



## Balinese Dogs: From Hero of the temple to dinner on the table

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### ABSTRACT

Bali is known as the islands of 1000 temples, Bali has a fascinating history about dogs. It is stated in the *Mahaprasthanika Parva* (Book of the Great Journey) on *Mahabharata* Story, after the end of the big war at Kurukshetra, Dharmawangsa (Yudistira) without any hesitation said that he would not go to heaven without his dog. He chose to suffer in the mortal world with his dog because the dog accompanied him throughout the journey. The journey of Yudhishtira to heaven accompanied by a dog, then inspires the Hindu Balinese people, in honor of the dog as a symbol of loyalty. No wonder, Balinese treat dog not as a pet but as a loyal friend. However, Animals Australia investigation team' member under

pseudonym 'Luke' on his interview conducted by Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC), claimed to have done a veiled investigation to uncover the practice of dog meat trade for consumption on the island of Bali. The man conducted a four-month investigation on the island, armed with small video cameras and mobile phones; he managed to document the activities of dog trading; ranging from how to catch the dog to how the meat is traded. Regarding the case, Government of Bali mentioned there is no such thing has been done in Bali. However, on several occasion, the dog is indeed used as a part of the ceremony. In the same time, the government also investigated the disseminated issue. However, they found nothing.

Keyword: Dog, Meat, Bali

Cite This Article: Ida Ayu Yuni Prasasti, Balinese Dogs: From Hero of the temple to dinner on the table. Bali Tourism Journal (BTJ)2017, 1 (1): 9-11

### INTRODUCTION

Bali is known as the islands of 1000 temples, Bali has a fascinating history about dogs. It is stated on *Mahaprasthanika Parva* (Book of the Great Journey) of *The Mahabharata*. After the end of the big war at Kurukshetra, Dharmawangsa (Yudistira) the oldest brother of the Pandavas, went on a journey to Mount Mahameru that was once believed as the gate of heaven, the journey symbolizes the willingness to break away from the human body toward nature and the pure spirit realm. In the journey, all of his brothers died caused by their action in the past life. Yudistira soon continued his lonely journey, only accompanied by a little dog that He found earlier in his journey.

Through all the struggling and pain they have to endure, this dog proved to be loyal and never gave up to Yudistira as his feet began to worries, until finally after a long and hard thunderous rain, they arrived at the gate of Heaven, guarded by Lord Indra Himself (Figure 1). Lord Indra welcomed Yudistira to heaven, with one rule, the dog may not enter heaven with him.

Then Yudistira without any hesitation said that he would not go to heaven without his dog, and chose to suffer in the mortal world with his dog. Lord Indra became furious and yelled that Yudhishtira had lost his mind, there is ultimate

happiness and an end to all the sorrow if he goes to heaven, what does a dog have to do with such rewarding pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

The journey of Yudhishtira to heaven accompanied by a dog, then inspires the Balinese Hindu, in honor of the dog as a symbol of loyalty. Dogs in Balinese society are considered as 'loyal friends,' so it is not surprising that many Balinese people keep dogs as pet. In the ceremony, the dog is used as an offering, with the prayer it will get a better place in next life. For Balinese people, respect for animals and plants is a must for the sake of maintaining the harmony of nature. Exploitation of the universe and its contents is something that should not be done.

However, the image seems to be indisputable in the following interview quotes:

"I began the investigation by pinpointing and getting to know the key players in Bali's completely unregulated dog meat industry. Eventually, they invited me to join them as their gangs stole, hunted, poisoned and killed dogs. "They believed I was interested in filming the preparation of local cuisine. That enabled me to have access to all aspects of the trade, from catching, to slaughter, to the butchering of dogs. Pretending that I wasn't devastated every time that I saw a dog being horrifically abused was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do as an investigator. "I have trained myself to

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Received: 23 June 2017  
Accepted: 22 July 2017  
Published: 25 July 2017



**Figure 1.** Yudistira and his dog arrived at the gate of Heaven, guarded by Lord Indra Himself <sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2.** Immediately sell it to the buyer <sup>4</sup>

cope with cruelty, but nothing prepared me for the brutal catching of dogs in a village. I focussed on my camera work, but it was gut-wrenching to hear these dogs voice their sense of betrayal. They were screaming and wailing in terror and sorrow.”<sup>3</sup>

The quote above is interview transcript of acknowledgment by an ‘Animals Australia investigation team’ member under pseudonym

‘Luke.’ The interview was published on the Australian Broadcasting Corp (ABC), where he claimed to have conducted a veiled investigation to uncover the practice of dog meat trade on the island of Bali. Armed with small video cameras and mobile phones, the man who conducted a four-month investigation on the island managed to document the activities of dog trading; ranging from how to catch the dog to how the meat is traded.

## THE INVESTIGATION

The result of his investigation shows that dog meat is obtained by catching stray dogs that roam on streets. The activity was carried out by a ‘Gangs’ of people who served as ‘dog hunters.’ They poison a stray dog on the street with cyanide poison, catch it, and immediately sell it to the buyer (Figure 2). It also revealed the dog meat is sold in the form of ‘RW’ satay to tourists who visit Bali.

Luke also mentioned that ‘the greatest shock was to discover that tourists are unwittingly eating dog meat and fuelling the trade. The average tourist coming to Bali has no idea that ‘RW’ on the outside of the street food stalls indicates dog meat. Mobile dog meat vendors are trawling famous beaches in Bali selling satay from buckets, deliberately not telling people the origin of the meat and when asked, they lie’. Meanwhile, the issue of dog trade is getting serious public attention, after interviews and photo and video documentation is viral in social media. A Tourists from Australia, Colin Carr, commented. “People will not come here (Bali) if they keep hearing stories about dog meat, especially if you can buy dog meat on the streets, then you think you’re eating chicken, beef or fish. In fact, you eat dog meat. Oh, no!” He said.<sup>5</sup>

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In response, Bali Public Relation Officer, Yadnya, said in his email to BBC Indonesia that there was no such an action had been done in Bali. He mentioned that in Bali, people fondly take care the dog. Dog become a symbol of a faithful beast, according to the Mahabharata story. If anyone says that dog meat is served to a tourist in a restaurant that is simply not true. “Yadnya added that in Bali no one sells dog meat to restaurants or public places.” For a dog with a particular color in Bali, it is indeed used as a ceremony with the intention of paying homage to the dog. Because the Hindus believe in reincarnation so that the dog in the future can incarnate into a better creature,” Yadnya added.<sup>4</sup> Similar statements were also expressed by Governor of Bali, Made Mangku Pastika. “The news reported in the social media about dogs in Bali was brutally

killed and sold as satay was wrong. I have checked it. It is not true," he said.<sup>4</sup>

The Bali Provincial Government clarified the information of satay made from dog meat in an object that circulated in some media by fielding investigation team to the area. The head of the Livestock Service Office and Animal Health of Bali Province, I Putu Sumantra, said that "Once there is information, we immediately coordinate with village officials and continue to investigate the location of the so-called sales venue. But until today, we have never seen anyone offering dogs satay to tourists," Sumantra continued, in the information circulating, it is said that the dog used for the satay was killed by using cyanide poison. Indeed, this issue is very disturbed the image of tourism. The issue is a grave threat to health. "If it is true that the meat sold comes from Cyanide poisoned dogs, it is lethal and can cause death to those who consume it," he said while speaking at *Podium Bali Bebas Bicara* (PB3AS).

Therefore, Sumantra invites all components of society to raise awareness by participating in supervision. Also, he noted the importance of conducting an investigation to the party who disseminated the information. "We need to know who spread the information and what their intention," Sumantra said. He is concerned that there might be certain intentions behind this issue. Moreover, the information has not been proven yet. Still, in his oration, Sumantra also informed that dog meat is not listed as a group of 'foodstuffs derived from animals.' "This means that such meat is only consumed by certain communities," he said. In the same time, he also acknowledged that this issue becomes a challenge for him in solving rabies cases.

As it previously reported, it is known that investigators from Australian animal protection NGOs recorded the 'killing of the dogs,' after doing four months undercover and infiltrated into the dog trade network in Bali. They pretended to be filmmakers who interested in the process of making local cuisine. The undercover investigators were invited by a restaurant owner to witness how people caught dogs in Kintamani, north of Bali. They see for themselves how the animals were poisoned with cyanide. Cyanide poison is not destroyed after cooking, therefore eating animal flesh that is

poisoned with cyanide is very harmful to human health. Bali's animal rights organization demanded on the governor of Bali to ban the consumption of dog meat. Nearly 75,000 people have signed Their online petition. The group estimates, annually in Bali, there are 70,000 dogs poisoned, shot, or beaten to death and then sold the meat.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The circulation of rumors about the practice of dog meat trade on the island by the Australian media becomes a major problem to Bali tourism. Moreover, it is alleged that the sold meat is a dog meat killed by cyanide poison and then sold to tourists who visit Bali. Also, besides concerned regarding health, this issue also affects the image of Bali tourism, in which is very harmonious with nature. The government has conducted an investigation to follow up on the circulated information, but so far has not gotten any findings. The government also appealed to the public to be more vigilant and participate in monitoring the practice.

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