



## Visiting Taman Ayun Temple, a Bali's Subak Heritage Temple in Mengwi

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### ABSTRACT

Subak temple serves as a socio-religious adhesive for agrarian society in carrying out its function as a member of this ancient system. One of the temples with an important function for an agrarian society in the Mengwi area, Badung, is the Taman Ayun Temple. Together with the Ulun Danu Batur Temple, these two holy places have a religious function for the Subak Pakerisan and Subak Catur Angga Batukaru areas. The two areas consist of five broad rice fields with a water distribution area that reaches 19,500 ha. In 1634, Taman Ayun Temple was constructed by order of Mengwi Kingdom, I Gusti Agung Putu after he moved the location of His kingdom from Belayu to Mengwi. Serving as the *Paibon* Temple for the Mengwi kingdom Royal Family, the Taman Ayun temple was magnificently built as a form of devotion to the royal ancestors. Later on, this temple developed as a *Penyawangan* for several large temples in Bali, which in the past could not be accessed in a day by the Mengwi people. Taman Ayun Temple also acts as a place to regulate water for the activities of the Subak community around the site. After UNESCO recognized Taman Ayun Temple as part of the manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy in 2012, the number of visits to Taman Ayun Temple increased significantly. Even though it has become a tourist-visit destination, visitors must obey several things when visiting this cultural heritage site. Apart from that, there are various interesting destinations around Taman Ayun Temple which are also worth visiting by tourists to know more deeply about the culture-based life adopted by the Balinese people.

**Keywords:** Taman Ayun, Subak, Heritage.

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### INTRODUCTION

The *Subak* system, Bali's cultural heritage, which UNESCO recognizes as a manifestation of the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* reflects the harmonious relationship between God, humans and nature. The acculturation of Balinese and Indian culture for 2,000 years strongly shaped the Balinese way of life. In the *Parahyangan* element, as an embodiment of human relations with a higher power in the Subak context, the community established the Subak Temple. Subak temple serves as a socio-religious adhesive for agrarian society in carrying out its function as a member of this ancient system. One of the temples with an important function for an agrarian society in the Mengwi area, Badung, is the Taman Ayun Temple. Together with the Ulun Danu Batur Temple, these two holy places have a religious function for the Subak Pakerisan and Subak Catur Angga Batukaru areas. The two areas

consist of five broad rice fields with a water distribution area that reaches 19,500 ha.<sup>1,2</sup>

The Taman Ayun Temple and its sacred area are historical heirlooms from the Mengwi Kingdom. The Kingdom, which at that time had other names, namely "Mangapura," "Mangarajia," and "Kawiyapura," was led by a King of the Mengwi Kingdom at that time named I Gusti Agung Putu.<sup>3</sup> Built-in 1634 by the first king of the Kingdom of Mengwi, Taman Ayun Temple means beautiful garden, located in Mengwi District, Badung, Bali, Indonesia. About 18 km to the west of the city of Denpasar. The main function of the Taman Ayun temple is the Mother Temple or *Paibon* for the Mengwi Kingdom. This holy place, by the Mengwi royal family, was designated to worship the Kings' ancestral spirits, manifested by constructing a *Paibon* building. For the Mengwi people, the shrines were also built to worship and ask the Gods for the Mengwi kingdom's people's welfare.

### A Temple with Socioreligious Function

In 2002 the Regional Government of Bali proposed to UNESCO that Taman Ayun temple be included in the World Heritage List. Then, on June 29, 2012, UNESCO designated Taman Ayun Temple as part of a world cultural heritage site based on the outstanding universal value, which belongs to the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana. The site has the official title Cultural Landscape of the Province of Bali. In detail, the Subak System is a manifestation of the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana (Cultural landscape of Bali Province: the subak system as a manifestation of the Tri Hita Karana, including the Ulun Danu Batur Temple and Lake Batur, the Pakerisan watershed, the *Catur Angga* Batukaru area and the Taman Ayun Temple site.<sup>5</sup>

Taman Ayun is a temple built by the King of Mengwi, I Gusti Agung Putu, in 1556 Saka (1634 AD) after He moved His palace from *Balahayu* (Belayu) to Mengwi.<sup>6</sup> At first, I Gusti Agung Putu built a temple north of Mengwi Village

to worship His ancestors. The temple is called Taman Genter. When Mengwi had



**Figure 1.4** *Candi Gelung*, the largest and distinctive feature at Taman Ayun Temple.



**Figure 2.9** The most notable monument in the second area is the *Bale Kulkul*, a high wooden bell with a soaring roof in the west corner.

developed into a larger kingdom, I Gusti Agung Putu moved Taman Genter to the east and expanded the temple. Another consideration was the temple's distance. The temples that existed in the past were located far away and inaccessible for a day's journey. Therefore, the King also wished to establish a place of worship with several buildings, such as *Penyawangan*, a representation shrine for the nine main temples in Bali. Such as Besakih Temple, Ulundanu Temple, Batur Temple, Uluwatu Temple, Batukaru Temple, and other main temples in Bali.

Initially, only two shrines were built, namely *Paibon* as a place to worship the ancestral spirits of the King and *Gedong Sari* to worship the spirit of Pasek Badak, who had been purified. The garden site was breathtaking according to the King's wishes (*kahyun*) and is equipped with several shrines to worship His ancestors' spirits. Thus, it is called *Taman Ahyun*, in the future pronounced as Taman Ayun.<sup>7</sup> The Taman Ayun construction was carried out for approximately two years from 1632. In 1634, this building was completed. On Tuesday, *Kliwon-Medangsia*, in the fourth month of 1556 Saka Year, the relocated and expanded shrine was inaugurated as Taman Ayun Temple. According to the Saka calendar, every Tuesday, *Kliwon wuku Medangsia*, the local community celebrates a *Piodalan* or ceremony to commemorate the day the temple was founded. In its journey, Taman Ayun Temple underwent several repairs. When Badung defeated the Mengwi Kingdom, the temple was rehabilitated in 1911 by the descendants of the King of Mengwi. Then, a terrible earthquake in 1917 caused severe damage to several temples in Bali, including Taman Ayun Temple. Restoration and repairs continue to be carried out at Taman Ayun Temple.<sup>8</sup> Massive repairs were carried out also in 1937. In 1949 repairs were carried out to the *Kori Agung* gate briefly, with a new large hall construction. Then, a repair was conducted in 1972, and the last was in 1976.

Taman Ayun Temple acts as a Mother temple and a *Bedugul* or source of irrigation temple. The function emphasized its existence to unite the community. For members of the Batan Badung Subak, the function of Taman Ayun Temple as an

irrigation hub is represented by a large pond surrounding the water transmitter temple.<sup>10</sup> The pond serves as a reservoir and the regulator to discharge the water. The water pool is connected to the rice fields located around the temple. In its function as the primary temple and unifying religious function, Taman Ayun Temple is positioned as a place to worship for people who have the same lineage, uniting them as one big family. Therefore, members of the Batan Badung Subak and other Subaks whose water sources derive from the pond at Taman Ayun Temple act as *Pangemong* (person in charge) to carry out the ceremony at the temple, together with the Mengwi Royal family.

From the historical perspective of its establishment and socioreligious function, it can be said that Taman Ayun Temple is a blend of natural beauty and springs. The King's vision was to successfully integrate the site into a pleasant area while building an irrigation system for the prosperity of his people. The perfect harmony between humans and nature is beautifully passed down to future generations. With a beautiful panorama of the royal water garden and alluring fresh air, the site reflects a spiritual, artistic and cultural life that brings visitors back to the Mengwi Kingdom's Golden Age. Therefore, it is no exaggeration if the Badung district government addressed Taman Ayun as a true symbol of Nobility charm.<sup>11</sup>

### The Temple Areas

The temple's site is arranged with the concept of a traditional Balinese garden, resembling a swan from an aerial view. Surrounded by an artificial river with various types of rare Balinese plants. The beauty of the landscape is coupled with sacred buildings. In the construction of Taman Ayun Temple, Raja was assisted by a Chinese descendant architect from Banyuwangi, East Java. The architect's name was Ing Khang Ghoew; in the local tongue, his name is better known as I Kaco.<sup>12</sup> As narrated in the ancient story of *Adhiparwa*, the entire temple complex depicts *Mount Mahameru* floating in the middle of the sea of milk, *Ksirarnawa*. The Taman Ayun Temple Complex occupies an area of 100 x 250 m<sup>2</sup>, composed of outer and three inner courts. The temple





**Figure 3.**<sup>14</sup> The most praised spot in the first area is a monument-shaped fountain. The monument fountain in the middle of the pond emits water in nine cardinal directions.

complex consists of three parts: the main shrine and buildings dedicated to Gods and Goddesses.<sup>13</sup> Three temple sites have different heights from each other. The outermost area has a lower position, and the innermost area is higher than the others.

The first area functions for various religious activities and artistic stages. The First Page of this place is called *Jaba*, located outside the pond. The outer court is connected by a bridge to the inner area, leading to *Candi Bentar* gate. The gate leads to the inner court, surrounded by a solid stone fence. In this first area, several shrines exist, such as Pura Luwur, *Bale Bundar*, *Sambyangan*, and *Pelinggih Sihuh Resi*. A pair of giant statues guard the entrance to the bridge and are located in front of the gate. A few steps to the left of the entrance, there is a small guard's post. A spacious hall or *Wantilan* is built for ceremonies, especially the *Tabuh Rah* ritual. It is a cockfight ritual held as a series of ceremonies at the temple. Subsequently, the building can be utilized as a *Bale Gong*, where the traditional music players perform their service. The first inner court seems to be divided by a walking path leading to the next gate, which is the

entrance to the second inner court. On the southwestern side, there is a *Bale Bundar*. The building serves as a resting area, with a view of architectural landscapes and gardens showcasing the temple's beauty. The most praised spot in the area is a monument-shaped fountain. The fountain is surrounded by a pond filled with lotuses. The monument fountain in the middle of the pond emits water in nine cardinal directions, providing a unique experience for those who see it. On the east is a group of small temples called Pura Luhuring Purnama.

Heading to the second yard, a gate at the end of the paving path divides the first and second courtyards. The second courtyard is situated at a higher position than the first court. Some of the buildings located in this *mandala* are *Bale Loji*, *Bale Kulkul*, *Bale Saka Pat*, *Bale Pangubengan*, *Papelik*, *Gedong*, *Stage*, and *Bale Gong*. Right across the gate, there is a barrier building named *Bale Pengubengan*. The architecture of this building is decorated with carvings, reliefs, and statues of *Dewata Nawa Sanga*, the Nine Gods that guard the nine cardinal points according to Hinduism belief. To the east of the second area is a small temple called Pura Dalem Bekak. Meanwhile, the most notable monument in the area is the *Bale Kulkul*, a high wooden bell with a soaring roof in the west corner.

The last area, or the innermost court, is the highest court and is considered the most sacred. A curved door named *Candi Gelung* connects the second court to the third. Located right in the middle of the second and third area boundaries. When the villagers held the grand ceremony, the door would be only purposed as the temple deities' access and other ceremonial equipment. Meanwhile, smaller gates on the left and right of *Candi Gelung* are access doors for public visitors during prayer activities or daily visits. In the third area, there are several buildings such as *Meru*, *Candi*, *Gedong*, *Padmasana*, *Padma Rong Telu*, *pelinggih Persimpangan Puncak Padang Dawa*, *Persimpangan Gunung Batukaru*, *Pelinggih Ratu Nyoman Sakti*, *Candi Pengayat Saru Gading*, *Persimpangan Pedanda Sakti Wawu Rauh*, *Pelinggih Ratu Ngurah Sakti*, *Persimpangan Uluwatu*, *Persimpangan Pura Sakenan*, *Persimpangan Pura*

*Sada*, *Paibon*, *Persimpangan Gunung Batur*, *Persimpangan Gunung Agung*, *Persimpangan Gunung Bratan*, *Padma Tiga*, *Persimpangan Maspahit*, *Persimpangan Batu Ngaus*, *Persimpangan Pasuruhan*, *Pelinggih Ratu Pasek*, *Bale Panca Resi*, *Bale Murda*, *Gedong Pengangge*, *Bale Saka Kutus*, *Bale Saka Nem*, *Bale Pawedan*, *Pengaruman*, *Panggungan*, and *Sambyangan*.<sup>15,16</sup>

*Meru* is the most eye-catching structure among all the buildings in the third courtyard. This palm-roofed building is the highest deities' throne. In Taman Ayun Temple, visitors can find a *Meru* with eleven overlapping roofs, considered the highest-level building. The level of a *Meru* is measured by its overlapping roofs' number, starting from one to eleven levels as the highest level.<sup>17</sup> In Hindu philosophy, the temple's three courtyards symbolize the Three levels of world cosmology, from the lowest, the human world, to the middle level, where the Gods and Goddesses reside. The last symbolizes the highest Heaven where the Almighty resides.

### Taman Ayun Temple as Tourist Attraction Destination

In Regional Regulation Number 16 of 2009 concerning the Bali RTRWP, The Taman Ayun area has been designated as a strategic area for the Province of Bali from a socio-cultural point of view due to its potential as a cultural heritage. Appendix XVIII to the above regional regulation states that the Taman Ayun Cultural Heritage Area includes Taman Ayun Temple, Subak Batan Badung, and Subak Beringkit. From afar observation, the pond in the Taman Ayun area is shaped like a water bracelet. Therefore, it makes the building float above the water's surface. Despite its aesthetic appearance, the pond surrounding the temple plays an important role as a source of irrigation for the nearby rice fields. With an approximately 2.5 hectares area, tourists can explore various spots to see many important buildings with the architecture of typical Balinese temples. As a tourist spot, Taman Ayun has adequate facilities such as toilets, a large parking area, and an art market.<sup>18</sup>

After UNESCO announced the Taman Ayun Temple as part of the

cultural heritage, Report indicated that the number of tourist visits to the Taman Ayun Temple has significantly soared. Visitor data for 2015 showed that foreign tourists dominated the number, followed by domestic tourist visits. Taman Ayun has three sections a tourist can explore; the open space section, the main building and buildings intended for Gods and Goddesses. The first area serves as the venue for various religious activities and art stages. Meanwhile, in the second area, visitors can see a building called *Bale Pengubengan*, complete with ornate carvings, to the beautiful and sacred statue of *Dewata Nawa Sanga*. Other attractions that can be enjoyed by tourists traveling to this place are the relics of the Mengwi Kingdom, which is preserved three hundred meters in length from the temple area, as well as the *Manusa Yadnya* Museum. In the museum, tourists can witness ceremonies related to the human life cycle, starting from the womb until death.

Despite being a tourist attraction, Taman Ayun's primary function is as a temple. Temple is one of the cultural tourism destinations in Bali. The function of temple is a religious place of worship for Hindus in Bali and is also an attraction for tourists. The building structure, history, and religious values through ritual ceremonies provide value for tourists.<sup>19</sup> A temple is a place of worship and sacred for the Hindu community. Therefore, visitors must obey several rules, especially to prohibit women on period from entering the temple area. Visitors are advised to dress appropriately with a cloth covering their lower body. Visitors must also be mindful of their words when visiting this holy place. Along with technological developments, various innovations can be a reference in the future to visit this tourist attraction. Sulistyadewi et al. (2021) proposed A Virtual Tour Application based on interactive multimedia; thus, visitors can visit Taman Ayun Temple anytime from any place. In her study, Sulistyadewi proposed a travel experience through technology, complete with voice narration. Thus, the visitors would experience a situation where a tour guide guides them. At the same time, they can

interact interactively with the system to obtain complete information about Taman Ayun Temple.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In 1634, Taman Ayun Temple was constructed by order of Mengwi Kingdom, I Gusti Agung Putu after he moved the location of His kingdom from Belayu to Mengwi. Serving as the *Paibon* Temple for the Mengwi kingdom Royal Family, the Taman Ayun temple was magnificently built as a form of devotion to the royal ancestors. Later on, this temple developed as a *Penyawangan* for several large temples in Bali, which in the past could not be accessed in a day by the Mengwi people. Taman Ayun Temple also acts as a place to regulate water for the activities of the Subak community around the site. After UNESCO recognized Taman Ayun Temple as part of the manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy in 2012, the number of visits to Taman Ayun Temple increased significantly. Even though it has become a tourist-visit destination, visitors must obey several things when visiting this cultural heritage site. Apart from that, there are various interesting destinations around Taman Ayun Temple which are also worth visiting by tourists to know more deeply about the culture-based life adopted by the Balinese people.

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