



Tirtha; A sprinkle to the soul

Ida Ayu Putu Widya Indah Sari¹

ABSTRACT

Balinese believe water has abilities to cleanse and neutralize sin through ritual. People use water in their various activities that related to religious practices. The functions are divided into two categories. First, it has a profane role and the other type; they used water as sacred material. Profane purpose means any activity to apply water as a material to fulfill daily human needs. While water with holy function, indicates it is used in religious activities. It is

called *Tirtha*. According to legend, *Tirtha* is an elixir of immortality. There are two methods to obtain *Tirtha*. Firstly, water is placed in *pelinggih pura* or *merajan* to receive blessings from God Almighty. Second, Balinese obtain *Tirtha* through a ritual that conducted by the priest. Moreover, Balinese people divides several types of holy water, namely *tirtha wangsuhpada*, *tirtha pembersihan*, *tirtha pengelukatan*, *tirtha penembak*, and *tirtha pengentas*.

Keyword: *Tirtha*, Water, Offerings

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INTRODUCTION

Since long time ago, humans, animals, and plants have been surviving on the earth. They depend their lives on the water. Water, which composed from two hydrogens and oxygen, cannot be separated from almost any living things on earth due to its enormous role to fulfill daily human needs, for instance, drinking, washing, bathing, etc. Furthermore, water can be used as the renewable energy sources and also help people to maintain the irrigation system.¹ Since it plays as our primary necessity, people also use water in their various activities that related to religious practices, including Balinese Hindu. People who lived in Bali are commonly known water for religious purpose as *Tirtha*.

THE HISTORY OF TIRTHA

According to legend, the history of *Tirtha* could be tracked in the story of *Mandara Giri* event, which has been written in *Adi Parva*, the first chapter of eighteen books of the *Mahabharata*. Before the human presence in this world, *Tirtha* is treasured as an elixir of immortality. The only places to obtain the *Tirtha* is in the base of *Mandara Giri* mountain. Should anyone reach its lower part, they have to dive into the deepest part of the hill, at the seabed of *Ksira* ocean. As mentioned in Hinduism manuscript, the story has begun with the summit between the God and *detya* (rakshasa). They decided to join their forces as a team, to seek the potion, *Tirtha Amertha*. The method that should be used to retrieve the *tirtha amertha* by stirring the ocean continuously.

To execute the process, *Naga Basukih* assisted the Gods and *detya* by constricting the mountain, then the join forces of Gods and *detya* hold the tail of the dragon and spin the mountain. Meanwhile, to keep the earth stable during the process, Lord Vishnu transformed himself into a giant turtle called *kurma* which assigned to brace the bottom of *Mandara Giri*. After a long and tiring process, *Apsara* (fairy), *Sura* (the Goddess of Wine), *Laksmi* (the Goddess of fortune and prosperity), *Uccaihsrawa* (a type of horse, used as the ride of the God), *Kastubhamani*, *Kalpawreksa* (a tree that fulfill desire), *Kamadhenu* (the ancestor of cow), *Airawata* (the first companion of Lord Indra) and *Dhanwantari*, emerged to the surface carrying the *Tirtha Amertha*. However, the *Tirtha* was quickly stolen by the *detya*. They eagerly wanted to have it since they believed the God would not give them any share. When the holy water was not in the right hand, Lord Vishnu was afraid that the *detya* might abuse the *Tirtha* and turned this world into the chaos.

Then, Lord Vishnu has an idea to sneak into the *detya's* camp, to take the holy water back. Thus, the Lord Vishnu shapeshifted into a beautiful woman. She was immediately asked *detya* for the *Amertha*. Infatuated by Lord Vishnu's disguise, the *detya* without any hesitation returned the elixir to Lord Vishnu. However, after the beautiful woman succeeded in convincing the *detya*, the demon realized they had been tricked and gone rampage. A great war occurred between *detya* and the Lord Vishnu. The battle was over, and the demons experienced great lost from him. Finally, the *Tirtha*

¹Pro 2 RRI Denpasar
widyaindahsari01@gmail.com

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Figure 1 The Mandara Giri event²

Amertha safely carried by the Lord Vishnu and returned to the heaven.³ The Gods share the potion and live in immortality.

In various hymns of Hinduism manuscripts, such as *Atharva Veda* and *Rig Veda*, water is a media that have purification power. Water has nature of *bhutas*, *chitakas*, and *chudaakas*, namely strength as the fundamental element, awareness, and spirituality. The liquid can cleanse and neutralize sin through the ritual process. Apparently, the practice does not mainly belong to Balinese or even Hinduism. A similar tradition has been done by various tribes and religion worldwide, with their respective purposes while mostly practice for sanctification.⁴ Moreover, the Greek also has the same myth about water. According to the Greek's faith, water is known as *Nectar*; the god's drink. Also, based on Greece's history, the water was called *Ambrosia*, means the food of the God. *Ambrosia* is a powerful fluid; it will cause an everlasting life.³

WHO'S CREATE TIRTHA?

As for the Balinese, they believe the water may be divided based upon its function. The functions divide into two categories. First, it has a profane role and the other type; they used water as sacred material. Profane purpose means any activity to apply water as a material to fulfill daily human needs. While water with holy function, which often

called Tirtha, is used in activities related to religious practices.⁵ Tirtha has been created by blessing the water in many certain way and method.

Tirtha is obtained by two methods. Firstly, the water is placed in *pelelingih pura* or *merajan* to receive the blessings directly from the God. By this method, Tirtha is known as *tirtha wangsuh pada* or *banyun cokor*. Second, Balinese also could have it throughout the ritual process conducted by the priest.⁶ The ritual is *Ngareka Tirtha* or creating the holy water or commonly refers as *Pasupati*. The method of transmuting water into Tirtha is by giving a soul into the object by sacred script through a mantra. If the mantra is not cast correctly, the *aksara* that compiled in the holy text would not provide any effect or could not turn the water into the holy water. When the mantra has been successfully delivered to the water, it will be applied as *pengurip bebanten*, to provide *urip* or to live the offerings.

In addition, water is not only the source of tirtha. In any occasion that related to Hindu's ceremony, people use coconut water as tirtha. Coconut water has the ability to cleanse and to purge. In *usadha taru Pramana*, it mentions that coconut water has the power to neutralize all kinds of disease and problem. Coconut, in the local language called *bungkak nyuh gading*, philosophically held a symbol to offset the influence of *sad ripu*, the six enemies to human according to the Hindu teachings.⁵ The coconut water is *Sukla*, has the power of Tirtha Amertha, the symbol of the Lord Vishnu's power that written on Mandara Giri Event. Then in *Yadnya*, coconut always included in several rituals associated with worship.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TIRTHA IN BALI-NESE HINDU'S CEREMONY

In Hindu's ritual, there are five types of offerings or *Banten*. They are *Dewa Yadnya* (to the God), *Rsi Yadnya* (to the priest), *Pitra Yadnya* (to the ancestor), *Manusa Yadnya* (to human), and last but not least *Bhuta Yadnya* (to nature). In *Bhagavadgita*, the main component of the offering consists of five natural elements, namely water, fire, flowers, fruits, and leaves. After we picked the materials from nature, yet these objects cannot be directly used as an offering. Before the beginning of Hindu's ritual, all of the main components are neatly compiled as Banten / offering; then it is blessed with *Tirtha Pembersihan* or *tirtha pengurip*. It symbolizes to sanctify and give the power to all instrument of the offering. It is mentioned in *Lontar kusuma Dewa Gong Wesi*; the priest must have to purify the Banten by using tirtha. In this case, tirtha serves as



Figure 2. Before the beginning of Hindu's ritual, all of the main components are neatly compiled as *Banten* / offering, and it is advised to bless it with *Tirtha Pembersihan* or *tirtha pengurip*.⁶



Figure 3. After the community finishes their prayer, they have to receive another type of *tirtha* which called *Tirtha Wangsuhpada* or *Banyun Cokor*. It needs to be splashed, drunk and washes to the face three times.⁹

a cleanser and help to connect the community to their worship.

People use the holy water not only to praise the offerings. For example, *Tirtha Pengelukatan*, it is also used to purify the community before they start to pray or ritual. The term *pengelukatan* is based on ancient words in Java, known as "Lukat" which means "to liberate." The *pemangku* splashes *tirtha pengelukatan* in the head of the prayer for three

times. After the community finishes their prayer, they have to receive another type of *tirtha* which called *Tirtha Wangsuhpada* or *Banyun Cokor*. They need to splash it on their head, drink and washes to their face three times.⁸ The action is aimed to purify the prayer physically and spiritually. When the cleansing and sanctity process has been done, it is hoped, the person who received the blessing may able to manage their emotions. *Tirtha* that has been given to the community is a symbol of *wara nugraha* or blessings from the God. The intention is to obtain safety and prosperity in life.⁷

In Hinduism, there is a teaching about reincarnation. Based on this belief, the Balinese Hindu has many ways to honor the deceased. One of many ways to guide the spirit or *Atma* to return to the afterworld is by using *Tirtha*. *Tirtha Pengentas*, which means "to cut off," is one of many types of *tirtha* that only applied to the deceased in *Ngaben* ceremony. The priest creates this type of *tirtha*, and it has purposed to cut the bond between *purusa* (soul aspect) and *Prakriti* (material aspect). *Purusa* and *Prakriti* are described as *Naga Banda*. It has been mentioned in Lontar *tutur suksma*; *Naga* has been represented as *Bayu* or energy, as the results of the unity of *Purusa* and *Prakriti*. Besides *tirtha pengentas*, the priest also used *tirtha penembak* which has a function to set the soul free from any obstacle that may be faced ahead¹⁰. Thus, these two types of *tirtha* have a principal existence in Balinese Hindu ceremony.

CONCLUSION

Water has two function, which is a profane and sacred function. As a holy function, Balinese Hindu turns water into *Tirtha* or holy water. *Tirtha* is used in many Hindu's activities. It has the power to purge and to bless. There are two methods to obtain *Tirtha*. Firstly, water is placed in *pelinggih pura* or *merajan* to receive blessings from God Almighty. Second, Balinese also believes that the *tirtha* may be achieved through a ritual that conducted by the priest. Moreover, Balinese people divides several types of holy water, namely *tirtha wangsuhpada*, *tirtha pembersihan*, *tirtha pengelukatan*, *tirtha penembak*, and *tirtha pengentas*.

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