

The Philosophy of *Rujak Buni* in the *Ngaben Pengiyehan* Ritual: a Study of Symbolic and Religious Meanings

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ABSTRAK. Studi ini mengkaji filosofi rujak buni dalam ritual Ngaben Pengiyehan yang dilaksanakan oleh Dadia Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, Desa Selat, Sukasada, Buleleng. Rujak buni, yang dibuat dari campuran buah buni merah, hijau, dan hitam, diartikan sebagai simbol solidaritas dan kebersamaan. Perpaduan rasa manis, asam, dan sedikit pahit mewakili keragaman pengalaman dalam kehidupan sosial, sekaligus melambangkan semangat kerja sama (*gotong royong*) dalam melaksanakan upacara keagamaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi, berfokus pada pengalaman hidup anggota Dadia dalam menyelenggarakan Ngaben kolektif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, serta dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa rujak buni tidak hanya menjadi bagian dari sesaji upacara, tetapi juga memiliki makna simbolis dan religius. Secara simbolis, hal itu mencerminkan persatuan dalam keberagaman dan prinsip *paras-paros*, *salunglung sabayantaka* (solidaritas dan bantuan timbal balik). Secara religius, ini menjembatani hubungan antar anggota masyarakat sambil menegaskan kembali pengabdian kepada Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. Ritual Ngaben Pengiyehan, yang didukung oleh kontribusi sukarela dari semua anggota Dadia, menunjukkan bagaimana makanan simbolis menjadi media untuk melestarikan tradisi, memperkuat kohesi sosial, dan menyeimbangkan kewajiban spiritual dengan realitas ekonomi kolektif.

ABSTRACT. This study examines the philosophy of *rujak buni* in the *ngaben pengiyehan* ritual carried out by Dadia Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, Selat Village, Sukasada, Buleleng. *Rujak buni*, made from a mixture of red, green, and black buni fruits, is interpreted as a symbol of solidarity and togetherness. The blend of flavors sweet, sour, and slightly bitter represents the diversity of experiences within social life, while at the same time symbolizing the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) in conducting religious ceremonies. This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, focusing on the lived experiences of Dadia members in organizing collective Ngaben. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that *rujak buni* is not only part of the ceremonial offerings but also carries symbolic and religious meanings. Symbolically, it reflects unity in diversity and the principle of *paras-paros*, *salunglung sabayantaka* (solidarity and mutual assistance). Religiously, it bridges relationships among community members while reaffirming devotion to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. The *ngaben pengiyehan* ritual, supported by voluntary contributions from all Dadia members, demonstrates how symbolic food becomes a medium for sustaining tradition, strengthening social cohesion, and balancing spiritual obligations with collective economic realities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Ngaben* ceremony is the central death ritual in Balinese Hindu tradition, functioning as the purification of the soul (*atma*) so that it may return to its source (*moksa*). In general, *Ngaben* is carried out through the cremation of the body using fire. However, in practice there are variations in its implementation that reflect the flexibility of Balinese culture. The *Ngaben* ritual in Bali is essentially flexible and demonstrates creative adaptations in response to the socio-economic dynamics of society (Wibawa, 2022). This indicates that tradition remains open to innovation without diminishing its religious significance.

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One form of adaptation is *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni*, which has developed in *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, Selat Village, Sukasada, Buleleng, since 1988. This ritual does not use fire, but instead employs *tirta* (holy water) and certain symbols, using *rujak buni* (a traditional dish made from *Antidesma bunius* fruit) as a philosophical metaphor. The diverse colors and flavors of the *buni* fruit (sweet, sour, and spicy) are understood as a reflection of togetherness in diversity. Rokach points out that rituals are able to build a sense of belonging and togetherness by uniting individual differences into a collective experience (Rokach, 2020). Thus, *rujak buni* is not merely food, but a cultural text that embodies the value of solidarity.

This practice also arises from economic awareness. The high cost of funeral ceremonies often becomes a social burden. Mas'amah emphasize that funeral rituals do not only function as religious practices but also as socio-economic negotiations in which communities strive to find a balance between tradition and affordability (Mas'amah et al., 2023). Therefore, the voluntary contribution system in *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* reflects solidarity, where all members of the *Dadia* are involved, whether they have a *sawa* (deceased body) or not. The philosophy of *paras-paros, salunglung sabayantaka* (shared feelings and mutual responsibility) becomes manifest through this practice.

Furthermore, *rujak buni* in the ritual context demonstrates both symbolic and religious dimensions. Symbolically, it represents social harmony within diversity, while religiously, it signifies the purification of the soul and the return of the elements to *Panca Maha Bhuta*. Xiong explains that food in a religious context is not only regarded as a physical object but also functions as a symbolic medium that bridges humans with the transcendent (Xiong, 2023). This is what makes *rujak buni* important to understand not merely as a dish, but as a spiritual medium.

Based on this background, the objectives of the study are to (1) describe the practice of *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni*; (2) analyze the symbolic meaning of *rujak buni* as a metaphor of togetherness; and (3) examine the religious dimensions underlying the legitimacy of the practice. This study is expected to enrich the literature on death rituals in Bali while also strengthening the discussion of food as a cultural symbol and a medium for value education.

2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-phenomenological design and a qualitative methodology. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on understanding the symbolic and religious meanings of *rujak buni* in the *Ngaben Pengiyehan* ritual as perceived and experienced by the local community. Creswell explains that phenomenological research aims to explore the essence of human experience regarding a phenomenon as described directly by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted in *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, Selat Village, Sukasada District, Buleleng Regency, Bali. This location was selected because it was here that the *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* tradition was first carried out in 1988 on a ten-year cycle and has persisted until today. The research subjects were members of the *Dadia*, *pemangku* (priests), and traditional leaders directly involved in performing the ceremony. Three main techniques were employed in this study: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document study. Given states that the use of multiple data sources enhances the credibility of qualitative findings through the process of triangulation (Given, 2008).

Data analysis followed the Miles model, which includes three stages: data reduction, by selecting data relevant to the research focus (symbolic meaning, religious meaning, and the philosophy of *rujak buni*); data display, by organizing data in the form of narratives, quotations, and tables of ritual stages; and conclusion drawing, by interpreting symbolic and religious meanings based on symbolic theory, contemporary ritual theory, and rational choice theory (Miles et al., 2020).

To ensure validity, the study applied source and method triangulation. Information from interviews was compared with the results of observations and documentation. In addition, the results of symbolic interpretation were cross-checked with key informants (*member checking*) to ensure alignment with the meanings understood by the community. Flick argues that validation in qualitative research is carried out by examining the consistency of the researcher's interpretation with participants' intended meanings and by comparing them across multiple data sources (Flick, 2015).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Stages of the Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni

Based on observation and documentation in *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* implemented through several important stages: *nanginin, meseh lawang, pepegat, maktiang pura dalem, ngeragaang, nganyut di cangkupan, nebus di segara, medeeng, pengeningan, meajar-ajar, dan peneleb*.

The resource person, Jro Mangku I Ketut Jasi, he is a priest of the Dalem Temple of Selat Village, emphasized that

"Each stage has its own symbolic meaning; for example, *pepegat* means breaking worldly ties, while *medeeng* signifies the spirit being escorted by young people as a symbol of *apsara-apsari*" (Interview on July 12, 2024).

Voluntary Contribution System

Since this tradition was first held in 1988, every 10 years, all *Dadia* members have been involved in a voluntary contribution system. According to I Nyoman Untung Eka Hariawan, *Petengen/Administrator of Dadia*,

“Even though my family doesn't have a sawa (deceased person), we still pay the dues, because this isn't about who owns the body, but about togetherness.” (Interview on July 14, 2024).

This shows the real practice of the philosophy of feeling the same and sharing the same burden (*paras-paros, salunglung sabayantaka*).

Rujak Buni Meaning

Rujak buni used as a symbol. Red, green, and black buni fruit are mixed together, creating a sweet, sour, and spicy flavor. According to Jro Mangku Ketut Payu Putra Negara as the priest in *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari,

“Rujak Buni reminds us that different tastes and colors can be combined into one, just like the people of Dadia who are different but united for Yadnya” (Interview on July 15, 2024).

Discussion

Symbolic Dimension

The symbolic dimension of *rujak buni* reflects the community's collective understanding of unity within diversity. This interpretation aligns with Geertz's concept of symbols as systems of meaning that transmit cultural knowledge and enable humans to communicate and maintain social cohesion (Alexander & Taylor, 2024). In this case, *rujak buni* serves not merely as food but as a symbolic medium that binds social and spiritual relationships among members of *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari.

According to Jro Mangku Ketut Payu Putra Negara,

“*Rujak buni* reminds us that different tastes and colors can be combined into one, just like the people of Dadia who are different but united for *yadnya*” (Interview, July 15, 2024).

His statement illustrates how *rujak buni* operates as a lived symbol a tangible expression of the principle *paras-paros, salunglung sabayantaka* (solidarity and shared responsibility). The mixture of red, green, and black *buni* fruits, with their sweet, sour, and spicy flavors, embodies the balance of difference and harmony, reminding the community that diversity does not contradict unity but completes it.

From a semiotic perspective, this symbolic act affirms what (Xiong, 2023) notes that food in a religious context is not merely a physical object but a symbolic medium bridging humans and the divine. Within the *Ngaben Pengiyehan* ritual, *rujak buni* thus becomes a “text” that translates spiritual values into sensory and social experience. The community's participation in preparing and sharing *rujak buni* reaffirms their devotion to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa while sustaining horizontal bonds among members.

This finding supports (Rokach, 2020) idea that ritual food fosters a sense of belonging and togetherness by uniting individual differences into collective experience. Through *rujak buni*, the *Dadia* community enacts this belonging not through words but through shared taste a metaphor of social cohesion. As long as the symbol retains meaning within the lived context, it remains alive and functional, sustaining both emotional and spiritual unity.

In the phenomenological view, therefore, the symbolic meaning of *rujak buni* is not externally imposed but emerges from participants' direct experience. The symbol is *lived*, not merely represented it manifests the community's value system through ritual performance. The *rujak buni* dish, with its layered sensory composition, embodies Geertz's (as cited by Alexander & Taylor, 2024) idea that cultural symbols materialize abstract meanings. Through this process, symbolic food functions as a cultural technology that transmits moral philosophy, reinforces social order, and nurtures spiritual identity within the community.

Religious Dimension

The religious dimension of the *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* ritual reveals how sacred meaning endures despite ritual simplification. For the *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari community, the ceremony remains a valid *yadnya* (sacred offering) even without the use of fire. Purification (*pembersihan atma*) is achieved through *tirta* (holy water) and symbolic food offerings such as *rujak buni*. This adaptive form reflects the flexibility and inclusiveness of Balinese ritual systems, in which faith and devotion take precedence over material form.

As Jro Mangku Ketut Payu Putra Negara explained, “*What matters is not the size of the ceremony, but the sincerity of the offering. Rujak buni is part of that sincerity*” (Interview, July 12, 2024). This statement highlights that religious authenticity derives from *ikhlas* (sincerity) rather than scale or expense. Such a view resonates with Mas'amah et al. (2023), who emphasize that funeral rituals are not merely religious practices but *socio-religious negotiations* a means for communities to balance tradition, economic reality, and spiritual obligation. The same principle applies in *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni*, where ritual simplicity becomes a manifestation of spiritual depth rather than its reduction.

This understanding aligns with [Kiper and Mauro's \(2025\)](#) concept of ritual as a cultural technology that not only represents belief but continually reconstructs it through collective participation. In this case, each ritual phase *pepegat* (separation), *medeeng* (spiritual escort), and *peneleb* (purification) operates as an embodied renewal of faith. *Rujak buni*, as part of the offering sequence, symbolizes the passage from the material to the transcendent, ensuring that the ceremony maintains both theological legitimacy and communal sanctity.

Moreover, the function of food as a bridge between human and divine realms, as proposed by [Xiong \(2023\)](#), is clearly observed in this practice. The blending of flavors and colors within *rujak buni* mirrors the harmonization between earthly imperfection and divine purity. Through shared participation in its preparation, devotees reaffirm devotion (*bhakti*) to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa and strengthen the sense of spiritual equality among all members.

In this sense, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* illustrates what [Kiper & Mauro \(2025\)](#) describe as the *active dimension of ritual*: a living, performative process that regenerates faith through repeated, embodied actions. The offering of *tirta* and *rujak buni* continuously mediates between the physical and spiritual worlds, transforming everyday substances into sacred expressions of gratitude. Thus, the ceremony's religious meaning lies not in its grandeur but in its sincerity, a truth echoed in both local theology and anthropological observation.

Ultimately, the religious essence of *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* demonstrates how Balinese Hindu communities reinterpret sacred obligations in changing socio-economic conditions. By emphasizing devotion over display, they sustain the essence of *yadnya* while embodying the adaptive spirituality that, as [Mas'amah et al. \(2023\)](#) suggest, allows ritual to remain both meaningful and sustainable in modern life.

Social-Economic Dimension

The socio-economic dimension of the *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* ritual reveals how economic rationality intertwines with communal solidarity. From its inception in 1988, the *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari community has practiced a voluntary contribution system (*urunan sukarela*) in which all members whether or not they have a *sawa* (deceased family member) participate equally. According to I Nyoman Untung Eka Hariawan,

"Even though my family doesn't have a *sawa*, we still pay the dues, because this isn't about who owns the body, but about togetherness" (Interview, July 14, 2024).

This shared responsibility embodies the local philosophy of *paras-paros, salunglung sabayantaka* a sense of emotional unity and mutual care among community members.

This system can be interpreted through the lens of Rational Choice Theory, which explains that social actions are guided by considerations of cost, benefit, and collective efficiency ([Martínez Peña & Ylikoski, 2024](#)). In this context, the decision to conduct *Ngaben Pengiyehan* collectively rather than individually represents a form of *collective rationality*. By pooling resources, the community minimizes economic burden while maximizing social and spiritual benefit. Each contribution, though seemingly voluntary, is rooted in the awareness that every member will eventually need similar support. Such shared foresight transforms economic calculation into moral obligation.

This reasoning aligns with the findings of [Sayuti et al. \(2023\)](#), who describe *gotong royong* as a resilient form of social capital in post-pandemic Indonesia. Their study demonstrates that mutual cooperation continues to serve as a mechanism of economic adaptation, enabling communities to withstand crises through shared responsibility. In *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni*, *gotong royong* takes on a religious dimension—it is not merely an act of social solidarity but also a fulfillment of *Pitra Yadnya*, the sacred duty to honor one's ancestors. Thus, the voluntary contribution system simultaneously achieves economic sustainability, religious merit, and cultural continuity.

Viewed through both economic and symbolic perspectives, this practice represents a rational negotiation between tradition and modernity. The community's choice to replace expensive cremation materials with symbolic offerings like *rujak buni* and *tirta* does not diminish the ritual's sanctity; instead, it ensures that every member, regardless of financial status, can perform *yadnya* with dignity. This resonates with [Mas'amah et al. \(2023\)](#), who argue that funeral rituals often function as arenas for socio-economic negotiation, where communities strive to reconcile sacred obligation with practical affordability.

Comparatively, this type of collective adaptation echoes the findings of [Miyake & Kohsaka \(2020\)](#) in their study of Japan's *Teikei* system an economic model based on solidarity between producers and consumers. Like organic farmers who shared costs to maintain sustainability, members of *Dadia* Pasek Gelgel also share ritual expenses to maintain spiritual and social balance. In both cases, economic rationality becomes inseparable from moral and cultural values.

Therefore, the socio-economic dimension of *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* reveals a sophisticated blend of pragmatic decision-making and cultural ethics. Rational calculation (in terms of cost and efficiency) merges with spiritual reasoning (based on solidarity and sincerity). Through this synergy, the community successfully transforms potential economic limitation into collective strength. This phenomenon illustrates what [Martínez Peña & Ylikoski \(2024\)](#) describe as the coupling of social and ecological mechanisms: rational actions remain embedded in moral frameworks that sustain social cohesion. In this sense, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* is not merely a cost-saving alternative, but a living model of adaptive wisdom (*kearifan adaptif*) that preserves tradition while ensuring inclusivity and economic resilience.

Synthesis

The results of this study show that *rujak buni* in the *Ngaben Pengiyehan* tradition is not just a side dish, but a symbol of life that holds layers of social, religious, and philosophical meaning. The symbolism of *rujak buni* arises from the combination of the colors and flavors of the *Antidesma bunius* fruit: red, green, and black; sweet, sour, and spicy, all combined in one dish. This combination becomes a metaphor for living together in diversity, where each element contributes to complete the whole. The resource person, Jro Mangku Ketut Payu Putra Negara, emphasized:

"Rujak buni is simple, but it reminds us that despite our different flavors, we can be one. Just like the Dadia people who are different but united in their *yadnya*" (interview on July 15, 2024).

This symbolic meaning aligns with Rokach's view that rituals can build a sense of belonging and togetherness by uniting individual differences in a shared experience (Rokach, 2020). In other words, *rujak buni* becomes a cultural text that fosters a sense of belonging among Dadia members. Despite differences in economic status, this collective experience ensures that the *yadnya* can proceed without creating an unequal burden.

The religious dimension is evident in the interpretation of *pengiyehan* as a means of purifying the spirit. *Tirta* (water) is used as a cleansing medium, while *rujak buni* (rice cake) serves as an affirmation that *yadnya* can be performed with sincerity, despite its simplicity. As Jro Mangku I Ketut Jasi, the Priest at Dalem temple, stated:

"What makes *yadnya* valid is not the size of the ceremony, but the sincerity of the offering. Rujak buni is part of that sincerity" (interview on July 12, 2024).

This statement aligns with Xiong, who explains that food in a religious context is understood as a symbolic medium that bridges the relationship between humans and God (Xiong, 2023). This means that *rujak buni* functions as a transcendental medium that bridges the congregation with *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*, as well as an expression of devotion to ancestors.

The socio-economic dimension is also a key pillar in this practice. With a voluntary contribution system, all Dadia members, whether they have a *sawa* (corpse) or not, participate. This indicates that the ritual is not monopolized by a particular individual or family, but rather a shared obligation. As I Nyoman Untung Eka Hariawan stated:

"We still contribute even though we don't have a *sawa*, because this is a communal *yadnya*, not just for one family" (interview on July 14, 2024).

This practice reinforces Sayuti's findings that mutual cooperation as a form of social capital has strong resilience, is able to adapt to economic challenges, and continues to function as a means of mutual assistance in society (Sayuti et al., 2023). Thus, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* is evidence that the value of mutual cooperation has not only survived but also transformed into an adaptive strategy to face modern economic challenges.

These three dimensions, symbolic, religious, and socio-economic, are mutually reinforcing. Symbolically, *rujak buni* conveys a message of togetherness; religiously, it serves as an offering that strengthens the spirituality of *yadnya* (traditional offerings); and socio-economically, it serves as a concrete means of facilitating collective participation. This tradition demonstrates that cultural innovation is not simply a cost-saving measure, but rather a philosophical transformation: communities find new ways to remain faithful to Balinese Hindu teachings, maintain solidarity, and preserve local wisdom.

Thus, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* can be understood as a meaningful alternative ritual: technically simple, yet rich in symbolism, religiousness, and social significance. The philosophy of *rujak buni* is not merely a metaphor, but a concrete practice of solidarity (*paras-paros*, *salunglung sabayantaka*) that connects generations, maintains social cohesion, and strengthens Balinese cultural identity amidst changing times.

4. CONCLUSION

This research found that *rujak buni* (rice cake) in the *Ngaben Pengiyehan* tradition in *Dadia Pasek Gelgel Dewa Ngurah Gde Pulung Sari, Selat Village, Sukasada, Buleleng*, has a meaning that goes beyond simply serving ritual food. Since its inception in 1988, this practice has become a symbolic, religious, and socio-economic medium that unites Dadia residents in *yadnya* (companionship).

First, symbolically, *rujak buni*, with its diverse colors and flavors, represents the philosophy of togetherness in diversity. This symbol emphasizes the values of *paras-paros* (community-to-community), *salunglung sabayantaka* (community-to-community), *salunglung sabayantaka* (community-to-community), and shared responsibilities.

Second, religiously, *rujak buni* serves as a medium for devotion. It is positioned alongside *tirta* (a sacred water) in purifying the soul, affirming that the validity of a *yadnya* is determined not by the amount of money but by sincerity and wholeheartedness.

Third, socio-economically, the voluntary contribution system involving all *Dadia* members demonstrates the power of mutual cooperation. This tradition is not simply a cost-effective alternative, but rather a social strategy to ensure that all members of the community can fulfill their *Pitra Yadnya* obligations with dignity.

Thus, *Ngaben Pengiyehan Rujak Buni* is concrete evidence of how Balinese local wisdom can create cultural innovations that remain aligned with Hindu teachings, strengthen social cohesion, and preserve the value of solidarity amidst modern challenges.

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