

THE EXISTENCE OF “NGINANG” AS A SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUPPETRY IN BALI

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ABSTRACT

Nginang is the habit of chewing betel leaves and other herbs, such as lime, gambier, areca nut, and tobacco. *Nginang* has been practiced by people in Southeast Asian countries and parts of Southern China since the 15th century AD. Currently, *nginang* habit in Indonesia has decreased, which can be caused by many factors. The custom of *nginang* in Indonesia, especially in Bali, has meaning in various rituals, such as in Balinese puppetry. *Nginang* functions as a social and theological means of Balinese Dharma Pewayangan Bali. The purpose of this study is to explore the social-theological meaning and existence of the *nginang* custom for puppeteer in Bali. This is a qualitative study, where primary data is obtained through interviews and observations, while secondary data is obtained through literature review. The conclusion from this study is that *nginang* is a theological symbol that unites spiritual and social aspects in the life of Balinese puppeteers who must master various arts and the Dharma of Balinese puppetry. *Nginang* can control words, actions, peace, and harmony during the performance and daily life of the *dalang*. *Nginang* should continue to the young generations of puppeteers in order to master the various arts and Dharma of Balinese puppetry.

KEYWORDS

Nyirih, *Nginang*,
Theology, and *Dalang*



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Introduction

Nginang is the habit of chewing betel leaves with other ingredients, such as lime, gambir, areca nut, and tobacco. *Nginang* has been practiced since the 15th century, during the time when China, India, Persia, and Europe were trading spices in Indonesia [2]. *Nginang* is not only practiced in Indonesia but also in Southeast Asian countries, Southern China, Yunnan, Burma, Madagascar, and Formosa [14]. *Nginang* in Indonesia holds significance in various rituals, such as birth ceremonies, coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and traditional health practices. These rituals are part of the human life cycle, starting from birth, maintaining health, to death .

Rituals related to the cycle of human life continue to be practiced in Indonesia to this day, especially among the Hindu community in Indonesia and Bali. The human life cycle rituals in Bali are called the Manusa Yadnya traditional ceremonies, which involve wayang art as a complementary element of the Manusa Yadnya ceremonies. Puppetry art in Bali not only serves as a complement to the Manusa Yadnya traditional ceremony but also functions as a medium for traditional ceremonies held in temples and as a form of entertainment. The art of puppetry, which functions as both a means of traditional ceremonies and entertainment, is inseparable from the role of the Dalang, who is required to practice the custom of *nginang* as outlined in the lontar Dharma Pewayangan Bali.

Nginang for the Dalang or puppeteer functions as a social and theological medium, where the social aspect relates to the etiquette of welcoming guests who watch the wayang performance, while the theological aspect contains stories related to human life in the world based on religious teachings. The puppeteer in the puppetry performance serves as a medium to convey communication through the played puppetry scenes. Additionally, the puppeteer embodies the meaning of God as the ruler of the universe or Hyang Mahagung Puniku Dalang Linuhung. This requires the Dalang to undergo educational stages, both formal and non-formal, so that the Dalang can present wayang stories based on religious teachings in accordance with the theological means of the *Nginang* tradition that must be performed by the Dalang.

Nginang in Indonesia, especially in Bali, is declining. Based on the results of preliminary studies (observations), in the surrounding environment of the authors' team, *nginang* is not found among the elderly to the younger generations. The decline in the habit of *nginang* also occurs among the younger generation who work as puppeteers. According to Wibowo, Rocmiatun, and Amida (2021:78 - 79), the decline in the habit of *nginang* is caused by several factors, including: (1) family factors that do not encourage the practice of *nginang* from generation to generation and do not provide information on the health benefits of *nginang*, as well as its significance in life; (2) globalization factors that allow the entry of foreign cultures, influencing the younger generation to adopt foreign cultures and abandon the natural health benefits of *nginang* due to advancements in the health field; (3) the environmental factor that does not preserve the habit of *nginang* and the habit of *nginang* is considered strange and dirty because it produces red saliva; and (4) the factor of community institutions that do not provide sufficient socialization and information from related institutions to promote the benefits of the *nginang* habit, both in terms of health and the significance of *nginang*.

Improving the habit of chewing betel in Indonesia, especially among the younger generation who work as puppeteers, requires socialization from various parties, one of which can be in the form of a literature review. The literature review "The Existence of “*Nginang*” as a Social and Theological Study of Puppetry in Bali" will discuss: (1) the

forms and symbols of *nginang* in the context of Balinese puppetry theology: (2) literature related to the theological value of *nginang*; and (3) the meaning and benefits of *nginang* for puppeteers, both socially and theologically. The discussion is expected to revive the *nginang* habit among the younger generation who work as puppeteers in accordance with the lontar Dharma Pewayangan in Bali.

Method

This is a qualitative research, where the data related to: (1) the forms and symbols of *nginang* in the context of Balinese puppetry theology; (2) literature related to the theological values of *nginang*; and (3) the meaning and benefits of *nginang* for puppeteers, both socially and theologically, will be presented in the form of sentences, images, and tables. The primary data collection technique was conducted through semi-structured interviews and observations, while the secondary data collection technique was carried out through literature review. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Balinese puppeteers, religious figures, and Balinese cultural experts, while observations will be carried out at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Denpasar and at the puppet show locations. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of four steps: (1) data collection; (2) data reduction; (3) data presentation; and (4) verification and drawing conclusions [13].

Discussion

1. Forms and Symbols of Kinangan in the Context of Balinese Puppetry Theology

The ingredients of *kinangan* in Balinese theater consist of betel leaves, lime, areca nuts, gambir, and tobacco. *Kinangan* consists of two forms, the unified form where the *kinangan* ingredients are mixed together and the separate form where the *kinangan* ingredients stand alone. The ingredients of *kinangan* are mixed by placing lime, betel nut, gambir, and tobacco on betel leaves in specific proportions, then the betel leaves are rolled lengthwise or folded. Both forms of *kinangan* are always presented at every Balinese puppetry performance, both as an offering to the puppeteer and as a ritual means for the puppeteer before the Balinese puppetry performance begins. *Kinangan* in separate forms is presented to the dalang, where the *kinangan* ingredients are arranged separately in a place called pabuan (figure 1). *Kinangan* in its unified form is used as a ritual tool for the puppeteer, composed of three ingredients: betel leaves, areca nuts, and lime. *Kinangan* in its unified form is tied with a string so that it does not come apart (figure 2).



Figure 1. Pabuan and Kinangan Ingredients
Source: [3]



Figure 2. *Kinangan* in the Unified Form
Source: [15]

Figure 1, image captions: (1) Betel leaf; (2) tobacco; (3) betel nut; (4) lime; and (5) gambir.

Theologically in Balinese puppetry, the ingredients of *kinangan* have symbolic meanings of the *Panca Dewata*, which consist of: (1) areca nut as a symbol of Lord Brahma; (2) betel leaves as a symbol of Lord Vishnu; (3) tobacco as a symbol of Lord Shiva; (4) lime as a symbol of Lord Iswara; and (5) gambir as a symbol of Mahadewa. The form of *kinangan* unity and the form of independent *kinangan* in Balinese puppetry theology also have symbolic meanings. The form of the unity *kinangan*, which is prepared by the dalang himself and consumed by the dalang by biting it three times, symbolizes that *Sang Hyang Tri Murti* (the God Brahma, God Vishnu, and God Shiva) are with him. The symbolic meaning of *Panca Dewata* and *Sang Hyang Tri Murti* in the *kinangan* is that the dalang will possess strength and confidence in the concept of divinity. *Kinangan* also has the meaning that all work can be done smoothly and without obstacles. The word *Nginang* has synonyms such as *nampi* or accepted, which means through *nginang* or *kinangan* receiving blessings from *Sang Hyang Trimurti*, so that the mouth can be kept from two types of mistakes: eating and drinking, as well as speaking.

The form of *kinangan* standing alone has the following meaning: (1) Betel leaves or base have the meaning that a puppeteer should be able to speak for a sufficiently long duration, capable of rhetoric (dialoguing as a puppet character) with language content that can reflect both guidance and entertainment. Betel leaves also carry the meaning of seasoning, where the puppeteer can manipulate language so that it can be enjoyed by the audience; (2) The white betel lime has the meaning of cleanliness or that everything presented must be in a pure and clean state, so the puppeteer must be able to convey guidance firmly, cleanly, and purely, without being influenced by negative elements. (3) Betel nut has the meaning that the presentation of the puppetry

performance, whether in the form of advice, is able to provide a positive contribution to society at large; (4) Gambir has the meaning of everything spoken by the puppeteer, carrying a deep significance, so that it is etched in the hearts of the community, becoming a model and guide in social interactions. Besides that meaning, *Kinangan* or *nginang* also aims to make the community calm, safe, and peaceful.

Kinangan in the unified form as a ritual medium for the dalang, one of which is in the form of *porosan* (figure 3) consisting of three materials, betel leaves, lime, and areca nut. *Porosan* is found inside *Canang* (figure 4). *Porosan* comes from the word *purusa* which means God and symbolizes the Deities Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva or the *Tri Murti* Deities (Jendra, 1998:74). *Dharma Pewayangan* states that *kinangan* is a very important practice in the concept of *Trimurti* theology.



Figure 3. *Porosan*
Source: [1]



Figure 4. *Canang*
Source: [12]

2. Literature Related to the Theological Values of *Nginang*

The procedures that must be followed by puppeteers in Bali when performing puppet shows are regulated in the *lontar Dharma Pewayangan*. The *Lontar Dharma Pewayangan* is an ancient text that contains guidelines for puppeteers when performing puppet shows. *Dharma pewayangan* is a guide that contains rules, procedures, behaviors, duties, and laws that must be followed by puppeteers during wayang performances. *Dharma Pewayangan* emphasizes the aspects of truth or *Satyam*, purity or *Siwam*, and beauty or *Sundaram*, where beauty is the fundamental principle of aesthetics. There are three teachings or principles that a puppeteer must possess: (1) worshiping *Shang Hyang Guru Reka*, who is placed in the mind; (2) *Sang Hyang Saraswati*; and (3) *Sang Hyang Kawiswara* in words or *wakya*. The *Lontar Dharma Pewayangan* also states that a puppeteer should understand the offerings and mantras that must be performed during the puppet show [6] [10].

One of the mantras included in the *Dharma Pewayangan lontar* is the mantra recited when the puppeteer performs the *nginang* ritual. *Nginang* for the puppeteer during a

puppetry performance serves the purpose of: (1) *pangraksa jiwa* or self-protection from all obstacles by using red saliva after *nginang* or *pees barak idung bang basmayang* and applying it to the forehead; (2) *pangeger* or creating a stir or attracting the audience, so they are interested in watching the puppetry performance; and (3) *pangalup swara* or praying to the Deity, so that everything spoken by the puppeteer becomes captivating. The mantra for soul protection contained in the lontar Dharma Pewayangan is as follows:

“Pakulun Sanghyang Parama Wisesa angraksa jiwa, Sanghyang Taya ngraksa bayu, Sanghyang Purusa Wisesa ngraksa sabda, Sanghyang Cintya ngraksa idep, sapa wani ala paksane, buta leak nembah, sarwa “Wisesa nembah, jatma manusa nembah, dewa batara asih, apan aku Sanghyang Tiga Wisesa, luhuring Ongkara Mula, alungguh ring nada licin, tan kasoran bawa ring wisesa, sing ala paksane urung, tka wedi tka asih, patuh, patuh, patuh” [4].

The *pangraksa jiwa* mantra means the puppeteer worships God in *Prabhawa Sanghyang Parama Wisesa* protects the Soul, *Sanghyang Taya* protects energy or *bayu*; *Sanghyang Purusa Wisesa* protects voice or *muyi*, *Sanghyang Cintya* protects the mind. Anyone who dares to disturb will face disaster, all beings submit, all the powerful and strong submit, all humans submit, the gods show compassion, because the puppeteer is the embodiment of *Sanghyang Three Wisesa*, everyone is afraid, everyone submits, and obeys.

The invocation mantra found in the *Dharma Pewayangan Lontar* manuscript, which is:

“Pakulun Sanghyang Tiga Wisesa amasang guna pangeger, lang geger, wadon geger, kedi geger, apupul ring arepku awijah lulut angrungu ingsun, pawakan ingsun Sanghyang Smara, waneh sira andulu Sanghyang Smara waneh sira andulu ingsun, tka welas den pada asih, isep, isep, isep, Ong Ang Ung Mang raja karya murti sakyem pattastra suksma ya namah swaha” [4].

The *pangeger* mantra has the meaning of worshipping God in *Prabhawa Sanghyang Three Wisesa*, there are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, so that the puppeteer is granted the gift of having the charm to be loved, cherished, and adored by the audience.

The mantra of *pangalup swara* contained in the *Dharma Pewayangan Lontar* manuscript is as follows:

“Pakulun Sanghyang Manik Astagina bungkahing sabda, Sanghyang asih tanpasah madyaning sabda, Sanghyang Oneng lulut tungtunging sabda, wiyar geger sing angrungu swaranku lunga nangis! teka nangis! Teg nyar, teg nyar, teg nyar” [4].

The mantra *pangalup swara* means God in *Prabhawa Sanghyang Manik Astagina* resides at the beginning of the sound, *Sanghyang Tanpasah* in the middle of the sound, *Sanghyang Oneng Lulut* at the end of the sound, all who hear the voice of the dalang become very moved and captivate the audience's hearts.

3. The Meaning and Benefits of *Nginang* for Dalang, Both Socially and Theologically

The role of the dalang in Bali until now is not only as the performer of puppet shows but also regarded as a relative by the Balinese community. The dalang, as a relative to the Balinese community, is always present at various traditional events in Bali, and their services are often utilized by the community and their relatives to perform tasks related to the kinship system. One of them is the process of proposing to a girl, known as *ngluku*. The process of proposing to a girl in Bali requires the role of a speaker in refined Balinese. A speaker in refined Balinese is one of the skills possessed by a puppeteer in Bali, so the Balinese community entrusts a puppeteer to act as a speaker who understands the customs and culture applicable in the process of proposing to a girl.

The puppeteer, who acts as a relative in the process of proposing to a girl, is presented with betel nut as a form of welcome. Besides being a relative, the Dalang in Bali is also trusted by the community to perform traditional ceremonies, such as *pemangku* or officiating traditional ceremonies in Bali, *balian* or *usada* or someone who provides traditional healing, the ceremony of carrying the corpse into the death ceremony or *ngaben* or called *memanjang*, preventing rain from falling or *nerang*, and so on. Based on the activities of the dalang as community relatives, the dalang in Bali are often referred to as *Jero Mangku Dalang*, *Jero Balian Saged*, *Jero Dalang Sakti*, and so on. The activities of the dalang are always accompanied by betel quid offerings, both as a means of offering in the *sekala* (real world) and *niskala* (unseen world).

Nginang, as a large-scale offering, symbolizes respect and welcome to arriving guests, and also serves as a means to boost the puppeteer's confidence. On a metaphysical level, the habit of *nginang* also signifies cleansing the mouth of two mistakes, eating or drinking incorrectly and speaking incorrectly. The habit of *Nginang* for the dalang is expected to control all speech and everything that is eaten or drunk. *Nginang*, as a spiritual offering, symbolizes the embodiment of the Almighty God with its manifestations as *Tri Murti* or *Panca Dewata* in the form of *kinangan* or *porosan*.

Conclusion

The form and symbol of *kinangan* in the context of Balinese pedalangan theology Bali has symbolic meanings related to Hinduism in Bali. The symbolic meaning of *kinangan* is found in the materials of *kinangan* and the forms of *kinangan*, both in unity and as standalone.

Lontar Dharma Pewayangan is a literary work that contains the theological values of the *nginang* tradition for puppeteers in Bali. The habit of *nginang* in the Lontar Dharma Pewayangan Bali is in the form of mantras that must be recited during the chewing

process or before the puppeteer performs the puppet show. The *nginang* mantras that must be recited by the *dalang* have theological value related to Hinduism.

Nginang for *Dalang* in Bali has a social meaning as an offering to the *dalang* who is already considered a relative. Theologically, the custom of *nginang* for *dalangs* in community life is part of the implementation of traditional ceremonies, both in the *Manusa Yadnya* and *Dewa Yadnya* ceremonies (traditional ceremonies related to offerings to God).

The next research could involve training on the *nginang* habits for young puppeteers in Bali, with materials based on this study's research. The *nginang* habit for puppeteers in Bali is contained in the *Lontar Dharma Pedalangan*, which must be practiced by all puppeteers in Bali.

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