

# Preservation of Living Monuments in Bali and Its Problems

*I Made Sutaba*



Indonesia is a Southeast Asian country with a very rich cultural heritage of historical and archaeological monuments, some of which belong to prehistoric periods. There are movable and immovable monuments made of both tangible and intangible material, and only a small number of them had been removed to government museums for protection. Most of them are still in the field, subject to the effects of nature and the environment, human activities, development projects, etc..

Based on their functions, the monuments in Indonesia are divided into two major classifications: “dead” monuments are those that are not used any more by the local people, e.g. the Borobudur and Prambanan temples; and “living” monuments, such as mosques, churches and the Hindu-Buddhist temples (puras) in Bali, are those which are still being used by the local community for religious purposes.

The royal palaces in Bali are still being occupied by the royal families. These living monuments have an important role in the religious life of the Balinese society as can be seen in Bali

today. There have been changes, however, as a consequence of the changing needs of society, based on its socio-cultural life, and both internal and external factors.



Stone pillar inscription of Blanjong, Sanur, Bali (c.914 AD) destroyed by moss and fungi (1986.)



### Preservation

The problems of preserving monuments are widespread for many a country. Although Unesco has undertaken countless activities in preserving important cultural heritage of the world, they operate with limited financial resources. Despite the con-

straints, Unesco have been doing excellent work, and the best example is the safeguarding of the Borobudur temple in Java.

While each nation is expected to look after its national cultural properties, historical and archaeological monuments included, and its government is concerned with and responsible in preserving the monuments for national interests, international assistance continue to be crucial.

The Indonesian government is aware of the numerous problems caused by the negative impact of modernisation, technology, population growth, commercial expansion, traffic, van-

dalism, illegal excavation, industrialisation and tourism. It is also concerned with problems arising from the monuments itself, being old, and gradually destroyed by the natural environment.

In the case of tourism, the increasing number of visitors,

and the subsequent construction and existence of tourist facilities near the monuments pose serious difficulties for preservation efforts. Facing these challenges, the government has embarked on a number of efforts through five-years development plan (REPELITA) and has been enforcing laws, such as the Monuments Ordinance (1931) which was issued by the Dutch government.

Many monuments have been preserved as national cultural properties; their importance cannot be under-emphasised, for they represent the following:

- a) historical and archaeological evidence, which is very important for reconstructing national history;
- b) a force to encourage and strengthen cultural identity as the basic building block for development in the modern world;
- c) a means for cultural appreciation, especially for the young generation; and
- d) an attraction for cultural tourism, and for establishing cultural understanding.

It is vital to note that preservation and conservation of monuments do not only mean the protection of the buildings



(through reconstruction and chemical treatment), but also the environment of the monuments, e.g. to maintain by law enforcement the atmosphere as integral to the whole. The utilisation of the areas around the monuments should be planned in detail by delineating zones for certain purposes. The other thing which we should bear on our minds is to preserve also the perception of the cultural values of the monuments within our growing society, to whom the property belong. Public support is crucially useful, which could be achieved through education. When we lose our cultural values of the ancient objects, we lose our historical roots, significance and spirit. Even technologically advanced countries, with all their money, could not buy - for the welfare of their society - cultural values, the dignity of their ancestors and their achievements. Ultimately, they need the historical spirit as a bolster to their national identity in countering the future.

**Preservation problems and the role of the local people in Bali**

Located at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago, Bali has numerous dead and living monuments spread all over the small island, most of which be-

long to the second group. With so many monuments, the government understands the need to coordinate efforts, and cooperate with the communities in encountering problems of preservation in Bali. Generally, a number of factors damage the monuments, namely:

- a) ageing
- b) effects of the natural environment and the climate
- c) human activities
- d) modernisation
- e) development projects
- f) industrialisation and tourism
- g) commercial expansion
- h) population growth
- I) traffic
- j) vandalism and illegal excavation



*Cleaning, chemical treatment and matching the broken parts of Prasada Rambutsiwi, Denpasar, Bali (1998).*

The development of archaeological studies have shown that preservation and conservation of monuments are technical matters based on scientific consideration. Work have started during the last few years in

developing countries, but are still affected by shortage of specialised and skilled personnel who could carry out the tasks as well as the maintenance. Although lacking funds and



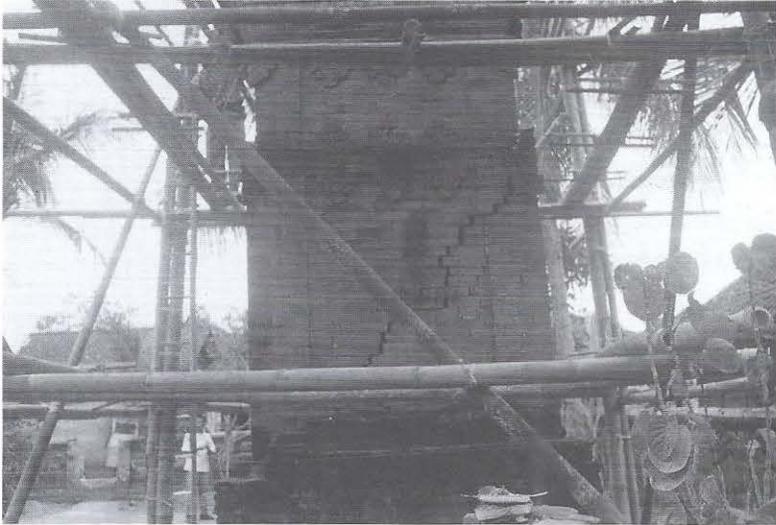
*The newly discovered prasada (lika pagoda) made of brick named Pura Rambutsiwi, Denpasar, Bali has been destroyed by kamboja tree on its top (1998).*



equipment, ASEAN countries have been co-ordinating programmes through SPAFA (Special Project of Archaeology and Fine Arts) to seek effective ways and means to manage some of the problems.

In discussing problems in preserving monuments in Bali, we must always take into account that the living monuments have a profoundly religious function

the responsibility of caring for the monuments is ultimately vital to ensure success in governmental preservation programmes.



*The broken body of Prasada Rambutsiwi, Denpasar (1998).*



*Cleaning, chemical treatment to preserve the stone pillar inscription of Blanjong, Sanur, Bali (1986).*

in the life of the Balinese. As this continues to be still very much the case today, the role of Balinese society in undertaking

The Regional Office for Preservation of Historical and Archaeological Heritage in Bali (Suaka Peninggalan Sejarah dan

Purbakala Bali) has a rich experience of working with the local people. Through their collaboration, a number of monuments have been restored with government financial support and the labour of the community.

There are certain positions in Balinese society which still exist, such as informal leaders, e.g. the priests (pedanda), the temple priest (pemangku), and the traditional chairman of the village community (Bendesa Adat) who are in charge of the village temples. The civil servant and the young generation (Sekehe Teruna Teruni) also have their roles which are not dissimilar. In this context, each village in Bali usually has three village temples named Kahyangan Tiga, e.g. Pura Puseh, Pura Desa (sometimes combined with Pura Bale Agung) and Pura Dalem. There are also archaeological remains such as statues, and inscriptions, etc..

For the Hindus, there are six important temples called Sad kahyangan, namely Pura Besakih, and Pura Lempuyang, etc.. Although Bali is a small island, there are many historical and archaeological monuments, most of which are very old, and their conditions are unstable. Preservation problems in Bali include the shortage of funds,

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