



## Bridging Tradition and Tourism in Puri Saren Agung Ubud

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### ABSTRACT

Puri, as one of the cultural heritages, contains cultural elements worthy of conservation. In addition to culture, Puri carries a reputation and inherent authority, shaping the image of leaders in society. The ancient buildings with extraordinary architecture and carvings on each structure not only stand as witnesses to the kingdom's past but also function as a living museum. The artistic system within this cultural element is manifested by the shift in the function of Puri Saren Agung Ubud from a residence to a tourist destination packaged with cultural tourism. Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati's visionary establishment of the Tedung Agung Studio in the 1980s has not only provided a space for children to learn dance and percussion but has also contributed to the preservation and evolution of traditional Balinese performing arts. The tourism experience of performing arts at Puri Saren Agung has further elevated the cultural significance of Ubud. Balinese art, with its dual functions of wali and balih-balihan, has become a captivating form of tourist performing art. From the classical Legong dance to other traditional performances, Puri Saren Agung Ubud has been a focal point for tourists seeking an authentic and immersive encounter with Balinese culture.

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### INTRODUCTION

The community recognizes Puri Saren Agung Ubud as Ubud Palace. It is a palace and the center of the ruling kingdom in its time, located in the tourist center of Ubud, Ubud District, Gianyar Regency. This palace marks the beginning of the history of tourism development from the era of the kingdom, Dutch colonial rule, to the rapid progress of Indonesia. Before becoming a tourist destination, Puri Saren Agung was one of the typical Balinese dwellings specifically inhabited by the Ksatria caste, which had physical and non-physical differences from other types of residences.<sup>1</sup> Other types of dwellings such as Gria, jero, and umah have differences compared to Puri. The structure and architecture of Puri are considered more luxurious and magnificent. Puri holds high value as it serves as the residence/palace for the King and his family. It is undeniable that eventually, Puri becomes one of the cultural heritages preserved by the local government. Its architectural form represents the region's character, and to this day, it is maintained as a popular tourist destination in the heart of Ubud's

tourism center.

Puri, as one of the cultural heritages, contains cultural elements worthy of conservation. In addition to culture, Puri carries a reputation and inherent authority, shaping the image of leaders in society.<sup>2</sup> The cultural elements are aspects of a cultural system that can contribute to the growth and development of culture. Moreover, within each system, there are interrelated influences.<sup>3</sup> Koentjaraningrat in Rumawan (2013: 152) states that the seven cultural elements have strong interconnections as a unified entity with the following order: Religious System and Religious Ceremonies; Social Organization System; Knowledge System; Language; Arts; Livelihood System, and Technology and Equipment System.

The ancient buildings with extraordinary architecture and carvings on each structure not only stand as witnesses to the kingdom's past but also function as a living museum.<sup>4</sup> Puri Saren Agung Ubud offers a deep historical tour experience and captivating art performances. The artistic system within this cultural element is manifested by the shift in the function of

Puri Saren Agung Ubud from a residence to a tourist destination packaged with cultural tourism. In this writing, the author emphasizes the characteristics of Puri Saren Agung Ubud that are related to the artistic tourism experience presented to visitors.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF PURI SAREN AGUNG UBUD

Puri Saren Ubud, a component of the Ubud Kingdom situated on the primary thoroughfare in Ubud village, Gianyar Regency, Bali Province, is positioned at the crossroads of Monkey Forest Street, Ubud Main Street, and Suweta Street in the Kaja Kangin direction. Located approximately 22 km from Denpasar city, it spans an area of ± 95.45 acres in Pempatan Agung. Puri Saren Ubud stands to the northeast of Puri Agung Ubud, the southeast is occupied by the Ubud art market, the southwest houses the Village Office, and the northwest is home to the Wantilan.<sup>6</sup>

Beyond its historical significance, Puri Saren Agung boasts remarkable aesthetic appeal. Despite its antiquity, the palace remains resilient and well-maintained,

preserving its original structure. Distinctive Balinese architectural features are evident in the elaborate carvings and intricate details adorning every facet of the palace. The walls, constructed from red bricks, showcase traditional reliefs and carvings.

Typically enclosed by lofty walls, the palace complex is divided into three sections: bencingah, jabaan, and jeroan, guided by the Tri Mandala concept. Bencingah corresponds to nista mandala, jabaan to madya mandala, and jeroan to utama mandala. Applying this concept facilitates the division of Puri Saren Ubud's territory into three segments: Jaba sisi, Jaba tengah, and Jeroan. Jaba sisi serves as an accessible area for the general public. In the era of the kingdom, it was the space where the Ubud king engaged with the people. Encompassing the region between the main gate and the partitioning wall leading to Puri Saren's central jaba, Jaba sisi holds historical significance. Jaba tengah acts as a nexus between jaba sisi and jeroan, symbolizing the connection between the king and his subjects. Access to jeroan necessitates traversing jaba tengah, acting as a link and simultaneously serving as a defense mechanism against external threats. Jeroan constitutes the primary domain of Puri Saren, functioning as the royal residence. It houses the Pura, a sacred space for the royal family's worship, also utilized by the Ubud Village community around Puri Saren. Jeroan delineates explicit boundaries within the Puri environment, requiring permission from the Puri family for entry.

Employing the Tri Mandala concept in Puri Saren's construction positions it as a symbol of authority, serving as the royal family's abode. This concept imparts a religious dimension to Puri Saren, with the presence of Pura spiritually binding the Puri Saren family and the neighboring community, reinforcing the religious symbolism within Puri Saren's structure. This symbolic representation reflects the religious essence ingrained in the Puri, where its architecture mirrors the typical Pura design in Bali, signifying Puri's authority. This authority elicits respect from the people of Ubud towards the Puri Saren family as descendants of the Sukawati King. The Tri Mandala concept



**Figure 1.** The iconic Kori Agung/Gate of Puri Saren Agung Ubud. By the end of the 19th century, Puri Saren Agung Ubud became the official residence of the Ubud Royal Family and served as the administrative center.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2.** The consistent dance shows at Kori Agung Puri Saren Agung Ubud are a delightful attraction for visitors. One of these performances establishes a connection between the Puri family and the local community on the outskirts of Puri. This spot is now a well-liked tourist destination in Ubud that shouldn't be overlooked.<sup>7</sup>

underscores that Puri Saren is a space where individuals are bound to conduct themselves with politeness and decorum.

### **“PITA MAHA” AND THE EVOLUTION OF PERFORMING ARTS AT PURI SAREN AGUNG UBUD**

Presently, the community's deep connection with Puri Saren Agung Ubud is akin to the description given by Counted & Watts (2017). A location can establish emotional bonds that cater to individual needs, providing a sense of security and comfort influenced by individual, community, and environmental factors. Simultaneously, it serves as an attraction drawing individuals into symbolic relationships with a place (Mina & Kamal, 2012).<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon is identified as place attachment, a bond cultivated through the human-place relationship (Altman & Low, 1992). Place attachment is a multifaceted concept involving human psychology, processes, and the physical environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), evolving over time through a complex process significantly influenced by social factors (Sattarzadeh, 2018). This is underscored by Hashemnezhad et al.'s (2013) argument in Sulistiani's work (2018), emphasizing that affective factors shaping place attachment encompass the physical features of the place, social dynamics, cultural elements, personal attributes, memories, past experiences, satisfaction, social interactions, and the duration of user activities in that space.<sup>9</sup>

Reflecting on January 29, 1936, the community's attachment to art and the emergence of artists prompted Puri leaders, alongside the Bali painter association, to establish an organization. Initiated by Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati, I Gusti Nyoman Lempad, Walter Spies, and Rudolf Bonet, the birth of the association named Pita Maha unfolded. Pita Maha became an organization interested in embracing painters and sculptors in Ubud and its surroundings. Contributions from artists Rudolf Bonnet from the Netherlands and Walter Spies from Germany elevated the quality of local paintings and sculptures, fostering a distinct painting style characteristic of Ubud. In the 1930s, Puri



**Figure 3.** The Puri Lukisan Museum presents the artistic journey of Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati. Alongside Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies, the Puri Lukisan Museum stands as the first museum in Ubud with a collection of paintings characterized by a distinctive style.<sup>10</sup>

Saren Agung Ubud organized an Art Bazaar every Saturday, featuring artworks by artists from various Ubud villages like Tebesaya, Padang Tegal, Pengosekan, Celuk, Mas, Batuan, and even Sanur and Denpasar. These pieces were introduced and offered to international guests, resulting in transactions and the sale and export of numerous paintings and sculptures to their home countries.

Following this, the Pita Maha association gave rise to the Puri Lukisan Museum, addressing concerns about the declining availability of high-quality Balinese artworks. Managed by the Ratna

Wartha Foundation, comprising Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati, Rudolf Bonnet, and Walter Spies, the museum was founded in 1954 and opened to the public in 1956. Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati utilized this opportunity to invite tourists, introducing them to the artists in Ubud associated with the Pita Maha organization.

The passion for art and culture in Ubud prompted Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati to establish an artistic dance and percussion center called “Tedung Agung” in the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> This served as a venue for children to practice dance and percussion, equipped with a comprehensive collection

of gamelan instruments. Even today, Tedung Agung Studio operates efficiently, presenting various performances at Puri Saren Agung Ubud and participating in diverse events in Bali.<sup>12</sup> The studio consists of four sekaa (art groups): Sekaa Sadha Budaya, Seka Bina Remaja, Sekaa Panca Artha, and Sekaa Jaya Swara, with one specifically dedicated to Legong dance.

### THE TOURISM EXPERIENCE OF PERFORMING ARTS AT PURI SAREN AGUNG

In Balinese society, art serves three primary functions: *wali*, *bebali*, and *balih-balihan*. Art for *wali* and *bebali* is sacred, reserved for ritual ceremonies, while art for *balih-balihan* is more social, aiming to entertain supporters. The category of *balih-balihan* art has evolved rapidly, particularly as Bali embraced tourism, transforming into a form of tourist performing art. Performing arts at Puri Saren Agung Ubud commenced in the 1930s with classical dance, notably Legong dance. This dance, with its complex movements intricately tied to the accompanying percussion, became a form of tourist performing art. In the 1930s, with the growing number of foreign tourists visiting Bali, Legong dance experienced significant growth, becoming a prominent cultural product until the late 1960s. The tourist performing arts thrived, particularly in tourist areas such as Badung, Gianyar, and Denpasar. In the 1970s, various forms of tourist performing arts emerged, including Barong “Kunti Sraya,” Kecak “Ramayana,” Janger, Legong dance, and the Ramayana Ballet. Bali’s tourism, focusing on culture, earned it the reputation of Cultural Tourism.<sup>13</sup>

Since the 1920s, abridged versions of legong dances have featured in concerts organized for tourists and in overseas tours by Balinese orchestras. Indeed, the dance has become culturally emblematic, and its image is used to advertise Bali to the world. Traditionally, the dancers are three young girls; the servant (*condong*), who dances a prelude, and two legong. All wear elaborate costumes of gilded cloth with ornate accessories and frangipani-crowned headdresses. Some of these are narrative, while others are abstract or general representations of nature, birds,



**Figure 4.** Legong Kraton is a classical dance that plays ancient stories such as the Prabu Lasem story. This dance is usually performed by three girls.<sup>16</sup>

insects, or plants. Those that involve narratives are, nevertheless, highly stylized, and the presentation of the drama is always secondary to the beauty of the dance. Although it probably is true that legong was influenced at one time by movements found in *sanghyang dedari*, this influence is comparatively slight and could not possibly count as a major source of legong.<sup>14</sup>

Puri Saren Agung Ubud continues to showcase Legong dance through the Tedung Agung Studio. Initially performed daily, the dance has taken on the impression of a “Masterpiece,” recognized as a significant artistic work. In 1985, artists from Puri Saren Agung Ubud collaborated with several countries, even traveling to Japan to present performances alongside the artistic team. Today, Tedung Agung Studio, under the leadership of Tjokorda Bagus Astika, remains a platform for the community to witness daily artistic events at Puri Ubud. Performances offer the advantage of being viewable from various angles, featuring diverse dance options for tourists to enjoy. Despite facing challenges in securing skilled percussionists, the studio’s weakness does not deter vibrant dance performances enjoyed by visitors. Puri Ubud, situated in Catus Pata Ubud, stands as a central tourist

destination, fostering the preservation of traditional culture and safeguarding Balinese arts and literature. To this day, Puri Ubud consistently organizes artistic performances for tourists.<sup>15</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The rich cultural heritage of Puri Saren Agung Ubud reflects a profound connection between art, tradition, and the vibrant community of Ubud. Tjokorda Gde Agung Sukawati’s visionary establishment of the Tedung Agung Studio in the 1980s has not only provided a space for children to learn dance and percussion but has also contributed to the preservation and evolution of traditional Balinese performing arts. The tourism experience of performing arts at Puri Saren Agung has further elevated the cultural significance of Ubud. Balinese art, with its dual functions of *wali* and *balih-balihan*, has become a captivating form of tourist performing art. From the classical Legong dance to other traditional performances, Puri Saren Agung Ubud has been a focal point for tourists seeking an authentic and immersive encounter with Balinese culture.

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