

Tagore the Eternal Seeker

Footprints of a World Traveller

Edited by
Suryakanthi Tripathi
Radha Chakravarty

Associate Editor
Nivedita Ray



Vij Books India Pvt Ltd
New Delhi (India)



Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, New Delhi

Published by

Vij Books India Pvt Ltd
(Publishers, Distributors & Importers)
2/19, Ansari Road
Delhi – 110 002
Phones: 91-11-43596460, 91-11-47340674
Fax: 91-11-47340674
e-mail: vijbooks@rediffmail.com
web : www.vijbooks.com

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First Published in India in 2015

ISBN: 978-93-82652-95-3

Price : ₹ 1650/-

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Printed in India
at Aegean Offset Printers

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Vision Comes True: Rabindranath Tagore and Balinese Contemporary Religious Identity

Gde Dwitya Arief Metera

On April 1, 2012 in Jogjakarta, Central Java, there was a public lecture by Dr. Partha Chatterjee, the Bengali author, on Rabindranath Tagore and his vision of Asia. The talk was organized by Kunci Cultural Studies Centre, Sangam House, and Etnohistori, a collective of young History and Anthropology students of which I am a part, and was sponsored by the Embassy of India in Jakarta. In the talk, Dr. Chatterjee told the audience about Tagore's visit to several countries including Indonesia. Set against the historical background of the rise of Southeast Asia's nationalism, Tagore's visit had considerable importance for envisioning the future of Asia, as Dr. Chatterjee managed to convey. A specific part of the talk that aroused questions from the audience was the fact that Tagore was in Jogjakarta and Bali among the several places he visited in Indonesia. Stories began to unfold, and it turned out that very few in the audience realized this historical visit. A poet that they adored actually visited their hometown and even wrote poems inspired by his visit. Tagore was indeed in Jogjakarta and Bali in 1927 and met several of the elite as also important figures in the Indonesian nationalist movement. The fact that not many Indonesians are aware about this became an object of my curiosity. From Dr. Chatterjee's lecture it was evident that Tagore's visit was not one of a casual nature but more a visionary one. I was, hence, inclined to look at this visit more closely.

This article is about Tagore's visit to Bali and the vision he had during his visit. His vision is one of modernization, especially as it related to Balinese religion. More importantly, there were two Balinese figures that studied at Santiniketan who became important actors in the modernization of Balinese religion as we see it today in its contemporary version. As a student of Balinese religion, my contribution through this article is to call for in-depth research to investigate the influence of Santiniketan's education and Tagore's ideas on these two Balinese intellectuals.

The Historic Visit

Many Indonesians are not aware, or at best, do not remember Tagore's visit to the country. The historian, Arun Das Gupta, who wrote an excellent account of Tagore's visit to Indonesia, made the same observation. Cornell-educated and a Fellow of the Asiatic Society, Professor Das Gupta is an expert on the history of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, and taught at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta from 1979-1981. As he wrote in his article, '*Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia: an Experiment in Bridge-Building*', this visit was 'well-nigh forgotten.' (Das Gupta, 2002: 455).

Rabindranath Tagore and Balinese Contemporary Religious Identity

The poor effort to preserve documentation on Indonesia's side might be the reason for this lack of awareness among the younger generation of Indonesians. As Das Gupta also mentioned, thorough search for resources in Indonesia and the Netherlands for colonial archives is needed to produce more information. However, from perusing sources mainly in India, Das Gupta has written an excellent account illustrating the motive and nature of Tagore's visit. My understanding of Tagore's visit, therefore, relies confidently on Das Gupta's account that I will retell here. I will specifically underline Tagore's stay in Bali.

Southeast Asia Tour and the Invitation

Tagore was in Indonesia for a little over one month from August 21 to September 30 1927. Half of that time, for around two weeks from August 26 to December 8, he spent in Bali, and the rest he spent in several towns in Java and Sumatra. He departed from Calcutta on July 12, 1927 with several friends. They were the philologist, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the painter and musician, Bhirendra Krishna Deva Warman, and the artist Surendranath Kar. They all sailed from Madras on the French ship *Ambois*.² Tagore's travel intention was a Southeast Asia tour and not to exclusively visit Indonesia. He and his companions stayed in Singapore for around a month before arriving in Batavia in August. Their route of their travel in Indonesia was Sumatra-Batavia-Bali-Surabaya-Surakarta-Jogjakarta.

There were several reasons as to why Tagore was in Indonesia. We know for sure that he was invited by several institutions that took the initiative and worked together to make the visit possible. These institutions were the Cultural Society for the Promotion of Literature and the Arts, or the *Kunstkring*, in Batavia, and the *Java Instituut* of which the king, Mangkunegoro VII of Surakarta, was the Chairman. Another institution that was involved was the Dutch Indonesian Archaeological Service, the *Oudheidkundige Dienst*. There was also a notable individual that helped with the visit. Arnold Bake, a Dutch musicologist who studied music in Santiniketan, helped prepare Tagore's tour and was in Indonesia with his wife during Tagore's visit (Das Gupta, 2002:459).

There are at least two reasons why these institutions were eager to invite Tagore to come to Indonesia. First, Tagore's works had been read in Java because of a translation of his works to Dutch and Javanese. Das Gupta noted that Kalidas Nag, the historian, was surprised to find during his visit to Java in 1924 that Tagore was known on the island. Tagore was read in Java largely because of the work of Raden Mas Noto Soeroto who translated Tagore's works into Dutch. Raden Mas Noto Soeroto was a Javanese prince from the Pakoe Alam family. His grandfather was Pakoe Alam V who was the head of Pakualaman, one of Jogjakarta's autonomous principalities. Raden Mas Noto Soeroto considered Tagore his spiritual guru and even named his eldest son after Tagore: Rawindra Noto Soeroto³. Besides translating Tagore's work, he also wrote a biography of Tagore and a book on Tagore's educational ideals. Later on, his Dutch version of Tagore's work was translated into Javanese by his close friend Soeriosoeparto. Soeriosoeparto was also a Javanese nobleman who later became King Mangkoenegoro VII of Surakarta and played host to Tagore when he visited Surakarta (Das Gupta, 2002: 457). Moreover, after he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, Tagore's

reputation was even more elevated among his Javanese readers.

The second reason also related to his reputation. Tagore was a source of inspiration to the Indonesian nationalist movement. His school in Santiniketan that tried to find an alternative to Western education by integrating modern elements and local culture had inspired the same movement in Indonesia. Ki Hajar Dewantoro, an Indonesian nationalist leader, who struggled with the country's education and founded the Taman Siswa School, was especially eager to meet Tagore himself. The Javanese knew something else about Tagore – that Tagore had returned the knighthood he had received from King George V in 1915 as a protest against the killing of Sikh people in Amritsar by British soldiers. (Das Gupta, 2002:454).

These two reasons led to an invitation to Tagore to visit Indonesia in 1927. However, as the Dutch East Indies government was nervous that Tagore's visit might potentially strengthen Indonesia's nationalist movement, it did not let the nationalists arrange the visit. Instead, the Dutch government let the *Kunstkring* arrange it. This is understandable especially if we note that, in 1926, a year prior to the invitation, the Dutch government had just been challenged by a communist revolt in Batavia and several other places in Indonesia (Das Gupta, 2002:459).

If from Indonesia's side the reasons to invite Tagore were strongly related to his work and his reputation among Indonesian nationalist leaders, Tagore's motive to visit Southeast Asia and Indonesia was quite different. As Das Gupta mentioned in his paper, Tagore was curious about the Hindu religion and culture in Bali. There was something about the remains of ancient Indian culture in Southeast Asia that caught his interest, and as Tagore put it, he was 'going on a pilgrimage to India beyond its modern political boundaries' (Das Gupta, 2002: 456). Moreover, Tagore was especially inclined to discover an Asian cultural identity. This was a cultural mission of Tagore's with two goals. As Das Gupta wrote, the goals were: first, to study Indian civilization in the antiquarian relics in Indonesia as well to study its arts and the life of its people and, second, to forge cultural cooperation between India and Southeast Asia (Das Gupta, 2002: 456).

Tagore in Bali: His Vision of Religious Modernization

Tagore departed for Bali from Batavia after a welcome reception from the *Kunstkring* and a dinner hosted by the British Consul in Batavia. He and his friends arrived in Buleleng on August 26, after a brief stop in Surabaya. From Buleleng, he traveled to several places in Bali: first, to Bangli via Singaraja and Kintamani, and then to Karangasem, Badung and Denpasar. He, however, stayed mainly at Tampak Siring and was invited to the palace of the King of Gianyar and to visit Ubud and Mundu (Das Gupta, 2002: 461).

What Tagore and his friends saw in Bali gave them such pleasure that it was reflected in the notes written by one of his accompanying friends, the philologist, Chatterji. The rituals, the people, the art performances, virtually every sceneries were memorable to them. Since the Hindu nature of Balinese culture was obvious, Tagore was intrigued by it. Das Gupta mentioned in his paper the lines that Tagore wrote in his letter about his impression:

'Along every village road processions of men and women were arriving with multifarious offerings. Some *puranic* age seemed to have come back to life before our very eyes, some picture from the Ajanta caves come out from the realm of art to the realm of life to revel in the sunshine' (Tagore via Das Gupta, 2002: 462).

Tagore's meeting with the King of Karangasem also left him with a great impression on the strong link between Balinese culture and India. It was when the King of Karangasem, Ida Anak Agung Bagus Djelantik, took Tagore on a motor ride that the King uttered a Sanskrit word to refer to the sea that they saw along the way. The King said '*samudra*' which took Tagore by surprise since he did not know that the King understood Sanskrit. He and the King had not spoken much owing to the lack of a common language (Das Gupta, 2002:462). This Sanskrit word, however, was an indication of the cultural link between them. Das Gupta wrote about this moment when Tagore was both pleased and surprised:

'The *raja*, seeing that this was surprising and pleasing to his eminent guest, went on to recite the other Sanskrit names for the sea: *sagar, abdhi, jaladhya*. Then he said: '*Saptasamudra, saptaparnvat, saptaban, sapta-akash*, (seven seas, seven hills, seven forests, seven skies). A little later, he recited the names of the Indian rivers Ganga, Jamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri and Sarasvati. India's geography seemed to be imprinted on the Balinese mind' (Tagore and Chatterji via Das Gupta 462).

There was also another moment, as is noted by Das Gupta, in which Tagore and the King discussed a Balinese religious text and Tagore was impressed by the King's question. The King asked the poet to interpret some passages from the text and he surprised Tagore by asking a question about man's ultimate quest in life. Chatterji, who was also present and helping with the interpretation of the text, asked the King to answer the question himself. The King then gave an answer that startled both Chatterji and Tagore. Das Gupta recounted the King's answer as follows: '*Dewa-Dewa tida pa, Nirvana satu*.' It meant that *Nirvana* is the supreme goal and not merely worshipping the gods (Chatterji via Das Gupta, 2002: 462). This moment specifically left such a lasting impression on Tagore that he referred to it in his poem on Bali. Das Gupta translated the lines in Tagore's poem, *Bali*, about this encounter: 'We said the same mantras together, pondered upon the same question of Nirvana.' (Das Gupta, 2002:462).

Despite enjoying much of what he saw in Bali, Tagore reserved a critical view about the island that linked with his home, India. As Das Gupta wrote, Tagore sensed that Bali was trapped in the past in an 'archaic manifestation'. All the dances, rituals, and life of the Balinese people, to him, represented the past trapped in the present. Tagore, nevertheless, appreciated the remains of the Indian civilization he found in Bali. However, he was not a supporter of revivalism. Das Gupta wrote that he is a 'modern man with forward looking mind'. Tagore, according to Das Gupta, sensed there was something wrong with all this.

The past was a great one [...]. But, still it is after all the Past and its duty was to fall behind the Present, not to come in front of it and stop the way of its self manifestation. (Tagore via Das Gupta, 2002: 463).

This vision of Tagore is particularly significant. His vision was that Bali should not linger in the past and instead move to the present. I take this as a vision of modernization. I believe this moment was at the heart of his visit besides the poems he wrote based on his experience in Bali. His discovery of the remains of the ancient Indian civilization in Bali yielded this vision. What he found in his Southeast Asia tour was India's past, trapped in the Balinese present.

Vision Comes True: Religious Transformation in Bali

The first time I read the story of Tagore's visit to Bali from Das Gupta's account, my initial response was one of surprise. As a student of Balinese religion, I had read the history of religious modernization in Bali and its contemporary form. I did not know that Tagore had his vision about this modernization. Moreover, I thought that the vision was a mere coincidence. However, further reading about the role of Balinese intellectuals in this process of modernization indicated to me that it might be more than a coincidence. Tagore's influence was present in the process of Balinese religious modernization since two Balinese intellectuals that played a prominent role in this modernization had been educated in Visva Bharati, Tagore's institution.

Becoming Modern: Balinese Religion in the 1950s

Thirty years after Tagore's visit, Balinese religion was indeed undergoing a transformation. Its transformation was in the nature of modernization, as it changed from a traditional and practice-based (orthopraxy) to a modern, rationalized orthodoxy. The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who was doing fieldwork in Bali in 1957-1958, first observed the symptoms of this modernization and this led to his essay 'Internal Conversion' in *Contemporary Bali*, published in 1964. Having worked for several years in Java writing a manuscript that later became his dissertation on Javanese religion, he found a surprising contrast in the Balinese way of conducting their religious life compared to their Javanese counterparts. Java, in the context of mid twentieth century, had developed, in Geertz's words, 'relatively well-rationalized systems of belief and worships... giving a conscious sense of religious diversity, conflict and perplexity still quite foreign in Bali.'⁴ Geertz was particularly struck by how indifferent the Balinese were to their own religious doctrines, rendering them to a state of 'total absence of either doubt or dogmatism, the metaphysical nonchalance.'⁵ Advanced observation led Geertz to conclude that at the core of Balinese religion is its orthopraxy, meaning what matters to the Balinese is whether ritual details are carried out correctly, and not orthodoxy in which the conceptual side remains less important:

'beyond a minimal level, there is almost no interest in doctrine, or generalized interpretation of what is going on, at all. The stress is on orthopraxy, not orthodoxy—what is crucial is that each ritual detail should be correct and in place... But the conceptual side is of much less moment: the worshippers

usually don't even know who the gods in the temples are, are uninterested in the meaning of rich symbolism, and indifferent to what others may or may not believe.' (Geertz, 1964)

However, by the time Geertz wrote this essay he sensed that there was already a transformation well underway at the ideological level in Balinese religion. Geertz indicated that Balinese religion was experiencing a swing of the pendulum from orthopraxy to orthodoxy. Using Weber's theoretical framework of 'rationalized' and 'traditional' religion, Geertz managed to show that the Balinese changed from being concerned by the concrete elements of religion (i.e. the traditional way of practicing rituals) to the abstract questions of values and dogma (the rationalized).

Geertz observed the symptom of this change at a funeral gathering in a village. He was caught up in a discussion among the Balinese youth who asked questions such as which of their customs were secular and which were sacred. The discussion was apparently animated by enthusiastic responses from several educated and semi-educated young men in that funeral gathering. They took turns making philosophical speculations, sharing academic views or personal beliefs⁶.

This *obvious* development at the personal level was also supported by an endeavor in terms of rationalizing the creed. As Geertz wrote, it was done through the agency of the printing business. There were several firms that published translations of classical palm-leaf literature available with the priests, books with interpretations of moral-symbolic values, and made them economically available to the keen masses.

Several decades later, anthropologists conducting research on contemporary Balinese religion see the result of this transformation. Shinji Yamashita (2003), in his research on the impact of the tourism industry to the development of religion in Bali, mentions several changes that took place after Geertz left. The most obvious was the establishment of the new orthodoxy mainly as a result of a campaign by the Hindu Council (*Parisadha*) to reform traditional Balinese religion. This new orthodoxy was made manifest in the 'textbook religion', to borrow Yamashita's term and was different from the Balinese traditional 'ritualism'. Yamashita was, nonetheless, referring to what is now commonly understood as modern Hinduism or *Agama Hindu* promoted by *Parisadha*, and the Balinese 'ritualism' he mentions is the traditional Balinese religion that was more concerned with rituals.

Another anthropologist, Leo Howe, writes in his work (2001, 2005) that, besides modern Hinduism promoted by *Parisadha*, there were new religious movements such as Sai Baba and Hare Krishna existing in contemporary Hindu Balinese society. He argues that the proliferation of new religious movements in Bali was a development subsequent to the introduction of modern Hinduism in Bali in the late 1950's. This modern Hinduism itself went through its formative years in the 1960s in parallel with an increasing interest in Indian Hinduism within a small circle of Balinese intellectuals.

Struggling for Recognition from Indonesian State

What was the reason behind this religious transformation? In order to address this question, we have to look at the political situation in Indonesia at the time. Minority religions in Indonesia were struggling for recognition by the state, including the Balinese religion. The Indonesian state was in its formative era in which many issues were being negotiated. The question concerning the fundamentals of the state was at the heart of the debate. Religion was part of that question. Indonesia was torn between those who supported a non-confessional state that was secular in nature and those who supported an Islamic state. As it turned out later, the supporters of the non-confessional state won the debate and Indonesia became anything but an Islamic state. However, as part of the trade-off, a Ministry of Religious Affairs was established in 1946 that was heavily dominated by the Muslim faction.

In 1952, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs stipulated several requirements for a religion to be recognized by it. First, it had to be monotheistic; second, it had to have a codified law for the followers; third, it had to possess a Holy Book and a prophet; fourth, it had to enjoy international recognition; and finally it was not to be limited to a single ethnic group (Picard, 2004:56). With these requirements as parameters, the traditional Balinese religious practices and belief did not qualify as a 'religion' ('*agama*', as it is in Indonesian language), but only as a belief with a lesser status than a religion (in Indonesian language this belief with a lesser status was termed '*kepercayaan*'), a derogatory categorization that dismissed their religion and made them vulnerable to proselytizing from Muslim and Christians.

As part of the effort to gain recognition, the *Parisadha Hindu Dharma Bali* (the then Hindu Council of Bali) had been promoting reform to traditional Balinese religion by infusing concepts and theological understanding to realign the traditional Balinese religion with Indian Hinduism, the source of Balinese religion. Making religious texts available to the keen masses was part of the effort. Thus Geertz actually saw the effect of the struggle of the Balinese intellectuals to consciously transform their religion owing to pressure from an external factor: the Indonesian state. The importance of this transformation from non-rationalized religion to a rationalized one has been highlighted by Geertz as an 'internal conversion' (Geertz, 1964: 294).

The main task of the transformation was to introduce a new and modern theological framework to the indigenous Balinese religion (Picard, 2011). This new theological framework was imported from India by Balinese intellectuals, some of whom were studying in India. An interesting question pertaining to this religious transformation of the Balinese religion related to why that theological framework was imported from India and not derived from local texts. A possible answer might be that several important Balinese intellectuals at that time were educated in India and they were assigned a central task in the ongoing transformation. A study by Bakker (1993) argues that the Balinese intellectuals played a critical role in this transformation. Interestingly, among those Balinese intellectuals, two were educated in Visva Bharati, in Santiniketan. They were Ida Bagoes Mantra and Nyoman S. Pedit.

Ida Bagoes Mantra and Nyoman Pedit: Two Balinese Graduates of Santiniketan

Among several Balinese intellectuals that played a pivotal role in the transformation of Balinese religion were Ida Bagoes Mantra and Nyoman S. Pedit. They both were among the first Balinese intellectuals that studied in India, and specifically in Santiniketan, and then came back to become prominent leaders. Mantra went to study Indology in Santiniketan in 1950 and received his doctorate there in 1957, the first Balinese to receive a doctorate degree from a university. Pedit went to Santiniketan in 1958, a year after Mantra received his doctorate, to study History of Indian Philosophy. Pedit was largely a journalist, while Mantra was a towering figure as both an intellectual and a bureaucrat. In the following section I will focus on Ida Bagoes Mantra but with only a short account of Pedit given the limited sources available about him.

Ida Bagoes Mantra: Intellectual and Activist

Pedit was a prominent youth figure and was involved in the struggle for Indonesian independence. He was a lieutenant for the youth army of Sunda Kecil (a region comprised of Bali and West Nusa Tenggara) in 1945-1949 and become its head in 1949-1954⁷. Pedit went to Santiniketan in 1958 to study the History of Indian Philosophy. When he came back to Indonesia he became a prolific writer and translator. His works were important in the availability of religious knowledge that fueled the transformation of Balinese religion. Among his important books were the translations of the Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Most Balinese read his translations and this helped the dissemination of new religious orthodoxy among the general Balinese population. His books also, in a way, shaped the understanding of the new generation of Balinese who read works such as the Bhagavad Gita.

Unlike the scarcity of sources on Pedit, there are several sources from which we can learn about Ida Bagoes Mantra. His biography that was written by his colleagues at the Udayana University is an excellent source. From this biography we can examine Mantra's role in the transformation of Balinese religion and learn about his study in Santiniketan.

Ida Bagoes Mantra's first encounter with Tagore's work was when he studied in Macassar, Eastern Indonesia. He was studying at the Dutch middle school AMS (*Algemene Middlebare School*) from 1947-1949 where he read world literatures and encountered Tagore's work for the first time. He was so taken with Tagore's work that he was determined to study at Visva Bharati in Santiniketan (Rama et. al, 1998:5).

Mantra eventually managed to study at Santiniketan in 1950. At Santiniketan, Mantra studied Indology. He was interested especially in Indian culture, an intellectual curiosity that was mirrored in his thesis. After four years of study, on December 24, 1954, he graduated with an MA thesis titled '*Ancient Indian History and Culture*.' He received his doctorate in 1957 by writing a dissertation titled '*Hindu Literature and Religion in Indonesia*.' (Rama et. al, 1998: 6).

From both his master's thesis and his dissertation, we can infer that Mantra dedicated much of his intellectual energy to Hindu religion and Indian culture. He also wrote several books on the religion and culture of Bali. Among his books we can find titles such as: *The Foundation of Balinese Culture (Landasan Kebudayaan Bali)* and *Bali: Socio-cultural Problems and Modernization (Bali: Masalah Sosial Budaya dan Modernisasi)*. This remarkable background will help us understand his later activism and role in the transformation of Balinese religion.

Mantra's role was central in the establishment of the Hindu Council in Bali. As has been mentioned above, the history of the establishment of the Hindu Council cannot be separated from the demand of the new state of Indonesia for a certain religion to be recognized by the central government. The Balinese religion that did not yet meet these requirements then needed to receive recognition from the state. A delegation led by the Bali governor at that time, Ida Bagus Sutedja, went to Jakarta to discuss the recognition of the Balinese religion with the central government. The outcome of this meeting was then shared with important religious figures of Bali in 1958. One step taken after this meeting was the setting up of a commission that would deal with securing this recognition. The head of this commission was none else but Ida Bagus Mantra. The very reason he was selected to head this commission, *Hindu Bali Sabha*, was that he was the first Balinese to have a doctorate and his expertise was on Hindu religion. Moreover, he had studied in India, in Visva Bharati, Santiniketan (Rama et.al, 1998:169).

The first meeting of the new commission was in November 1958 to prepare for the setting up a new institution, a Hindu Council, which would concern itself with the religious matters of the Balinese. The second meeting, on February 23, 1959, was at the Faculty of Letters of Udayana University, where Mantra was the Dean. This meeting turned out to be an historical one as it managed to establish the first Hindu Council in Bali. At that meeting, there were eight delegations from all over Bali, the heads of religious offices in Bali, and several representatives of religious organizations on the island. The task of the newly-established council was to sustain, strengthen and develop Hinduism in Bali. Mantra became the Council's first secretary. The Board of the Council itself consisted of priests (*sulinggih*) and laymen religious leaders (*walaka*) (Rama et.al, 1998:168).

The role of the newly-established Hindu Council was important in the transformation of Balinese religion. It introduced new practices, it built a new temple, and it produced religious texts as guidance for the Balinese. The new practice that was introduced to the general Balinese population was the three-times-a-day prayer by chanting *Gayatri* mantram. This was followed by the establishment of a new kind of temple, *Jagadnatha*, in Denpasar, the capital city of Bali, before being replicated in each town all across Bali. The new temple, *Jagadnatha*, was built primarily to accommodate Balinese that stayed on in the city and could not go back to their own villages to participate in rituals and worship. This establishment of the *Jagadnatha* temple with its goal of serving the Balinese urbanites is central to the modernization of Balinese religion. The Balinese urbanites that could not always participate in the rituals held in their villages of origin needed a new form of religious articulation of which the new temple became an essential part (Metera, 2012). The

idea of building *Jagadnatha* temple came from Ida Bagoes Mantra, among others. He was the one who insisted on the name *Jagadnatha* and he led the team that built the temple in Denpasar, the capital city of Bali. The building process started in 1964 and ended in 1975 (Rama et.al, 1998:173-175).

Mantra also took part in the establishment of an institute that taught Hinduism and produced young Balinese Hindu intellectuals. His initial idea was to set up an educational institution that would preserve the teaching of Hinduism. This was urgent because Mantra observed that there was not much effort to preserve Hinduism, which was a minority religion in Muslim-dominated Indonesia. He set up another meeting, in November 1961, with representatives of Hindu youth from all over Indonesia as well as some priests sponsored by the Hindu Council. The meeting took place for about a week from November 17 to November 23 and resulted in some policy recommendations. Among the recommendations was the setting up a Hindu institute that would teach Hinduism to the general public. Two years after the recommendation, on October 3, 1963, the *Maha Widya Bhawana Institut Hindu Dharma* was established, largely based on Mantra's idea (Rama et. al, 1998: 9).

At the beginning of the Institute's operation, people were skeptical about its graduates, largely about their ability to find jobs. However, as the Institute keeps operating, its graduates find jobs as teachers of Hinduism in schools all over Bali and Indonesia. The Institute became a university in 1993 and has expanded to include departments like Law and Literature (Rama et. al, 1998:181).

Mantra's role as secretary of the Hindu Council was pivotal as he managed to advance important ideas and policies. We can see that he was an activist actively promoting transformation and consolidation of Hinduism in Bali. However, Mantra's role was not limited to the Hindu Council. He went on to assume important roles in Bali and in Indonesia. He became the Rector of Udayana University in Bali from 1964-1968; assumed a position as the Director General of the Cultural Affairs Section under the Ministry of Culture and Education of Indonesia from 1968-1978; became the Governor of Bali from 1978-1988; and finally became the Indonesian Ambassador to India from 1989-1992.

During his role as the head of the Cultural Affairs Section in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and as the Governor of Bali, Mantra was very active in promoting Balinese art and supporting art events in Bali. The Art Centre in Denpasar and the Bali Art Festival (*Pesta Kesenian Bali/ PKB*) were established with his support. His passion for art was clearly cultivated during his study in Santiniketan. His biography mentions that the curriculum Mantra encountered in Santiniketan emphasized art and culture. This experience in Santiniketan seems to have had a lasting impact on Mantra, and he implemented his passion for art when he returned to his hometown, Bali.

Mantra passed away in 1995 but his influence and legacy continue to the present. His family is an influential one in Bali and one of his sons is now the mayor of the city of Denpasar. His name is immortalized in Bali with a street named after him, and his Bali Art Festival continues to be the most festive event in the year.

Conclusion: Tagore's Vision Comes True Through Two Graduates of Santiniketan

When Tagore had his reservations about Bali in 1927, Bali was still under colonial rule that deliberately preserved its archaic nature. This policy was called *Baliseering*, a policy to keep Bali in its seemingly pristine and untouchable form and secure from the influence of the outside world. The colonial government imposed this policy with a goal to develop tourism and attract more visitors to the beautiful island. However, as the nationalist movement defeated the colonial administration and a shift to a new Indonesian state took place, Bali also underwent radical changes. The new Indonesian state imposed new regulations on religious life that forced changes in the Balinese religion. A modernization of Balinese religion had to take place. This modernization, in a manner, is the realization of the vision that Tagore had decades earlier.

Interestingly, this modernization was carried out by Balinese intellectuals that had been trained and educated in Visva Bharati, Santiniketan. Ida Bagoes Mantra and Nyoman S. Pendit both studied in Santiniketan in the 1950s and came back to become prominent figures that shaped policymaking and influenced the development of the Balinese religion to its present state. They were the first Balinese intellectuals who studied in India and thus paved the way for later generations to come to India and strengthen the ties between the two countries. Tagore's mission of bridge building (Das Gupta, 2002) was successful, and Tagore's influence was felt in as far a place as Bali in Indonesia.

A future project is needed to shed more light on this link between Tagore's vision and its realization carried out by the two Balinese graduates of Santiniketan. The project should scrutinize what specific aspects of knowledge from Visva Bharati did Ida Bagoes Mantra and Nyoman S. Pendit implement in their writing and policies. What did they get from their study in Santiniketan that shaped their worldview? This short article, besides pointing to this link between Tagore's vision and its realization, also calls for a in-depth research on these two Balinese graduates of Santiniketan and what they received from Visva Bharati.

Notes

- 1 Das Gupta, Arun. 'Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia: An Experiment in Bridge-Building.' *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land en Volkenkunde*, Vol.158, No. 3, 2002, pp. 451-477.
- 2 Das Gupta, *idem*, p. 45
- 3 Das Gupta, *idem*, p.457
- 4 Geertz, Clifford. 'Internal Conversion in Contemporary Bali' *Malayan and Indonesian Studies Presented to Sir Richard Winsted*. Ed. Roolvink, J. Bastin & R. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 287.
- 5 Geertz, 1964. *idem*, p.287

Geertz, *idem* pp. 294-5.

Short biography of Pendit by Gramedia books, the largest publisher in Indonesia. <http://www.gramediapustakautama.com/penulis-detail/35045/Nyoman-S-Pendit>

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