

The hyperactivity of Nyoman

Scholarly sources:

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Meet Nyoman

Nyoman Tilim was an seven-year-old boy living in Bali in 1952. He may look sweet and innocent, but if you had asked his villagers about him, they would likely tell you he was a "handful."

We'll get to that in a minute. First, let's learn a little about his world.



Nyoman's world

Nyoman's country Bali is a tiny island nation in the Indian Ocean. It's located in Indonesia. You can see it as a speck just east of Java (toward the bottom of the map).

Bali was a very different kind of country. First, it was not Islamic like its Indonesian neighbors. Bali practiced Hinduism.



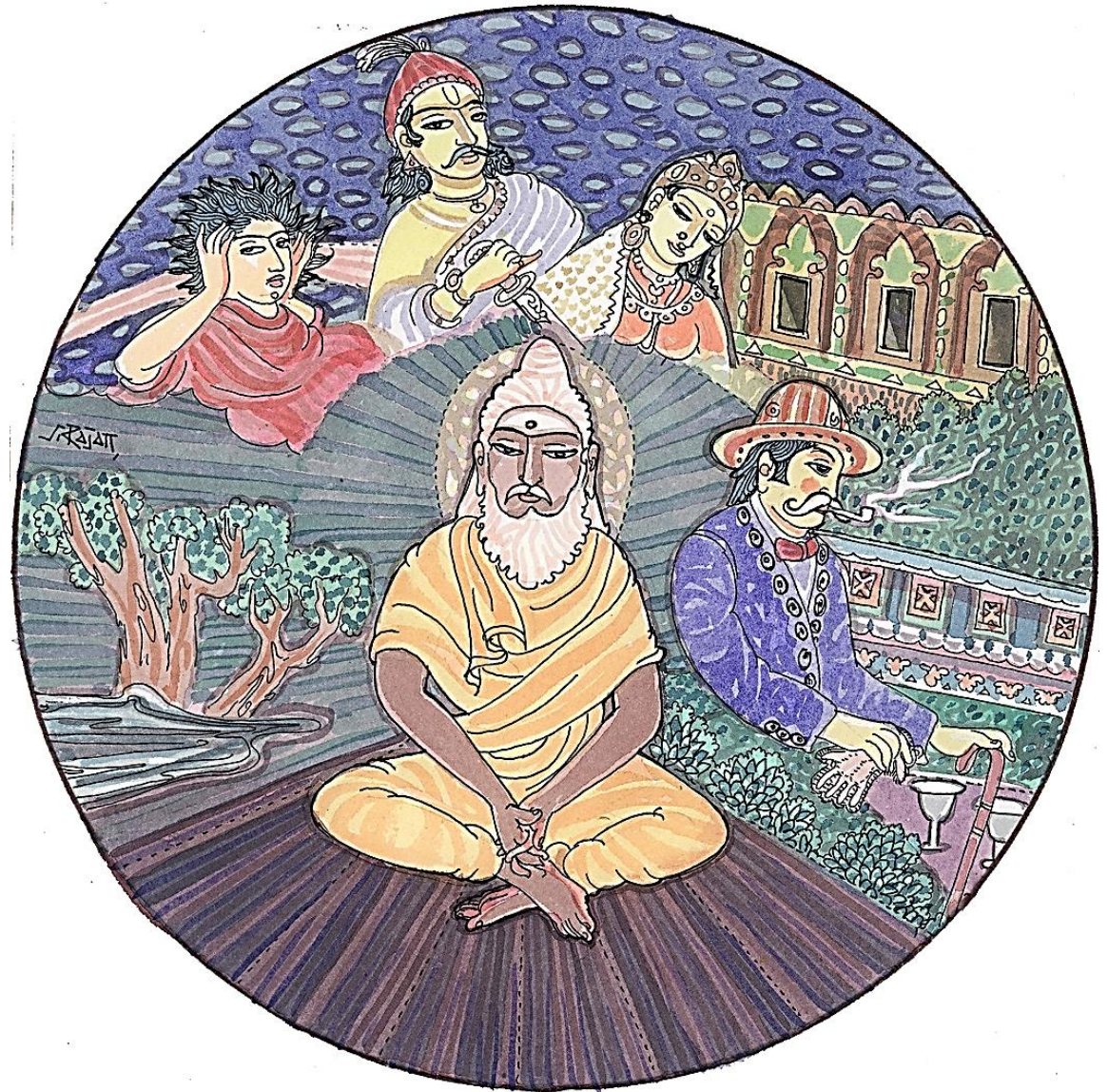
Second, the Hinduism it practiced was different than other Hindu nations. The Balinese did not put much stress on Hindu laws and scriptures or a belief in one supreme being called "Brahman."

The Balinese brought in their earlier beliefs in the protective power of animals and ancestor worship. They honored these spirits at shrines (see right).



The Balinese, like most Hindus, believed in reincarnation. The dead were cremated in order to free their souls for the next journey.

They believed that the dead people's souls would be reborn in human form every fourth generation.



Another difference is that religion in Bali was practiced mostly through art and performance. Theater was everything to the Balinese. Through it they expressed their beliefs and got out the emotions of the people.



These ritual performances had much to do with self-control or the lack of control. Balinese children were taught self-control from the time they were infants. They were even trained to move their limbs in very controlled ways—movements that would eventually lead to dance patterns.



But somehow none of this training
"took" with squirmy little Nyoman.



See, Nyoman lived in a nice Indonesian house with very understanding parents.



And his village was beautiful
with hard-working and
exceptionally friendly
people.

But these people had rules.



Aggressive behavior was not tolerated.
Children had to play peacefully with each
other. Fighting was never allowed.



But poor little Nyoman had too much energy for his own good. Plus he had a temper. He was supposed to control himself. But this was asking the impossible of Nyoman.

He even had to leave school when he was six. School was not the law at that time in Bali, and because Nyoman could not sit still or control himself, the teacher thought it best for him to leave.



Nyoman's name meant "third child." He was the youngest in his family and had an older brother and sister. He also had a dog that he adored.

His brother and sister had no problems with self-control. Both stayed in school. Both were also active in performance art. His sister was learning Balinese dance and his brother was learning music.



Nyoman's older brother Wayan was a member of a gamelan, which was a Balinese orchestra that played an important role in village ritual theatre. The orchestra instruments included tuned bronze gongs, gong-chimes, and metallophones, with accompaniment by drums and cymbals. Wayan played the gong-chimes.

The gamelan met in its own clubhouse and would rehearse after supper until 10 pm every day of the week.



Wayan tried to involve his little brother. The gamelan gave him the opportunity to learn the cymbals because they required the least discipline. But alas, this did not work out.

"Nyoman," admonished the gamelan leader, after a month of trying to coach the boy, "our orchestra must have precision for when we are performing. We cannot have you crashing these cymbals any time you wish. We do not improvise here!"

And so poor little Nyoman failed at something else.



Nyoman's parents gave a lot of thought to the problem with their youngest child.

One day his mother, Ni Made, came to Nyoman with an idea. "You should have a role in the village, my child. Right now there is no room for you, with your disruptive behaviors."



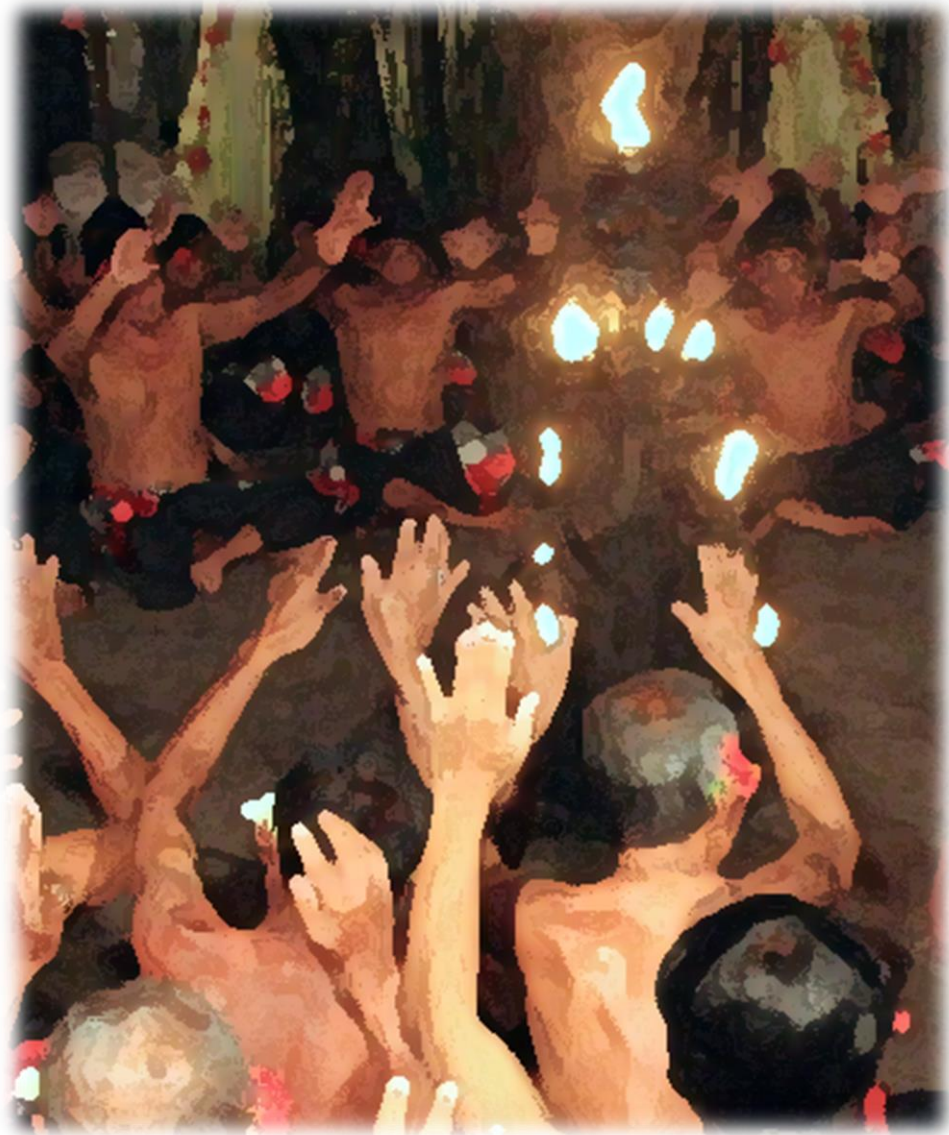
Nyoman felt like he was going to cry. He knew what his mother said was true, but he also knew he just couldn't help himself. He didn't know why he was so different.



His mother went on. "For the past two weeks our village has attended rehearsals of the barong dance. Your brother and his gamelan play in the performances. Your father and I notice that this is a time when you seem very focused.

"But we also realize that you don't have the discipline to play the role of many of the dancers."

Nyoman dropped his head.



"But your father and I think that you might be able to play a part in the kris dance at the end," she stated.

Nyoman's mouth dropped. The kris dance was his favorite part of the barong performance. The boys and young men danced with Asian daggers called krisses. The dance was the wildest thing he'd ever seen.

"See these dancers require so much energy and they improvise, which we think might suit you. Plus in time the other dancers could teach you how to put yourself into a trance state during the dance that might help you control your impulses."



So Nyoman's mother went to the elder who was organizing the barong and asked permission to add her son.

"Well, Nyoman must realize that we rehearse every day and the effort is extreme," said the man. "Do you think he has that much energy?"

"Oh he has that!" reassured Nyoman's mother.



And so Nyoman went to rehearsals. Every day he and his dance partners swirled, leaped into the air, kicked their heels, and tossed their bodies onto the ground for hour upon hour. At each rehearsal, the dancers added a new, even wilder step to the improvisation.

Every night the villagers watched the rehearsals, as these performances acted out their ancient religion and all that was important to them.

At the end of each day, Nyoman was so exhausted he couldn't even play with his beloved dog (who was somewhat understanding).



Finally it was the day of the actual performance. All performers got into their costumes that villages had been creating for months.

People came from miles around the village to see their epic theater of good versus evil.

The dance opened with monkeys and people dancing in a peaceful, controlled environment.



Barong, the king of the jungle, then made his appearance in this setting. He looked like a half shaggy dog, half lion, and was manned by two boys with only their legs showing.

Barong was everything that was good and helpful to people. He had powers to defeat illness, black magic, and any other kind of misfortune.



The gamelan played and men, women, and animals danced around their beloved Barong.

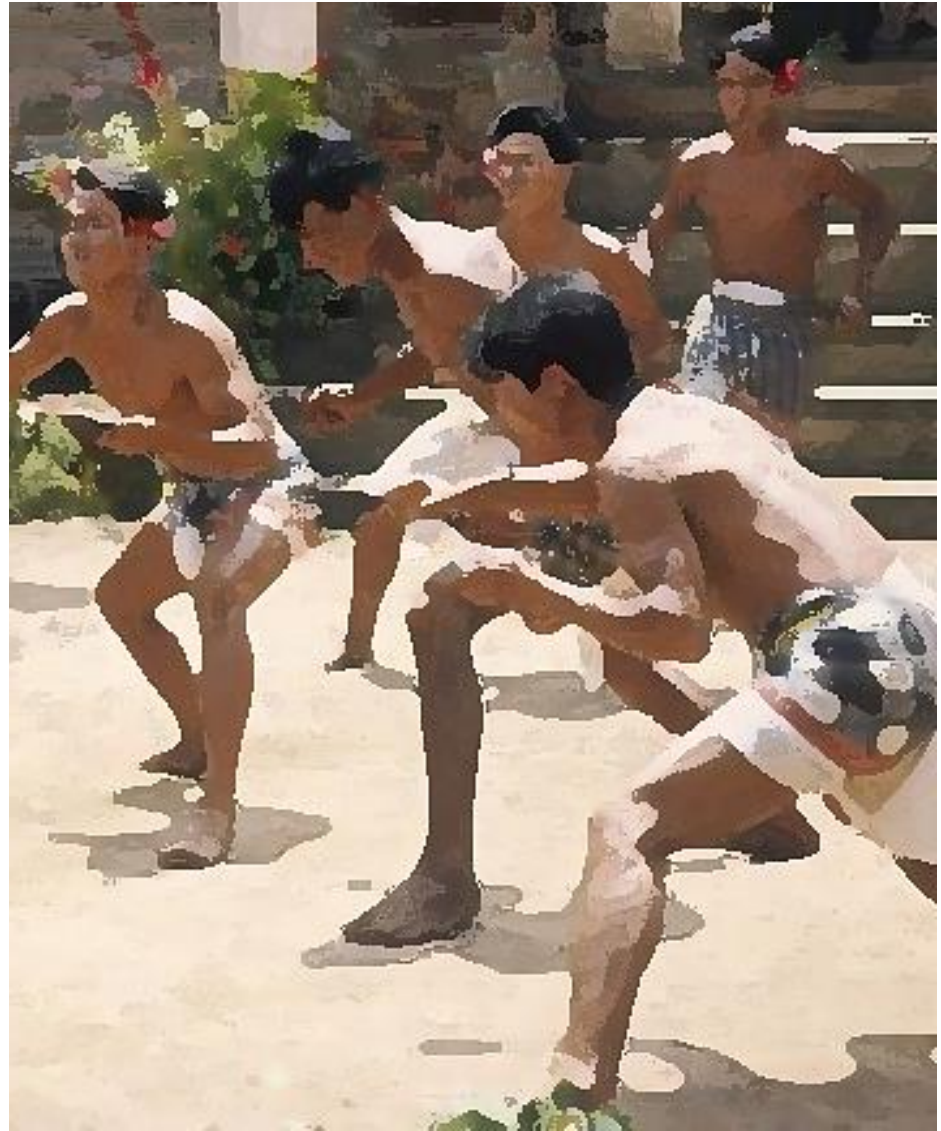


Then the dreaded Rangda appeared. While Barong represented good, Rangda represented evil. Rangda was known as a demon queen.

In her dance, Rangda made havoc in the community. She spotted the male supporters of Barong who were armed with krisses. In front of them she insulted Barong and taunted the men and boys.



Enraged and in a trance the supporters swung their krisses and attacked her. But her powers were so strong that they were knocked out.



When they came to, they were so upset by their failure, that they tried to stab themselves with their krisses. But they were finally stopped by the entrance of the Barong.

Good won and here the dance ended.



The morning after the performance,
Nyoman's mother woke him up.

"My son, I see that this dance has
worked for you," Ni Made began.

Nyoman listened intently (of course
he was too tired to do much else).



"You see what our theater does for our people?" Ni Made continued. "It shows us what goodness and evil is."

Nyoman nodded.

"We try to avoid violence in our village. Instead, we show it and act it out in theater. But it is also more."



"Our theater gives many of our people the opportunity to play out their creative urges. They act, make our beautiful costumes, and create the dance steps."



"Others, like your sister, can show off their more sensitive sides in the dances."



"Yet for others, like your brother, it is a way to learn new skills or simply to have enrichment."



"But for you, my son, it has become a wonderful way to use your aggression in a good way.

"Don't you agree?"



Nyoman could only gaze affectionately into his mother's eyes. He'd found a way to act out his hyperactivity.

But he'd also found an important role for himself in his wonderful village.



The end

Let's talk!!!