

## The Existence of Penjor Pan Balang Tamak in Karangasem

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### ABSTRACT

Penjor symbolizes gratitude and appreciation for the blessings of the earth bestowed by the divine. Balinese Hindus believe that Mount Agung is the sacred residence of Hyang Bathara Putra Jaya, along with other gods and ancestors. In the village of Karangasari Karangasem, there is a Penjor that remains true to ancestral traditions, unchanged from what has been orally passed down by the village elders. This Penjor is known as Penjor Balang Tamak. It represents critical thinking, devotion, and an expression of thanks to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. The use of this Penjor has been preserved through generations and has become an integral part of the community's identity. It is placed in the northwest corner of the Bale Agung, to the east of the Candi Bentar in the Pura Puseh courtyard, as a tribute to the Balang Tamak figure and a symbolic witness to the village council meetings (pesangkepan) held at Bale Agung.

**Keywords:** Penjor, Pan Balang Tamak, Karangasem.

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### BACKGROUND

The Balinese people consider bamboo to be an inseparable part of their daily lives. It is used for building houses, making furniture, architectural structures, musical instruments, in the Yadnya Ngaben ceremonies, Penjor, satay skewers, semat (to weave offerings), and in 49 other traditional and cultural functions of Balinese society.<sup>1</sup> The favorable qualities and advantages of bamboo over other plants have become a source of inspiration and a guiding principle for the Balinese way of life. Bamboo grows straight when young but bends as it ages, symbolizing the Balinese Hindu philosophy of humility and respect.<sup>2</sup>

Penjor, iconic in both religious and formal government events, carries the symbolism of bamboo in every use. It represents gratitude and thankfulness for the blessings of the earth bestowed by the divine. Balinese Hindus believe Mount Agung is the abode of Hyang Bathara Putra Jaya, along with the gods and ancestors. The significance of Penjor symbolizes the mountain and its contents as the dwelling place of the gods, serving as an expression of gratitude for the blessings granted by God.

Penjor is described as a bamboo pole with the top part intentionally left to bend. This bamboo is decorated with various ornaments made from young palm leaves (ambu) or young coconut leaves (busung) arranged in circular patterns, along with other components, including offerings (banten).<sup>4</sup>

The Penjor in Bali has undergone significant changes. According to research by Mudra (2016) in Badung, in 1990, Penjor in Bali was still made from bamboo and young coconut leaves. Nowadays, these leaves have been replaced with dried young lontar palm leaves. These leaves last longer and are easier to shape, making the Penjor more aesthetically pleasing and artistic. Additionally, the Penjor can last longer because its preparation takes considerable time.

Unlike this transformation, in Desa Karangasari Karangasem, there exists a Penjor that still adheres to the traditional methods passed down through generations, remaining the same as what has been verbally passed down by village elders. The community refers to it as Penjor Balang Tamak.



**Figure 1.**<sup>3</sup> Penjor in Tenganan Village. Penjor is one of the essential elements that must be prepared by Balinese Hindu. (2023, private collection).

## Penjor Becomes an Integral Part of Balinese Life

Offerings are an essential part of the Yadnya ceremonies in Bali. Some of these offerings are highly complex, making them one of the most impressive cultural phenomena and appreciated by tourists. Plants, or their parts, are key elements in the offerings and most likely hold symbolic meaning related to these ceremonies.<sup>5</sup>

Penjor serves as a symbol used by Hindus to manifest art using materials from nature. This symbol represents gratitude and thankfulness to Ida Sang Hyang Widhi (the Divine). Penjor creates a culture that aligns with art in its rich visual form. As long as a cultural product holds deep meaning, it can become a symbol. This symbol can serve as a way to express religiosity, aesthetics, ethics, and profound philosophy.

Penjor is featured during the sacred festivals of Galungan and Kuningan, introduced by Sang Atapa Hyang (Sang Kulputih) in Saka 804 (882 AD). It was first used as a means of honoring divine blessings during the reign of King Sri Jaya Kesunu, and this tradition continues to this day.<sup>6</sup>

Balinese Hindus celebrate Galungan every 210 days by preparing Penjor, which is placed in front of homes, specifically to the right of the main entrance, in temples, and along village streets. Typically, the Penjor remains displayed for 35 days, from Penampahan Galungan to Budha Kliwon Wuku Pahang.<sup>7</sup>

The components of Penjor are symbolic, as detailed in the Lontar Tutur Dewi Tapini. These symbols include:

1. Bamboo, representing the power of Hyang Brahma. Tall bamboo symbolizes a high place, akin to a mountain or giri.
2. White cloth, symbolizing the power of Hyang Iswara.
3. Coconut, signifying the power of Hyang Rudra. Young coconut leaves (Janur) represent the power of Hyang Mahadewa.
4. Leaves (Plawa), indicating the power of Hyang Sangkara.
5. Tubers and fruits (Pala Bungkah, Pala Gantung), symbolizing the power of Hyang Vishnu.

6. Sugarcane, representing the power of Hyang Sambu.

7. Sanggah Ardha Candra, denoting the power of Hyang Shiva.

Overall, the Penjor and its decorations represent the strength of Sang Hyang Tri Purusa. Once completed, the Penjor is positioned at the lebu (the right side of the entrance to the courtyard), with its shrine and curved top facing the main road.

The decorations along the bamboo, from the bottom to the top of the Penjor, include hanging rice, tubers, corn, cloth, and other items. These elements symbolize the feathers of the Naga Ananta Bhoga, representing the source of sustenance and nourishment.<sup>8</sup> The Penjor must be crafted to maintain its sacredness, with its religious function taking precedence over its aesthetic value.<sup>9</sup>

In Balinese culture, the Penjor is classified into two types: sacred Penjor and ornamental Penjor. The sacred Penjor is prepared specifically for religious ceremonies, focusing on its symbolic meaning and significance. In contrast, the ornamental Penjor serves as decoration for various activities, emphasizing aesthetic value in its design. The Penjor has evolved into an ornament with changing meanings. Its vibrancy is reflected in its accessories, which include artistic decorations that make it appear beautiful, luxurious, and often costly to produce.

## Penjor And Its Development

In urban Balinese communities, there has been a trend towards purchasing pre-made Penjor materials, such as decorations, tamiang, and endongan. Instead of crafting these items from scratch, people now only need to assemble the bamboo and decorations at home, which speeds up the process. This shift has turned Penjor decorations into products that can be bought from shops and seasonal stands.

Regional variations also highlight different uses of Penjor. For instance, the Ngerebong tradition in Kesiman Village, Denpasar, is celebrated every six months at Pura Pengerebongan Petilan Kesiman, following the Balinese calendar—specifically 8 days after Kuningan Day, on Sunday / Redite Pon Wuku Medangsia. Since 1937<sup>10</sup>, this tradition features Penjors



**Figure 2.**<sup>13</sup> The Pengerebongan Penjor in Petilan Kesiman Village is renowned for its vibrant display.

that are five times larger than usual.<sup>11</sup> The Ngerebong tradition has transformed Penjor creation into a competitive event that draws the interest of locals, art lovers, and tourists. Despite the larger size and creative elements showcased in the competition, Penjor installation in front of the temple still adheres to traditional standards, including elements like hanging pala, pala bungkah, and palawija, which represent agricultural produce and expressions of gratitude.<sup>12</sup>

## Pan Balang Tamak and the Penjor Tradition in Karang Sari Village, Karangasem

The Balang Tamak Penjor is a tradition in Karang Sari village, located in Duda Utara, Selat sub-district, Karangasem regency. This village is situated between Mount Agung and Mount Lempuyang, at an elevation of 600-700 meters above sea level.

The Balang Tamak Penjor is part of the Ngusaba Sambah and Ngusaba Goreng traditions during the Sasih Kalima (fifth month) in Karang Sari village. Although this tradition is documented in the village's customary regulations (awig-awig), the current practice of Balang Tamak Penjor relies on oral transmission of stories rather than written records. According to Jro Bendesa Adat Karang Sari, the exact origin





**Figure 3.**<sup>14</sup> The Balang Tamak Penjor is a tradition in Karang Sari village.

of the Balang Tamak Penjor is unknown. However, the community remains enthusiastic about preparing offerings for the Balang Tamak Penjor, especially during the ngadegang bhataru kumeligi ritual, which honors the deity residing at the Penjor.

Pan Balang Tamak, also known by other names such as Pan Walang Tamak, Ki Balang Tamak, Ki Walang Tamak, Walang Tamak, Balang Tamak, and Ki Wana, carries a complex meaning.<sup>15</sup>

The term "Walang" translates to "obstacle" or "barrier," and is often extended to mean "malang," which can imply misfortune or bad luck. The term "Tamak" means "greedy" or "avaricious," which is considered a negative behavior. Therefore, "Balang Tamak" can be interpreted as a barrier against those who exhibit bad behavior. Alternatively, "Balang Tamak" or "Bala Tama" can be broken down where "bala" refers to common people or the lower class, and "tama" means "noble" or "excellent." Thus, "Bala Tama" or "Balang Tamak" can also signify a good common person.

Pan Balang Tamak is a controversial figure in myths, embodying a dualistic social identity with both positive and

negative connotations. In Balinese society, the identity of Pan Balang Tamak is viewed ambiguously, reflecting both positive and negative aspects.

There is an intriguing story about the origins of the Balang Tamak Penjor. According to Jro Mangku I Wayan Bendesa, the tradition of the Balang Tamak Penjor began with the restoration of the Bale Agung at the village temple. An unknown individual requested to join the village as a member. When the villagers gathered and needed additional members, the village leader allowed this person to become part of the community. This person introduced himself as I Balang Tamak, accompanied by his wife Ni Tanu.

During the renovation of the Bale Agung, I Balang Tamak expressed critical thoughts while listening to the village leader's directions for the renovation process. I Balang Tamak was described as a sharp and critical village member who carefully considered the village's policies and decisions regarding the selection of bamboo for renovation and for the Piodalan Sasih Kalima ceremony.

Pan Balang Tamak imparted several life values: (1) Villagers should adhere to existing rules and norms. (2) In

social life, one should not deceive or mislead others. (3) Important matters require clear communication to avoid misunderstandings. (4) People with negative traits like Pan Balang Tamak are often avoided and disliked by the community. For many Balinese, the story of Pan Balang Tamak carries a negative impression due to his bad behavior and his being shunned and disliked by his surroundings.<sup>16</sup>

The Balang Tamak Penjor is a crucial element for the community of Desa Adat Karang Sari, Karangasem. Research titled "Penjor Balang Tamak: A Hindu Communication Perspective in Desa Adat Karang Sari, Duda Utara Selat, Karangasem"<sup>17</sup> outlines that the Balang Tamak Penjor is a symbol of criticism, devotion, and gratitude towards Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. The use of the penjor has become a tradition passed down through generations and is deeply integrated into the community. The Balang Tamak Penjor serves as a medium of communication for the people, to share pan balang tamak values.

The structure and components of the Balang Tamak Penjor include materials such as two bamboo shoots, two Sanggah Cucuk, a piece of Janur Ambu woven with sticks, and Panca Pala (rice, coconut, banana, fruits, and tubers). Additionally, it features six Sujang, two Kolong-kolong, and two Banten Pejati that have been assembled.

The penjor is positioned in the northwest of the Bale Agung, east of the Candi Bentar in the Pura Puseh courtyard. This location is meant to honor the figure of Balang Tamak and to serve as a witness during the village meeting (pesangkepan) held at the Bale Agung. The elements of the Balang Tamak Penjor include:

1. Two pointed bamboo shoots, each 2 meters high (apenyelegan), symbolize Mount Agung and Mount Lempuyang, representing Purusa (cetana) and Pradana (acetana). The concept of uniting these two mountains as the abode of Hyang Genijaya and Hyang Putranjaya, manifestations of Lord Shiva, is decorated with Janur Ambu.
2. Janur Ambu and woven sticks symbolize the union of two cosmic forces.

3. Sanggah Cucuk represents the strength of Lord Shiva.
4. Panca Pala symbolizes prosperity, interpreted as five types of fruit corresponding to the five cardinal directions: east, west, north, south, and center.
5. Sujang, made from bamboo sections, placed at the base of the penjor, includes three items: Toya Anyar (holy water), Sajeng Mentah (fermented drink), and Sajeng Rateng (rice wine), symbolizing fertility.
6. Banten Pejati is the main offering, presented as a symbol of sincerity in performing rituals and ceremonies. Several meanings are associated with the Balang Tamak Penjor:
  1. Bamboo shoots, though strong, are hollow inside. This teaches that even though we are strong, our inner selves may be empty. We should fill ourselves with goodness and virtue.
  2. The straight part of the bamboo penjor is left unadorned and planted in the ground. This signifies that good deeds are often unseen, hidden, and only recognized by certain people.
  3. The Balang Tamak Penjor is dismantled 43 days after the end of the Ngusaba Sambah ceremony and 11 days after the Ngusaba Goreng ceremony. This signifies that nothing is eternal; everything has an end.
  4. The bamboo shoots and Janur Ambu symbolize critical thinking and non-verbal communication as a form of resistance from the common people against leaders.
  5. Banten Pejati represents sincerity in performing traditions, Panca Pala symbolizes fertility, and other ornaments represent the richness of the earth, as well as offerings to Lord Shiva.

## CONCLUSION

Penjor carries both religious and aesthetic significance in Balinese culture. It embodies gratitude and respect towards nature and Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. Rich in symbolism and spirituality, the Penjor illustrates the deep connection between humans, nature, and their beliefs. While the practice of creating Penjor has evolved in various regions, its profound meaning remains integral to Balinese rituals and customs. The Balang Tamak Penjor is a key element in the ngusaba sambah and ngusaba goreng ceremonies held in the fifth month of the Karangasari village calendar. Although this tradition is officially recorded in the village's customary laws, its current practice relies heavily on oral history rather than written documentation. The tradition of Balang Tamak Penjor is actively preserved by the local community. The Balang Tamak Penjor is a profound cultural symbol in the Karangasari Village, Karangasem, reflecting deep religious and philosophical values. Positioned strategically to honor traditional figures and serve as a witness during village ceremonies, it embodies a blend of spiritual and practical elements.

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