

## **Nyepi Holiday Package: Between Commercialization, Commodification and Revolting to Hegemony**

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### **ARTICLE INFO**

Received  
29 September 2015  
Accepted  
01 February 2016  
Available online  
07 March 2016

### **ABSTRACT**

*Nyepi* is a sacred and a holy day for Hindus in Bali, Indonesia. It only happens once a year. At *Nyepi* time, for one day, all day activities in Bali are stopped, and the Hindus shall carry *Catur Bratha PeNyepian*, which consist of: *Amati Karya* (not working), *Amati Geni* (not light a fire), *Amati Lelungan* (not traveling) and *Amati Lelanguan* (not having fun/entertainment). Along with the rapid development of tourism in Bali, a *Nyepi* ritual is also inseparable from the shadow of tourism commercialization. In the last decade, more and more businesses are offering *Nyepi* holiday packages to tourists. Surely this is contrary to the real essence of *Nyepi*. The purpose of this research is to reveal what tourism through the commercialization of *Nyepi* holiday packages which has been done through the commodification of *Nyepi* as compared to its real meaning and how does *Nyepi* become a new hegemony in the sphere of social multiculturalism. This research approach is qualitative description, and the theoretical used, among others: the commodification theory, the theory of hegemony and the theory of consumerism. The result show that the influence of commercialization and commodification of Balinese culture is an outcome of the advancement of tourism. *Nyepi* commodification occurs in the process of modernization, which is rooted in capitalism and the increasing of heterogeneity in Bali. This phenomenon appears as an attempt by revolts against prevailing hegemony of *Nyepi* in Bali.

Keywords: nyepi, holiday package, commercialization, commodification, hegemony, consumerism

### **Introduction**

The tourism concept developed in Bali cannot be separated from culture and religion, as this is its soul. Through the "Bali Regional Seminar on Cultural Tourism" in 1971, the concept of "Cultural Tourism" formally adapted and used as a slogan to Bali's tourism (Picard, 2006). This was confirmed by the Regional Regulation (Perda) No. 3 of 1974 issued by the Government of Bali, and then updated by Perda No. 3 of 1991 on Cultural Tourism. More than a decade later, this concept is reinforced through the Bali Provincial Regulation No. 2 of 2012 on

Cultural Tourism of Bali. So from the beginning, it has been declared, that the kind of tourism developed in Bali is tourism based on the culture of Bali, which are inspired by the teachings of Hinduism, and a philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*. All activities of the majority of the people of Bali are inseparable from Hinduism in its foundation.

As part of the effort to draw closer to God, the Hindu community implemented a series of ceremonies *Nyepi* in Bali. This is in accordance with the decision of PHDI (Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia - the highest assembly of Hindus in Indonesia),

*Nyepi* in Indonesia is a celebration for the *Çaka* New Year from India. *Nyepi* ritual includes seclusion, purification, restriction of movement of the body and the mind, introspection and contemplation. It is expected that this be done, in silence and solitude so the Hindus in gain spiritual enlightenment and get closer to God.

The celebration of *Nyepi* is a day that is sacred to the Hindu community in Bali, when *Nyepi* starts, during one day, all activities in Bali stop, including the closure of roads, seaports and airports. Lighting, transportation and electronics should not be used. They hope all of the Balinese Hindu community can peacefully implement *Catur Bratha Penyepian*, which consists of: *Amati Karya* (not working), *Amati Gni* (not light a fire), *Amati Lelungan* (not traveling) and *Amati Lelanguan* (not having fun/entertainment).

However, *Nyepi* is also inseparable from the shadow of commercialization and commodification of tourism. In the last decade, more and more tourism businesses are offering *Nyepi* holiday packages to tourists. Surely this is contrary to the real essence of *Nyepi* itself. Problems try to convey, among others: what tourism, through the commercialization of *Nyepi* holiday packages, has done with the commodification of *Nyepi* as compared to its real meaning? As well, how *Nyepi* has become a new hegemony in the sphere of social multiculturalism?

This research is important, given that the Hindu religion is the soul of the Balinese culture, and also the roots of Bali's tourism. A culture intact will provide great benefits for the sustainability of Bali's tourism in the future.

### Research Objective

The purpose of this research is to study about commercialization of *Nyepi* holiday packages which has been done through the commodification of *Nyepi* compared to its real meaning and how does *Nyepi* become a new hegemony in the sphere of social multiculturalism.

### Literature Review

As far as the authors' concern, no studies have specifically discussed the commercialization and commodification of *Nyepi* holiday packages in Bali. However, there are some references in this study, among others: First, the study entitled *Identitas dan Komodifikasi Budaya dalam Pariwisata Budaya Bali - Cultural Commodification in Bali Cultural Tourism* (Putra, 2008). In this study, he discussed how tourism and the presence of tourists could influence social and cultural life of a nation. The artists' orientations are no longer in religious art, but more on the commercial orientation, and art has experienced commoditization, where the value of art has been measured by money (market value). Second, a study entitled *Komodifikasi Budaya Populer dalam Pariwisata - Commodification of Popular Culture in Tourism* (Surbakti, 2008). In this study, he emphasized that industrialization led to the commodification of tourism has really happened in Bali, not only by tourism investors, but also by their own local communities. Popular tourism products in postmodernist culture are suspected of being culturally shallow and simply considered a negative impact of tourism.

Both researchers bring the concept of thinking, about the practices of the commodification of popular cultures in Bali. While, this study focuses more on the commodification of Balinese culture through commercialization on *Nyepi* holiday packages, in addition, this study also discusses 'cultural rebellion' as a result of the hegemony of *Nyepi* in Bali.

### Theoretical Concepts

*Nyepi* is the Hindu's feast day to celebrate the *Çaka* New Year (*Tilem Kesanga*). *Nyepi* became known and formally adopted by the public in 1983, and the *Ogoh-ogoh* (a giant, monsters like puppet as a symbol *Bhuta Kala* / negative energy, which is then burned in night before *Nyepi* starts) on the eve of *Nyepi* is a new phenomenon (Pringle, 2004). As a new tradition, *Nyepi* has been considered an important day in the Hindu tradition in Bali. Especially, *Nyepi* is the only Hindu feast that gained legitimacy as a national holiday in Indonesia.

The main purpose of the celebration of *Nyepi* is to invoke the presence of God Almighty, to cleanse *Bhuana Alit* (human nature / microcosmos) and *Bhuana Agung* (universe / macrocosmos). At the peak of *Nyepi* ritual, the Hindu people do *Catur Brata Penyepian*, which consists of: *Amati Geni* (do not use or turn on the fire, including the use of electricity and turned off the light), *Amati Karya* (not working), *Amati Lelungan* (not traveling), *Amati Lelanguan* (not entertained, by either TV, internet, or radio), as well as be more focused to do meditation, *Tapa*, *Brata*, *Yoga*, and *Samadhi* (contemplation).

*Catur Brata Penyepian* lasts for 36 hours starting at 06:00 am in the morning, till 06:00 pm the next day. A series of ceremonies *Nyepi*, among others: *Melasti* ceremony - doing the cleaning to the sea / river, *Tawur (Pecaruan)* - offerings ritual, *Pengrupukan* - now dominated by parading *Ogoh-ogoh*, *Nyepi* and *Ngembak Geni* - phase to end *Tapa*, *Bratha*, *Yoga* and *Samadhi*, then visiting families and relatives, then forgiving one another, as well as praying together with all family members (Suwantana, 2010).

Implementation of *Nyepi* has a spiritual power that can strengthen the mental and self-identity of the people. Through the concept of self-control and contemplation (by look inside themselves), *Nyepi* can reinforce the integration of mankind in the universal sense.

### Methodology

The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative with the phenomenological approach, in which the researchers tried to explore the meanings and identify the commercialization of *Nyepi* holiday packages. Data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews with tourism stakeholders and religious figures, literature reviews and documentation.

### Results and Discussion

Bali is an icon of tourism in Indonesia, as it has attracted many tourists, both local and international. Of course, in addition to providing benefits to Bali, tourism also has consequences in the form of negative impacts.

One of them is the commodification of culture. Commodification is a real phenomenon in Bali, especially in the sectors of tourism industry. In Bali, commodifications also arise in the context of spirituality and religion. Bali tourism has forced people to be part of the international multi-cultural society, and unconsciously has brought local communities sandwiched between maintaining traditions and culture (which is a commodity that can be sold), while on the other hand the process of internationalization through tourism means banging the culture with the modern world (Narottama, 2011). In addition, the Balinese are known to be very strict in applying and passing on cultural traditions to the social environment among themselves, but on the other hand, very loose application to foreigners / outsiders.

Since the Balinese people are aware of the role of tourism in improving the economy, the Balinese people no longer seem to restrict tourism to be present in all aspects of their lives, and tourism can easily fit in the realm of customs, traditions, religions and cultures. Balinese society is able to adhere to the tradition and culture among them, and be able to take advantage of the cultural traditions and economic benefits for the purpose of tourism.

Along with the increase in demand in the tourism industry, a small portion of local people in Bali later became an intermediary of culture (*cultural broker*), and materialism has made the Balinese people consciously modify their cultural products for tourist consumption. Nevertheless, the people of Bali are still able to distinguish the performances for themselves, for their gods, and those especially for tourists, besides that, they know the boundaries between which products are sold to tourists and which should be protected from commercial exploitation (Howe, 2006).

The term commodification began to be well known about this last decade. Commodification commonly is known also by the term of commercialization, capitalization, commoditization, touristification (Ritzer, 1999; Picard, 2006). Commodification is to make something directly and intentionally (with full consciousness) as a commodity. Commodification refers to the symptoms of contemporary economy, and tourism is a

sample of perfect commodification (Surbakti, 2008). Commodification or touristification is a form that capital owners desire with full awareness and business calculations utilizing cultures with various symbols, icons and religious art and culture as a commodity for markets (Redaksi, 2008).

**Schhhhh...**  
**NYEPI DAY is TUESDAY, MARCH 12th**  
 Join us at [Resort Ubud] for 48 hours of the most refined silence and relaxation  
 Check out our Special Nyepi Packages - but don't tell TOO many people OK - we want to keep it quiet!  
**Nyepi Package 1 - DeLuxe Room Rp. 4.825.000 per couple - for 2 nights and 3 days**  
**Nyepi Package 2 - Villa with private pool Rp. 14.245.000 per couple - for 2 nights and 3 days**

**Our Special Nyepi Packages Include**

- 2 Nights and 3 Days accommodation in a "DeLuxe Room" or "Private Villa"
- Daily Buffet Breakfast for two at [Restaurant]
- Buffet Lunch for two at [Restaurant] on Nyepi day
- Buffet Dinner for two at [Restaurant] on Nyepi day
- Experience traditional Balinese cultural handicrafts (making of the Nyepi praying ornaments), together with Meditation and Yoga classes
- 25% OFF for spa treatments at our [Spa] (minimum of 2 hours spa treatment)
- Free wireless internet access
- All prices quoted are net and include all taxes (offer for KTP/KITAS/KITAP holders only)

www.[Resort].com/nyepi

Figure 1. An advertisement that offers Nyepi package at a resort in Ubud.

The picture show how we asked that not to make any voice -the models show by its body language and Schhhh ...! - because of Nyepi. There clearly implied how the values of Nyepi has been commodified and commercialized.

According to Barker (2004: 408 in Surbakti, 2008), commodification is the process associated with capitalism in which the object, quality, and a sign are used as commodity and the commodity is something whose sole purpose is to sell in the market. Nyepi ceremony and the entire rituals, was originally not intended for commercial use, but in reality, the ritual has been commodified in such a way to be commercial because of the grip of materialism and capitalism tourism.

Culture, as a tourist attraction in Bali often undergoes a process of compromise for the sake of improvement "selling points" to tourists. Unfortunately, religious values are often packaged together to attract tourists. Initially, a Nyepi holiday package is to accommodate travelers; international,

domestic and non-Hindu Balinese people who do not celebrate Nyepi. Over time, more and more tourists are on holiday, who are interested to know the atmosphere of Bali during Nyepi.

**DENPASAR**  
 HOTEL ACCOMMODATION CENTER  
 Valid 22 - 24 March 2012

**Nyepi Vaganza**

<b>STUDIO ROOM</b> IDR. 1.610.000 nett	<b>1 BED ROOM</b> IDR. 1.810.000 nett	<b>2 BED ROOM</b> IDR. 3.328.000 nett
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3 Days 2 Nights stay, Inclusive of Daily Breakfast, 1 time Lunch and 1 time Dinner on 23 March 2012

Full program for all guests:  
 ULTIMATE THURSDAY NITE FLAME | FAMILY MOVIES IN... 21  
 KIDS ACTIVITIES

(0361) 4...  
 info@[Hotel].denpasar.com | www.[Hotel].denpasar.com

Figure 2: 'Nyepi Vaganza' package in a hotel at Denpasar

The above figure tell us that the word 'Vaganza' means festive, massive. This is really deviate from the essence of Nyepi, like restraint, inward contemplation and simplicity.

In the last decade, the promotion of Nyepi holiday packages are more intense, and it's mostly held in luxury hotels. This is due to the intensity of marketing in various mass media. The packages are promoted through print media (newspapers, magazines, tabloids) and electronic media (internet). The price range offered is quite varied, depending on duration of stay, the programs and the hotel class. Prices range from eight hundred thousand rupiah, up to fourteen million rupiah for two days. Activities offered in the Nyepi holiday package are also diverse, from dining at the restaurant, watching movies / DVD, spa treatments, and also making some Nyepi's ornaments.

The presence of tourists with all the customary habits often creates the effect of

"mimic" by the locals. The habit, which imitated, could be good, or even bad, and in a certain period of time, it can shift the values of the local culture (Putra, 2008). The consumer of the package are not only non-Hindu locals, domestic tourists and foreign tourists, but has started to be consumed also by the local Hindu in Bali. Thus, hotel is seems like an escape for those who do not celebrate *Nyepi*.

When a ritual of *Nyepi* takes place, there are those (Balinese and non-Balinese, Hindu and non-Hindu) who feel constrained and overburdened. They feel uncomfortable on the various limitations during *Nyepi*. This discomfort increased with the new rules that prohibit local TV and radio broadcasts during *Nyepi* day. This inconvenience they shed through social networking sites. They blaspheme and revile the ritual of *Nyepi* in Bali, one of which is the case of Ibnu Rachel Farhansyah's Facebook status that angered the people of Bali a few years ago.

Although *Nyepi* is just a day, they feel compelled, hegemony and marginalized. By "escape" to the hotel, they feel freed and satisfied. *Nyepi* package at the hotel seemed to establish themselves into popular culture in the community. In addition to local and foreign tourists, many customers are new families and derived from the group, which are capable financially. Gramsci (1971) in his book: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* uses the term 'hegemony' to refer to the way the dominant group in a society gains support from groups in subordination through the process of "leadership" of intellectuals and morals.

Hegemony is domination by consensus or agreement, directly or indirectly, and openly or secretly which influences the cognitive structures and affective controlled group (Surbakti, 2008). They are in revolt over *Nyepi* hegemony that has lasted for decades. Instead of doing *Tapa*, *Yoga*, *Semadhi* and self-contemplation for themselves, they prefer to take off and satisfy the senses and rebel rebelled against important symbols of the religious culture of Bali.

NYEPI RITUAL IN BALI: AUTHENTICITY VS COMMODIFICATION VARIABLES OF CHANGES		
VARIABLE	PAST (5-10 years ago)	PRESENT
Essential Meanings / Signification	<i>Nyepi</i> ritual as a process of body and mind purification through asceticism	<i>Nyepi</i> ritual as a burden in the modern and free lifestyle
Time Period	36 hours	3 days 2 nights holiday
Costs	None	Hotels, food and entertainment cost, approximately Rp.850.000 - Rp 5.000.000 per day
Events	<i>Catur-Bhrita Penyepeian</i> , Meditation, Contemplation	Candle light dinner, watch movies surfing Internet, etc
Expectation	Self cleansing and purification	Spend time, escape
Participants	Hindu, Balinese	International and domestic tourist, non-Hindu and also Hindu Balinese
Goal	Self elightment	Consumerism, Hedonism, Capitalism
Tourism Workers	They take day off, not working	Forced to work because of hotel's demands
Marketing Intensity	None	Published in various forms of media

Figure 3. Variables of Change on *Nyepi* Ritual, Past and Present.

Increasingly widespread marketing of *Nyepi* packages in a variety of mass media, showed that this tourism product can be received and absorbed by the market. In addition to foreign tourists, the other consumers are the Balinese people who want to release the senses' thirst and want to feel a different sensation from the *Nyepi* celebration in previous years. Surely this cannot be separated from the modern urban lifestyle that has embraced today's society.

The term 'consumerism' is defined as understanding / lifestyle that considers goods (luxury) as a measure of happiness, pleasure, not frugal lifestyle, etc. Consumerism is a mindset and actions where people buy things not because he/she needs the goods, but because the act of buying itself gives satisfaction to him/her (Soedjatmiko, 2007). Consumption is not only to meet preference and basic human needs, but also deals with symbolic elements to mark class, status, or a particular social symbol. Consumption is also used as a tool to express social differentiation.

To do a *Nyepi* holiday package at the hotel is no longer a necessity, but it has turned into a form of prestige, to show an increase in a person's socio-economic class. According to Baudrillard, in consumerism, the underlying thought is not the logic of needs, but is shaped by man's desire, which assumes that all needs can be met by consumption (Baudrillard, 1970). Consumerism itself has become a life style of contemporary society. Through advertising and promotion in various media,

consumption is always present wherever and whenever, even used as a solution when a problem arises. When a person thinks that doing *Catur Bratha Penyepian* is considered a burden, then by buying a *Nyepi* holiday package, he/she can eliminate the burden, as well as raise their prestige.

### Conclusion

It is very common in Bali, that art and religious traditions wrapped in culture are commercialized and serve as a major tourist attraction. Along with this, the presence of foreign tourists as well as their culture is considered a threat called 'cultural pollution', and is regarded as a 'trigger of degradation' of the Balinese culture.

Unfortunately, Bali has already opened itself to international tourism. This is the reason the people of Bali easily adopt tourism as an important sector for their economy sustainability. In fact, tourism can, and often appears in the realm of religion in society. Thus, Balinese cannot differentiate between its own values with the values brought by foreign tourists. Although at first, *Nyepi* has nothing to do with tourism and commercial purposes. But in fact, *Nyepi* holiday packages are sold in hotels. This indicates that *Nyepi* ritual has commoditized, because it was created with the primary objective to become a commodity for the sake of tourism. Increasingly the widespread marketing of *Nyepi* holiday packages, prove that the market can accept these commodities. It is feared, authentic Balinese cultural traditions herded into a touristic culture, which is the confusion between cultural values and tourism.

Religious rituals are no longer only for spiritual, but also an economic issue, and it often becomes a commodity. A sacred ritual, for the capitalists, was no longer as something that is upwards to divinity, but it could be, something that makes their merchandise sell, and their revenue increase dramatically. *Nyepi* commodification occurs in the process of modernization, rooted on capitalism, and the increasing cultural heterogeneity in Bali. On one hand, this phenomenon appears as an attempt by revolts against prevailing *hegemony* on *Nyepi* in Bali.

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