



## A brief concept of Nyegara Gunung: an intertwine of sacred mountain and mystical sea

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### ABSTRACT

Many legends, myths, and folktales discuss mountain and its central position for people. From base to top, the mountain summit holds the highest spiritual value, because the place is considered close to heaven. Balinese folk divided the land into three sectors: highland for the immortal beings, mainland for human, and in the dark depth trench, reside spirit of the abyss. Since the beach is the closest area to the underworld, the Balinese forefather avoided spending their time on the coastline. The teaching about the mystical mountain and mythical water have been passed throughout generations and probably become a chief reason for them to respectfully hold

their tradition in respecting both the areas. This concept is called *Nyegara Gunung*. It stands on the truth that the mountain and the sea are part of mother nature that gives tremendous impact on life. Many customs around the globe also share the concept of the sacred mountain as well as a myth about the sea. The folk views environment conservation becomes the primary key to live in harmony. Therefore they stand for anything in regards to keep the nature undisturbed. Through ritual, they express their gratitude to the supreme being as well as to teach their offspring to respect what they have on the island.

**Keyword:** Nyegara gunung, mountain, sea

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### INTRODUCTION

Upon visiting Bali, if one lucky enough, may find a festive ceremony being celebrated on great temple of Besakih. Alternatively, witness a march of white-dressed Balinese carrying colorful relics to the nearest beach. A question arises, what is that ritual called?. The simplest explanation by local might be a completely new term, namely *Nyegara Gunung*. However, what is the reason behind this custom?

### THE INSEPARABLE MOUNTAIN AND SEA

Many legends, myths, and folktales discuss mountain and its central position for people. We may observe by our naked eyes its fertile area provides tonnes of nutrients for trees to grow, and become a sanctuary for wildlife to proliferate. Numerous mineral resources extracted from the earth in these hill areas, then utilized by humans for their needs. Meanwhile, from a socio-religious perspective, the mountain is considered sacred. Some may be familiar with the journey of *Pandava* to the summit of Mahameru to reach heaven or the myth about Lord Zeus who rules from his throne at the top of Mount Olympus. Other places such as Mount Sinai in Judaism and its descendant religions, Hara Berezaiti in Zoroastrianism, Mount Kailash for Hinduism, Mount Etna in Italy, many

others. these stories addressed the mountain as a sacred place.<sup>1,2</sup>

From base to top, the mountain summit holds the highest spiritual value, because the place is considered close to heaven. Similar beliefs are shared by Hindus who live on the island of God, Bali. The dogma was shared from the acculturation, after Ancient Javanese kingdom conquest to Bali in the ninth century.<sup>4</sup> According to the Balinese belief, every high, towering thing is powerful and has a good nature. Obviously, the mountain is the most elevated thing one may find on earth. There are several peaks of more than 2,000 meters height on the land, such as Mount Batur, Mount Agung, Mount Abang, and Batukaru. Mountains scatter from the center to the east coast, with Gunung Agung as the easternmost peak. Bali's volcanic properties have contributed to its extraordinary fertility, and its high mountains provide high rainfall, which supports a highly productive agricultural sector.<sup>5</sup>

One of the many legends of universe creation believed by the folk sees Bali as the whole universe, floating on a carapace of a giant turtle, *Bedawang*.<sup>6</sup> Balinese folk divided the land into three sectors: highland for the immortal beings, mainland for human, and in the dark depth trench, reside spirit of the abyss. Since the beach is the closest area to the underworld, the Balinese forefather avoided spending their time on the coastline. In contrast,

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**Figure 1.** Bali's volcanic properties have contributed to its extraordinary fertility, and its high mountains provide high rainfall, which supports a highly productive agricultural sector<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2.** Melasti ceremony is to eliminate negative energies upon human and nature<sup>11</sup>

today we may see that the coast area attracts the most tourists to spend their holiday gazing at the horizon of Bali famous sunset. The island of Bali has a width of about 153 km and stretches around 112 km north to south. Administratively, covers 5,780 km<sup>2</sup> with a population density of around 750 people / km<sup>2</sup>. Coral reefs surround the island, black sandy beach on the north to east part and white sandy beach on its southern part. In the depth of the sea, various creatures such as sharks, barracudas, deadly sea snakes, and poisonous fish are sneaking between the coral reefs.<sup>7</sup>

The teaching about the mystical mountain and mythical water have been passed throughout

generations and probably become a chief reason for them to respectfully hold their tradition in respecting both the areas. The mountains with their lakes and rivers are home to the land of fertility, and they stand for everything that is holy and prosperity. Their fear for the sea as well as the hill is a spiritual fear that prevents them from overexploiting nature. They also believe that mountains and oceans are closely related. Everything that happens on the mountain will affect the sea, on the other side of the coin, the condition of the ocean will have a significant influence on the land.<sup>8</sup>

## THE RITUAL

In *Lontar Purana Bali* script, environment conservation becomes the primary key to live in harmony.<sup>9</sup> The idea is well known as *Sad kertih*, which covers preservation for the soul, ocean, forest, freshwater source, social life, and individual health. The seas and forests as part of the *kertih* that play a crucial role for inhabitant creatures. The people take great care to preserve it based on the script. Some of Siwagama Texts also mention mythology regarding the connection between life and the sea.<sup>10</sup>

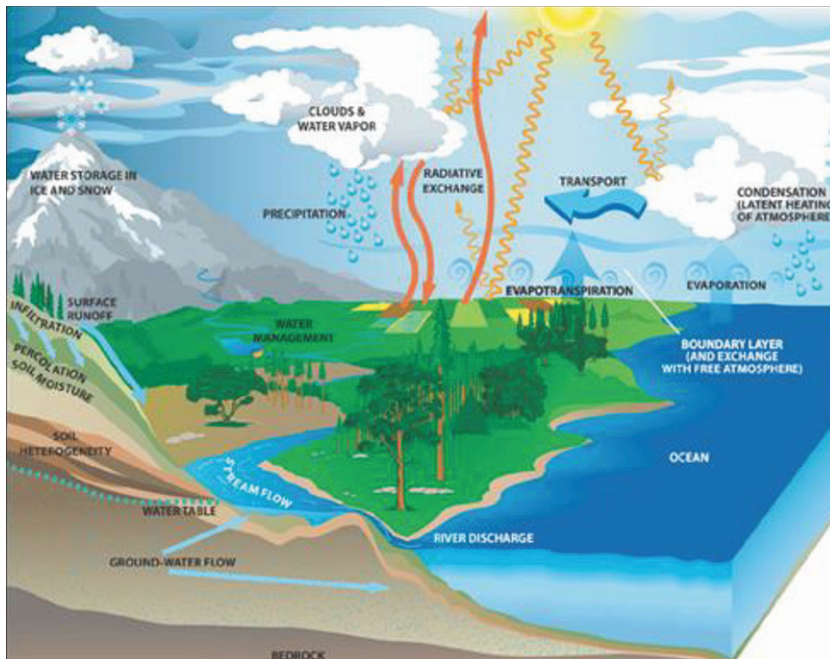
In the religious practice of Balinese Hindu, people pray to the sea to invoke *Tirtha Amertha*, the elixir of life through *Melasti* ceremony. According to *Sundari Gama* Manuscript, *Melasti* ceremony is to eliminate negative energies upon human and nature.<sup>12</sup> We may easily find the procession several days before the celebration of *Nyepi* on the ninth month of Balinese calendar. From a young age to elder, march together and flocked the nearest beach to do a *Melasti*. The procession is annually held before *Nyepi*; however, on some occasions such as *Ngusaba* and *Nangkluk Merana*, the folk may as well perform the ritual.

Similarly, in *Pitra yadnya* ceremony, a ceremony for the deceased. The mourning family spread the ashes to the sea, as a symbol returning the body to the universe. Those ritual practices stand on a concept called *Nyegara Gunung*.<sup>13</sup>

## THE PHILOSOPHY

*Nyegara Gunung*; A philosophy that believes between the sea and the mountain is inseparable yet supporting one another. Every action on the mountain as upstream will have a direct impact on the ocean, as the downstream. One prominent example of this relation is easy to understand; the sun heats seawater, and it falls as rain. Then, the trees absorb the water through a process called the hydrologic cycle. Freshwater flows into the river or as groundwater, nourishing plants, animal and the human as well. *Nyegara Gunung* is a spiritual





**Figure 3.** Illustration of Hydrologic cycle<sup>14</sup>

poise *Rwa bhineda*, a dualism teaching in Balinese society itself, similar like good and bad, day and night, male and female, mountain and sea, *luan-teben*, or holy-unholy. The Nyegara Gunung acts as the principal foundation of the spatial concept in Balinese culture.

Some scholars argue that the concept of Nyegara Gunung is a real-life example of *Lingga and yoni*. The Mountain as a manifestation of “Lingga” is a place where “Lord Shiva” resides whereas the Ocean, which covers 71% surface of the earth,<sup>15</sup> as the embodiment of “Yoni,” a place where Siwa’s essence resides. Lingga Yoni is symbolic *Purusa Pradana* (male and female). The intertwine of Purusa and Pradana will give birth to wealth and prosperous life.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of *Nyegara Gunung* stands on the truth that the mountain and the sea are part of mother nature that gives tremendous impact on life. Many customs around the globe also share the concept of the sacred mountain as well as a myth about the sea.

The folk views environment conservation becomes the primary key to live in harmony. Therefore they stand for anything in regards to keep the nature undisturbed. Through ritual, they express their gratitude to the supreme being as well as to teach their offspring to respect what they have on the island.

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