

# SARASWATI IN BALI

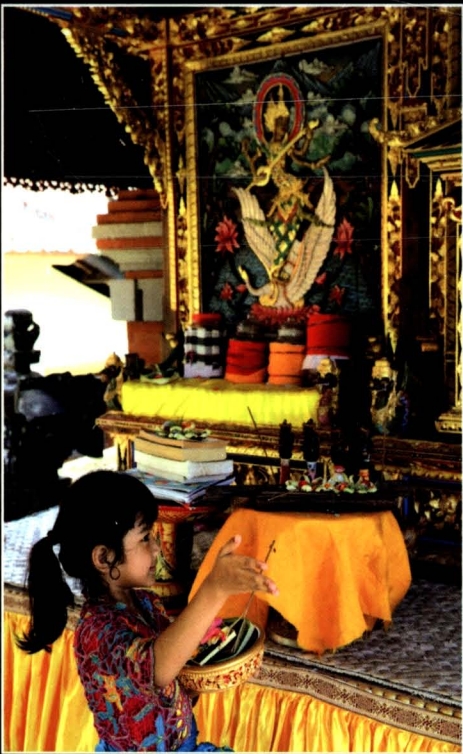
*a Temple, a Museum, and a Mask*



Ron Jenkins

ARMA





Child presents offerings beneath the image of Saraswati in the ARMA Museum temple.

Saraswati is worshipped in Bali as the goddess of knowledge, beauty and the arts. This book traces her influence on daily life in the village of Peliatan by showing how the ceremonies, shadow plays, and masked dances held at the Pura Madya temple festival are mirrored in the art collection, landscaped gardens, and cultural events at the nearby ARMA Museum. Balinese beliefs in the sacred power of art and literature are revealed through vivid descriptions of the festival and lively interviews with painters, dancers, farmers, kings, and priests. Ancient texts inscribed on palm-leaf manuscripts suggest that Saraswati's teachings enrich human life with invisible meaning. As one of the world's most famous tourist destinations struggles to preserve its cultural traditions, the museum and the temple help keep Bali's hidden wisdom accessible by putting the knowledge of Saraswati into action.

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*a Temple, a Museum, and a Mask*

ARMA

Agung Rai Museum of Art















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Pages 2 & 3: I WAYAN BENDI. *Life in Bali*. 1990, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 137 cm, Collection of ARMA Museum, Ubud, Bali.

Page 4: Constructed from bamboo and woven palm leaves festive *penjor* poles sway in the wind as worshippers stream into a temple gate.

Page 6-7: The sacred mask known as *Rangda* is regularly taken from its temple shrine to the sea where it is fortified by the spirits of the invisible world or *niskala*.

Endpaper: The traditional Balinese *aksara* alphabet.

#### Photographs

IB Putra Adnyana (pages: 4, 6-7, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 25, 28, 29 (top right), 31, 34-35, 36-37, 39, 41, 46, 53, 58-59, 61, 63 (left), 67, 69, 70, 75, 79, 83, 85, 87, 90-91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 102, 113, 115, 116 (left), 117, 119, 122, 123, 127 (top left & below), 128, 130, 132, 135, 139, 145, 147 (left), 152, 158 and front inside flap), Koes Karnadi (pages: 2-3, 8, 10, 12, 24, 38, 42, 52, 60, 65, 66, 72-73, 74, 84, 109, 111, 112, 118, 131, 146, 148), Gathot Subroto (pages: 88 (top), 147 (top right)), RLS (pages: 129 and backcover), Ron Jenkins (pages: 8, 17, 19, 20, 22, 27, 29, 31, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57, 71, 77, 80, 81, 82, 88, 100, 101, 103, 105, 107, 110, 116, 121, 127, 136, 140, 141, 147 and back inside flap).

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MANGKU GUSTI MADE BARET.

*Goddess Saraswati*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 70 cm, Collection of ARMA Museum, Peliatan, Ubud, Bali.



# Dedication

*For my adventurous son Nicander,  
with hopes that his thoughts, words, and actions  
will always be inspired by the wisdom of Saraswati.*







DEWA MADE KUNDEL.

*Ritual Procession (detail)*, 1980,

ink on canvas,

52 x 75 cm, Collection of ARMA Museum, Ubud, Bali.



# Preface

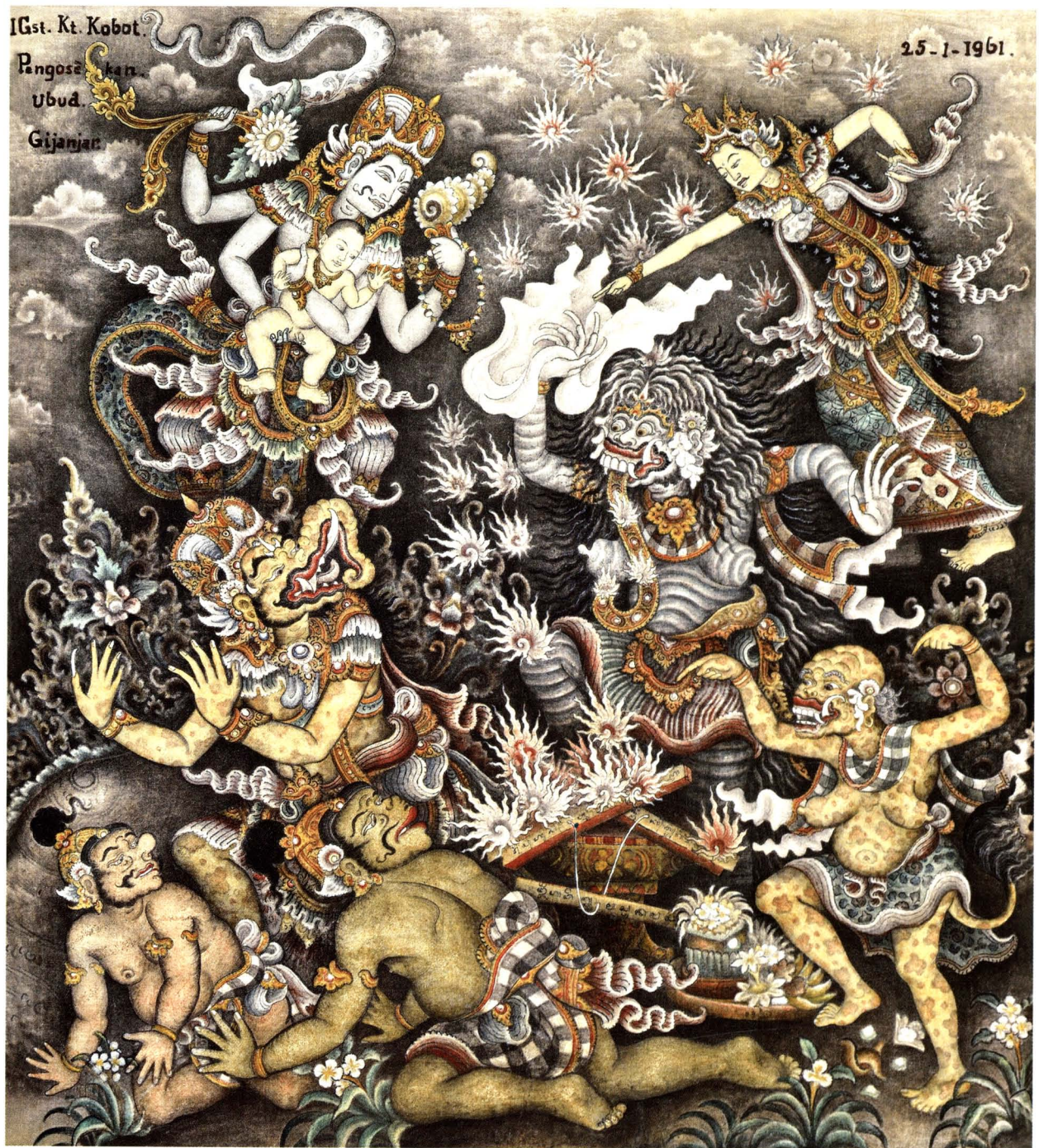
**Saraswati in Bali** by Professor Ron Jenkins is an excellent and comprehensive account of Saraswati. For the Balinese, the goddess Saraswati is the symbol of knowledge, science, wisdom, beauty, and creativity. As a divinity of Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, Saraswati created sixteen '*aksara modre*' (sacred letters) which are the genesis of literature, music, ritual and art. Herein, I emphasize the meaning of Saraswati as a *Sinom* poem:

*Kabawos aksara utama* (expressed as prime letters)  
*Sastrane nembelas siki* (sixteen in number)  
*Ongkara sakti nunggal* (the mighty and magical Ongkara)  
*Mamurti dados tri sakti* (transforms into three letters)  
*Ang, Ong, Mang, kasinahin* (highly regarded as Ang, Ong, Mang)  
*Dasa aksara ne mungguh* (radiating the ten letters)  
*Sa, ba, ta, a, i, nunggil pisan* (of sa, ba, ta, a, i )  
*Na, ma, si, wa, ya, yeki* (completed by the virtuous na, ma, si, wa, ya)  
*Ang, Ah murub* (Ang and Ah glows)  
*Metu siwam, satyam, sundaram* (purity, righteousness, and aesthetic beauty rises)

This book is essential for understanding Balinese culture.

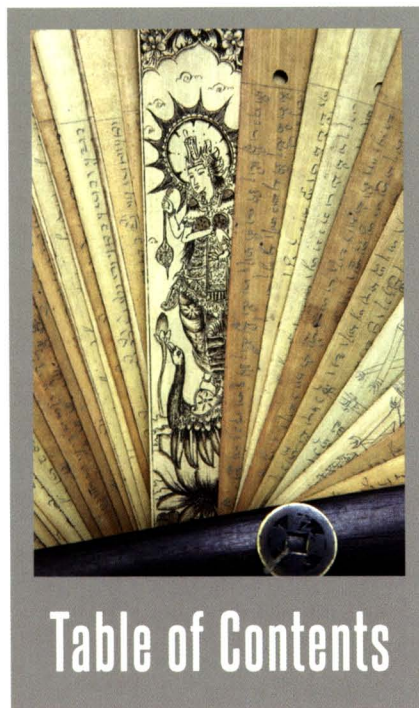
Prof. Dr. I Made Bandem  
former director of the Indonesian Institute for the Arts





I GUSTI KETUT KOBOT. *The Prophecy of Ganesha*, 1961,  
acrylic on canvas, 185 x 94 cm.  
Collection of ARMA Museum, Peliatan, Ubud, Bali.





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NYOMAN MEJA. *Jauk Dance*. 1979,  
acrylic on canvas, 90 x 60cm,  
Collection of ARMA Museum, Peliatan, Ubud, Bali





## Acknowledgments and Sources

This book could not have been written without the generous assistance and support of the many Balinese artists, scholars, curators, entrepreneurs, poets, and priests who have helped me to understand their worldview since my first arrival on the island in 1976. These extraordinary individuals include Ida Pedanda Ketut Sideman, Pedanda Istri Suci Padma, Cokorde Raka Kerthyasa, Bupati Cok Ace, Cokorde Gede Sukawati, Dr. Nyoman Catra, Made Dewa Dharmawan, Ibu Anom of Puri Peliatan, Dewa Made Batuan, Ketut Kodi, Made Djimat, Ibu Cenik, Dr. Made Bandem, Suasti Bandem, Dr. Nyoman Sedana, Desak Made Laksmi, Made Wianta, Intan Wianta, Burat Wianta, Sugi Lanus, Ketut Liyer, Wayan Nardayana, Wayan Mongoh Aria, Nyoman Kayun, Ida Bagus Putra Baruna, Pande Made Linggih, Pande Nyoman Sujana, Wayan Bajra Wasan, Nyoman Sujana, Nyoman Gunarsa, Dr. Wayan Dhibia, Wayan Sukra, Cokorde Bagus Wiranata, and many others too numerous to mention.

Special thanks go to Anak Agung Rai and his wife Ibu Rai who gave me full access to the ARMA Museum and Agung Asrama who introduced me to the people responsible for the inner workings of Pura Madya.

All quotes in this book are taken from interviews I conducted during multiple fieldwork visits to Bali that began in 1976 and were funded by the Watson Foundation, The Institute for Intercultural Studies, The Asian Cultural Council of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and a senior research grant from the Fulbright Program of the U.S. State Department. My heartfelt thanks go to all the individuals connected to Pura Madya who patiently

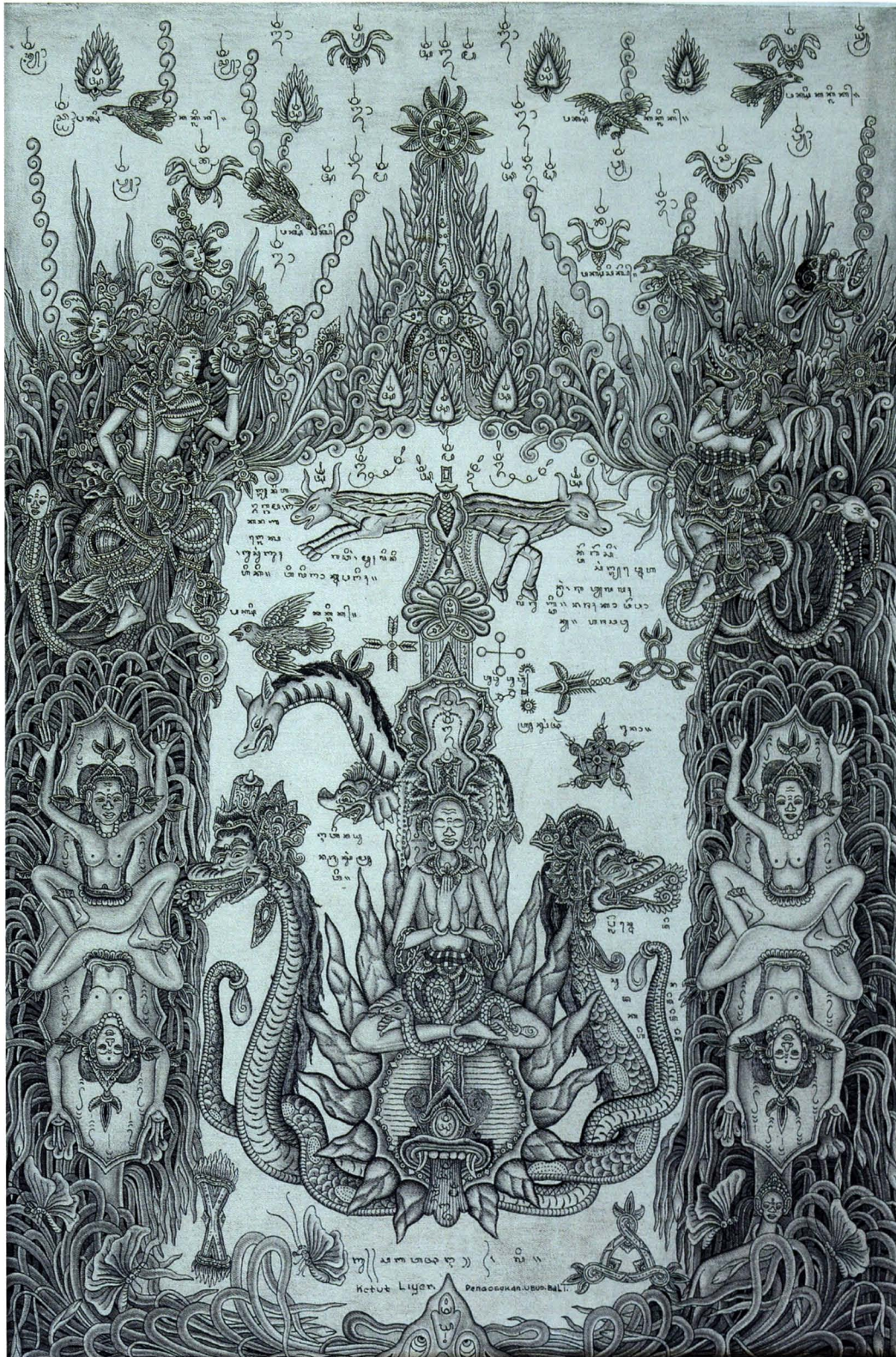
answered my endless questions about the performances and rituals that took place there.

With enormous gratitude I thank Hildred Geertz of Princeton University for her generous feedback on the first draft of this book. Her extraordinary trilogy of books about Balinese arts and artists should be required reading for anyone attempting to make sense of life on the island. Without the insights she provided me in her published writings and personal correspondence this book would have been greatly impoverished.

I am also deeply indebted to Sugi Lanus and Nyoman Catra for their assistance translating the excerpts from the Saraswati *lontar* that appear in this volume's appendix. The palm-leaf manuscript is entitled "Aji Saraswati" and was originally housed in Gria Gede Tegalwangi in Banjar Angkan, Klungkung, but is now part of the government *lontar* collection held in the Denpasar offices of the Balinese Minister of Culture. Ketut Kodi's interpretation of that manuscript, expressed publicly in performance and privately in his home reflects his wisdom as a scholar, artist, and man of morals. I am honored that he took the time to share his understanding of Saraswati with me and the readers of this book.

Finally, I thank my wife Franziska for her indulgence during the many trips we have taken together through the back roads and unusual abodes of Bali. My research would have been incomplete without her thoughtful questions, sensitive observations, and keen sense of facial recognition.





KETUT LIYER. *Untitled (detail)*. 1970,  
ink on cotton, 54.5 x 37.5 cm,  
Collection of the Artist. Pengosekan, Ubud, Bali.



— *Introduction* —

# *Saraswati* in Modern Bali: Putting Knowledge into Action





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Saraswati is worshipped in Bali as the goddess of knowledge, beauty and the arts. Those realms come together most vividly in the festivals held to celebrate the anniversary of every Balinese temple. Ornately sculpted offerings of flowers, fruits, and rice cakes are presented to the spirits of the invisible world in ceremonies that include masked dances, shadow puppet plays, gamelan music, and the chanting of sacred texts. This feast of the senses continues for several days in an effort to entice the gods, demons, ancestors, and other intangible beings to assume their most benign forms, take residence in the temple, and bestow their blessings.

This book traces Saraswati's influence on Balinese daily life in the village of Peliatan through the complex web of overlapping relationships that connect a village temple festival to a nearby museum. The festival that marks the founding of Peliatan's Pura Madya temple coincides with the day set aside to honor Saraswati; and the meaning of each ceremonial event, from the spectacular street processions to the philosophical banter of the clowns, can be traced to sacred manuscripts associated with the goddess. The stories, mantras, and local histories found in these texts provide a foundation of knowledge for the densely layered festival. Priests, performers, and worshippers refer to this collective wisdom throughout the ceremonies, but their understanding is expressed primarily through active participation in communal song, prayers and ritual preparations rather than direct discussion. Saraswati's collective wisdom is also a primary,

but unspoken, source for the paintings, performances and rituals that are on display every day of the year a few hundred meters from Pura Madya at the Agung Rai Museum of Art, known as ARMA, a cultural center that presents Bali's heritage as a "living tradition" in a process of continual renewal.

The interdependence between these sacred and secular institutions illuminates the ways in which modern Balinese society has preserved and reinvigorated its Hindu-animist culture by adapting to the global realities of life on an island that is one of the world's most famous tourist destinations. The Balinese religion incorporates elements of Hinduism, animism, Buddhism and local mystic beliefs into a form of worship unlike any other in the world. Religious ceremonies in Bali are equally unique and draw tourists from around the globe. In this context the temple festivals at Pura Madya bring foreigners and their economic resources to Peliatan, enriching cultural attractions like the ARMA Museum and its adjacent hotel resort. ARMA in turn redistributes its resources to provide support for the musicians, dancers, and offerings that are essential to the Pura Madya ceremonies. All the religious texts, rituals, and values embedded in the Pura Madya festival are mirrored in the paintings, ceremonies, art classes, and special events that take place at the museum, paid for by tourist dollars, but open for free to local Balinese. In the topsy-turvy world of global Bali, the temple doubles as a cultural exhibition space for tourists at the same time that the museum/resort doubles as a