

Analysis of Hindu Teachings Messages Karmaphala and Tri Hita Karana in Pulau Plastik Movie Series

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Abstract

Educational documentary film is a visual media tool used to convey certain messages to the audience. One of them is the series Pulau Plastik by Dandhy Dwi Laksono. The series describes the dangers of plastic for the environment and humans by using the terminology of Hindu teachings, such as Karmaphala and Tri Hita Karana. The purpose of this study is to analyse the meaning of Hindu ecological teachings and also describe how films using religious messages can make the audience understand the teachings of Hindu while building environmental awareness. This research is a qualitative literature research, using a sociological approach to study the relationship between religion and society, then through descriptive analysis methods to collect related data. The findings of this research show that religious teachings that are often considered transcendent can be grounded using visual media. There are four episodes from the film series which explain four teachings of Hindu Bali ecology. Hindu ecology is contained in the teachings of Tri Hita Karana and also Karmaphala which explain that the mutual relationship between nature, humans, and God is aimed at achieving

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happiness and peace.

Keywords: Karmaphala, Tri Hita Karana, Pulau Plastik Series, Hindu Teachings.

Abstrak

Film dokumenter edukatif merupakan sarana media visual yang digunakan untuk menyampaikan pesan-pesan tertentu kepada khalayak. Salah satunya adalah film serial Pulau Plastik karya Dandhy Dwi Laksono. Dalam film tersebut, memaparkan bahaya plastik untuk lingkungan dan manusia dengan menggunakan terminologi ajaran-ajaran Hindu, seperti Karmaphala dan Tri Hita Karana. Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk menganalisis makna ajaran ekologi Hindu dan juga menjabarkan bagaimana film dengan menggunakan pesan ajaran agama dapat memahami penonton ajaran itu sendiri sekaligus membangun kesadaran lingkungannya. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kepustakaan yang bersifat kualitatif, dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi untuk mempelajari hubungan antara agama dan masyarakat, kemudian melalui metode analisis deskriptif untuk mengumpulkan data terkait. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa, ajaran agama yang seringkali dianggap transenden dapat dibumikan dengan menggunakan media visual. Serial tersebut terdiri dari empat episode yang mewakili ajaran-ajaran Hindu Bali. Ekologi Hindu tertuang dalam ajaran Tri Hita Karana dan juga Karmaphala yang memaparkan bahwa hubungan timbal balik antara alam, manusia, dan Tuhan tujuan untuk mencapai kebahagiaan dan kedamaian.

Kata Kunci: Karmaphala, Tri Hita Karana, Serial Pulau Plastik, Ajaran Hindu.

Introduction

The issue of plastic waste is not new; nearly every country is experiencing this problem. The global plastic production reached a staggering 390.7 million metric tons in 2021.¹ The data shows that

¹ 'Global plastic production 2021', *Statista*, accessed 26 September 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/282732/global-production-of-plastics-since-1950/>.

single-use plastic consumption in Indonesia reaches 100 billion plastic bags per year, with only about five percent successfully recycled.² Bali, as one of Indonesia's tourist destinations, is greatly affected by this issue. The once-beautiful beach views are now disrupted by piles of plastic waste, threatening marine ecosystems and the appeal of local tourism.

The concerns of Balinese communities about this issue sparked the creation of the *Pulau Plastik* documentary series. According to Dandhy Dwi Laksono, the director of the series, the idea originated from discussions with friends in Bali who expressed their frustration over the plastic waste crisis in the region.³ Through a collaboration with Gede Robi, an activist committed to a healthy and eco-conscious lifestyle, Dandhy designed a documentary series specifically aimed at raising awareness among the Balinese community about the importance of environmental conservation.

The *Pulau Plastik* series not only presents facts about the dangers of plastic to the environment but also integrates Balinese Hindu teachings such as *Karmaphala* and *Tri Hita Karana*. *Karmaphala* emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationship of every human action, while *Tri Hita Karana* promotes harmony between humans, nature, and God. This approach aims to raise awareness among the Balinese community about the importance of maintaining ecological balance as part of their spiritual responsibility.

Through visual media, *Pulau Plastik* not only grounds religious teachings often perceived as "transcendent" but also conveys sustainability messages relevant to the social and cultural context of the Balinese community. With a simple yet profound narrative, the series serves as a reminder for Balinese society to embrace local wisdom values in addressing modern challenges such as plastic waste.

This study aims to analyze how the concepts of *Karmaphala* and *Tri Hita Karana* are interpreted in the *Pulau Plastik* series,

² *Serial Pulau Plastik Eps. II: KARMAPHALA (CONSEQUENCES OF OUR ACTIONS)*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGglfKElnaE>.

³ Dandhy Dwi Laksono, Interview with the Director of Pulau Plastik Series, 31 January 2024.

particularly in episodes 2 and 4. Furthermore, it explores how this approach can enhance the Balinese community's awareness of environmental sustainability through the integration of spiritual and ecological values.

The Interpretation of *Karmaphala* in the Second Episode

Etymologically, "karmaphala" is composed of two words, namely "karma" and "phala". Both words are derived from Sanskrit, with *Karma* meaning an action, a job, even if any work is done well or badly. While *Phala* means result, fruit, effect, recompense, dang anti loss.⁴ Thus, *karmaphala* can be interpreted as fruit, result, or reward that is appropriate, according to the actions done. If the action is good, it will get good results, and vice versa.

Based on the above understanding, it can be seen that *between Karma and Phala* cannot be separated from each other. The two have a very close relationship and are interrelated.⁵ This is because there can be no effect without a cause, no reaction without action, and also a result without effort. This law of *karmaphala* applies to all beings, including humans, animals, plants, and the universe.⁶

In Hindu ecology, *karmaphala* is categorized by human actions towards nature and the environment, along with the resulting impacts. During his lifetime, man must truly maintain the preservation of nature and must not act arbitrarily. This is because *karmaphala* is accumulative, which means that if a person's treatment is good towards nature, then nature will also provide benefits and sustainability to humans. But on the contrary, if humans do not want to protect nature and exploit it continuously, then this will wreak havoc in the future.⁷

⁴ P.J Zoetmulder and S.O Robson, *Kamus Jawa Kuno Indonesia*, 1st Ed. (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1997), 735.

⁵ Komang Suhardana, *Karmaphala Menciptakan Krama Baik Menurut Kitab Suci Hindu* (Surabaya: Paramita, 2010), 19.

⁶ Cudamani, *Karmaphala dan Reinkarnasi* (Jakarta: Yasan Wisma Karma, 1987), 2–20.

⁷ Suhardana, *Karmaphala Menciptakan Krama Baik Menurut Kitab Suci Hindu*, 28.

In addition to being accumulative, *karmaphala* also has other qualities, including fairness and objectivity. This means that the law of karma does not look at a person's rank, title, degree, religion, ethnicity, wealth, or identity. If a community agrees to do good, including in protecting nature, then those virtues can be felt by all groups, not just one or two people based on certain criteria. Even if the poor do good, he will get good results too. So if the rich do badly, then the results will be worth the action.⁸

Referring to the division of the types of *karmaphala* by time, the relationship of karma with nature belongs to the category of Prarabda Karma. This karma is karma or actions that are done during life and will be rewarded in the world as well.⁹ For example, if illegal logging is carried out in the wilderness, it will cause forest fires whose smoke will clump together and adversely affect human respiratory health. This is also related to garbage, if people do not care and litter, the environment will be marred and cause various diseases.

Thus, in Hinduism *karmaphala* is closely related to everyday life. No matter how small the action is, it will definitely have an impact on human life, both directly and indirectly.¹⁰ Therefore, it is very important for a person to pay attention to his actions in this world, especially to nature as a creation of God Almighty.

In the environmental context, *Karmaphala* emphasizes the importance of human responsibility toward nature. Episode 2 of the *Pulau Plastik* documentary series explicitly illustrates how human behavior toward plastic waste affects ecosystems and human health. For instance, disposing of plastic waste into rivers may seem like a small act that solves problems at a local level. However, in the long term, this practice leads to ocean pollution, disrupts marine life, and

⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁹ I. Nyoman Subrata, Ajaran Karmaphala Menurut Susastra Hindu Perspektif dalam Kehidupan Sehari-Hari ', *Jurnal Sanjiwani* 10, No. 1 (2019): 58.

¹⁰ i Gede Soma Widnyana, 'Persepsi Umat Hindu Terhadap Ajaran Karmaphala Dalam Teks Agastya Parwa Di Desa Songan Kintamani Bangli', *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu* 1, No. 2 (6 October 2017): 450.

eventually returns to humans in the form of harmful microplastics. As one of the narrators in this episode stated, "The trash we throw away today is a problem passed down to the next generation." This reflects the principle of *Karmaphala* that every action has inevitable consequences.

The negative impact of plastic waste does not cease after its decomposition. When plastic enters the environment and interacts with various bacteria, it breaks down into tiny particles less than 5 mm in size, known as microplastics.¹¹ These microplastics can contaminate drinking water, accumulate in the food chain, and release toxic chemicals that may lead to serious health issues, including certain cancers. Micro- and nanoplastics have been associated with acute toxicity, chronic (sub)toxicity, carcinogenicity, genotoxicity, and developmental toxicity.¹² Furthermore, microplastics often carry bacteria that adhere to their surfaces, potentially contributing to the spread of various diseases mentioned above.

When plastic waste is not properly managed, it inevitably leads to environmental degradation and disruption of ecosystems. Humans are not exempt from these consequences, which is the very essence of the cycle of *Karmaphala*. Humans act, and humans also bear the consequences.

The Interpretation of Tri Hita Karana in Fourth Episode

The concept of *Tri Hita Karana in Hinduism* is composed of three main words, namely *Tri* (three), *Hita* (prosperous / happy), and *Karana* (meaning cause, taken from *Sang Hyang Karana* which is another name *Sang Hyang Widi* as the cause of all things).¹³ This concept can

¹¹ Budi Widinarko and Inneke Hantoro, *Mikroplastik Dalam Seafood Dari Pantai Utara Jawa* (Semarang: Universitas Katolik Soegijapranata, 2018), 4.

¹² Zhihao Yuan, Rajat Nag, and Enda Cummins, 'Human Health Concerns Regarding Microplastics in the Aquatic Environment - From Marine to Food Systems', *Science of The Total Environment* 823 (June 2022): 153730, doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2022.153730.

¹³ I Wayan Sudiarta, 'Konsep Tri Hita Karana Dalam Pelaksanaan Pariwisata Budaya Hindu' 2, no. 1 (2021): 17.

be interpreted as three basic teachings for Hindus in acting and behaving.

In *Tri Hita Karana*, there are three very important elements in life, namely *urip* (life), *buwana* (nature), and *manusa* (humans). These three elements are the main keys for humans, in order to maintain their relationship with God the Giver of Life (*urip*), relationship with nature (*buwana*), and with others (*manusa*).¹⁴ When man has good treatment of God, nature, and others, then he has maintained the balance of life and is not selfish.

Regarding its relationship with Hindu ecology, the universe is one of the elements of the *Tri Hita Karana*. One must always preserve nature and really attach importance to the interests of the surrounding environment. This is because humans cannot live alone, humans will always depend on nature and take good benefits in all aspects of life.¹⁵ If a person can practice this teaching well, then it is certain that he will also live a good life as well.

In Hinduism, one of the natural pre-servation that is mandatory and prioritized to be maintained is the sea. This is because the sea has an important role as a sacred axis in Hindu worship. Various rituals of worship are performed as offerings to God, especially to the sea god. Not only that, the sea is also described as a source of life, a source of liberation and well-being that is closely related to God, eschatology, and its relationship with other creatures.¹⁶

The fourth episode of *Pulau Plastik* documenter series illustrates how this teaching is translated into practical actions by the Balinese community. This episode depicts a clean-up activity around Pura Lempuyang, involving over 1,500 volunteers. The purpose of this action is; first, to plant a seed of awareness to the youth about the dangers of plastic waste which harmful to the environment for hundred years. Secondly, it creates a sense of belonging to the

¹⁴ IW. Mertha Sutedja, *Tri Hita Karana and World Peace* (Surabaya: Paramita, 2012), 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶ I Nyoman Suarka Et Al., 'Laut Dalam Perspektif Teologi Hindu Pada Susastra Jawa Kuno', *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu* 8, No. 1 (11 January 2024): 31, <https://doi.org/10.37329/jpah.v8i1.2678>.

notion that nature needs human protection. This initiative not only reflects the relationship between humans and nature but also the foster community solidarity.

Ida Mas Dalem Segara, one of the figures featured in the series, highlights that humans often forget their responsibility to care for nature, despite relying on it for food and other necessities. He also emphasizes that plastic can be categorized as *leteh*—something impure—especially when used in sacred rituals or offerings. This perspective underscores the spiritual relationship between humans and God, which is manifested through respect for and preservation of nature.

The narrator of the series, Gede Robi, encourages concert attendees to maintain cleanliness and transform the event into the cleanest concert in Bali. He emphasizes that while the actions of one individual may not create significant change, the collective effort of everyone participating can generate a substantial impact. Robi highlights that the attendees are art enthusiasts who care for one another, linking this sentiment to Bali's *Tri Hita Karana*. He further stresses that this teaching must not be reduced to mere rhetoric without meaningful action.

The Effectiveness of Pulau Plastik Series as Preaching Medium

Racism and anti-Semitism are rooted in the history of the

As humans who certainly cannot live alone and always need others and therefore humans need communication in order to understand each other. With billions of people in the world and millions of languages spoken, it can certainly complicate the process of communicating. However, these difficulties can be dispelled by various forms of communication that can be used. Humans can communicate through oral, written, gestures, and pictures. Man sees the world like a moving picture. Then the image affects the viewer in a way that no other form of expression can, this is the singular power of cinema.¹⁷ With the development of the cinema industry, humans

¹⁷ Niall Flynn, 'Ecologies of The Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature', *Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*, Environmental humanities, 6 (2014): 174–77.

can express their thoughts and opinions with the aim of being achieved.

With economic progress and increasing prosperity, signs began to emerge of a profound disappearance in contemporary society. Contemporary society favors style over meaning, values appearance more than depth, pursues skin more than content. People actually live spiritual values more than pseudo-spiritual values.¹⁸ So it is not an exaggeration if reading literature or watching movies can arouse moral thoughts and develop ethics of thought and feelings. This is common to most people, because mass media is the main way by which they acquire ethical attitudes, especially in contemporary culture.¹⁹ In line with the behavior of modern society which tends to be more individual and apathetic, the movements and visuals of the images in the film are able to move the heart and bring out the emotions contained in the film.

At the same time, people are now faced with various kinds of natural disasters, most of which occur due to human activities. Various efforts are being made to prevent further environmental damage. Including by raising campaigns through films. One form of film art that is interpreted in fiction and non-fiction stories with the aim of educating and spreading environmentally conscious messages through film is called ecocinema.²⁰ A wide variety of environmental aspects are featured in environmental films. Because the main purpose of ecofilm is to show the impact of human actions on nature, as well as stimulate critical thinking about environmental conservation efforts through creative expression in film.²¹ Most

¹⁸ Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Dunia Yang Dilipat: Tamasya Melalui Batas-Batas Kebudayaan*, 4th ed. (Yogyakarta: Cantrik Pustaka, 2020), 26–27.

¹⁹ Pat Brereton, *Environmental Ethics and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

²⁰ Sufi Mohamed, 'Ecocinema and The Evolution of The Documentary Genre: From The 11th Hour (2007) to The Age of Stupid and Finally The Cove (2009)', researchgate, 2, accessed 28 August 2023,

²¹ Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds., *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013), 13.

ecocinema films will show climate change, garbage accumulation, illegal logging, and the consequences that affect human life.

Media producers and filmmakers were inspired by harnessing the idea of a global tipping point while developing a persuasive visual style that draws on the scientific truth of climate change to permeate the media landscape with images of global warming in a variety of fiction films including *11th Hour*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Quantum of Solace*, *Wall-E*, and *Avatar* with its highly invasive form of mineral extraction.²²In addition to these fictional films, filmmakers also display their messages through famous documentaries. Such as *Seaspiracy* (2021), *Kiss the Ground* (2020), *Sexy Killer* (2019), *Pulau Plastik* (2021), *Semesta* (2018), and many other films.

Documentaries can use sadness or not as an appeal; However, not a few use logical appeal to try to reason with their audience.²³ Mark Minister in his essay mentions that in *Al Gore's film An Inconvenient Truth*, the audience laughs and nods in agreement with Gore. The approval signals the film's success in doing what not many environmentally focused works of film and literature have done. Film is an art of persuasion. He compared two films (*An Inconvenient Truth* and *Everything is Cool*) that focused on the issue of global warming, although both conveyed their message in different ways; However, both films recognize that the factor of persuading the audience to act on the environment is not focused on facts or predictions of catastrophe. The audience is persuaded by the characters in the film who are fun and believable that it is even possible to emulate.²⁴ This feeling can arise with the narration and visualization of a good film so that the message contained in the film can be conveyed to the audience and received well.

²² Brereton, *Environmental Ethics and Film*, 55.

²³ Mohamed, 'Ecocinema and The Evolution of The Documentary Genre: From The 11th Hour (2007) to The Age of Stupid and Finally The Cove (2009)', 17.

²⁴ Mark Minister, 'The Rhetoric of Ascent in an Inconvenient Truth and Everything's Cool', in *Framing The World: Exploration in Ecocriticism and Film* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 25–26.

Human interest in the world of film through the visualization of moving images can cause concern and foster awareness in humans of the environment. Screens that display environmental damage due to human actions accompanied by long-term impacts are able to foster a sense of human responsibility towards nature as a place to live and the main resource for human life. Balanced with teachings in religion, film can be the right medium to popularize religious teachings to increase human awareness of nature.

Pulau Plastik utilizes a simple narrative and visual approach to ground Balinese Hindu teachings for the local community. While there is a general view that films cannot drastically change worldviews, particularly in terms of ethical or environmental issues, films still possess the power to reframe perceptions. As Pat Brereton (2016) explains, cinema helps connect audiences with cautionary scenarios that allow them to view the world from a different perspective. Film critic Roger Ebert has also highlighted how cinema evokes empathy, enabling audiences to enter other worlds and see reality in a new light.

In the context of *Pulau Plastik*, the documentary encourages viewers to consider plastic waste from a broader viewpoint, addressing the human tendency to place itself at the center of the moral universe. The series successfully raises environmental issues in an engaging way, using visual media to increase ecological awareness and foster a shift in perspective. Although it may ultimately only reach an audience that is already somewhat aware of the issue, by showcasing real-life actions such as clean-up efforts in Bali, *Pulau Plastik* illustrates how human actions align with Hindu values, effectively combining spiritual and ecological aspects in a grounded and impactful way.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze how the Hindu teachings of *Karmaphala* and *Tri Hita Karana* are integrated into the documentary series *Pulau Plastik*, and to explore how this approach can raise

environmental awareness among the Balinese community. Through an analysis of episodes 2 and 4, it was found that the series effectively connects Hindu values with contemporary environmental issues, particularly the impact of plastic waste.

The key findings of this study show that *Karmaphala* is interpreted in the film as a law of cause and effect, illustrating the consequences of human actions on nature and their own health. Episode 2 clearly depicts how the disposal of plastic waste, though seemingly a simple action, has significant ecological repercussions. Meanwhile, the application of *Tri Hita Karana* in episode 4 emphasizes the importance of harmony between humans, nature, and God, which is manifested through community clean-up efforts and solidarity.

Additionally, the *Pulau Plastik* series demonstrates the effectiveness of cinema as an environmental educational tool. While a common criticism of films is that they cannot drastically change worldviews, this documentary proves to be capable of reframing viewers' perceptions of plastic waste. With simple yet powerful visualizations, and a narrative that touches upon local spiritual values, *Pulau Plastik* successfully connects the audience to environmental issues in a more personal and profound manner.

The recommendations from this study suggest that similar approaches, which combine visual media with local wisdom, can serve as an effective model for raising environmental awareness in other regions. Furthermore, collaboration between filmmakers and local community figures, as demonstrated by Dandhy Dwi Laksono and Gede Robi, can strengthen the message intended for local audiences.

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