

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF PURA DESA BENGKALA AS A LOCAL HISTORY LEARNING RESOURCE IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Pura Desa Bengkala is one of the significant cultural heritage sites in Bali that embodies the historical continuity of Balinese Hindu civilization and local traditions. This study aims to examine the historical development of Pura Desa Bengkala, analyze its architectural structure and socio-religious functions, and evaluate its potential as a local history learning resource for senior high school students. The research employed a qualitative historical approach involving observation, interviews, and document analysis. Data were collected from local community leaders, temple administrators, historical records, and relevant literature. The findings reveal that Pura Desa Bengkala has evolved through a long historical process influenced by the interaction between indigenous Balinese beliefs and Hindu cultural traditions. Architecturally, the temple reflects the Tri Mandala spatial concept and contains various sacred structures that symbolize the cosmological values of Balinese Hinduism. Beyond its religious function, Pura Desa Bengkala serves as a center for social integration, cultural preservation, and the transmission of local wisdom within the community. The study further demonstrates that the temple possesses substantial educational value as a local history learning resource. Its historical background, cultural significance, architectural characteristics, and embedded values can enrich history learning by providing contextual and experiential educational opportunities. Integrating local historical heritage into classroom instruction can strengthen students' historical awareness, cultural identity, and appreciation of regional heritage. Therefore, Pura Desa Bengkala represents an important educational resource that supports the implementation of local history-based learning in senior high schools and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage through education.

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INTRODUCTION

History education plays a strategic role in developing students' historical awareness, cultural identity, and critical understanding of the relationship between past and present societies. In contemporary educational practice, history learning is expected not only to transmit historical facts but also to encourage learners to interpret

historical evidence and connect historical phenomena with their surrounding environment. Therefore, the utilization of local historical resources has become increasingly important in creating contextual and meaningful learning experiences. Local history enables students to understand historical developments from perspectives that are closer to their daily lives, allowing them to appreciate the cultural heritage that shapes their community identity. The integration of local historical sites into history instruction has been recognized as an effective approach to fostering historical thinking skills and strengthening students' awareness of cultural heritage preservation (Wiyanarti et al., 2021).

One of the regions in Bali that possesses significant historical and cultural resources is Bengkala Village, located in Kubutambahan District, Buleleng Regency. Bengkala is widely known as a traditional village with unique social and cultural characteristics that distinguish it from other Balinese communities. The village is particularly recognized for its relatively large population of deaf-mute residents, commonly referred to as the "Kolok" community. Beyond its social uniqueness, Bengkala preserves a rich historical legacy reflected in local traditions, oral narratives, ancient inscriptions, and sacred religious structures that have survived from earlier periods of Balinese civilization. Historical evidence indicates that Bengkala has existed since at least the twelfth century, as demonstrated by the Bengkala inscription, which provides information regarding social organization and governance during the Ancient Balinese period. The continuity of traditions and social structures from the past to the present illustrates the village's importance as a historical landscape that embodies the interaction between culture, religion, and community life (Widnyana et al., 2017; Renawati, 2019; Remawa et al., 2021).

Within this historical setting, Pura Desa Bengkala occupies a central position as an institution that integrates religious, social, and historical dimensions of community life. As part of the Kahyangan Tiga system, Pura Desa functions as a place of worship dedicated primarily to Dewa Brahma and serves as a focal point for communal religious activities. Historically, the development of village temples in Bali cannot be separated from the spread of Hinduism and the influence of the Majapahit Kingdom, which introduced a more systematic religious structure based on the Trimurti concept. This process contributed to the establishment of the Kahyangan Tiga system, consisting of Pura Desa, Pura Puseh, and Pura Dalem, each fulfilling complementary religious and social functions within Balinese traditional villages (Ardika, 2007; Paramadhyaksa, 2015; Subrata, 2020).

The historical significance of Pura Desa extends beyond its religious function. Previous studies have emphasized that temples in Bali represent valuable historical resources because they preserve material evidence, collective memories, and cultural practices associated with past societies. Temples often function as repositories of historical narratives, ritual traditions, and social institutions that reveal the dynamics of political, cultural, and religious development in Balinese communities. Consequently, temples can serve as credible and authentic sources for history learning, particularly in relation to the development of Hindu civilization in Indonesia and the evolution of local cultural traditions (Saputra, Pageh, & Yasa, 2022).

Among the distinctive features of Pura Desa Bengkala is the existence of Meru Tumpang Solas (eleven-tiered Meru) and Meru Tumpang Sanga (nine-tiered Meru). This architectural characteristic represents an unusual phenomenon because village temples generally contain Meru structures with fewer tiers, such as three, five, or nine, corresponding to their religious status within the local hierarchy. In Balinese temple architecture, an eleven-tiered Meru is typically associated with major temples such as Sad Kahyangan or Dang Kahyangan, which possess broader religious authority and a higher degree of sacredness. Therefore, the presence of an eleven-tiered Meru within a village temple raises important historical and philosophical questions concerning the origins, functions, and meanings of the structure in the context of Bengkala's historical development (William & Saliya, 2017; Paramadhyaksa, 2015).

Furthermore, oral traditions and archaeological interpretations suggest that the existence of these Meru structures may be associated with Bengkala's historical status as an important settlement during earlier periods of Balinese history. Local informants and archaeological investigations have linked the temple's unique architectural features to the village's historical significance, supported by inscriptions dating to the reign of King Sri Jayapangus. Such findings indicate that Pura Desa Bengkala possesses substantial historical value for understanding the political, religious, and social transformations that occurred in northern Bali during the Hindu-Buddhist period. The temple therefore constitutes not only a sacred religious site but also a living monument that preserves historical evidence relevant to the study of Balinese civilization.

From an educational perspective, the use of historical sites as learning resources has gained increasing attention in history education research. Heritage sites, archaeological remains, historical buildings, and religious monuments provide opportunities for experiential learning by enabling students to observe historical evidence directly. Such learning experiences help students construct historical understanding through interaction with authentic sources rather than relying exclusively on textbooks. Research has demonstrated that local historical sites contribute to the development of historical consciousness, cultural appreciation, and critical inquiry skills among students. In this regard, Pura Desa Bengkala offers significant potential as a history learning resource because it combines historical, architectural, religious, and cultural dimensions within a single educational context (Pelealu, 2019; Paramita et al., 2019; Wiyanarti et al., 2021).

The relevance of Pura Desa Bengkala as a learning resource is further strengthened by the implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes contextual learning and the exploration of local environments as educational resources. The curriculum encourages students to investigate historical phenomena through direct engagement with historical sources available in their surroundings. As a living historical monument, Pura Desa Bengkala enables students to explore evidence of Hindu-Buddhist influence, traditional Balinese social organization, religious practices, and cultural continuity. Through site-based learning activities, students can better understand that history is not merely a collection of past events but an ongoing process reflected in contemporary social and cultural realities.

Although several previous studies have discussed the history of Bengkala Village and the significance of local cultural traditions, research specifically examining the historical background, architectural structure, and educational potential of Pura Desa Bengkala remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on historical narratives or broader cultural issues without comprehensively analyzing the temple's role as a local history learning resource for senior high school students. This gap highlights the need for a study that integrates historical investigation with educational analysis to demonstrate how local cultural heritage can contribute to history education.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the historical development of Pura Desa Bengkala, analyze the structure and functions of its sacred buildings, particularly the Meru Tumpang Sanga and Meru Tumpang Solas, and evaluate its potential as a local history learning resource for senior high school students. By exploring the intersection of history, architecture, religion, and education, this research seeks to contribute to the preservation of Balinese cultural heritage while supporting the development of contextual and culturally responsive history education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative historical research approach to examine the historical development, architectural structure, and educational potential of Pura Desa Bengkala as a local history learning resource. Historical research is appropriate for reconstructing past events through the collection, criticism, interpretation, and presentation of historical sources. Furthermore, the qualitative approach enables researchers to understand social meanings, cultural values, and community perspectives regarding the existence and function of Pura Desa Bengkala (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study was conducted at Pura Desa Bengkala, located in Bengkala Village, Kubutambahan District, Buleleng Regency, Bali. The site was selected because of its historical significance, the presence of Meru Tumpang Sanga and Meru Tumpang Solas, and its potential as a local history learning resource. Bengkala is recognized as one of the ancient villages in Bali that preserves various cultural traditions, historical remains, and religious heritage that are relevant to the study of Balinese history (Ardika, 2007; Andika, 2018).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observation was conducted to identify and document the architectural characteristics, spatial arrangement, and physical condition of the temple complex. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants, including temple priests (Jero Mangku), customary village administrators (Penyarikan Desa Adat), community elders, and local residents who possess knowledge regarding the history and cultural significance of the temple. Document analysis involved examining inscriptions, historical records, previous studies, and relevant literature concerning Balinese Hinduism, temple architecture, and local history (Bowen, 2009).

The research procedure followed the stages of historical methodology, namely heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage focused on identifying and collecting historical sources related to Pura Desa Bengkala. Subsequently, source criticism was conducted to evaluate the authenticity and credibility of the collected data. Interpretation involved analyzing relationships among historical facts and contextualizing them within broader historical developments in Bali. Finally, historiography was employed to synthesize the findings into a coherent historical narrative regarding the history, structure, and functions of Pura Desa Bengkala (Gottschalk, 1986).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentary evidence. This procedure enabled the researchers to validate historical information and reduce potential bias arising from individual accounts. Through triangulation, a more comprehensive understanding of the historical significance and educational value of Pura Desa Bengkala was achieved (Denzin, 2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Historical Background of Pura Desa Bengkala

Bengkala Village is one of the oldest traditional villages located in Kubutambahan District, Buleleng Regency, Bali Province. The village occupies an important position in the historical development of North Bali due to its long-standing existence and the preservation of numerous cultural traditions inherited from earlier generations. Geographically, the village is situated within a rural environment characterized by agricultural landscapes and traditional settlements that continue to maintain indigenous Balinese cultural values. The relative stability of the geographical environment has contributed significantly to the preservation of historical remains, including inscriptions, sacred structures, and local traditions that have survived from the Ancient Balinese period until the present day (Ardika, 2007; Andika, 2018).

Historical information obtained through interviews with local informants indicates that Bengkala is widely regarded as a village whose origins predate several major kingdoms in Bali. Community members maintain a strong historical consciousness regarding the antiquity of their settlement and frequently associate the village's origins with the era of Ancient Bali. According to local narratives, Bengkala had already existed before the reign of King Sri Jayapangus and functioned as an established settlement with its own social and cultural system. This perception is reinforced by the discovery of inscriptions that mention Bengkala and provide evidence of organized social structures and administrative activities during the twelfth century. Such findings support the interpretation that Bengkala was an important settlement in northern Bali during the Ancient Balinese period (Remawa et al., 2021; Renawati, 2019).

In addition to its historical significance, Bengkala is widely recognized as the home of the Kolok community, a group of deaf-mute residents who have developed a distinctive sign language and cultural system. Although the existence of the Kolok community is often examined from social and anthropological perspectives, local oral traditions frequently connect this phenomenon with historical events and ancestral narratives. Community members believe that certain historical experiences involving political authority and supernatural sanctions contributed to the emergence of the Kolok population. These beliefs illustrate the close relationship between historical memory, cultural identity, and local knowledge systems within Bengkala society (Widnyana et al., 2017; Renawati, 2019).

Within this historical and cultural landscape, Pura Desa Bengkala occupies a central position as one of the most important religious institutions in the village. As a component of the Kahyangan Tiga system, the temple functions as a sacred space where villagers conduct collective religious activities and maintain their relationship with ancestral traditions. Observations conducted during the fieldwork revealed that the temple remains actively used by the community for ritual ceremonies, religious gatherings, and customary activities. The continued use of the temple demonstrates its enduring relevance within contemporary village life and highlights its role as a living cultural heritage site rather than merely a historical monument.

The most distinctive characteristic of Pura Desa Bengkala is the existence of two prominent Meru structures, namely Meru Tumpang Solas and Meru Tumpang Sanga. These structures immediately attract attention because their architectural characteristics differ from those commonly found in ordinary village temples. Based

on observations, the Meru structures dominate the sacred area of the temple and serve as focal points within the spatial organization of the complex. Their physical appearance reflects a high degree of craftsmanship and religious symbolism, indicating their importance within the ritual life of the community.

Information obtained from interviews with the Penyarikan Desa Adat Bengkala revealed that the existence of Meru Tumpang Solas and Meru Tumpang Sanga is closely associated with the historical development of the village. According to local explanations, archaeological investigations conducted in Bengkala identified several indicators suggesting that the village once possessed a more significant political and religious position than is commonly recognized today. Informants reported that archaeologists linked the presence of these Meru structures with the possibility that Bengkala functioned as an important center of authority during earlier periods of Balinese history. The interpretation was supported by evidence derived from inscriptions associated with the reign of King Sri Jayapangus, which demonstrate the historical prominence of the area.

Field observations further revealed that oral traditions continue to play an important role in explaining the origins and significance of the temple. Community elders and temple custodians frequently refer to narratives involving pawisik, bisama, and ancestral instructions related to the establishment and maintenance of sacred structures within the temple complex. These oral traditions function as an important source of historical knowledge and provide explanations regarding architectural decisions that may not be documented in written records. Consequently, the history of Pura Desa Bengkala is preserved through a combination of material evidence and collective memory transmitted across generations.

The findings therefore indicate that Pura Desa Bengkala represents more than a religious institution. It serves as a repository of historical memory, cultural values, and social identity that connects contemporary villagers with their ancestral past. The temple embodies evidence of historical continuity and illustrates how local communities preserve and reinterpret their heritage through religious practice and collective tradition.

DISCUSSION

The Historical Significance of Meru Tumpang Sanga and Meru Tumpang Solas in Pura Desa Bengkala

The existence of Meru Tumpang Sanga and Meru Tumpang Solas in Pura Desa Bengkala represents a distinctive phenomenon within Balinese temple architecture. Generally, Meru structures with a greater number of tiers symbolize a higher degree of sacredness and are commonly associated with major temples such as Sad Kahyangan and Dang Kahyangan. Therefore, the presence of an eleven-tiered Meru within a village temple raises important questions regarding the historical status and religious significance of Pura Desa Bengkala.

The findings suggest that the existence of these Meru structures cannot be understood solely from an architectural perspective but must also be interpreted within the broader historical context of Bengkala Village. Evidence derived from inscriptions associated with the reign of King Sri Jayapangus, combined with oral traditions maintained by the local community, indicates that Bengkala may have possessed a strategic political and religious position during the Ancient Balinese period. This interpretation supports the argument that the village was not merely a peripheral settlement but potentially functioned as an important center of social and religious activities in northern Bali. Such a historical status may explain why sacred structures generally associated with higher-ranking temples were established within Pura Desa Bengkala.

From the perspective of Balinese Hindu cosmology, Meru symbolizes Mount Mahameru, the sacred cosmic mountain believed to be the center of the universe. The number of tiers reflects specific theological meanings and hierarchical relationships within the Hindu religious system. According to Paramadhyaksa (2015), an eleven-tiered Meru is commonly associated with the highest manifestations of divinity, particularly Lord Shiva as the supreme deity within the concept of Dewata Nawa Sanga. Consequently, the existence of Meru Tumpang Solas in Pura Desa Bengkala indicates the presence of an advanced theological tradition that extends beyond the ordinary functions of a village temple. This finding reinforces the notion that local religious practices in Bengkala developed through a complex interaction between indigenous traditions and Hindu cosmological concepts.

Furthermore, the historical uniqueness of Bengkala as a village often associated with Bali Aga traditions may also contribute to the presence of these architectural features. Bali Aga communities are generally recognized for preserving older cultural elements and maintaining distinctive religious traditions that differ from those introduced during the Majapahit period (Andika, 2018). Therefore, the Meru structures in Pura Desa Bengkala may represent the continuity of local religious traditions that were subsequently integrated with Hindu

influences, resulting in a unique architectural expression that reflects both historical continuity and cultural adaptation.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of oral traditions in reconstructing local history. Narratives concerning *pawisik*, *bisama*, and ancestral instructions continue to shape community interpretations regarding the origins of the temple. Although oral traditions cannot replace archaeological evidence, they provide valuable insights into the collective memory of the community and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of local historical development. This observation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the significance of oral history in interpreting Balinese cultural heritage and sacred architecture.

Architectural Structure and Multifunctional Roles of Pura Desa Bengkala

The structural organization of Pura Desa Bengkala reflects the implementation of fundamental principles of Balinese Hindu cosmology. The application of the Tri Mandala concept demonstrates how sacred space is organized according to hierarchical levels of sanctity. Such spatial arrangements represent not merely architectural considerations but also religious beliefs concerning the relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. As explained by Subrata (2020), the division of sacred space into Nista Mandala, Madya Mandala, and Utama Mandala reflects the cosmological order that underlies traditional Balinese architecture.

The findings reveal that the spatial configuration of Pura Desa Bengkala serves both symbolic and practical functions. The placement of Meru Tumpang Solas and Meru Tumpang Sanga within the most sacred zone emphasizes their central role in religious ceremonies and reinforces their symbolic significance within the temple complex. The existence of various shrines (*pelinggih*), ceremonial pavilions, and communal structures further demonstrates the integration of religious and social functions within a single sacred environment.

Beyond its religious role, Pura Desa Bengkala functions as an important center of social cohesion. The presence of Bale Sangkepan, Bale Paruman Agung, and Bale Teruna indicates that the temple serves as a venue for community meetings, customary deliberations, and collective decision-making processes. This finding supports Geertz's (1973) argument that religious institutions in Bali function not only as places of worship but also as centers of social organization and cultural integration. Through regular religious ceremonies and communal activities, the temple strengthens social solidarity and reinforces shared cultural values among community members.

The cultural function of the temple is equally significant. The preservation of ritual traditions, architectural heritage, and local knowledge systems demonstrates the temple's role as a cultural institution responsible for transmitting collective memory across generations. Community participation in temple maintenance, ritual performance, and cultural preservation reflects a strong commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. This observation aligns with Picard's (1996) assertion that Balinese temples play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity and preserving local identity amid social change.

The multifunctional nature of Pura Desa Bengkala therefore illustrates how religious architecture can simultaneously serve spiritual, social, cultural, and historical purposes. The temple acts as a living institution where religious beliefs, social relations, and cultural traditions intersect, thereby contributing to the resilience of local identity and community cohesion.

Pura Desa Bengkala as a Local History Learning Resource

One of the most significant findings of this study is the educational potential of Pura Desa Bengkala as a local history learning resource. Contemporary history education increasingly emphasizes the importance of contextual learning, which enables students to connect historical concepts with tangible evidence in their immediate environment. In this regard, Pura Desa Bengkala provides a unique opportunity for students to engage directly with authentic historical sources and cultural heritage.

The historical characteristics of the temple make it particularly relevant to the study of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia. Through direct observation of the temple, students can examine evidence of religious acculturation, architectural development, and social transformation that occurred throughout Balinese history. Such experiences support the development of historical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze historical evidence, evaluate sources, and construct interpretations based on observable data. This finding is consistent with Wiyanarti et al. (2021), who argue that local historical sites can enhance students' historical consciousness and facilitate deeper engagement with historical learning.

The educational value of Pura Desa Bengkala extends beyond historical content knowledge. The temple also provides opportunities for students to understand broader cultural concepts, including religious tolerance, cultural diversity, community cooperation, and heritage preservation. Through site-based learning activities, students are exposed to the living dimensions of history, enabling them to appreciate how historical processes continue to influence contemporary social and cultural life.

The findings are particularly relevant within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages the utilization of local resources and promotes experiential learning approaches. By integrating Pura Desa Bengkala into history instruction, educators can move beyond textbook-centered teaching and create more engaging learning experiences that foster critical thinking and cultural awareness. Students are able to observe historical evidence directly, interact with community members, and explore the relationship between local history and national historical narratives. Such experiences contribute to a more meaningful understanding of history and strengthen students' appreciation of cultural heritage.

Moreover, the utilization of Pura Desa Bengkala as a learning resource contributes to heritage conservation efforts. Educational activities conducted at historical sites encourage younger generations to recognize the value of cultural heritage and develop a sense of responsibility toward its preservation. In this way, history education functions not only as a means of transmitting historical knowledge but also as an instrument for sustaining cultural continuity and strengthening local identity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Pura Desa Bengkala possesses substantial educational value as a local history learning resource. Its historical significance, architectural uniqueness, religious symbolism, and cultural functions provide rich learning materials that support the objectives of contemporary history education while simultaneously promoting the preservation of Balinese cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the existence of Meru Tumpang Sanga and Meru Tumpang Solas in Pura Desa Bengkala is closely related to the historical development and religious significance of Bengkala Village within the context of Balinese civilization. The presence of these Meru structures reflects not only the influence of Balinese Hindu cosmology but also the historical importance of Bengkala as a settlement that possessed a strategic socio-religious position during the Ancient Balinese period. Supported by inscriptional evidence, oral traditions, and local historical narratives, the findings indicate that the architectural uniqueness of Pura Desa Bengkala represents the continuity of local traditions integrated with Hindu religious concepts, resulting in a distinctive form of sacred architecture rarely found in ordinary village temples.

The study also reveals that the architectural structure of Pura Desa Bengkala follows the traditional Balinese concept of Tri Mandala, which organizes sacred space into hierarchical zones according to levels of sanctity. The temple contains various religious buildings, including Meru Tumpang Sanga, Meru Tumpang Solas, pelinggih, and ceremonial pavilions, each serving specific functions within the religious and social life of the community. Beyond its role as a place of worship, the temple functions as a center of social interaction, cultural preservation, and community organization. Through religious ceremonies, customary meetings, and the transmission of local traditions, Pura Desa Bengkala continues to play a vital role in maintaining social cohesion and preserving the cultural identity of the Bengkala community.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that Pura Desa Bengkala possesses substantial potential as a local history learning resource for senior high school students. The temple provides authentic historical evidence through its architecture, historical background, oral traditions, and religious practices, enabling students to engage directly with local cultural heritage. Its utilization in history education supports contextual and experiential learning, strengthens historical awareness, enhances students' understanding of Balinese Hindu civilization, and fosters appreciation for cultural heritage preservation. Therefore, Pura Desa Bengkala can serve not only as a religious and cultural institution but also as an effective educational resource that contributes to the development of meaningful local history learning in senior high schools.

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