

**COMODIFICATION OF *NGABEN GOTONG ROYONG*  
(MUTUALLY PERFORMED CREMATION CEREMONY)  
AT *GERYA TAMAN SARI LINGGA*  
BANYUASRI SUBDISTRICT, *BULELENG* REGENCY**

Ni Luh Nyoman Kebayantini<sup>1</sup>, I Wayan Ardika<sup>2</sup>,  
I Gde Semadi Astra<sup>2</sup>, Emiliana Mariyah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Program, Udayana University

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Letters, Udayana University

E-mail: [s2kjbdyunud@yahoo.com](mailto:s2kjbdyunud@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT**

Cremation ceremony is a ritual performed by Bali-Hindu followers when someone dies. It is classified as a big ceremony for the reason that it costs much money, labor and time. As community members, the Bali Hindu followers are faced with so many problems that many cannot perform cremation ceremony conventionally. As a response to this condition, the *sulinggih* (priest) residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* (Griya = a particular residence where the priest resides) has planned to produce the mutually-performed cremation ceremony. Basically, it is a practice of comodified cremation ceremony which is offered to be cheap, practical and to be easily performed.

It is produced to obtain a profit. Therefore, every material and manpower involved are commodities which have exchange values. As far as its production process is concerned, the consumers and the object are made not to be related. The habitus, that is, the belief of Bali-Hindu followers that a cremation ceremony should be performed when someone dies, the cultural and symbolic capitals in the forms of knowledge, status, and authority and the legitimacy of the priest residing at *Gerya Taman Sari Lingga*, and the domain that they are not able to perform the conventional ceremony have led to the performance of the mutually-performed cremation ceremony. It has various meanings such as the meaning of intensification of religious values, the meaning of tradition degradation, the meaning of egalitarian, the meaning of efficiency, the meaning of welfare, the aesthetic meaning and the meaning of image.

**Keywords:** comodification, mutually-performed cremation ceremony, *gerya* (a particular place where the priest resides), *sulinggih* (the priest).

## I Introduction

What is frequently stated by the philosopher is that 'death is a real life'. Death does not only mean that the soul leaves the body, but it is related to the socioreligious life of the human beings who are left. In relation to that, the Bali Hindu followers give response to death by performing cremation ceremony. Wita (Putrawan, 2008) states that cremation ceremony is a highly heavy religious ritual as it costs much funds, time and labor.

Conventionally, there are several variants of names given to the cremation ceremony. The levels how it is organized also vary. As space, time, way of thinking and the attitude of the people change, a new and different way of organizing the cremation ceremony has been created which is termed as *ngaben gotong royong* (the mutually- performed cremation ceremony). It is produced as a response to the condition that the people have been made differentiated by many things such as occupation, income, family size and residence, making them not able to perform the conventional ceremony.

The mutually-performed cremation ceremony is a discourse produced by the *sulinggih* (the priest) residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* as a way of conducting the cremation ceremony cheaply and collectively so that those coming from the lower class can afford it. It is produced, performed and led by the *sulinggih* (the priest) residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga*. Whoever may consume it provided he/she pays in accordance with the stipulation regulated. Based on what is stated by Pilliang (2004: 21), it can be stated that the mutually-performed cremation ceremony is a commodity as the other commodities, that is, it is produced for sale. Based on the background described above, the problems formulated in this study are (1) what is the form of the comodification of the ceremony mutually-performed at Gerya Tamansari Lingga, Banyuasri Subdistrict, Buleleng Regency?; (2) what factors have led to the comodification of the cremation ceremony mutually performed at Gerya Tamansari, Banyuasri Subdistrict, Buleleng Regency?; (3) what are the meanings of the cremation ceremony mutually-performed at Banyuasri Subdistrict, Buleleng Regency? The theories employed for analyzing the problems are eclectic in nature, a way of critical thinking referring to the theory of comodification, the theory of discourse of power/knowledge, the theory of practice and the theory of deconstruction.

This study is designed to use qualitative method with the approach of cultural studies. The data used are the qualitative data in the form of narration and or expressions supported by quantitative data in the form of figures. The data were collected by observation, in-depth

interview, life-history, and documentary study. The data are descriptively, qualitatively and interpretatively analyzed.

## **II Discussion**

The results of this study can be explained in three main parts as follows. *First*, the form of the commodification of the mutually-performed cremation ceremony can be seen from the production activity, the distribution activity and the consumption activity (Fairclough, 1995: 27). The production activity refers to the activity of producing various things needed for the cremation ceremony and involving many parties, which, if what is stated by Marx is referred to, is termed as production relationships (Pals, 2001: 217). Every object is a commodity which is produced for sale. Every production activity is performed with reference to how to organize labor based on responsibilities and functions, detailed job description, and to the financial incentive as the motivator. This is similar to the scientific management introduced by F.W. Taylor (Barker, 2005: 187). The workers work for wages as stated by Marx (Poespoewardoyo, 1989: 167; Lee, 2006: 182). The modern technology is applied to producing *kajang* and *pengawak* which are the sacred elements needed when the cremation ceremony is performed. The motives are human and material productivity, work efficiency and rational order of life. In relation to that, Jaques Ellul (Poespowardoyo, 1989: 88-89) states that it is such a community is termed as a technological community.

Distribution refers to the activity of introducing the mutually-performed ceremony in such a way that it is getting exposed and inspires people to consume it. This activity is carried out through many ways such as *dharma-wacana* (preaches) delivered at many villages around Buleleng regency; printed mass media such as brochures and books so that it can be widely spread; and oral communication within and outside the *gerya*.

As far as the consumption activity is concerned, it can be explained that the consumers of the mutually-performed ceremony vary in regard to their origin, occupation, income, education and traditional social status in the community. The consumers are never involved in the production activity, meaning that they are not different from the other market consumers who just come and consume what they buy. According to Pilliang (2004: 182), the relationship between the subject and the object only takes place as the consumption relationship and extremely they are termed as *consumers par-excellence*. With reference to what is stated by Raymond William (Pilliang, 1994: 34; Kasiyan, 2008: 188), they are termed as 'the users' rather than consumers as

they consume the mutually-performed ceremony to fulfill their basic need as the *pratisentana* (descendants) to perform the cremation ceremony for their ancestors. Those who consume the mutually-performed cremation ceremony are labeled as those who are economically poor as they consume the cremation ceremony which is simply packaged (*nista*) and collectively performed. This means that in the consumption process an identity is formed and collectiveness and simplicity are communicated.

*Second*, there are three factors leading to the commodification of the mutually performed cremation ceremony. They are *habitus* which refers to the habit and the tendency of the Bali Hindu people to always perform cremation ceremony when someone dies. In their cognitive structure, the belief that a cremation ceremony is a ceremony of death, the symbol symbolizing the purification of the soul, and the form of devotion to the parents/ancestors is maintained.

The cultural and symbolic capitals, as the next factor, refer to the capital owned by the *sulinggih* (the priest) residing at *Gerya Taman Sari Lingga* in the forms of scientific and religious knowledge, status, legitimacy and authority which allow him to plan, produce and at the same time to lead (*muput*) the mutually-performed cremation ceremony. By performing the mutually-performed cremation ceremony, he can compete over, win and convert the other capitals such as economic and symbolic capitals.

The domain, as the last factor, refers to the development of social modernity, that is, the knowledge owned by the *sulinggih* (the priest) residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* and the characteristic of the Buleleng community (the Singaraja community in particular) which has been so accustomed to welcoming changes that the mutually-performed cremation ceremony is accepted. In addition, a number of individuals, having neither skill nor knowledge of making what is needed for the cremation ceremony, limited funds, time and labor, prefer performing the cremation ceremony mutually. The influence of market ideology cannot be neglected. The Balinese people tend to prefer buying what is needed for performing religious ceremonies to making it by themselves. If the wish to obtain a benefit is referred to rather than the intensification of spirituality when performing a religious ceremony, then the image of capitalism cannot be neglected. According to Boudieu (Fashri, 2007: 164), the globalization which is loaded with neoliberalism, which assumes that everything can be traded for a benefit, has also been responsible for this.

*Third*, the meanings of the commodification of the mutually-performed cremation ceremony vary, starting from the meaning of deepening religious values, that is, the consumers are grateful

that they can perform, although differently (*nista*), the cremation ceremony; the meaning of degrading tradition, that is, there has been no exchange of labor (*ngupon/ngayahang*) and foods (*patus/isin sok*); the meaning of egalitarian, that is, the recognition of being equal among the consumers and the *sulinggih*; the meaning of efficiency, that is, being able to minimize the cost, labor and time spent by both the consumers and producers; the meaning of welfare, that is, being able to absorb workforce and to give wages as well as to give religious knowledge; the aesthetic meaning, which can be exemplified by the *maperas* ritual symbolizing the meeting of those who are dead and those who are still alive, in which mutual respect is shown in the form of *kawangen* (small offering) which can inspire the feeling of aesthetics and enjoyment (*klangen*) for those who perform it and those who enjoy it; the meaning of image, that is, the mutually-performed cremation ceremony is simply packaged (*nista*) and is created for those who are economically poor and; as a result, the priest residing at Gerya Tamansari Lingga is referred to as ‘the fighter fighting for the poor’ for the reason that the consumers who are economically poor are provided with several facilities.

There are four novelties as far as this study is concerned. The *first* novelty is that the mutually-performed cremation ceremony is one of the alternatives for performing the cremation ceremony. The *second* novelty is that in the cremation ceremony mutually performed, the *kajang* and *pangawak* are produced using modern technology, that is, the technology of *sablon* (silk-screening) for efficiency and effectiveness. The application of this technology shows that the Balinese people, in performing their religious rituals, pay more attention to what is produced than to the process. The next novelty, which is the third, is that the cemetery at Buleleng Traditional Village has been commodified. What is meant is that every user of the cemetery should pay to the village, although it is part of the Pura *Dalem* (the temple where God Ciwa is worshipped) area which is considered sacred. The commodification of the cemetery shows its degradation and the degradation of the *kahyangan tiga* (the three main temples in every traditional village in Bali) as everything is measured with money. The *fourth*, the last novelty, refers to the ownership of cultural capital and symbolic capital has caused the role of the priest residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* to become more complex. What is meant is that he does not only function as *pangloka palasraya* and *guru loka*, but also functions as a producer or an entrepreneur in religious rituals.

### **III. Closing**

The comodification of the cremation ceremony performed mutually at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* includes the production, distribution and consumption activities. It is this which has caused it, as part of the Hindu religious culture in Bali, to be treated as and considered the commodity which can be traded for a benefit.

The cultural capital and the symbolic capital owned by the *sulinggih* (priest) residing at *Gerya Tamansari Lingga* have been the important factor which has caused the comodification of the cremation ceremony mutually performed to take place. By the cremation ceremony mutually performed the *sulinggih* can acquire and convert the other capitals.

The meaning of image as a helpful fighter who struggles for the poor has been created through the symbolic strategy. This type of image is becoming important as a means of promotion to attract more consumers.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This writing is part of the writer's dissertation. In this opportunity, the writer would like to highly thank and appreciate Prof. Dr. I Wayan Ardika, M.A., as the Supervisor; Prof. Dr. I Gde Semadi Astra, as Cosupervisor I; and Prof. Dr. Emiliana Mariyah, M.S., as Cosupervisor II for their guidance, supervision and correction so that this dissertation can be completed in time. The writer would also like to thank the Rector of Udayana University, Sp. P.D. (KHOM); the Director of the Postgraduate Program of Udayana University, Prof. Dr. A.A. Raka Sudewi, Sp.S. (K); Vice Director I, Prof. Dr. Made Budiarsa, M.A.; and Vice Director II, Dr. I Ketut Susrusa, M.S., for the opportunity and facilities provided to the writer when attending and completing the Doctorate Program at Udayana University. High appreciation is also extended to all the parties who have helped the completion of this study.