are Hindus and are under a patrilineal system, men hold a higher position than women. The difference in social position is significant in how we should understand the cultures of the Minangkabau and the Balinese society in the context of modern and modern Indonesia.

It is important to note that Bali is only one and the latest of a Hindu

mosaic in Southeast Asia (Ramstedt, 1999: 403). The Hindu religion in Bali is named as Water Religion or *Agama Tirta*. The meaning of water or “*tirta*” refers to the River of Sindhu in India (Ardhana, 2016: 1). At the present time, there are a number of common grounds between Balinese Hinduism and Indian Hinduism. For instance, in Indian Hinduism many people look upon *Brahman* as the supreme God. In Balinese Hinduism, many people take upon *Sanghyang Widhi Wasa* as the supreme God. The Balinese term of *Sanghyang Widhi Wasa* is just like *Brahman*, since *Sanghyang Widhi Wasa* is believed to encompass global dualities. This can be seen in *Kakawin Sutasoma*, written by Mpu Tantular as follows:

“*Rwaneka dhatu winuwus war-a Budha Wiswa. Bhineka rakwa ringapan kena parwanosen. Mangkang jinatwa kalawan siwatwa tunggal. Bhineka tunggal ika tan hana dharmam mangrwa*”.

In the Balinese terminology, it is well known as *Rwa Bhineda*, in which the ideology of unity and diversity later developed.

In Balinese Hinduism, *Sanghyang Widhi Wasa* is believed to have several avatars, and most of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses of Bali were traditionally merged. Indeed, there are similarities between the beliefs of Balinese Hinduism and Indian Hinduism. However, a number of Balinese Hindu beliefs and practices were merged into Balinese Hinduism

d knife while another hand holds membered head, on her neck necklace of skulls. In Balinese Hinduism, the Kali is a far departure from the native Kali as represented in Indian Hindu belief. In Bali Hinduism, Kali is called as Rangda, and is believed to be among the avatars of Dewi Durga. The story of Durga

developed in Bali most likely during the 10th to 11th century within the context of the story of Calonarang in East Java. According to the local tradition in Bali, the Calonarang is Mahendradatta, a wife of the king Udayana. Until now, the Balinese believe that the soul of Mahendradatta is Durga, the consort of Shiva.[]

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