



## Hidden Gem for Tourist in Central Part of Bali : Kehen Temple in Bangli

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### ABSTRACT

Tourist visits drastically fell for several months in Kehen Temple, as The Bangli Regency Tourism and Culture Office reported. From January-May 2021, the number of tourist visits to tourist objects and attractions in Bangli Regency reached 57,417, dominated by foreigners. However, there was nil visitor to the temple. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism objects and attractions in Bangli Regency were packed with tourists from July to August. The most exceptional temple in Bangli, Kehen Temple, is a museum in disguise that display ancient remnants of old Balinese culture. The researcher presumed the shrine was established between the late IX century and early X century, according to the Kehen temple's copper inscriptions. During the reign of King Anak Wungsu, the place was the location for the inauguration ceremony for the royal officer. The event was held in the presence of the Hyang Kehen, a spiritual entity believed to be the Lord of Fire. In the 14th century, a priest from Java, Danghyang Nirartha, redesigned the site without losing its authenticity. Nirartha introduced the latest architectural landscape that is generally used by most of the temples in Bali. Kehen Temple has been developed as a tourist attraction with fully supported amenities, facilities, and access. In Kehen Temple, the visitor may directly witness the architectural design of the temple's entrance, the standout point that makes the temple exceptional. Then, various relics from the megalithic period and a sacred banyan tree in the temple courtyard.

**Keywords:** Kehen Temple, Bangli, Tourist.

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### BACKGROUND

Tourist visits drastically fell for several months in Kehen Temple, as The Bangli Regency Tourism and Culture Office reported. From January-May 2021, the number of tourist visits to tourist objects and attractions in Bangli Regency reached 57,417, dominated by foreigners. However, there was nil visitor to the temple. The head of the Bangli Regency Disparbud I Wayan Adnyana confirmed on Thursday (17/6), revealed that the number of visits to the Kehen Temple was nil because no tourists were visiting, both domestic and foreign. Not because the site was deliberately closed by the respective managers. Adnyana added that before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism objects and attractions in Bangli Regency were packed with tourists from July to August.<sup>1</sup>

Bali has four types of temples; the first one is Pura Kawitan, a place of worship for those with the same family or clan. Then, Pura Kahyangan Desa is used as a place of worship by residents who

inhabit a Pakraman village or traditional village. Furthermore, Pura Swagina is a place of worship for those with the same profession. Lastly, Pura Kahyangan Jagat is a temple of worship for the public without focusing on their family origin, village origin or profession.<sup>2</sup> Kehen Temple is a Pura Kahyangan located in the town of Bangli, precisely in Cempaga Traditional Village, Bangli District, Bangli Regency. Cempaga Village has an area of 589 acres, with an altitude between 500 to 550 meters above sea level. This northeastern tip village of Bangli city has a tropical climate with a relatively cool breeze. Throughout the year, the area receives sufficient rainfall with an average of 2000-2500 mm per year, making the village has moderate humidity with an average temperature of 27 degree Celsius. The Cempaga Village area consists of eight neighborhoods, with an approximately 8029 population of 4004 men and 4025 women.<sup>3</sup>

Kehen Temple is one of the most iconic tourist attractions in Bangli that is

worth visiting. The temple, located at the southern foot of the Bangli hill, stands on the north side of the main road facing south. Across the road to the south, there is a small temple called the Penyimpunan Temple, which is part of the Kehen Temple complex. To the west and south is a small village called Banjar Pekuwon. Behind the north of the temple lies the panoramic beauty of Bangli Hill. To the southeast, approximately 200 meters from Kehen Temple, there is the Bangli Cultural Hall, which originally played a role in presenting various Balinese arts for visitors to enjoy. The temple's position is higher than the main road, with the contours of the terraces. The front left and right entrance stairs are decorated with statues depicting epic Hinduism stories. For its main entrance, this temple uses *Candi Kurung*, which is different from other temples; thus, it is a special feature of this temple. In the outer courtyard, a large sacred banyan tree has stood for centuries and is respected by the local community.

### The historical record in Copper Inscriptions

The existence of Kehen Temple is said to have been known since the late IX century and early X century. Even in the XIII century, the local ruler treated the holy place with great care. Three copper inscription plates were the primary information source with code names Bangli Pura Kehen A, B and C. It discussed the building's details and whereabouts; however, there was a lack of information regarding when the temple was established. The usage of the name Kehen is an enigma up to date. The first inscription, Bangli Pura Kehen A, consists of eighteen lines in Sanskrit with some part in the Old Balinese language, estimated to be forged in 804-836 Saka (882-914 AD). It mentions the name Hyang Karinama in the Old Balinese language and Hyang Api in Simpat Bunut Village. Both names referred to old hermitages that existed in the area at that time.

The Bangli Pura Kehen B inscription consists of 10 lines, with particular mentions of the name of Senapati Kuturan, Sapatha and some of the king's employees in the Old Javanese language. During the reign of King Anak Wungsu, Kehen Temple had a special function, namely a holy place for royal officials to take their oath in the presence of the Hyang Kehen, who was probably the Lord of Fire or Hyang Agni. Sapatha is an ultimate curse that would be the consequence should the royal officer break their duty. The curse would

be Hina (Humiliated), Papa (Degraded), and calamities to the family and the descendants. This inscription is estimated from the Saka year 938-971 (1016-1049 AD). The function of Pura Kehen as a place to hold a sacred oath is supported by the existence of a vessel wrapped around four dragons called the Sarpantaka Vessel. Today, the vessel is situated in a building in the form of a gedong located east of eleven stories Meru. The Sarpantaka vessel was used as a container for Holy water, Tirta Sarpantaka, which would be given to those sworn in the temple.

Next, the third inscription dated in Saka 1126 (1204 AD) contains various instructions and guidelines for the resident to celebrate holy ceremonies at the Kehen Temple. This inscription listed the name of King Sri Dhanadhiraja, the son of King Bhatara Parameswara and grandson of Bhatara Guru Sri Adhikunti and his consort Bhatara Sri Dhanadewi. The word Bhatara or Betara comes from Sanskrit, meaning 1) 'god, betara'; 2) 'a king who has died and been purified or identified as a god/betara'; 3) kings who are still alive or still actively reigning; 4) a place or complex of sacred buildings to worship gods/betara.<sup>5,6</sup>

In addition, the third inscription also mentioned that several temples have a unified relationship with Kehen site, including the Hyang Matu temple, Hyang Kedaton, Hyang Paha Bangli, Hyang Pende, Hyang Wukir, Hyang Tegal, Hyang

Waringin, Hyang Pahumbuka, Hyang Buhitan, Hyang Peken Lor, Hyang Peken Kidul, and Hyang Kehen. The word Hyang/Sang Hyang/parhyangan/kahyangan, in some ancient Balinese inscriptions refers to sacred places. The worshiped gods often begin with the word Hyang/Sang Hyang/parhyangan. For instances, some ancient inscription mentions Hyang Api, Hyang Tanda, Hyang Karimama (Bangli Pura Kehen A), Hyang Tahinuni (Gobleg Pura Batur A), Sang Hyang in Turuñan (Turuan AI), Sang Hyang Wukir Kulit Byu (Batur Pura Abang A/ Tulukbyu A), Sang Hyang Hyang Mandala ri Lokasrana (Bangli Pura Kehen C), and Sang Hyang Candri ring Linggabhawana (Selumbung). The terms hyang and sang hyang are more often associated with Hindu religious teachings that developed in Bali, but actually these words have older roots, namely the original Austronesian belief that glorifies ancestral spirits and the forces of nature. The realm where the hyang reside is called kahyangan and parhyangan.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

### Remnants of Megalithic Culture

Besides referring to the temple as its name, Kehen, sometimes the locals associated the temple with its other name, Hyang Api Temple. The word Kehen is thought to have come from the word Keren (place of fire). When associated with the first inscription in Sanskrit, it mentions the words Hyang Api, Hyang Karimana, Hyang Tanda and the names of monks. Kehen Temple presumably existed at the end of the IX century or the beginning of the X century AD. From the data of the inscription, it is possible to see that the Hyang Api in the first inscription changed its name to Hyang Kehen. In inscription III, where Kehen might be originated from the word Keren, a synonym for brazier or place of fire. The name Hyang Api is contained in the first inscription, then became Hyang Kehen in the third inscription and subsequently became Kehen temple. The finding presumably means that Kehen Temple existed in the Saka year between 804-836 (between AD 882-914 AD). In another word, Kehen Temple already existed at the end of the IX century or the beginning of the X century AD. The existence of Kehen Temple, which has ties to the history of Bangli Village,



Figure 1.<sup>4</sup> Kehen Temple.



is contained in the inscription No. 705 Kehen C Temple Inscription.

Further hypothesis argued the temple is estimated to have existed since the megalithic era, as evidenced by the presence of sacred stones, which are praised by the local community. After holy priest Danghyang Nirartha's arrival in Bali in the 14 century, the Kehen temple was redesigned. The priest introduced measurement standards and site landscape that became the basis of the Balinese Hindu temple's architectural design to date, known as *Tri Mandala*.<sup>11</sup> Today, the Kehen Temple sitemap consists of three areas: the nista mandala or outer area, the Madya mandala or middle area, and the Utama mandala or inner area. As a sacred

temple, the site is not only being addressed for prayer or religious activities but also serves many functions, such as Social, Educational, Cultural, Political, Economic and Recreation.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout history, villages, banjars, or temples in the Bangli Village area united under Gebog Domas, a socioreligious union to oversee the temple-related matters, including ceremony, cleanliness, and security.<sup>13</sup> Coupled with the strong sense of unity from several villages outside Gebog Domas, known as Pengempon Pura Kehen. This cooperation symbolizes Bangli's village's uniqueness compared to other regions or areas. The spirit of togetherness and harmony has been passed down from generation to generation in

every activity related to the existence of Kehen Temple. During the Bangli kingdom's reign, the king specifically provided protection, moral and material support for every ceremony held at Kehen Temple. After Indonesia achieved its independence in 1945, protection and support were then given by the Bangli Regency Government.<sup>14,15,16</sup>

### Hidden Gem in Central Part of Bali

Kehen Temple has been developed as a tourist attraction, with fully supported amenities, facilities, and access. In Kehen Temple, the visitor may directly witness the architectural design of the temple's entrance, the standout point that makes the temple exceptional. Then, various relics from the megalithic period and a mysterious banyan tree in the temple courtyard. The banyan tree is sanctified by the community and holds many myths. One of its notorious myths is that whenever its branch falls off, it is an omen of death for a prominent figure. This superstition is even recorded on the temple's inscription and has been proven several times.

Because of its function, this temple is suitable as a spiritual tourist attraction. The temple is accessible by two-wheeled vehicles, cars, and tour buses. On their way to reach their destination, the scenery of Bangli Hills, with a tall and shady aura, gives its beholder a serene and peaceful impression. Around the tourist attraction of Kehen Temple, a large parking area is provided for cars and motorized vehicles. Parking is to the east of the Kehen Temple tourist attraction. Currently, the Bangli Regency Culture and Tourism Office has expanded the parking area with a place that meets security standards.

The traveler can visit Tourist Information Center near the parking lot, providing the necessary information about the Kehen Temple tourist attraction. The Tourist Information Center also provides cloth and scarves. Tourists who wish to walk into the temple area are advised to wear cloth and scarves. It is done to maintain the sanctity of the temple. There are approximately 23 stalls for souvenir hunters, most of which sell Balinese souvenirs. The kiosks are located north and south of the parking lot. Souvenirs sold at the kiosk include wooden statues,

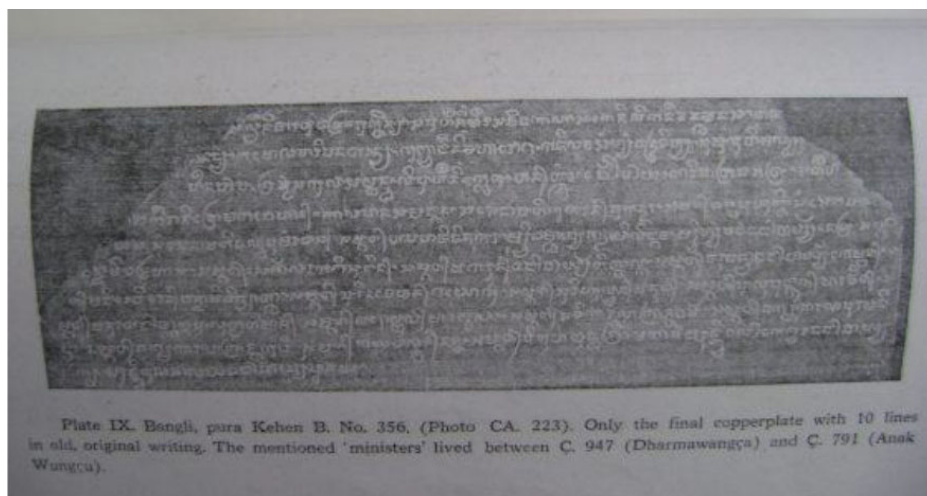


Figure 2.<sup>10</sup> Documentation of Kehen Temple Inscription B.



Figure 3.<sup>17</sup> The Iconic main gate of the temple *Candi Kurung*.

Balinese cloth and Balinese masks.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The most exceptional temple in Bangli, Kehen Temple, is a museum in disguise that display ancient remnants of old Balinese culture. The researcher presumed the shrine was established between the late IX century and early X century, according to the Kehen temple's copper inscriptions. During the reign of King Anak Wungsu, the place was the location for the inauguration ceremony for the royal officer. The event was held in the presence of the Hyang Kehen, a spiritual entity believed to be the Lord of Fire. In the 14th century, a priest from Java, Danghyang Nirartha, redesigned the site without losing its authenticity. Nirartha introduced the latest architectural landscape that is generally used by most of the temples in Bali. Kehen Temple has been developed as a tourist attraction with fully supported amenities, facilities, and access. In Kehen Temple, the visitor may directly witness the architectural design of the temple's entrance, the standout point that makes the temple exceptional. Then, various relics from the megalithic period and a sacred banyan tree in the temple courtyard.

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