



## Siat Yeh : an appreciation to water source – Cultural Tradition in Jimbaran and Gianyar

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### ABSTRACT

Balinese daily life is closely related to spiritual practices as a religious society. Various traditions are held on the island closely associated with their religious life, Whether it is a piodalan series at a temple or in a series of Hindu religious holidays. Every area has its distinguished ways of expressing gratitude to the higher being. one of them is the Siat Yeh, a tradition common in Banjar Teba, Jimbaran and Suwet Village, Gianyar. Balinese people interpret water as a source of life. The spirit of water conservation has been passed down through various ritual activities, including the Siat Yeh activities in Jimbaran and Suwat Village. The Siat Yeh tradition in Banjar Teba, Jimbaran, was an ancient tradition that the residents had revived. It is expected that the meeting of two holy water sources from Suwung Beach and Segara Beach would

bring prosperity to the residents. People believe by meeting these two sacred waters would bring positive energy for them. Aside from a symbol of respect for the two holy water sources, the people of Banjar Teba hope that Siat Yeh will become a legacy that can be passed on to future generations. The villagers of Suwat, Gianyar, also carry out similar Water war activities. Albeit different in some of its technical processes, this hereditary tradition is also a means to worship ancient water sources that have previously supported community survival and hitherto. This activity has become an annual event that has successfully attracted the attention of many visitors to participate. Its simple activities are the primary reason many tourists were interested in seeing this cultural heritage.

**Keyword:** Siat Yeh, Water, War, Jimbaran, Gianyar

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### BACKGROUND

Balinese daily life is closely related to spiritual practices as a religious society. Various traditions are held on the island closely associated with their religious life, Whether it is a piodalan series at a temple or in a series of Hindu religious holidays. Every area has its distinguished ways of expressing gratitude to the higher being. one of them is the Siat Yeh, a tradition common in Banjar Teba, Jimbaran and Suwet Village, Gianyar.

Jimbaran is a village in the administrative area of South Kuta District, Badung Regency. This area which is famous for its seafood gastronomy tourism, is located in the south of the island of Bali. Part of its territory is bordered by the sea, making Jimbaran Village have a beautiful beach line with white sandy beaches. In addition to the surrounding environment being managed as a tourism area, the residents of Jimbaran Village also still preserve the Siat Yeh tradition, a unique tradition held by the residents of Jimbaran Village every Ngembak Geni holiday (the day after Nyepi).

Jimbaran Traditional Village has two springs; namely, in the East, it is called *Suwung* Beach (swamp water), while in the west, it is called *Segara* Beach. The Siat Yeh tradition is a tradition that is

carried out the day after Nyepi Day *Ngembak Geni* by the Jimbaran community. After a full day, the people of Jimbaran Traditional Village carried out Catur Brata Penyepian. The next day, the Jimbaran indigenous communities would gather at Ulun Suwi Temple with their children to play on the water or *makecel-kecelan* in the local's tongue. Young people from Banjar Teba would mostly become the most dominant participants.

On occasion, the societies were divided into two groups. The first group was communities from Br. Teba, Br. JeroKuta, Br. Kalang Anyar and Br. They would be assigned to go to the East, namely Suwung beach (swamp). While the societies of Br. Menega, Br. Pesalakan, Br. Mekar Sari and Br. Ubung would be asked to the west, namely Segara Beach (sea). Then, after reaching the sea and the swamps, they would take the water and pour water from one group to another. This activity has been carried out for a long time. Then, the mekecel-kecelan activity developed under the name Siat Yeh Tradition.<sup>1</sup>

### A SPIRIT TO RESPECT WATER SOURCES

To understand the spirit behind Siat Yeh, first, it is important to understand the ritual's meaning. Philosophically, the Siat Yeh tradition is divided

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into two words, namely Siat and Yeh. The word “Siat” means war. The context of the war in ‘Siat Yeh’ indicates an eternal war in humans’ hearts. Every day, human beings have to deal with good and bad thoughts that may significantly impact themselves and their environment. At the same time, the word “Yeh” means water as a source of life that should be protected and respected. The water spring and its vicinity are a purified space for the Balinese. Despite its primary function to fulfill domestic needs, water from springs is often used for Balinese Hindu rituals.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, by keeping the water spring preserved, it is believed that prosperity would come to those who defend it. The Siat Yeh tradition is also interpreted as bringing together two water sources in the Jimbaran Traditional Village. The water sources are seawater on the Segara beach and fresh water at Suwung beach.

For Jimbaran Traditional Village’s community, the custom embodies gratitude and devotion to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. Human attitude towards

nature consists of three perspectives: submission to nature, harmonization to nature, and mastering nature. Balinese people tend to be harmonious with nature; thus, the balance will be maintained. Balinese people view nature as the source of life on earth. Hence, it needs to be conserved for their survival and future generations.<sup>3</sup>

There would be offerings accompanied by various art performances as embodiments of local’s expression to the Almighty God in its implementation. People of Jimbaran conduct the ritual to preserve their ancestor’s legacy. It is held every six months, after the celebration of Nyepi. Balinese culture believes water is a medium to cleanse body and spirit to achieve a higher purity level. In the day after Nyepi, Ngembak Geni, people celebrate the day by celebrating water as a symbol of prosperity, then use it to purify themselves. It is all included on the Siat Yeh.<sup>4</sup>

Another perspective said that the local custom symbolizes mass water purification or *Penglukatan Agung*. It can be seen from the beginning of the ritual, where the community started their tradition by *mendak Tirta*, a process to obtain two holy water. Freshwater is obtained from the east coast (Suwung beach), while saltwater is retrieved at the West coast (Segara beach). According to the elders, before many buildings were erected in the Village, the water from these two springs would naturally flood and mix on high tide. The meeting of two water sources, *campuhan*, is believed to emit a strong spiritual power; thus, the water is commonly used as the medium to hold purification rituals. The energy from the Segara and Suwung waters, if managed properly, is believed to have a positive impact on the Jimbaran community.

Most of the residents made a living on these two beaches in the past. Suwung Beach in the East was a site to produce salt. Meanwhile, in the west were potential spots for anglers to fish. Later, they traded salt and fish to other villages to fulfill their clothing and food needs.<sup>6</sup>

However, the rapid development of hotels and tourism-related infrastructures has resulted in the two water junctions being unable to occur naturally. Due to this reason, through Siat Yeh, the community sought to reunite the two springs as a means of worship. According to local villagers, if the two springs can meet, it would provide positive energy to the people of Jimbaran then prosperity would be blessed to everyone.

The youth of the Banjar Teba pioneered the return of an ancient tradition. Initially, they desired to revive the forgotten rite in Jimbaran. Since 1983 Jimbaran has never held Siat Yeh due to unknown reasons. Seeing the condition of Jimbaran Village,



**Figure 1.** The group from Suwung Beach wore traditional white costumes. Accompanied by traditional music Baleganjur, both groups would march to the pointed destinations to finish their duty. They would take scoop the water, put it on the clay-jug container, and parade it back to Banjar Teba.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2.** The Group of Br. Menega, Br. Pesalakan, Br. Mekar Sari and Br. Ubung wore the traditional yellow costume. They would be asked to retrieve the saltwater to the west, namely Segara Beach (sea).<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3.** While singing and showing their joy, they immediately splashed each other with the holy water to unify the two springs in the Village. The ritual is held at *catus pata* Banjar Teba, Jimbaran<sup>5</sup>

which is close to two springs, they decided to coordinate with the *penglingsir* (elders). From the meeting, they finally agreed to reconstruct their ancient tradition with the concept of Siat Yeh, which is now being carried out in Banjar Teba, Jimbaran.

The youth and women of Jimbaran Village, especially Banjar Teba, really hope to remove worldly impurities and provide positive energy by holding the Siat Yeh Tradition annually. Balinese people believe every physical space or aspect has a soul within. To conserve the soul's existence, they provide it with rituals. Besides appreciating the ritual's philosophical reasons, the tradition is expected to attract foreign tourists to Jimbaran. The Siat Yeh tradition is similar to the traditional Balinese game, *meguyonan* (joking). They construct a concept of the current Siat Yeh from the game that everyone can see. Today, *Sekaa Truna-Truni* Bhakti Asih (Youth Organization), Residents of Banjar Teba Jimbaran, have an icon; thus, someday, they may proudly pass the legacy to their offspring.

### TRADITIONAL GAME IN SACRED ATMOSPHERE

The Siat Yeh tradition will begin with dividing the group into two groups. The first group would retrieve holy water at the Eastern Beach, and the second group at the western beach. Accompanied by traditional music *Baleganjur*, both groups would march to the pointed destinations to finish their duty. They would take scoop the water, put it on the clay-jug container, and parade it back to Banjar Teba.

At Banjar Teba, a group of girls from the *Sekaa Truni* Bhakti Asih would welcome the holy waters with a performance of *Rejang Sari* dance, a welcoming dance, as an expression of joy in embracing the sacred water. Next, four women

face each other when the dance ends, placing a jug above their heads. They would crack the jar to mix the water from those two different sources. The Siat Yeh is about to begin.

However, before pouring the water to each other, the youths would cheerfully sing, similar to traditional children's games. The song is *Sekar rare*, a common folk song that children sing while playing. Its lyric describes the joy of living in coastal areas.

*"Idupe metanah pasih, Idupe metanah suwung. pade alih, pade sikiang. Menadi tunggal apang nawang kangin kauh."*

The song's stanzas illustrate that the folk lived on mother earth. As a symbol of life, water reflects the effort to make a useful life. After the opening ritual, The committee would start pouring water to a small coconut shell or *cetok*, which marks the start of the tradition. While singing and showing their joy, they immediately splashed each other with the holy water to unify the two springs in the Village. The ritual is held at *catus pata*, cross junctions of Banjar Teba, Jimbaran.<sup>7</sup>

The bodies of young people on the west side are covered with sand. At the same time, the east side is covered in mud to represent their springs—sand as a symbol of seawater, and then mud represents the swamp water.<sup>8</sup>

### WATER WAR TRADITION IN SUWAT, GIANYAR

Another Siat Yeh exists in Suwat Village, Gianyar. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, the residents of Suwat Village spend their time all day to conduct a water War or Siat Yeh. This mandatory custom is held every first day at the beginning of the year, in contrast with Siat Yeh at Jimbaran, which is held after Nyepi Day. It sparks its charm to attract foreign and local tourists who wish to participate in the uniqueness of the local culture. Indeed, this tradition is open to everyone. Therefore, everyone on the location has a great possibility to be doused by water. It would spread a sense of happiness; thus, all feel it and participate in cleaning themselves.

The Water War or Siat Yeh in Gianyar is one of the unique traditions believed to be a form of cleansing oneself from negative things that have happened in the previous year. Thus, in entering the new year, the same bad experiences will not be repeated. According to the folk, the ritual was related to a mythical spring in the previous era. The water was believed to cure any illness, besides King's use for daily consumption. As a symbol of respect to the spring, the residents of Suwat Village were obliged to hold the water war, hoping the springs



**Figure 4.** The Water War or Siat Yeh in Gianyar is one of the unique traditions believed to be a form of cleansing oneself from negative things that have happened in the previous year.<sup>9</sup>

would continue to flow, as an important component for the Village.

Despite no binding sanctions for the community should they not participate in the tradition, there was never mentioned about small participants of the Suwat's Water war in history. Every year, the number of participants gradually increased. The simplicity of the Water War tradition becomes the primary reason the local custom always attracts more people to come.

The participant of the Water War is the village residents, both men and women, from small children to the elderly. For babies and the elderly who cannot participate directly in the location, their family will bring them water to wash after the war is over. Before starting the Water War, the residents of Suwet Village, Gianyar, usually hold mass prayer at the catus pata of Suwat's Village. Five Pemangku would lead the prayer, each sitting facing the four cardinal directions, and one person among the five would sit in the middle. The Villagers solemnly prayed to the God Almighty in his manifestation as Lord Vishnu, symbolized by water. After the prayer was finished, the Village's priest would sprinkle holy water, followed by the participants dividing themselves into two groups and splashing each other.

## CONCLUSION

Balinese people interpret water as a source of life. The spirit of water conservation has been passed down through various ritual activities, including the Siat Yeh activities in Jimbaran and Suwat Village. The Siat Yeh tradition in Banjar Teba, Jimbaran, was an ancient tradition that the residents had revived. It is

expected that the meeting of two holy water sources from Suwung Beach and Segara Beach would bring prosperity to the residents. People believe by meeting these two sacred waters would bring positive energy for them. Aside from a symbol of respect for the two holy water sources, the people of Banjar Teba hope that Siat Yeh will become a legacy that can be passed on to future generations.

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