

Some Balinese Uses of Animal Symbolism Are Aristocrats Pigs?

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The Balinese are not, in general, distinguished by being direct, outspoken or contemptuous. Emphasis is laid on an elaborate linguistic etiquette and the avoidance of public demonstrations of acrimony, which lends an air of formality and somewhat contrived calm to human affairs. This is not to imply that quarrels and conflicts are absent – as visitors to the island sometimes assume – rather these are preferably buried below the surface so that they do not disturb the unfolding masque of court and village life. Outside the towns, Balinese society is still largely traditional; tight-knit local communities, the caste system and the complex of religious activities all bind men together within an ordered and secure world, but often at the expense of underlying stresses. In many cases, for example, peasants remain to some degree subjects of the old aristocracy, while at the same time they are increasingly aware of the impositions of the central government, which they view as dominated by the Javanese. The undercurrent of resentment, which this tends to provoke is rarely voiced in public; instead it finds expression in the way the Balinese adapt and reinterpret customary beliefs.

In the small court centre of Tengahpadang, in a remote corner of South Bali, where I did fieldwork for two years, this antagonism towards the local aristocracy and the Javanese took an interesting and amusing form. It involved the interpretation of ideas surrounding the birth of twins of opposite sex, *anak kembar buncing*. Although the Balinese are not unique among Indonesian peoples in expressing ritual concern over unusual births, their beliefs are highly developed and have proved a continuous source of controversy. For, in Bali, the birth of mixed twins is a matter of grave religious significance according to established custom, justified by mythological accounts. If twins are born to a high-caste family, but especially into the traditional aristocracy, or Satriya, this is an exceptionally propitious event which, in the past, signified good fortune for both king and realm. It was also regarded as appropriate that the twins should marry when they became adult (on the stated grounds that they already indulged in intercourse in their mother's womb!), although in this case they were brought up separately during their childhood. The precise opposite holds for the low castes, who comprise the bulk of the peasant population. Traditionally, the arrival of *anak buncing* in an ordinary village family was regarded as a disaster and an evil omen, which resulted in the pollution of the entire community where it occurred. Among other things, the offending couple and their children were sentenced to a long purificatory period in the local graveyard – hardly the most congenial of places, particularly for Balinese – and were, obliged to pay the costly ritual necessary to remove pollution. This is still felt in many places to be a ritual necessity but is forbidden by officialdom on the grounds that it violates the humanitarian principles of the *Pancasila* [state ideology]. Of equal interest to the political disputes, which this has caused, however, are the logical problems inherent in the beliefs. While there is general, if passive, support for indigenous customs regarding twins, there is a section of the peasant populace which argue that there is no reason intrinsically why twins should be pure in one caste and polluting in another. With typical sociological insight, it is suggested that the rules were deliberately introduced by the aristocracy in order to remind the lowly precisely how lowly they were.

Balinese ideas about twins however contain an amusing twist, which is used to stand the argument on its head to the detriment of the aristocrats. Apart from humans, there is one particular species of animal to which similar constraints apply, namely the pig. As the Balinese are not Muslim, pigs are freely bred and are not considered impure, but rather a delicacy. Nonetheless, their habits provide a rich source of simile, because they are thought of as dirty, stupid and often noisy. Unlike most other domestic animals, pigs are not allowed to mate casually and their breeding is hedged about with symbolic

restrictions. All normal male piglets are castrated shortly after birth and fattened for slaughter. Boars can only be reared from an unusual litter – one where there are: only twins of opposite sex., Like their noble counterparts, the male and female piglets are then separated and kept in adjacent sties, until they attain sexual maturity. It is then that the congruence with humans becomes most obvious, for the young boar and sow are obliged to undergo a modified and rudimentary version of the Balinese marriage ceremony performed over their now-joint sty. (To the best of my knowledge, this is the only circumstance under which animals are formally married according to human rites. Similar ceremonies are performed for certain inanimate objects, for example slit-gongs before being used in temples.) The boar is even permitted a brief honeymoon before assuming his public duties, which consist of his services being rented to local sows for a fee of between Rp.50 and Rp.100. The inference from this is fairly clear. In the cardinal matters of birth and fertility, the pig is identified with man. This is the more remarkable in that the comparison of human beings with animals, particularly if domestic, is normally, prohibited and considered extremely insulting. To rephrase Henry Ward Beecher, it is not the monkey but the pig, in Bali, which is ‘an organized sarcasm upon the human race’.

The extension of beliefs concerning abnormal births from mankind to a species of animal suggests that there may be a logical association to the Balinese – in this case between pigs and aristocrats. Whereas the birth of twins to an ordinary family is a calamity, for aristocrats' and pigs it is propitious; for the former it ensures the welfare of the realm, among the latter it ensures the supply of food. And, like the king, the pig-owner is fortunate if twins are born in his household. Further, the marriage of twins born to a peasant family is forbidden, while it is proper for swine and the nobility and it is appropriate if the union is fruitful. The Balinese recognize yet another parallel. Ordinary low caste villagers were generally monogamous in the past, while princes traditionally maintained not only numerous wives but also informal additional liaisons. In Tengahpadang, perhaps unsurprisingly, the local boar was said to have many wives or mistresses ‘just like a king’ and, if any doubts remain, in private the villagers referred to the local prince, Tuanku, as Tuan Kucit – Lord Piglet.

The object of this unflattering comparison to pigs is not confined to the Balinese aristocracy but is also extended to embrace the Javanese. For the name given to boars in Bali is *Radèn*, the identical term to the Javanese court title. Originally, it appears that the name stemmed from mythology and referred to a boar living in *Yamaloka*, the Underworld; but the Balinese make the connection quite explicit by calling the boars sometimes by another Javanese title, *Radèn Mas*. In Tengahpadang, the villagers used to derive quiet enjoyment from this identification. When the village boar was trundled out on his lead along the main street, blissfully unaware of his symbolic burden, bystanders would murmur that he was exactly like a Javanese – dirty and incontinent.

The origins of the symbolism and regulations attached to the birth of twins of opposite sex in Bali are probably lost irrevocably in the past. An organized body of beliefs and practices has, however, survived and has proved susceptible to new interpretations by contemporary Balinese. These serve to provide villagers with the means to make statements, which cannot always be safely expressed in public. Two particular sets of relationships are emphasized which are often laden with tension – the villagers' ties to the traditional aristocracy and with the dominant Javanese. The extension of beliefs about, twins to include pigs, and animal names, open up possibilities of symbolic ambiguity which takes the form of unstated questions, such as: Are Aristocrats Pigs?