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BALINESE CHARACTER
A PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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For a high-caste girl, menarche is marked by a ceremony with many offerings. Before the ceremony, she is kept in a special house and finally she is dressed with the same care as a bride and is specially blessed by a Brahman priest; and even if she has not been betrothed before, she will be married soon after. The low-caste girl may be married by an elopement phrased as an abduction — even before puberty.

Rites de Passage (Plates 84 to 100)

Each Balinese goes through the stages which we have discussed — he is a baby, a knee baby, a third-place child, a latency child, an adolescent, finally an adult who, aging surprisingly little, lives to a beautiful old age, with delicate, lined features and feet that are often still willing to dance. The different periods of life are held together by the thread of consistent personality; Balinese are said to be either "serious" or "naughty" and this dichotomy extends from babyhood to old age; it cuts across sex, caste, and hierarchical lines. Remarkably consistent, the "naughty" old intellectual temple priest will be found to be *au courant* with every love affair in the village, every gambling debt, every scandal, but the very pretty "serious" girl of sixteen will know nothing of such doings. Other personality characteristics are presumed to be just as stable; they are attributed early and continually reinforced by the expectation of the community. Some people are "daring," "poised before those of higher status," "bold" to touch unclean things like corpses or women past menarche; others are "fearful," "shy," "tongue-tied in the face of status," "timorous" in face of the aura of ceremonial uncleanness surrounding birth and death. Some people are "show-offs" seeking the limelight, acting as if they thought "they had lights on the tops of their heads"; others are "embarrassed ones," unwilling to ask a favor, although the Balinese say that "if you want to receive, you must be willing to ask." Some people have a "shining" quality of high birth or special beauty and spirit; they are said to *mebawa*, to glitter, and with this may be joined a high temper, which will make them comparable to a sharp sword whose touch is death. Some love to go among crowds, to watch and participate; others go among crowds only as much as their affairs demand. All such differences are accepted as innate and are recognized early in life. People comment upon them continually, as we might say, "She has blue eyes," or "She is going to be tall." Parents make no attempt to modify such behavior, and sometimes say articulately, "Oh, the one who is incarnated in you must be a great gambler."

For Balinese life is a series of never-ending circles, half of which are spent in life between birth and death, and half in the supernatural world between death and re-

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birth. Generation after generation, souls are reborn into their great-grandchildren, direct or collateral. They are greeted with respect as having come from the other world, and pass through the series of ceremonies which bind them more and more to this life. They receive holy water, are sprinkled with sacred meal, and pray as human beings to the ancestors. They set foot on the ground and have their hair cut, have their teeth filed, elope, go through a marriage ceremony, and finally pass out of this body to wait in the next world until the third generation brings them back again, perhaps to a better "turn," perhaps to a worse one, for everyone "takes turns" in having sometimes a good fate, sometimes a poor one. People say philosophically, "I am having bad luck this incarnation." Each of the ceremonies is endlessly like the last; for every new element distinctive of a three-month birthday as compared with a six-month, of a wedding as compared with a tooth-filing, there are a hundred which are similar. Every ceremony stresses the timelessness, the solidity of the ritual frame in which people and gods are caught.

Except death. Death, necessary as it is to the theory of reincarnation, presents a stumbling block to the Balinese of quite a different order from that which we have to face. Among them, parting with loved ones is never emphasized and tears are inappropriate except for a small baby who might as well not have come at all — it stayed such a short while and shared so little food. Individual immortality, both past and future, is affirmed to the point of monotony. A child knows who he is, and a man spends much time trying to stem or avert misfortune by paying up the ceremonial debts which his soul contracted, either during an earlier incarnation or in heaven. When a guilty man drinks the magic water which is used to discover which member of a group is a thief, he calls down leprosy and other horrible deaths upon his own head for a thousand generations. The sense of personal uniqueness in Bali is slight and people are shy at mentioning their own names or the names of others, but each has an impersonal individuality which is completely tough and incontrovertible.

The trouble with death is the body; it is the problem of how to get rid of that body which is of such enormous importance to every Balinese. The body is the stage on which his emotions are played out in isolation, cut off from all close inter-personal ties, endlessly guarded against some disaster which will declare him cut off from the full society of men. The most terrible swearword in Bali is "*Sakit Gede*," the "Great Sickness" — leprosy — and high-caste Balinese in a group will turn cold and sick beyond all possibility of breeding to hide their feelings, if one mentions that there is said to be a Brahman priest in the leper colony. They dare not think how many people are living whose birth-feasts and marriages and burials were desecrated by holy water

which that priest consecrated after he was contaminated. The problem is impossible of solution; the body cannot finally be separated from the soul, nor can they finally be united. The decaying body, as it falls to bits and is eaten by worms, typifies the Balinese major fear of witches who eat corpses and young babies; but the souls must be tenderly ushered out of life into heaven. Cremation, a Hindoo importation still not followed in Bajoeng Gede, is not a solution; one finds in the mountains and in the plains the same tendency — to re-create the body of the dead, to dispose of it, to re-create it, to dispose of it, to re-create it again. Cremation, as a means of disposal of the original corpse and of its subsequent surrogates, is dramatic, but it is not a final solution.

Significantly, the Balinese show intense emotion — a riotous, hysterical gaiety — at the burials of other people. When their own relatives and spouses die, they are merely subdued; but when a new corpse which has been kept in the house about ten days is to be carried to the graveyard for cremation, all the repulsion toward the fact of death crops up. Men overcompensate, plunge their arms into the rotting corpse and boast that their skin crawled with maggots; or they suddenly stop dead in the midst of the scene, staring unseeing, only to plunge back into the melee which characterizes the carrying of bodies to be buried, of corpses to be cremated, or of towers which contain bones only.

The first funeral is a comparatively quiet and orderly affair. Neighbors bring food to be cooked for all the guests, offerings are prepared, and the body is washed and adorned with various magical devices to insure beauty in the next incarnation. It is dressed and undressed several times, carried to the cemetery amid a mild amount of rioting — sometimes with none — and buried. The village or caste group, or ward in a large city, is *sebel* (ceremonially unclean) for three days, the household for a longer period, after which the tie with death is ceremonially cut. The spirit is ordered to go away but still invited to watch over the household, and life is resumed. This misleading simplicity, in which a death is treated with no more ritual or fuss than a big birthday or a marriage, belies the real feeling about death, which is expressed in the later ceremonies in which the body is re-created — out of the actual bones in the plains villages, or with rice in a basket in Bajoeng Gede — only to be laboriously disposed of again; and again re-created, and again disposed of.

When there is to be a great cremation in which many casteless people will share in the great ceremonials for a Brahman priest or a member of the prince's household, people prepare for weeks, making thousands of prescribed offerings and selling everything that they have in order to spend more on the ceremony. Because of the great

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number of guests who come to cremations, it is impossible to predict the cost, and this weight of rising and unguessable expenditures adds to the anxiety. Cremations are regarded as work by those whose responsibility they are, but they provide a festival for the surrounding villages.

The weeks of laborious preparation culminate in three days of ceremonial. The graves are first dressed in human clothes, then opened, and the bones are dug up and assembled. They are dressed again and laid out in a little town built in the cemetery. Delicate little dolls which represent the souls of the dead are carried home from the cemetery to the houses where they lived on earth, there to receive food and drink, to pray to the ancestors, and finally to ask leave to depart. These little "souls" are then carried back to the cemetery and placed inside the bundles of dressed-up bones. Thus the person is again re-created. On the next day, a new set of "souls" is taken to the priest's house and blessed, and the "bones" are later given a second laying-out as if they were corpses. On the third day the bones are burned in coffins shaped like animals appropriate to each caste, but the cremation fires are no sooner out than the people are poking among the ashes, gathering the small bits of specified bones and again re-creating a body upon which the little cornucopia-shaped prayer leaves are laid, so as to define again all the sacred anatomical points. Representative samples of this re-created body are then ground to dust in a mortar, each close relative taking a hand at the grinding, and the dust is placed in still another human replica and finally carried to the sea. It is thrown into the sea, but only to be re-created again in a new replica at stated periods thereafter. When someone dies, people may insure themselves by buying a special holy water, which permits them to wait twenty-five years before undertaking this elaborate, expensive, and demanding ritual. After each phase in the death ceremonial — after the real death, after the cremation, after the disposal of later re-creations of the body of the dead — comes the ceremony of *mepegat*, in which the souls, carried in the arms of members of the family like the babies which they will again become, ceremonially break the tie which binds them to the living — but only for a little while.

Conclusion

In these various contexts of life the Balinese character is revealed. It is a character based upon fear which, because it is learned in the mother's arms, is a value as well as a threat. It is a character curiously cut off from inter-personal relationships, existing in a state of dreamy-relaxed disassociation, with occasional intervals of non-personal concentration — in trance, in gambling, and in the practice of the arts. The Balinese