

Promoting Hindu Spiritual Activities and Preserving the Traditions of Vernacular Communities: The Balinese Hindu Palm-Leaf Manuscript Literacy Program in Indonesia

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Abstract

Recently, the Balinese Hindu Palm-Leaf manuscript literacy campaign has been formalized in Indonesia in a regional law concerning the Balinese language, scripts, and literature. This study examines this practice to determine how the literacy program has been implemented.

It employed a descriptive research method based on phenomenology and studied the Dukuh Penaban traditional village, Karangasem, Bali, as a case study. Within the case study, it employed observations and interviews for gathering data. Observations were carried out during the literacy program of the Museum Pustaka Lontar in Dukuh Penaban. Furthermore, interviews were employed to gather data with Brahmans, Balinese activists for Balinese language, Balinese intellectuals, the Museum Pustaka Lontar manager, and *Penedun*” writer or translator of Lontar manuscripts.

Its findings clearly show that Balinese Hindu spiritual activities are still practiced. Significantly, tradition must be preserved via reading the palm-leaf manuscripts called lontar in order to restore the spiritual practices for future sustainability of traditions.

Keywords: Balinese, Literacy Program, Palm-leaf Manuscript

Introduction

Bali is a province in Indonesia, characterized for its Hindu-majority population residing in a predominantly Muslim-majority country. This province is frequently cited in national media and public discussions as a locale where the regional culture and religions coexist actively and harmoniously in daily life. Consequently, this province has become well-established in the tourism industry. Spiritual aspect of Bali's culture is a prominent attraction for visitors, encompassing various forms of artistic expressions, architectural landmarks, and communal practices.

Setiadi & Gharata (2022) note that religious, cultural, and behavioral activities have a crucial role in shaping the views of individuals residing in settlements towards the external environments. The incorporation of Hindu rituals and customs, originating from India and transmitted to Bali through ancient Javanese intermediaries, holds great importance within the Balinese culture.

In Bali, there exists a longstanding tradition of employing lontar as a medium for writing manuscripts, with a particular emphasis on Hindu scriptures. Furthermore, lontar manuscripts hold a revered position as sacred texts, containing religious teachings and literary works. Within the caste structure prevalent in Bali, the Brahmins, also referred to as Pedanda in Indonesian, have historically enjoyed privileged access to open lontar manuscripts and have exercised authority over religious ceremonies pertaining to these sacred texts. According to Suarya (2022), the manager of the Pustaka Lontar Museum, the inclusion of sacred and divine scripture on lontar manuscripts endows them with a hallowed status, necessitating their safeguarding under the supervision of Brahmins.

The Balinese population, known for their long-standing literary legacy, particularly in reading lontar texts as a component of their religious practices, is presently witnessing a decline. The rise of global tourism has generated concerns among the Balinese population about the potential harm to their cultural, economic, and ecological identity (Pujaastawa, 2017). Furthermore, the issue of challenges to local/primordial cultural identity is intricately linked to the advancement of global industry and the modernization of culture. These challenges are no longer solely a result of personal interactions within the local communities and nation-states but have expanded to encompass the global sphere (Laksono, 2022).

Numerous studies pertaining to the literacy program have been undertaken by researchers scrutinized by scholars. However, there is no comprehensive theoretical framework of the literacy program for Balinese lontar manuscripts. According to these studies, those who read and listen to the reading of lontar manuscripts employ them in their daily lives. They are based on the ritual of reading Balinese lontar scripts. Suamba (2020) points out that anthropologists can observe oral and written traditions in rituals and daily life. However, as Dagenais (1995) points out, a good understanding is necessary for reading and listening to the manuscripts and texts to properly understand the text.

Furthermore, if the Balinese Lontar manuscripts reading ritual is promoted, both practices will help the readers develop the ability to choose good things and tell them apart from the evil ones: skills they can apply to their daily lives. This is because the literacy program of Balinese lontar manuscripts is expected to bring the initiative of Brahmins and elites to show that Balinese people and researchers can access copies of lontar scriptures other than religious teachings.

The Balinese manuscripts on palm-leaves demonstrate the importance of reading and writing in various spheres of life, including Balinese social and cultural life, which Hinduism influences. It is thus useful to determine what is good and not-so-good about this practice by having an analytical comprehension of the original text.

In this context, this study examines the literacy program of the Balinese Hindu Palm-Leaf manuscripts. It aims to explore how these manuscripts contribute to the promotion of Balinese language, scripts, and literature among the Balinese people. It also intends to examine various research inquiries, including the role of Balinese Lontar Manuscripts as a means of facilitating the literacy program.

Its objectives are as follows.

1. To ascertain the extent to which the program has facilitated the dissemination of literacy of Lontar manuscript's practices.
2. To determine the implementation of the Regional Law on Balinese Language, Scripts and Literature.
3. To ascertain the impact of the literacy program in the Dukuh Penaban traditional village, located in Karangasem, Bali.

Background to the Issue

Balinese Palm-Leaf Manuscripts (Lontar)

In Bali, there exists Balinese Hindu manuscripts called lontar written on palm leaves in the Indonesian language (Figure 1). The Balinese community holds the belief that lontar, a traditional form of literature, holds significant meaning and serves as a valuable resource in their daily lives. Lontar encompasses various forms of verbal communication, visual representation, and serves as a reflection of life, offering guidance and exemplification for appropriate and inappropriate conduct. The tradition of reading lontar texts in Bali can be seen as a manifestation of the religious aspect of these texts. This cultural practice serves as a means to preserve long-standing intellectual traditions. The act of reading lontar texts is deeply intertwined with the ceremonial system and Hindu religion in Bali, as established by Putra (2015).

Notably, there exists a longstanding practice of employing 'lontar' which is a particular a writing material that was used and is still being used in Bali and in the western part of Lombok which is inhabited by Balinese. It is made of leaves, usually the fan-shaped leaves of the lontar palm tree (*Borassus flabellifer oxfabelliformis*, or Palmyra). They are still being used as a medium for transcribing manuscripts, particularly those pertaining to Hindu scriptures (Hinzler, 1993).

Lontar manuscripts, which include religious and literary teachings, hold a revered position akin to that of sacred books within the cultural context of Bali. Within the caste structure prevalent in Bali, the Brahmans, also known as Pedanda in the Balinese context have historically enjoyed the sole privilege of accessing and initiating the opening of lontar texts, as well as overseeing religious ceremonies pertaining to the sacred scriptures. Lontar, as revered artifacts are deemed sacred and warrant safeguarding by the Brahmans due to their incorporation of sacred writings in their inscriptions.

Balinese lontar manuscripts have a wide range of subjects, including historical accounts, scientific knowledge, moral principles, customs and cultural teachings, as well as instructions for communal life, with a particular focus on the region of Bali (Ardiyasa, 2021). It also serves as a record of human conduct within a cultured society (Sutramiani, et al., 2015; Putra, 2015). Furthermore, the Balinese lontar comprises texts that encompass the teachings of life, serving as a repository of intellectual history. Specifically, these lontar manuscripts document the intellectual and spiritual treasure of the Balinese community, in accordance with the customary practices (Putra, 2015). Moreover, the Balinese lontar holds significant religious significance as it is believed by the Balinese community to possess spiritual values. It is specifically regarded as the abode of Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati, an embodiment of Ida Sang Hyang Widi (the divine entity), who is revered as the ultimate source of wisdom (Putra, 2015). Consequently, lontars are thereafter preserved at locations of religious or significant importance. Such repositories are often housed within Pedanda's residences, and private households where lontars have been passed down through generations, or in dedicated lontar museums, and specialized lontar libraries.

Balinese lontar holds a significant level of sanctity due to its predominantly religious teachings, secret speeches (ajawera), and unimplemented social values. Seven divisions of scriptures contain some manuscripts open to public access. They are about holy religious teachings and kawisesan (mantra kanuragan), referred to in English as a magical spell for strength by Pedandas who still possess the highest division of scripture. Due to previous backing from the Balinese government in 2018, Brahmans (Pedanda) have consented to allow

access for people to read the lontar manuscripts. From a historical perspective, one of the contributing elements is that the argument over authority and access to manuscripts has mostly been resolved, and it appears that the authority that flows to the monarchs and Pedanda through regional autonomy has lessened worries about preserving a monopoly on manuscripts (Sukabawa, 2019).

Consequently, certain contents of lontar, such as the Veda and Wariga groups, remain exclusive to specific individuals, namely the Pedanda, and are not accessible to the wider community (Sukabawa, 2019).

The History of Literacy Program on Balinese Lontar Manuscripts

The tradition of reading lontar in literary activities in Bali is closely related to the ceremonial system and Hindu religious system in Bali. Thus, reading lontar texts is a manifestation of cultural action to save intellectual traditions that have existed for a long time (Putra, 2015). Balinese lontar literature provides a comprehensive account of the *nyastra*, a historic educational institution deeply rooted in the Balinese culture. This legacy encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including both scientific and artistic domains. This aligns with the assertion made by Rubinstein (1996;2000) that the origins of writing and reading may be traced back to a period preceding the establishment of literacy initiatives during the Dutch colonial era and subsequently the Republic of Indonesia. The text provides evidence of the significance of writing and reading throughout several domains of human existence, encompassing the social and cultural aspects of the Balinese society, which is deeply influenced by the principles and beliefs of Hinduism.

Many variables contribute to the linguistic alterations in Bangka Malay, with a specific emphasis on the efforts and methods employed to maintain language. Collection of data through interviews and library sources have unveiled that the language is subject to impact from a multitude of elements. However, despite the concerted efforts of both the government and the society, there remains a need for optimization. In this regard, acquisition of language skills through education can play a crucial role in the preservation of a particular language and serve as a deterrent against the encroachment of alien linguistic influences (Hariyanto et al., 2023).

Review of Literature

Much has been studied related to these manuscripts. For example, Bruce (2011) presents an overview of modern information literacy research and practice, with a primary focus on advancements. He examines various interpretations of information literacy, consolidates endeavours in educational, community, and workplace settings, and presents current research findings.

The literacy program of the Balinese lontar manuscript was firstly an effort initiated by the Balinese Brahmans (Pedanda) and Balinese elites to restore spiritual practices that their advocates claim to be in decline due to modernization. In 2018, there was a campaign aiming to promote the practice of reading Hindu scripture from palm-leaf manuscripts called *lontar*. There were Brahmans, Balinese activists for Balinese language, Balinese intellectuals, and regional government of Bali Province who were eager to work together in dealing with religious practices and socio-political aspect of Balinese. The regional law No 1 2018 was launched as a legitimation to support the movement initiative for which the Brahmans and the local kings would be positively expect the success of the literacy program.

Picard (2020) shows that Balinese lontar literacy program has been shaped by many historical periods, namely 1928, the 1960s, and the implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia in 1999. As he says, in 1928, an initiative has been undertaken to replicate and transcribe the original lontar manuscript, which had been carefully preserved and safeguarded by the *puri* (commonly referred to as palaces - there are nine palaces in Bali, namely Klungkung, Buleleng, Karangasem, Mengwi, Badung, Tabanan, Gianyar, Bangli, and Jembrana) and the lontar library, Gedong Kirtya (the inaugural lontar library in Bali).

The Balinese lontar manuscript holds significant religious importance and is considered sacred, thereby necessitating permission from the Brahmans for its access, as per Balinese

cultural norms. Lontar manuscripts are typically unveiled and exhibited during religious ceremonies, particularly on Saraswati day. In Hinduism, Saraswati day signifies the bestowal of knowledge and reverence for the Goddess of Knowledge, Dewi Saraswati. This occasion is observed every six months (210 days) or on the Saniscara Umanis Wuku Watugunung, which consistently falls on Saturdays. Saraswati Day holds significant importance throughout the Hindu community, particularly for individuals engaged in educational pursuits, including school pupils. Dutch scholars, Van der Tuuk and Lieftrinck, together Sanskrit experts from India, Pandit Shastri and Prof. Raghu Vira, have played a significant contribution in the collection of Balinese lontars written in Sanskrit. Subsequently, commencing in June 1928, the endeavor to decipher Balinese lontars have been persistently pursued by Balinese priests and Dutch scholars, who have collaborated in amassing lontar copies with the assistance of Balinese royalty and erudite individuals. The presence of these individuals has exerted a significant impact on Balinese intellectuals and the administrators of Gedong Kirtya, prompting them to facilitate access to the Balinese lontar manuscripts, which continue to hold sacred significance among the Balinese Hindu community.

During the 1960s, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia has formally recognized and accepted the inclusion of Hindu Bali (Balinese Hindu) as one of the recognized religions in the country. Subsequently, the Balinese Hindu community in Indonesia has established the Parisada Hindu Dharma as a governing body tasked with overseeing and harmonizing religious practices among the Balinese population. The Parisada organization has taken on the task of translating sacred scriptures from India, creating a theological canon, producing a Hindu catechism, establishing standardized religious rites, formalizing the role of the priesthood, and offering religious education to the Balinese people. These endeavors have collectively resulted in a process of "scripturalization" within Balinese religion, signifying a transition in emphasis from ritual practices to textual sources (Picard, 2020). Furthermore, it should be noted that the council has officially recognized Upadesa as the inaugural book solely dedicated to elucidating the principles and belief of Agama Hindu. The approach employed is characterized by its systematic nature, aiming to comprehensively outline a cohesive set of principles that define the essence of *Agama Hindu*.

Research Methodology

This study focuses on the Balinese lontar literacy program in Dukuh Penaban Village, Karangasem, Bali. It systematically involves collecting and analysing observations to examine its activities. The literacy program of Balinese lontar manuscripts, which has been legitimated by the local government of Bali Province in 2018, has been actively implemented in the Dukuh Penaban village since 2017 a year before the regional law was launched. It was due to the community of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village which has lontar manuscripts and has been passed down to generations. Many people in Dukuh Penaban Village are still illiterate and do not read the manuscripts which are written in Old Javanese and Sanskrit.

This is qualitative descriptive research, employing a phenomenological study of Dukuh Penaban traditional village, Karangasem, Bali. It is aimed at analyzing the Balinese Hindu Palm-Leaf manuscript's literacy and determining how the program shares practices. The theory of phenomenology has been extensively documented to answer the research problems (Smith, Flower, and Larkin, 2009, in Suartika, et al., 2020). It is a study applied for social science for which it also deploys its understanding to exploring the consciousness and beliefs of the local Balinese population (Suartika et.al., 2020). In addition, phenomenology is defined as "the science of beginnings" by Merleau-Ponty (Micula, 2008 in Suartika, 2020).

This study employs two methodologies, as data collection procedures and data analysis approaches: observation and interviews (Haryono, 2020; Sugarda, 2020). Moreover, interviews involved discussions on the activities of the Balinese lontar literacy program. In the interim, a comprehensive examination was conducted to gain insight into the ideology of *Tri Hita Karana* and the cultural attributes of the Jagadhita Balinese community by means of analyzing Balinese lontar manuscripts.

Data presentation involves qualitative data analysis techniques. Furthermore, the study involved direct observation of the activities and behavioral patterns of the community through the Museum Pustaka Lontar and the Balinese Language Care Alliance in Karangasem, Bali.

The study also conducted interviews with key informants who possess knowledge and access to lontar manuscripts and their historical significance. These individuals are:

1. Bendesa (the Traditional Chief) of Dukuh Penaban Village in Karangasem,
2. The activists of the Balinese Language Care Alliance in Karangasem.

Findings and Discussion

Reviving the Balinese Lontar Manuscripts

Reviving the Balinese Lontar Manuscripts has concluded that the Balinese lontar is an artefact and a life guide for Balinese Hindus (Figure 1). The Balinese people must keep and preserve both functions. Therefore, it would be fascinating to look into studies on socio-cultural movements to read lontar manuscripts carried out by lontar libraries and foundations, community social organisations through studios based in traditional villages, and contemporary cultural researchers or scholars in Bali.

There is occasionally concern about the Balinese people losing the ability to comprehend the quality of life described in the lontar book and apply it to daily life. Throughout history, the Balinese lontar manuscripts have maintained considerable significance, mostly due to its function as a conduit for information transmission, documentation of historical occurrences, and as a means of communication.



Fig. 1: Balinese Palm-Leaf Manuscript (Indonesian, lontar)

Source: Authors

In Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, there is a conflict where some parties continue to believe that the only people with the right to read lontar manuscripts are the royal family, the family that owns the lontar, passed down from generation to generation, and priests (Pedanda). In addition, the fact that lontar manuscripts are still widely collected privately and obtained from generation to generation. In addition, the family that owns the collection of lontar manuscripts is still unwilling to grant access to anyone other than their family members so that they can open and read the lontar manuscript, especially those who will help maintain it. While there is a desire to revive Balinese lontars, which are revered and serve as a guide for their daily lives, the dynamic knowledge movement started by modern academics is growing stronger. Views on the role of intellectuals no longer place themselves in the rear or side in expressing strict collectivist truths as the motor (actor) of reading Balinese lontar scripts; instead, it strives against the forms of power which make it into its object and tool (Calderon, et.al., 2018).

The actors who have led the movement show the evidence of a culture that "maintains" cultural and social identities to call for improvements in social justice may be found in what the players do and how they identify themselves as actors in the movement that exists in Balinese society (Laksono, 2022). However, there was an obstacle when the owner of the lontar

manuscript has mistrust and misgivings about foreigners who wish to read and examine the sacred lontar text (Van der Meij, 2017).

People of Dukuh Penaban are currently concerned about how to implement that aim to integrate the ritual of reading the lontar texts into the fabric of a social and culturally harmonious way of life. According to Lanus (2018), the lontars were written and passed down without anyone understanding them, which resulted in a substantial body of knowledge that took a long time to understand. However, there is a commonality or vital energy to build social regulations in it, as well as in all other lontar texts, whether through ceremonial systems, agriculture, government (politics), language, or spells, to be the regulator of the psychological order for the Balinese people (Lanus, 2018). Although a community-led movement to preserve Balinese lontar manuscripts, including one by Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village in Karangasem, the Balinese Lontar Library, and other cultural artefacts has existed in Bali since 1928, it has not necessarily raised awareness among the local Balinese population.

To support that aim to integrate the ritual of reading the lontar texts into the fabric of a social and culturally harmonious way of life, reading Balinese lontar manuscripts in religious activities or rituals held to accommodate them, which are utilized as tools in the movement for doing so, is, in this case, made possible by the strength of some factors. Brahmins, Balinese language activists, intellectuals, and the regional government of Bali Province were all willing to cooperate in addressing Balinese religious customs and socio-political issues. Each actor performs following their social position, and this, in turn, makes the role of "actor" significant in the development of the reading of Balinese lontar scripts. With the involvement and participation of *Pedanda* (priests), Balinese political elites, Balinese language literacy movement participants, Bendesa traditional villages (Chief of Traditional Villages), and *Penedun* as agents of intellectual system power in the fields of knowledge, truth, and awareness to read Balinese lontar manuscripts was inspired by this power of knowledge.

Reading the Hindu manuscripts on lontar is a new movement which appeared in 2018. It was when the regional law of Bali Province stated the Balinese language, scripts, and literature. The Balinese Brahmins (Pedanda) and aristocracy spearheaded to read the Balinese lontar manuscript to revive spiritual traditions that their proponents claimed had fallen out of favour owing to modernisation. An initiative to promote reading Hindu manuscripts from lontar, or palm-leaf manuscripts, was launched in 2018. Additionally, the initiative of the literacy program to read Balinese lontar manuscripts is an effort to assist the revival of the tradition of doing so, which is something that the Balinese Hindu community encourages once more.

Regional Law on Balinese Language, Scripts, Literature and its Implementation

There was a campaign aiming to promote the practice of reading Hindu scripture from palm-leaf manuscripts called lontar, in 2018. The province of Bali's regional government, Balinese lontar philologists, and lontar observers came up with the idea to organise each Banjar (village) in Bali to read the lontar manuscripts, which were previously only kept sacred in the homes of the priests or the people who owned them legally. They were eager to work together in dealing with religious practices and socio-political aspect of Balinese. The regional law No 1 2018 was launched as a legitimation to support the movement initiative for which the Brahmins and the local kings would be positively expect the success of this revival movement.

The local rulers and Brahmins eagerly anticipated the success of the literacy campaign; therefore, regional law No. 1, 2018 was introduced as justification to support the project. Furthermore, the Regional Law of the Province of Bali Number 1 of 2018 (see Figure 2) concerning Balinese Language, Script, and Literature strengthens the legitimacy of the Balinese language for the Balinese Hindu community to learn Balinese, which is anticipated to help read the lontar texts, which were initially translated and studied by scientists and experts of Sanskrit from India. The Regional Law Number 1 of 2018 mentions about the Regional Law of Number 1 2018 is intended to make efforts advancement for Balinese Language, Script, and Literature through protection, development, utilization and coaching potential of Balinese Language, Script and Literature.

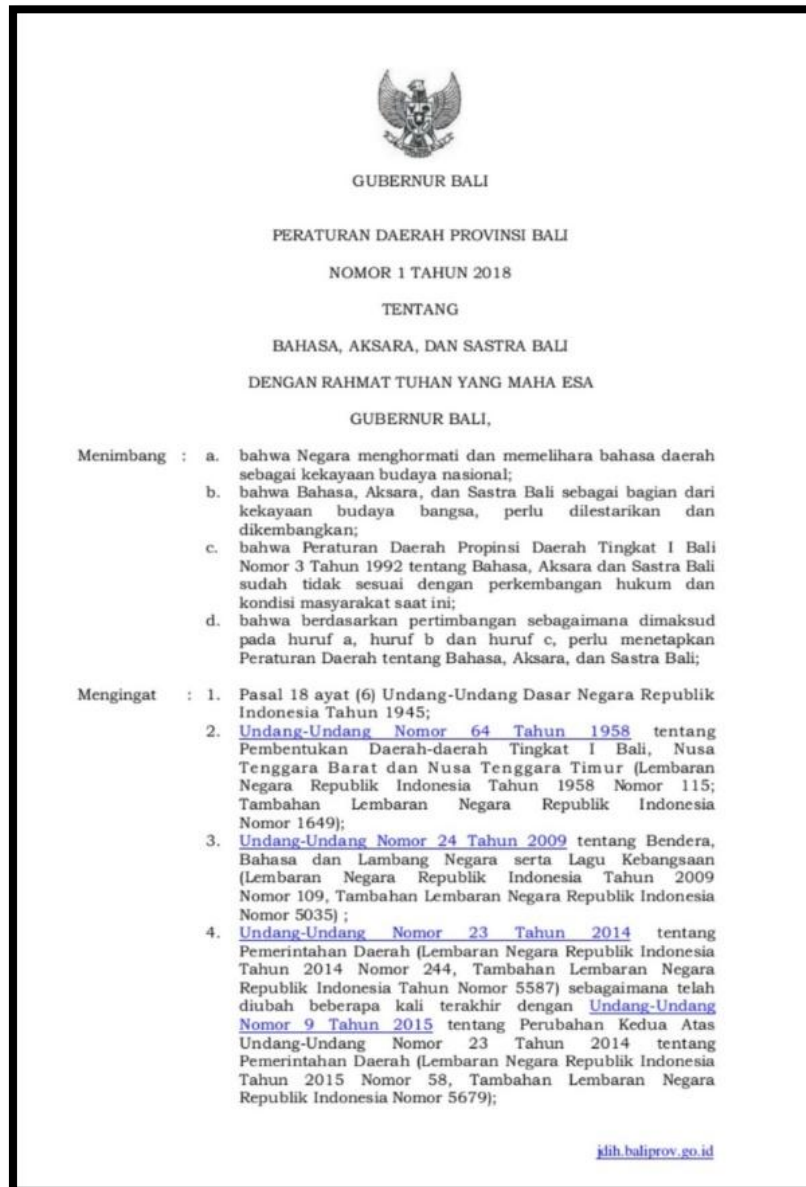


Fig.2: Regional Law on Balinese Language 2018

Source: Authors

Responding the legitimation of the Balinese Language, Scripts, and Literature, there have been activities to encourage Balinese people to actively engage with regional law for preserving the culture and religious rituals through the literacy program. the Governors and Deputy Governors of Bali formally inaugurated the fourth year of Balinese Language Month in 2022 on February. There were six events: *Krialoka* (a workshop in Balinese), *Widya Tula* (a seminar in Balinese), *Wimbakara* (a competition in Balinese), *Sesolahan* (a performance in Balinese), *Reka Aksara* (an exhibition in Balinese), and the presentation of the *Bali Kerthi Nugraha Mahottama* (the Governor of Bali Award). Bali Governor Wayan Koster said, "All these events aim to promote the *Danu Kerthu Gitaning Toya Ening* theme, essentially the Water of Knowledge. Governor Koster stated that despite the current COVID-19 pandemic's dire status, attempts to preserve the Balinese language, script, and literature must continue. Wayan Koster stated, "Because these three components are the foundation of Balinese culture and the core of Balinese ancestral beliefs. In addition, I Nengah Tamba, the Regent of Jembrana (one of the regencies in Bali Province), stated that the other program was a workshop for the younger

generation because it appears that Balinese lontar are increasingly being marginalised in today's world amid the development of technology and digital media. The workshop's goal is to instil a love of lontar manuscript in the younger generation, in line with efforts to increase their understanding of the value of lontar manuscript as a repository for the local knowledge and brilliance that has made Bali known as the "Island of the Gods" and contributed to Bali's reputation (Pemerintah Provinsi Bali, 2022).

The local government has actively participated in its success by offering a literacy program using lontar manuscripts since 2018. On September 5, 2018, at the Presentation of Prizes for the Balinese Script Website Design Competition at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Udayana University, Denpasar, the Governor of Bali, I Wayan Koster, delivered a speech in reaction to the pronouncement of the law and pledged to uphold Balinese culture and the magnificent ancestral legacy. The Balinese lontar manuscript was one of Indonesia's manuscripts registered in the internet domain, giving rise to even more pride, and claiming that registering the Balinese lontar manuscript as an internet domain affirms the Balinese script's standing in the global community. The situation can be compared to Chinese, Japanese, or Korean characters. The Governor predicted that we would become better renowned around the world.

On October 5, 2018, the I Gusti Ngurah Rai airport began using Balinese script, signalling the beginning of a serious initiative. The nameplates of public, state-owned, and private institutions were then written in Balinese script. Additionally, he claimed that the Governor's Regulation Number 80 of 2018 describes the requirements that apply to the usage of Balinese script. Latin script must be below Balinese script. It aspires to honour our ancestors' legacy and demonstrate our pride in the traditional Balinese indigenous knowledge (Tabelak, 2022). There is a reason why the Balinese manuscripts has already been given formal government recognition and authority. "We are taking this action to honour the legacy of our honourable forebears. The Balinese script would eventually go extinct if we don't protect it." The Governor continued, expressing his pride that many young people had been inspired to study the Balinese script and that it had been established that the competition's winners were from a younger age. He said that young people should continue to preserve our culture and local wisdom rather than getting overly caught up in modernisation, adding that science and technology may advance.

The Literacy Program and its Practices in Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village

The literacy program on Balinese lontar manuscripts has been implemented and received assistance from the Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village in Karangasem, Bali. The community shared commitment to preserve the existing tradition on the Balinese lontar manuscripts by encouraging people to conserve and understand the content of scripture on lontar. The opening and release of the Museum Pustaka Lontar took place on Tuesday, April 11, 2017 (Figure 3). There were already plans about the stages of development on roughly 1.5 ha of property belonging to the Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, even though not all the museum's structures were yet constructed at that time. The construction of the "Bale Sangkul Putih," as the structure was then known, and lontar conservation and training were happening then. Since then, the palm-leaf museum has been built thanks to a partnership between villagers and Balinese literacy activists. The Department of Culture advocates for preserving Balinese culture routinely urge the preservation of the traditional values of the Balinese people's ancestral history recorded in the lontar media. On lontar, several archival materials and cultural artefacts are related to the Balinese people. The Hanacaraka Association's creator and curator of the Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, Mr Sugi Lanus, estimates that 8,000 lontars are owned by the people of Karangasem Regency. In some communities in the Karangasem Regency, writing and sharing lontar manuscripts have been a custom for a very long time. It is because many palm trees may grow on arid soils like those in the *Abang* and *Kubu* regions. Everyone who writes a lontar does so by hand using knowledge passed down through the years.



Fig.3: Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, Karangasem, Bali
Source: Authors

Current lontar is both a work of art and a museum of antiquity. One of four categories—religion and ethics, history and mythology, fiction or science, arts, humanities, law, customs, and folklore—categorises lontar manuscripts. The 313 lontar manuscripts from the museum, displayed at Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, fall into these three groups. In Figure 4, most of the collection's funding came from gifts from a select group of families and Mr. I Dewa Gede Catra, the collection's curator and Penedun. Some efforts should be made to help the family and community of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village understand how to maintain the manuscripts as cultural heritage, as they have been owned for a very long time. In Karangasem, Bali's Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban has begun to offer some access to locals, notably in terms of protecting lontar, cataloguing the lontar division, and instructing locals on preservation techniques. In response to these initiatives, ongoing, diligent work should be done to maintain the lontar.



Fig. 4: Lontar Collections of the Community of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village
Source: Authors

On October 14th, 2018, Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban established a lontar clinic to address the issues raised by owners who still adhere to a spiritual belief and believe that the lontar is a sacred object prohibited from being saved. Although lontar manuscripts are precious relics, the museum management has plans to inform lontar owners that they must also be protected. Another significant problem is that specific lontar collections cannot be read

because of corrosion and deterioration. To conserve lontar that is damaged or cannot be read, to read manuscripts, and to transcribe the one that is already frail or damaged into new one, the Museum offers human resources, specifically volunteers. In theory, according to the Museum and its management, "the more Balinese who have lontar know about "lontar, the richer they will be".

Since its founding, the Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban in Bali Province, Karangasem Village, and Karangasem Regency has also transformed into a Lontar Education Centre (see Figure 5). In 2019, Dukuh Penaban's residents demonstrated their sincerity and diligence by first placing in the National Pokdarwis for the Mandiri category. The Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban has alternated between hosting a variety of cultural, artistic, and educational activities, workshops, camping trips, and visits from school children, college students, members of the government, organisations, local communities, archipelago, and international nations. Since then, a great effort has been made to preserve the Balinese lontar effectively. The Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban traditional village, Karangasem, won the esteemed Indonesia Museum Award 2022 for the Inspiring Museum category on December 20th, 2022.



Fig. 5: Museum Pustaka Lontar serves as a Lontar Education Centre
Source: Authors

Prior to the official recognition of the regional law, the community of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, located approximately 1.2 kilometers north of Amlapura City and in close proximity to the Karangasem Regent's Office, demonstrated a genuine commitment to collaborative efforts in establishing the Pustaka Lontar Museum of Dukuh Penaban. This museum aims to function as a central institution for education and the preservation of lontar manuscripts. Therefore, it is commonly known as a community-driven initiative. The inhabitants of Dukuh Penaban, a traditional village located in Karangasem, own over 400 lontar manuscripts. The state of each lontar collection found in the vicinity exhibits variation. Certain lontar collections are maintained in satisfactory shape due to the diligent care provided by the heirs of its owners, who possess a comprehensive understanding of their contents. However, a significant portion of the population exhibits illiteracy and cognitive decline due to their refusal to acknowledge the existence of lontar within their lineage, thereby impeding their ability to comprehend written texts. The aforementioned challenges have compelled the inhabitants of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village to undertake measures in order to safeguard the local lontar collections, ensuring their preservation and protection. This initiative is being carried out in collaboration with the community's Bendesa Adat Dukuh Penaban and the Director of Pustaka Lontar Museum, Mr. I Nengah Suarya.

Conclusions

The main outcome of the research is to provide insights to effectively support the cultural norms of the Balinese people and ensure the preservation of Hinduism within the region of Bali. It shows that the Balinese Hindu lontar manuscript functions as a comprehensive manual for Balinese Hindus, providing guidance on religious rituals and practices. Regarded as a sacred artifact, it has unfortunately fallen into a state of neglect and obscurity. Furthermore, political regulation might be established by the implementation of regional legislation in the year 2018. The governor of Bali, in his recent launch of the fourth Balinese Language Month, underscored the significance of this initiative in not only preserving and advancing the Balinese language, script, and literature, but also as a means to encourage the younger generation to consistently safeguard, cleanse, and exalt lakes, springs, rivers, and the sea as vital life sources, in accordance with regional and gubernatorial legislation. The Governor also has foreseen potential benefits for the younger generation in Bali with the implementation of the Balinese Language Month. If Balinese youth demonstrate enthusiasm and cooperation in preserving and advancing Balinese language, script, and literature as cultural legacy, they may not need to worry about the consequences of ongoing development dynamics, including its challenges and complexities.

The study offers valuable insights into the cultural relevance of this traditional medium within the people of Bali. Through the examination and analysis of the lontar manuscripts, a more profound comprehension of the sustained significance of lontar within these communities over various historical periods and up to the present era may be attained. The community of Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village demonstrates a praiseworthy endeavor. The Pustaka Lontar Museum as a centre of lontar education aligns with the relevant local legislation and the directives set forth by the governor. The initiative serves to facilitate the active participation of the local community in supporting literacy programs and the conservation of ancient manuscripts. However, the research was constrained to the analysis of a phenomenological study conducted in Dukuh Penaban Traditional Village, Karangasem, Bali, utilizing a descriptive qualitative methodology. The research sample was restricted to a specific number of informants. However, it is imperative to conduct additional research on the literacy programs pertaining to indigenous manuscripts in the Indonesian archipelago.

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