

Myth and Meta-Signs of the Banyan Tree in Indonesian Culture

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Abstract

The research aimed to investigate the presence of myth and meta-signs within the banyan tree based on the perspective of Indonesian culture. The data were collected from informants who have wide knowledge about the banyan tree, namely the village elders and priests. The data were analyzed using Barthes's model of myth. The results show that the banyan tree has six myths, such as someone gets sick after disturbing the banyan tree, the banyan tree is eternal, disaster occurs after the banyan tree is cut, spirits make the banyan tree becomes peaceful and solitude, the banyan tree is a hallowed tree, and the tree is a place where mythical spirits lived. In addition, there are four meta-signs related to the banyan tree. The banyan tree is used as a symbol by Pancasila, Indonesian Cooperative, Golkar party, and Ministry of Law and Human Rights of Indonesia. Indeed, the banyan tree has become part of Indonesian culture. It has a deep philosophical value, such as being sturdy, strong, protective, and everlasting for a very long time.

Keywords: Myth, Meta-Sign, Banyan Tree

Introduction

The introduction should describe the nature of the problem and current state of knowledge; state the purpose, scope and general methods, and present hypothesis and/or research goals. The paper should demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources.

The banyan tree is a tree species in the *Moraceae* family. It is a large tree with shady and torrential leaves. Banyan trees are commonly grown around graveyards and in several places, like forests, near streets, and temples (Wijaya, 2019). Especially in Bali, banyan trees are commonly covered with black and white cloth.

The banyan tree's important characteristic in society is that it makes us think irrationally. The tree is considered hallowed, sacred, or scary, making it a myth. The myth is believed in almost all regions in Indonesia. The impression of something mythical is also raised if we see the tree directly from nearby (Aguinis et al., 2011; Rudokas & Čižaitė-Rudokienė, 2021).

Myth can be defined as spoken information created in society that is inherited from generation to generation (Arista, 2019; Yan & Ming, 2015). Myth contains the origins of the universe, Gods, supernatural, heroic persons, and certain societies which have the purpose of continuing and stabilizing culture, giving a life direction, legalizing cultural activity, giving the importance of life, and giving

knowledge models to explain everything that hard to explain by our minds. Every area of this world has something called myth. Here, the myth arises among the folks about the banyan tree like if someone disturbs the tree, then s(he) will be sick, the banyan tree is eternal, a disaster occurs after the banyan tree is cut, and spirits make the banyan tree becomes peaceful. Solitude banyan tree is a hallowed tree, and it is the place where mythical spirits live.

Then, there will be some questions that occurred from the myth. The reasons for society to believe those myths and the theories that could be analyzed or drawn up are: Besides, in modern history, several institutions or organizations in Indonesia have also used the banyan tree as their symbol. The philosophical side of the tree is extreme in society. Several philosophical reasons might exist for the symbols that used the banyan tree. The symbol is a significant part of analyzing semiotics (Baharsyah et al., 2020; Wijayanto & Iswari, 2021).

The researchers used Roland Barthes's theory (1957) about myth to analyze mythological things. Here is the Roland Barthes' theory model about myth. Myth occurs when the real thing or sign (3) consists of signifier (1) and signified (2); at the same time, the sign (3) or denotative sign is also the signifier (I), from the signifier (I) or connotative signifier will bring out signified (II) or connotative signified and then it underlies the emergence of sign (III) or connotative sign (Sobur, 2004: 69).

Both denotative and connotative meanings occur in Barthes's model of myth. Denotative refers to the literal meaning of a word. For example, a Graveyard is the place where dead people are buried. Meanwhile, connotative refers to the associations that are connected to a particular word or emotional suggestions related to the word or not the literal meaning of a word. For example, Graveyard means death, hallow, and others (Sobur, 2004: 69).

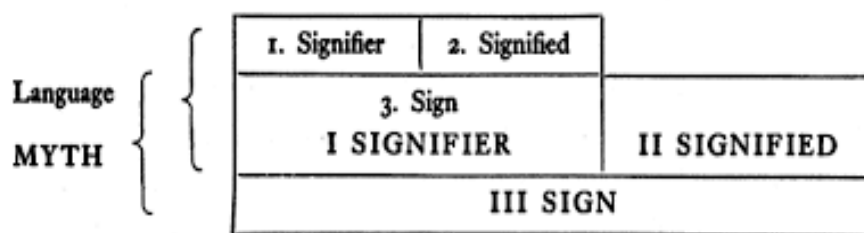


Figure 1. Barthes's Model of Myth

Meanwhile, to analyze the meta-sign of something, the researchers used Barthes's theory about the connotative meaning and Saussure's dyadic model. The dyadic model consists of: Signified the mental concept of something. For example, the concept of hallowed in our mind, the concept of protection in our mind, etc. Signifier, the real thing of something. For example, the real thing of trees, leaves, etc.

Methods

The data were collected from informants who have extensive knowledge about the banyan tree, especially the village elders and priests. The data were analyzed using Barthes's model of myth. To ease the analysis process, the researchers used a table. The results were then presented to explain the study in depth.

Results and Discussion

Myth of Banyan Tree

Below are the findings of the myth of the banyan tree related to Barthes' theory of myth. The researchers found six myths.

Someone sick after disturbing the banyan tree

When certain people disturb the banyan tree, they get sick after that. The words disturbed here are like taking a pee on the tree or plucking its leaves. We may analyze that those people might be in a bad condition at that time when they were doing those actions. Then, those people tried to spread their stories

or experiences to other people in order not to do those actions. The story became a belief based on that experience. Then, the story is inherited and arrives on us, becoming that myth.

Table 1. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The people in bad condition at that time are the signifier of the denotative sign (3).	The metal concept of those people who disturbed the tree, peed on the tree, plucked the leaves and got sick (cough, flu, etc.) is the signifier of the denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) = Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
The people who get sick after being disturbed (peeing or plucking the leaves) by the trees are the denotative sign and the connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	The sickness because of those actions is the connotative signified connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
Certain people disturb the banyan tree, and then they will get sick after that. It is the connotative sign and the myth of the banyan tree. The words disturbed here are like taking a pee on the tree or plucking its leaves.	

The banyan tree is eternal

The people say the tree is eternal (See Chaudhari & Chaudhari, 2023). Based on that myth, it happens because the tree is empowered by the holy power that makes it live for a very long time. From a scientific perspective, the banyan tree is large and giant. The tree is one conservation tree for providing a water source and has firm roots and many roots that would be able to gather much water for its provision. The banyan tree is an excellent adapter for every environmental condition. It is also a tree with a long age and could live for a hundred years. Because of those proofs about the abilities and advantages of a banyan tree, it might be possible to call it an "eternal" tree or a tree that could live for a very long time.

Table 2. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The banyan tree is the signifier of the denotative sign (3).	A large and big tree with long and strong roots, shady and torrential leaves, and the ability to live for a hundred years is the signified of the denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) = Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
The banyan tree is the denotative sign and connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	Eternality is the connotative signified of connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
The banyan tree is eternal, which is the connotative sign and myth of the banyan tree.	

The disaster occurred after the banyan tree was cut

People say we forbid cutting down or damaging trees because it will lead to disaster. We might see from news on the television where it is reported that some catastrophes occur after some mythical things are damaged or destroyed, like cutting a banyan tree in this case. For example, a landslide occurs somewhere after someone cuts off a banyan tree (See Pratama et al., 2022). The analysis of that myth shows that the tree has strong roots that can hold the land tightly, like in the sloping ground where the tree is accidentally growing. When the sloping ground nearly falls, the tree can keep it as long as it lived. During the wet season, the ground can still be held by the tree because the tree has long and strong roots that can be used to absorb the water. But some irresponsible people cut off the tree, and then there is

nothing to hold that sloping ground down. Also, when the wet season comes, nothing can keep the ground, and the landslide occurs. Therefore, the disaster occurred; those are the messages conveyed by the myth that we should not cut off trees illegally.

Table 3. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The banyan tree, which can hold land (sloping land), is the signifier of a denotative sign (3).	A large and big tree with long and strong roots is the signified of denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) = Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
The banyan tree being cut is the denotative sign and connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	The occurrence of a disaster (landslide) is the connotative signified of connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
A disaster (landslide) that occurred after the banyan tree was cut is the connotative sign and myth of the banyan tree.	

Spirits make the banyan tree become peaceful and solitude

Confident people do meditation under the banyan tree because it is believed to be a peaceful place, and they can gain good concentration with the help of spirits in the tree. It is another myth about spirits that are helpful to humans. If we try to analyze the myth, the banyan tree is shady and torrential, which could make us feel cool under that kind of tree. The tree has a lot of branches and leaves. As we know, the tree does photosynthesis to transform carbon dioxide into oxygen. In photosynthesis, the tree needs chlorophyll in the leaves. One leaf could transform a little carbon dioxide into oxygen, which can be used for us to breathe. Then, we can imagine how much oxygen could be produced from a banyan tree with millions or even billions of leaves. It is not strange that we feel cool under the tree because that is the first place the oxygen comes out, and it is still fresh and not contaminated by the other polluted gases. It is not strange that when people under the banyan tree feel relaxed, solitude makes them rapidly concentrate during meditation.

Table 4. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The cool air from the banyan tree is the signifier of the denotative sign (3).	The feeling of cool and freshness that impacts our body is the signified denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) = Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
Spirits make the banyan tree peaceful, and solitude is the denotative sign and connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	Peacefulness and solitude are the connotative signified of connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
Spirits make the banyan tree peaceful, and solitude is the connotative sign and myth of the banyan tree.	

The banyan tree is a hallowed tree

The people say that the banyan tree is a hallowed tree. The analyses show that the hallowed thing here is usually identical to the graveyard, where the banyan tree commonly grows near the cemetery. That perspective is derived from the hallow of the graveyard. When we talk about the banyan tree, the first thing that comes to mind is the graveyard, followed by a hallow thing. Indirectly, the perspective about the hallow of the banyan tree is influenced by the hallow of the graveyard. The hallow of a graveyard comes from a dead body that is buried in the cemetery. We judge the graveyard as a hallowed

place; that judgment and perspective are also directed to the tree itself. Therefore, the hallowed here is also because of the misjudgment between the graveyard and the tree. Moreover, if we see the banyan tree directly, we feel intimidated and scared. It happens because the banyan tree is big, shady, and torrential, influencing our minds and making us scared to see it. That impression frames our minds to the fact that the banyan tree is a hallowed tree.

Table 5. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The banyan tree is the signifier of the denotative sign (3).	A large, big tree with shady, torrential leaves is the signified of the denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) = Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
The hallowed banyan tree is the denotative sign and connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	The hallow of the banyan tree is the connotative signified connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
The banyan tree is a hallowed tree, which is the connotative sign and myth of the banyan tree.	

The banyan tree is a place where mythical spirits lived

The people say the banyan tree is where mythical spirits live. It is the most common myth in our society. The people say that many kinds of mythical spirits lived there. We try to analyze that myth. In the past, people were free to cut every tree for farming areas, especially the banyan tree. With that rapid logging, some intelligent and wise people realized that action would cause something bad for the environment and nature. Then, those people tried to make protection for several trees that had an excellent ability to hold the ground and save water. However, they could not just force people to stop logging; they thought about an effective way to decrease logging activity. Then, they tried to make a story about several trees where mythical creatures lived, including the banyan tree. With the existence of that story, the people were afraid to cut or damage the tree, and they believed that if they did it, then the mythical spirits would be angry and something terrible would happen. Then, that story is inherited from generation to generation, and it becomes a myth that the tree is a place for mythical spirits. The myth conveyed that people should try to keep nature and the environment, including decreasing logging activity.

Table 6. Barthes' Model of Myth

Signifier (1)	Signified (2)
The banyan tree is the signifier of the denotative sign (3).	The banyan tree is the signified of denotative sign (3).
Sign (3) Signifier (I)	Signified (II)
The banyan tree is the denotative sign and connotative signifier of the connotative sign (III).	The metal concept of mythical spirits in the tree is the connotative signified connotative sign (III).
Sign (III)	
The banyan tree is where mythical spirits lived and is the connotative sign and myth of the banyan tree.	

Meta-Signs of Banyan Tree

The banyan tree has been developed to symbolize several organizations and institutions in Indonesia.

The symbol of the third principle of Pancasila

The symbol of the banyan tree on the Pancasila is the signifier of a banyan tree. The banyan tree is a signifier of a big tree that is shady and torrential. The big tree is a signifier of a place for many people

to take shelter because of its size. Then, it becomes the signified of Indonesians who take refuge under the nation of Indonesia.



Figure 2. Pancasila

The symbol of the banyan tree signifies a real banyan tree. It means a tree with strong roots and many roots, which signifies the strength of Indonesian unity. Meanwhile, a tree with many roots signifies the diversity of Indonesians, whether the races, tribes, religions, etc. Then, it becomes the unity of Indonesia despite that diversity.

The symbol of Indonesian Cooperative

The symbol of Indonesian Cooperative is a signifier of the banyan tree symbol, which is a signifier of a real banyan tree. Then, it becomes the signifier of the unique personality of Indonesians.



Figure 3. Indonesian Cooperative

Moreover, the real banyan tree signifies the roots of the banyan tree, which in turn means the strength of Indonesian society.

The symbol of the Golkar party

The symbol of the Golkar party is a signifier of the banyan tree symbol on the Golkar symbol. The banyan tree on the Golkar symbol is a signifier of a real banyan tree. The real banyan tree is the signifier of a banyan tree's shady and torrential leaves. Then, it becomes the signified of protection. The protection signified that Golkar protects the people of Indonesia.



Figure 4. Golkar Party

The banyan tree signifies the root of the banyan tree in the Golkar symbol. Thus, it becomes the signifier of the sturdiness and strength of the Golkar party.

The symbol of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of Indonesia

The Ministry of Law and Human Rights symbol is the banyan tree symbol. The banyan tree symbol signifies the real banyan tree. The real banyan tree signifies the upper part of the banyan tree. Because of the width of the tree, it signifies universal sharing. Then, it signifies the sharing of law toward all Indonesians equally.



Figure 5. Ministry of Law and Human Rights of Indonesia

Moreover, the banyan tree symbolizes the roots of the banyan tree. The roots of the banyan tree are firm, which signifies the strength of law in Indonesia.

Conclusion

The myths that arise in Indonesia cannot be separated from the culture. It is the other way to deliver meaning from the real meaning itself. From the myth discussion above, we are expected by the creator of the myth that we should maintain a good relationship between humans and the environment. We should not judge a myth as an irrational thing or not believe it because it is something conventional. However, the myth contains good moral values, prohibition, and an invitation to keep something or nature in another way, in this case. We cannot separate this thing because it is a part of the local wisdom; we might see that the place that still believes in myth and running has a good environment. Besides, the banyan tree is a part of Indonesian culture, and several organizations and institutions in Indonesia also

use it for its philosophical value. Banyan tree has meanings such as sturdy, strong, protective, and everlasting for a very long time.

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