



## Memunjung, a feast for the dead

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### ABSTRACT

*Memunjung* is a form of respect and solidarity with the deceased. It realizes by the family visiting their late relative in cemetery, then spend their time having meals together with the dead. The tradition has been practicing since the Hindu-Buddhist period. It is well developed both in Java and Bali. The community practices this activity on certain days, such as *Galungan*, *Kuningan* and *Pagerwesi* day while in Java, they carry out *Memunjung* during holidays such as *Idul Fitri*. Balinese Hindu offers *Tampelan punjung* and *Banten punjung* to the spirit of ancestors, families or relatives at

home or cemetery. In certain days, the visitor brings the deceased's favorite food to the cemetery then they enjoy the meal together with the dead. Recently, the custom to visit the grave is rarely done by Balinese, especially to those who live in regional areas that do not have strict rules about burial. Some argue that the increasing Balinese's standard of living as well as technological advancements, contribute to change people mindset about the funeral in the present. Hence, there are only a few areas that are still practicing burial for the dead.

**Keyword:** *Memunjung*, Offering, Burial

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### BACKGROUND

*Pitra Yadnya* has a philosophical meaning to pay respect for the ancestor.<sup>1</sup> The Ancestor has a special place for Balinese. In their daily activities, the Balinese asks for a blessing to their late forefather. They always establish direct contact with the deceased, even though the relationship is invisible, but deep in their heart, they believe the dead watches their offspring, families, and relatives in this world. Surround them with protection, and as a beacon to guide the living. The Law of Reincarnation, and *Karmaphala* teaching strongly rooted in Balinese society. The philosophical background of the ritual. They believe human behavior in this world affects the ancestor in the netherworld.<sup>2</sup>

*Memunjung* is a form of respect and solidarity with the deceased. It realizes by the family visiting the cemetery, then spend their time having meals together with the dead. The community practices this activity on certain days, such as *Galungan*, *Kuningan* and *Pagerwesi* day. It is said that the tradition is a custom acculturation between Java and Bali, that has been passed down from generation to generation, since the day Hindu-Buddhist teachings being introduced to the island of the Gods.

### A HERITAGE FROM THE PAST

The *Memunjung* tradition has been practiced since the Hindu-Buddhist period. It is well

developed both in Java and Bali. The Balinese practices the culture since they hold Hinduism as their religion. While in the land of Java the tradition survives as a real form of acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist with Moeslem. Moreover, Balinese who hold Christian as their religion is still practicing the tradition until nowadays.<sup>3</sup>

According to Winata in his article entitled *Tradisi Memunjung saat Hari Raya di Jawa dan Bali*, he explicitly mentions that similar custom and terms are well known for Javanese. They carry out *Memunjung* during holidays such as *Idul Fitri*. The meaning is more or less the same; to pay homage to the elder. If in Bali, they only visit the deceased, then in Java, Javanese also visit their living elder or parent. *Memunjung* in Java is usually to visit older women especially mother or grandmother. Additionally, there is also a *punjung* offering placed in the living room. Unlike sophisticated Balinese offering, their *punjung* is a jar full of sweet cookies. It acts as offering for the spirits or as welcome snacks for their living families who may visit them when the feast day arrives.<sup>4</sup>

The Chairperson of the *Paruman Walaka of Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI) Buleleng Regency, Dewa Nyoman Suardana explains that Hindus who still have deceased families or relatives that have not been cremated through Ngaben ceremony, they are compulsory to visit the dead and bring them offerings, food or *Punjung*. It is clearly mentioned in the manuscript

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**Figure 1** Memunjung is a form of respect and solidarity with the deceased. It realizes by the family visiting the cemetery, then spend their time having meals together with the dead<sup>5</sup>

of *Medang Kemulan* and *Usana Dewa*. As the form of *Pitra Yadnya*, the holy and sincere sacrifice for the ancestors, it has a meaning more than to pay respect for the late family or relative. This activity also serves as a form of bonding and as a reminder to the living that there are blood ties that connect their families.<sup>6</sup>

## THE OFFERING

Balinese Hindu offers *Tampelan punjung* and *Banten punjung* to the spirit of dead ancestors, families or relatives. If the body of the deceased is not yet been cremated, in another word, still buried in the cemetery, then, in every particular holy day such as *Galungan*, *Kuningan*, *Pagerwesi*, *Tumpek*, *Anggara Kasih* and so on, the mourner or relatives are compulsory to provide offerings on the grave.

The offerings are simple *Banten Sodan* or *Canang Jempani*, *Tampelan Punjung* and *canang genten kembang ura*. *Tampelan punjung* consists of plates made of banana leaves; betel leaves in an odd number (3 or 5), two sets of cone-shaped banana leave, tobacco and three slices of areca nut

Sometimes, the visitor brings the deceased's favorite food. They put the food or the drink on a banana leave plate or any disposable plate and leave the offering on the grave mound. They Sprinkle the offering with holy water, burn incense, and call the deceased's name to enjoy the meal.

Whereas for the deceased who has passed the *Ngaben* procession, the family presents the *punjung* in *Bale Peyadnyan* or offering pavilion at their house. In general, the offering is similar to the one at the grave. However they put the *sodan* on a small table or tray, *Pulu* contains rice grain, areca nuts, betel nuts, betel leaves, *gambir*, *Tampelan Punjung*,



**Figure 2** *Tampelan punjung* and *Banten punjung*<sup>7</sup>

and additionally, the deceased's favorite food

If we classify the offering based on the time it is given, there are daily, and specific day offering. The specific one is usually presented at the cemetery; then the visitor enjoys the meal together with the dead. They are going to call the dead's name, expecting the spirit would come to appreciate the *punjung* offerings that have been provided before it. The visitor then wishes the late to reach tranquillity and happiness in their new world. It is essential to offer *canang* and incense, as a form of sanctification, therefore it becomes a holy offering. It acts as a transmission for the ancestors who did not have time to join the feast. Thus the core essence or *Amertha* from the offerings may reach them, wherever they currently are. Therefore, it would please them.<sup>6</sup>

## MEMUNJUNG IN PRESENT

As time goes by, *Memunjung* tradition slowly begins to fade in the middle of hustle bustle living of modern Balinese. In fact, for the Balinese themselves, nowadays the term is only familiar in some areas on the island. In recent days, the tradition to visit cemetery is rarely seen, especially in regional areas that do not have strict rules about burial.

In the past, the procession of *Ngaben* was a ceremony that could not be done by many people since it spends a lot of money. Additionally, the ceremony should only be done on certain days

Banten Punjung untuk Almarhum yang sudah diaben :



**Figure 3** Offering for The late that has been through Ngaben ceremony<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 4** Memunjung tradition slowly begins to fade in the middle of hustle bustle living of modern Balinese<sup>8</sup>

which makes the community unable to carry out the ceremony carelessly. Hence, burial is commonly done by Balinese people at that time, while waiting for the right time and sufficient fund to conduct the Ngaben ceremony.

According to the community's account, the increasing Balinese's standard of living, accompanied by technological advancements contribute to change people mindset about the funeral in the present. The majority of Balinese are now able to carry out the procession for their deceased family. As a result, the number of burials is decreasing. A well-established economy also creates new habits in society. When a member of a family passed away, and in the next few days, there is no good day to do Ngaben ceremony; then the family commonly decide to leave the body in the hospital that provides mortuary rental facility. Should the right day have been in a matter of time, the body will be taken home and treated for the procession sake. According to the community, it saves them from spending a lot of money. It is also more efficient since they do not need to carry out two ceremonies; burial, and then Ngaben in the future.

We might now able to see the tradition of memunjung in the cemetery around Klungkung, Gianyar, Tabanan, and especially in Singaraja regency. Chief of Pakraman Buleleng village, Singaraja regency, Jro Nyoman Sutrisna revealed, currently, the tradition of visiting the dead has begun to fall due to there are many people who

no longer carry out burial ceremonies. Usually to the family who are unable to carry out the Ngaben ceremony, they choose to do *mekingsan ring geni* ceremony. In Pakraman Buleleng Village, the tradition of Munjung is still sustainable for the people of Banjar Jawa. Meanwhile, for other Banjar, it is no longer a common custom.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

Memunjung is a tradition that emphasizes respect and solidarity with the deceased. Family and relative of the dead, visit the cemetery, then spend their time having meals together with the dead. It is believed that the tradition has been existing since the Hindu-Buddhist era. Moreover, It is well developed not only in Bali but also in Java. Recently, the custom to visit the grave is rarely done by Balinese, especially to those who live in regional areas that do not have binding rules about burial. Some argue that the increasing standard of living of the Balinese, as well as technological advancements, contribute to change people mindset about the funeral in the present. Thus, there are only a few areas that are still practicing burial for the dead.

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