





Social solidarity and cultural preservation: the role of female *sekaa gong* in Ubud



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ABSTRACT

Female *Sekaa Gong* is a collective of women in Ubud Village who unite to perform Balinese music, transforming individual ideas into a collective vision. This group fosters social relationships and a sense of togetherness among its members. This article explores the intricacies of the Female *Sekaa Gong*, highlighting its role in preserving traditional Balinese music (*Karawitan*) and providing feminine aesthetic nuances. The research, conducted through a qualitative interpretive method within a cultural studies paradigm, examines the positionality of the Female *Sekaa Gong* in social and touristic contexts. Findings indicate a rise in the number of Female *Sekaa Gong* in Ubud Village, motivated by five key factors: religious emotion, a sense of humiliation, status improvement, actualization of beauty, and the desire to create tourist performances. The Female *Sekaa Gong* plays several roles in ritual and social activities, including: (1) serving as a ritual complement; (2) building social solidarity; (3) expanding traditional roles; and (4) preserving cultural values. Its presence marks a shift in the social paradigm regarding gender norms in *gamelan* performance, reflecting a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity and adapting to contemporary circumstances.

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1. Introduction

The advancement of civilization has profoundly influenced changes in social structures and values. This transformation has inevitably impacted the position and form of art within society. To ensure the survival of art forms, these changes must be embraced. As Soemarwoto [1, p. 48] asserts, the benefits of these changes to society hinge on the adaptability and wisdom with which they are approached. Typically, environmental changes come with inherent advantages, prompting humans to adapt or adopt these modifications. Art, as a historical legacy, is not immune to change. Each generation endeavors to make its artistic mark, adding new dimensions to the existing body of work. The freedom of creative expression is boundless, allowing artists to develop innovative concepts. Purwanto [2] suggests that the artistic process materializes through dialogues, discussions, workshops, and interactions with evolving aesthetic and ethical ideas. Conscious, creative, and selective artists continuously seek new avenues to elevate art, transcending gender barriers and encouraging participation from both men and women. Women's participation in the arts is not a novel phenomenon. Historically, women have played significant roles as dancers, performers, and in vocal art traditions such as *matembang*, *makidung*, and *makekawin*. These activities persist today, particularly in various customary and religious rituals. However, in the realm of Balinese Karawitan (traditional Balinese music), which predominantly features the gamelan, men have historically dominated. The inception of gamelan did not include instruments specifically designed for women, as they were tailored to men's physical attributes and aesthetic preferences. Therefore, there is a nuanced paradigm that states the roles of genders in Balinese arts, where men should play music, while women become dancers.

During Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidency in Indonesia, the concept of emansipasi (emancipation) emerged, advocating for women to be treated equally to men. This idea heightened women's awareness of their societal roles. Although it was not a radical movement, it underscored that women have the same opportunities as men. With the growing emphasis on gender equality, there has been a concerted effort to involve women in Balinese Karawitan, encouraging them to play gamelan instruments. The Bali Arts Festival (PKB), inaugurated in 1979, played a pivotal role in this movement, with women first participating in the festival in 1985 as part of the 'Female Gong Kebyar Parade'. This inclusion marked a shift in the perception and roles of women in the arts. The festival demonstrated that women could excel in competitive artistic performances, challenging traditional gender roles. By 2001, the 'Mixed Gong Kebyar Festival' saw men and women performing together, reflecting a growing acceptance of gender equality in the arts. As Yudarta [3, p. 48] notes, this phenomenon positioned women and men as equals in playing the Gong Kebyar, symbolizing a stride towards women's emancipation in art. In subsequent Bali Arts Festivals, particularly in 2007 and 2008, female gamelan players, identified as Female Sekaa Gong (SGW), became more prominent, although they primarily participated in parades rather than competitions.

Previous scholarship on women and Balinese gamelan have been conducted by Emiko Saraswati Susilo and Sonja Downing. Susilo's thesis, "Gamelan Wanita: A Study of Women's Gamelan in Bali" (2003), highlights that women's involvement in Balinese Karawitan began in 1975 in Nusa Penida. One significant motivator for women's participation was their desire to contribute to *ngayah* activities through gamelan performance, a crucial factor in the emergence and growth of Women's Gong Societies in Bali [4]. On the other hand, Downing conducted her ethnographic work in Pengosekan, Ubud to investigate the female childrens group and the affect that it has for the community. Her research has resulted an article and a book based on her project [5], [6]. I wish intend to extend previous scholarship on women's gamelan by investigating the womens group in Ubud and its relations with religion and tourism. The emergence of women's groups across the island has undeniably sparked the formation of local collectives, inspiring the women of Ubud Village to create their own Female Sekaa Gong. This movement reflects a broader cultural shift, showcasing the spirit, determination, and enthusiasm of these women as a positive development within their community. It highlights the potential of artistic endeavors to foster gender equality and empowerment. The establishment of Female Sekaa Gong in Ubud Village is particularly remarkable given Ubud's status as a renowned tourist destination in Bali. Despite their busy lives, the women of Ubud have shown a steadfast commitment to preserving and promoting the arts within their community. The presence of the Women's Sekaa Gong embodies the spirit of a universal concept, rooted in the fundamental desire to cultivate social relationships within the group. This initiative not only highlights their commitment to art but also showcases the powerful community spirit driving their efforts.

2. Method

The study of Female Sekaa Gong in Ubud Village illustrates how a traditional art organization, predominantly supported by women, can significantly contribute to the evolution of Karawitan amidst cultural changes. This research focuses on the objectives and motivating factors behind the formation of Female Sekaa Gong, as well as its role in the social and ritual activities of Ubud Village. This research employs interpretative qualitative methods, aligning with the Cultural Studies paradigm. The research process includes preparation, site selection, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings. The methodology involves analyzing descriptive texts to understand the spirit and dynamics of Female Sekaa Gong within the context of Ubud Village's tourism landscape. The analysis aims to comprehend and interpret experiential phenomena related to Female Sekaa Gong in Ubud Village, utilizing a logical and truth-value system. This study seeks to unravel the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the subject, and the situational pressures influencing the investigation. It particularly emphasizes the investigation's richness in social and ritual values, providing a comprehensive understanding of Female Sekaa Gong's impact and significance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Female Sekaa Gong as a Social Organization

When discussing the concept of *sekaa* within the community life of Ubud Village, it is essential to consider the traditional organizational system that thrives and evolves in this area. *Sekaa* encompasses various types of activities aligned with specific objectives and includes distinct provisions or requirements for its members. A notable feature of *sekaa* is its orientation towards community life, closely intertwined with the *banjar*, village, and customary practices. The term *banjar* was first known in prehistoric Bali. The term was written on the Gobleg Pura Desa Inscription dated 836 Caka or 914 AD in *Kuno* (ancient) Balinese language [7]. The term *banjar* now refers to a form of local community in Bali, acknowledged by the Indonesian government, based on a certain territorial boundaries and regulated their specific regulations, known as *awig-awig* [8, p. 2]. According to Astika [9, p. 112] [10, p. 112], *sekaa* is a smaller institution or social group compared to the *banjar*. In some cases, *sekaa* may extend beyond the boundaries of a single *banjar*. A *sekaa* consists of members who organize themselves around shared interests. It includes a membership, leadership structure, established relationships between members, rules or *awig-awig*, and specific functions related to community groups and interest groups within the *banjar*, customary village, and official village. There are several types of *sekaa* that exists, which share a common interest among the members, such as *sekaa teruna-teruni*, *sekaa subak*, *sekaa gong*, and *sekaa mesanti* [11, p. 2].

According to Sherif, as cited in Gerungan [12, p. 89], four main characteristics play a crucial role in the formation of social organizations and distinguish them from other social entities: (1) shared motivation among members; (2) diverse skills; (3) the establishment of organizational norms; and (4) the development and affirmation of organizational structures. These elements collectively contribute to the unique characteristics of social organizations. The formation of a social organization, such as a *sekaa*, arises from the collective efforts of its members to achieve specific goals that are more attainable through cooperative activities than individual endeavors. A common drive or motive serves as the fundamental impetus for the creation of a *sekaa*. Without a shared motive among individuals, the emergence of a distinct social organization is highly unlikely. This principle also underlies the establishment of all-women gamelan groups, known as Female Sekaa Gong. A Female Sekaa Gong comprises several female community members who unite around a common interest, stemming from individual ideas. These individual ideas coalesce into a collective vision, facilitating communication, interaction, and collaboration among *sekaa* members. The idea of forming a Female Sekaa Gong has been evident in Ubud since 2008, with the establishment of three groups: Sanggar Candra Wirabhuna at Puri Saraswati Ubud, Female Sekaa Gong Banjar Ubud Kaja, and Female Sekaa Gong Ubud Kelod.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the establishment of any type of *sekaa* is preceded by an initial meeting designed to inform prospective members about the intentions and objectives of the organization. This foundational meeting serves as a critical step in aligning the members' understanding and commitment to the collective goals. Specifically, in the context of forming a Female Sekaa Gong, this meeting is convened to communicate the objective of preserving and maintaining Balinese traditional music. During this preliminary gathering, detailed discussions are conducted to elucidate the cultural and artistic significance of the *sekaa*, emphasizing its role in sustaining and promoting the rich heritage of Balinese gamelan music. The organizers outline the specific goals, which may include the preservation of traditional repertoires, the adaptation of music to contemporary contexts, and the fostering of intergenerational transmission of musical knowledge. Moreover, this meeting addresses the logistical and structural aspects of the *sekaa*, including membership criteria, leadership roles, and the framework for rehearsals and performances. By providing a comprehensive overview of the *sekaa*'s mission and operational plan, the meeting ensures that all prospective members are well-informed and motivated to contribute to the collective effort. The formation of a Female Sekaa Gong not only aims to conserve traditional music but also seeks to empower women within the cultural sphere, providing them with a platform to actively participate in and shape the artistic landscape. This initiative reflects broader societal goals of gender equality and cultural continuity, reinforcing the importance of communal engagement in the arts.



Fig 1. The initial meeting in establishing a Female Sekaa Gong

3.2. Gamelan Smaradhana as the Musical Medium

Smaradhana is a gamelan ensemble created in 1991 by the late I Wayan Beratha, a prolific musician, composer, and gamelan maker from Denpasar. This ensemble represents a new era of Balinese Karawitan, incorporating both existing elements and those newly unearthed from various hidden patets. The emergence of *barungan* Smaradhana has revitalized the existing system of tunings and patets in Balinese Karawitan. Smaradhana demonstrates the polyphonic nature of Balinese gamelan, which Western scholars classify as polyrhythmic music due to its rich expressions, dynamics, and tempos. Smaradhana's gamelan is unique as it is categorized as a 'New Group Balinese Gambelan' that remains true to its traditional roots. Gamelan Smaradhana is not the outcome of a literary analysis or scientific inquiry revolving around the reading of sources; instead, see Fig. 2, it is the ongoing recognition and admiration of an individual engaged in the realm of Balinese Karawitan. Indeed, for the sake of a more fundamental discourse, it is indisputable that the endeavors of Karawitan in Indonesia, an essential component of the art scene of the 20th century, are inextricably linked to the challenges and upheavals it encounters, in an effort to inspire artistic consciousness and ingenuity within the cultural horizon of Indonesia.

According to I Wayan Beratha, the word Smaradhana is derived from two meanings: 'smara' meaning sound, and 'dhana' meaning rich. Hence, Smaradhana translates to 'rich in sound' (interview, April 6, 2006). As depicted in Fig. 2, Smaradhana is indeed rich in sound as it can derive at least three types of patet from its seven main tones, such as patet selisir, patet tembung, and patet sundaren. In Java, patet selisir is equated with patet nem, patet tembung with patet limo, and patet sundaren with patet barang. Additionally, Gamelan Smaradhana can produce different tunings, such as pelog and slendro. Various musical nuances can be achieved through modulation from one patet to another or from one tuning system (barrel) to another. This flexibility allows Gamelan Smaradhana to create a very soft, sweet, and romantic atmosphere, making it suitable for both dance accompaniment and instrumental music. The repertoire includes pieces from Pagambuhan, Palegongan, Smara Pagulingan, Gong Gede, and Gong Kebyar traditions. The emergence of Smaradhana gamelan as an innovative force appears to be a calculated and well-conceived reference. Its presence has the potential to enrich and enliven the long-established musical traditions of Balinese Karawitan, thereby enhancing its musical nuances. The high level of difficulty associated with the *patet* playing in Smaradhana did not discourage the women of Ubud Village from choosing the Smaradhana gamelan as a medium. The pieces chosen, are adapt to the women's abilities, which is largely a transformation of other Balinese gamelan genres, such as the classical *lelambatan* pieces from the Gong Gede repertoire. The nuances of grandeur of the *lelambatan* pieces are still maintained while also altering the musical ornamentations to fit the characteristics of gamelan Smaradhana.



Fig 2. Gamelan Smarandhana

3.3. Goals and Motivating Factors

In general, all forms of activities carried out by humans clearly have a certain purpose why these activities are carried out. Activities in the field of Balinese Karawitan, especially those that use gamelan as a medium, have been able to show the existence of women joining a traditional organization called Female *Sekaa Gong*. The activities as *Sekaa Gong* carried out can make a strategic contribution and have value related to the lives of its members, both for themselves and for others in a broader context. Referring to the concept of art expressed by Leo Tolstoi, women's activities in the Balinese Karawitan are a form of expression of feelings addressed to others so that the person feels what the perpetrator feels [13]. The formation of the Female *Sekaa Gong* case study in Ubud Village is a form of emancipation of women based on certain interests, such as: (1) as a channel of talent and pleasure, in the form of real activities and creativity that feel they have the same passion as group solidarity; (2) structuring in social life; as a form of social interaction in terms of organizing, maintaining, and developing patterns of social interaction among members with activities carried out; (3) fostering traditional and religious life; as a form of participation and existence in the implementation of ceremonies, strengthening traditions, and kinship ties. Based on the author's observations, it can be stated that the meaningful motivations that encourage women in Ubud Village to form a Female *Sekaa Gong* are caused by the following: (1) religious emotion; (2) a sense of *humiliation*; (3) status improvement; (4) actualization of beauty appearance; and (5) realizing tourist performances.

3.3.1. Religious Emotions

Religious activities harmonize with existing art forms because they all rely on the perpetrators' soul vibrations. Religious activities based on a soul vibration elicit religious emotion, whereas art activities based on a soul vibration produce aesthetic emotion. The combination of religious and aesthetic emotions creates a cultural tradition rich in spiritual and aesthetic nuances. This is well preserved in community life and distinguishes the Balinese Hindu population. According to Koentjaraningrat [14] a culture's religious system always aims to maintain religious emotions among its followers to the greatest extent possible. Religious traditions in Ubud Village, as well as in Bali in general, are based on Hindu teachings. The community's implementation of religious teachings refers to a concept of life balance in order to achieve unification and approach, both with the natural environment, with fellow humans or people around them, and with God. This concept is known as *Tri Hita Karana*, and one of its manifestations is the practice of rituals performed on a daily or specific day that are thought to have magical and religious significance. The formation of Female *Sekaa Gong* in Ubud Village emphasizes the values of Hinduism with the concepts of *satyam*, *shiwam*, and *sundaram*. Referring to Dana's opinion [15, p. 158], the concepts of *satyam*, *shiwam*, and *sundaram* include truth, purity, and beauty to express the values of honesty, sincerity, and loyalty. Hinduism teaches its followers that all forms of offerings are made from the bottom of the heart, full of honesty, and sincere intentions. The philosophical values contained in *satyam*, *shiwam*, and

sundaram are expressed through the results of creativity in stabilizing the activities of Female *Sekaa Gong* in Ubud Village so as not to conflict with the true values of Hinduism.

The existence of Female *Sekaa Gong* in Ubud Village is also motivated by religious emotion. According to Koentjaraningrat [16, p. 202], religious emotion is a vibration of the soul that at some point encourages people to behave religiously. The formation of Female *Sekaa Gong* is a desire to be able to actively participate in *ngayah* activities, which is one concept that can be aligned with religious awareness, the extent to which a person with awareness and sincere feelings carries out the obligation to perform religious activities. The women in the previous routine were only involved in preparing ceremonies and upakara in religious activities. However, the encouragement of religious awareness motivated the women to shift their desire to be able to do activities as usually done by men, namely *ngayah* playing gamelan. *Ngayah* is an activity that is done sincerely and is a religious awareness that can spur the spirit. *Consciousness* is an experience passed through in life spread over certain levels of cognitive complexity that require a high level of brain and nervous system. In other words, consciousness is a special type of cognitive process that arises when cognition reaches a certain level of complexity [17, p. 50]. The formation of Female *Sekaa Gong* in artistic activities is a conscious effort that arises from an understanding that art and art-making are cognitive activities that can provide experiences and values that can be used to improve life and life as a human being. Rafael Raga Maran [18, p. 102] says that art is a value that creatively pushes humans towards the fulfillment of human dignity as humans.

3.3.2. Apprehension

Struggle implies effort or hard work done to obtain something. Women in the modern era have a very different view from women who lived before. With the rise of feminism, women are constantly struggling to obtain justice, the same position, rights and obligations as men in society. Until now, what is being pursued by the feminism movement as said by Murniati [19, p. 77] is the fight for justice for women, which is a fight for justice for all human beings treated unfairly. The potential of the Female *Sekaa Gong* with the gendings they are able to present should be appreciated by the community. If their involvement is indeed based on a sense of being motivated with a sincere spirit to glorify and perceive the beauty that Balinese Karawitan provides, then surely the skewed expression that "PKK (Banjar's Women Group)" is a merely a '*Perkumpulan Kamen dan Kebaya - Group of Women with Kamen and Kebaya*', for Female *Sekaa Gong*, will disappear by itself [20, p. 11]. The presence of Female *Sekaa Gong* is primarily motivated by a desire to demonstrate that women can perform the same activities as men. What the women truly want to achieve through their involvement in Balinese Karawitan is a sense of *jengah* (strong desire/motivation) to achieve success through good performances, as well as to find new ways to improve the quality achieved. Fig. 3 the following pictures are ritual activities of Female *Sekaa Gong* in the form of *ngayah* performing gamelan.



Fig 3. Female *Sekaa Gong*'s participation in *ngayah* activities

3.3.3. Status Improvement

Patriarchal culture is related to the patriarchal family system that emphasizes that sons are the *pancer*/core of the family, the successors of the dynasty, *wangsa* and *soroh* [21, p. 71]. Even more importantly, sons also serve as the family's savior from the suffering of hell. Therefore, sons are very important from a legal, social, economic, cultural, and religious perspective, so it

is unsurprising that they are given priority over female children. Nowadays, however, the numbering of sons seems to apply no longer. This symptom can be observed that opportunities in artistic activities provide equal space between boys and girls. Every social phenomenon, including women's decision to pursue *Karawitan*, cannot be separated from their motivation, meaningful reasons, and desired outcomes. According to Fromm [22, p. 17], humans are *homo esperans*, or hopeful. This means that everything they do is motivated by hope, specifically the hope of having something more meaningful in their lives and being free of boredom. Women's involvement in the *Karawitan* world raises their social status because their presence among their husbands' families includes not only their body, but also their skills, experience, and knowledge. Similarly, in addition to caring for their families, they also engage in artistic activities. This capital has a psychological impact in the sense that it makes it easier to develop self-confidence, ability, and competitiveness. According to Megawangi [23, p. 57], suggests that capitalizing on skills, experience, and knowledge can be used as provisions for adjusting to the level of ideological superstructure, specifically religion and cultural values. Initially, it only emphasized the level of relationships between individuals in a hierarchical family, but later progressed to a level that resulted in gender equality

3.3.4. Beauty Appearance Actualization

Ibrahim [24, p. 23] argues that in patriarchal societies, men view women as objects of sexual desire. Women have been taught since childhood to beautify themselves to increase their body capital, which in turn increases their attractiveness to men. As a result, preening is a stereotypical female activity. Thus, preening is associated not only with efforts to improve the quality of body capital, but also with self-actualization in the appearance of beauty, attractiveness, and perfection, so that women are constantly encouraged to beautify themselves and feel guilty if they do not, as shown in Fig. 4 (a) and Fig. 4 (b). Working in the domestic sector limits women's access to public spaces for both professional and recreational purposes. This can lead to boredom because recreation is a basic human need. If they frequently leave the house for recreation, particularly when accompanied by excessive preening, the community may label them as 'flirtatious women' [25, p. 119]. As a result, Female Sekaa Gong activity serves as a channeling space that allows women to work, preen, and recreate while also alleviating boredom from domestic chores. In this context, the presence of Female Sekaa Gong is critical because it can channel some of these needs simultaneously.



Fig 4. (a) Female *Sekaa Gong* performance with costumes and accessories in the Bali Arts Festival;
(b) Women's gong group's creative performance in Bali Arts Festival

3.3.5. Realizing Tourist Performances

Since Bali entered the world tourism network, one of which is Ubud Village as a tourist destination in Central Bali, artists have creatively begun to create special forms of art that are 'peddled' and even sold to tourists. According to Dibia [26, p. 31], art forms for tourism are created by packaging elements of existing traditional arts, including taking elements of ritual

art that have been sacred by the community. As a result of this reform and packaging effort, important parts of the art must be changed, even eliminated, because they are considered not to be in accordance with the tastes and needs of tourists. The parts that must be sacrificed concern not only the content and form of the art itself but also its appearance and presentation. Soedarsono [27, p. 119] proposes a concept of tourist performing arts as art *by metamorphosis*. Art that has undergone this metamorphosis is indeed different from art created for the benefit of the local community, which is called *art by destination*. This happens because tourists have different aesthetic tastes from the aesthetic tastes of artists in tourist destinations. Furthermore [27] mentions the characteristics of tourist art, as follows: (1) imitation of the original; (2) short or condensed version; (3) removal of sacred, magical and symbolic values; (4) full of variations; (5) presented attractively; and (6) cheap for the size of the tourist pocket.

The development of tourism in the Ubud area is a fundamental aspect that can grow, develop, and increase the quantity and quality of existing art. The presentation to tourists encourages the reappearance of art forms that have not been performed for a long time in accordance with the needs of tourists, as well as the creation of new types of art that have a modern breath while still paying attention to the basic principles of traditional nature. Ubud being one of the tourist destinations in Bali, provides a great space and opportunity to encourage the growth of local arts groups in Ubud Village. Global interaction through the world of 'travel' cannot be denied, indirectly influencing the artists. Artists have the sensitivity to capture the opportunities that exist by increasing the role of Female *Sekaa Gong*, which was originally formed only for *ngayah* a series of religious rituals, then conditioned into a tourist performance art as an aesthetic presentation performance. Thus, the presence of Female *Sekaa Gong* as a 'new' performance can enliven and enrich the existing tourist performances in Ubud Village. In Ubud Village, two prominent Female *Sekaa Gong* groups, SGW Candra Wati and SGW Candra Kirana, continue to thrive and attract tourist audiences. Both groups regularly showcase their skills at the Kemuda Sari Temple stage, located at Puri Saraswati Ubud (see Fig. 5). This stage, with its historical and cultural significance, provides an ideal setting for the preservation and performance of traditional Balinese arts, enhancing the authenticity and appeal of the shows.



Fig 5. Kemuda Sari Temple stage, Puri Saraswati Ubud

Female *Sekaa Gong* Candra Wati (see Fig. 6) offers a performance titled "Legong Dance" every Tuesday, with a duration of 1 hour and 15 minutes. Their repertoire is meticulously curated to provide a comprehensive representation of Balinese dance forms. The pieces performed include.

- Kebyar Ding Sempati – Composed by the late I Made Regog, serves as the opening music, this piece is characterized by its vibrant and dynamic rhythm, symbolizing the energy and

enthusiasm of the performers. It sets a lively tone for the evening, captivating the audience from the outset.

- Puspawresti Dance - A welcoming dance that features graceful and intricate movements. This dance not only showcases the technical skill of the dancers but also embodies the hospitality and warmth of Balinese culture.
- Cendrawasih Dance - Inspired by the bird of paradise, this dance is a visual spectacle of elegant and fluid choreography, symbolizing beauty and freedom. The dancers' movements mimic the bird's majestic flight, creating a mesmerizing experience.
- Topeng Monyer Dance - A mask dance characterized by its expressive and dramatic gestures. The Topeng dance tradition is deeply rooted in Balinese culture.
- Panji Semirang Dance - Depicting the story of Panji, this dance combines narrative elements with classical Balinese dance techniques. It is a tale of love and adventure, rich with cultural symbolism and emotional depth.
- Tari Kelinci (Rabbit Dance) - A playful and engaging performance that highlights the dancers' agility and creativity. This dance adds a light-hearted element to the performance, appealing to audiences of all ages



Fig 6. Candra Wati Women's Gong Troupe Tour Performance titled *Legong Dance*

On the other hand, Female Sekaa Gong Candra Kirana from Banjar Ubud Kaja (see Fig. 7) presents the "Ramayana Ballet" every Wednesday, with a performance duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes. This ballet narrates the epic tale of the war between Sri Rama, the King of Ayodya, and Ravana, the King of Lanka, who kidnaps Dewi Sitha during her sojourn in the Nandaka Forest. The story culminates in Ravana's defeat, resulting from his deceit and hubris, and Dewi Sitha's return to Sri Rama due to her unwavering loyalty and sincere devotion. The Ramayana Ballet is not only a display of exquisite dance techniques but also a powerful narrative that conveys moral and spiritual lessons, deeply resonating with Balinese cultural values.



Fig 7. Tourist performance of Candra Kirana Women's Gong Sekaa, Ubud Kaja titled *Ramayana Ballet*

The performances by these Female Sekaa Gong groups are integral to the preservation and promotion of traditional Balinese music and dance. They play a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of the region, especially in the face of globalization and modernization. Their dedication to these art forms ensures that they remain vibrant and relevant, passing on these

traditions to future generations. Moreover, these performances serve as a significant attraction for tourists in Ubud. By engaging with both traditional narratives and innovative choreography, these groups contribute to the dynamic cultural landscape of Ubud, ensuring that Balinese performing arts remain a living tradition. The structured performance schedules of these groups reflect a well-organized approach to cultural tourism, ensuring that visitors have the opportunity to witness the beauty and complexity of Balinese dance and music.

3.4. The Role of the Women's Gong Troupe in Ubud Village

The women have demonstrated a fairly steady existence by playing gamelan, which is one of the forms of creativity that is gaining popularity in Ubud Village. Through gamelan, women are able to realize a new cultural icon, namely gamelan as a 'masculine culture'. After being able to show its existence, Female *Sekaa Gong* in Ubud Village has the following roles in ritual and social activities: (1) as a ritual complement; (2) building social solidarity; (3) expanding traditional roles; and (4) preserving cultural values.

3.4.1. As a Ritual Complement

Art or art objects serve purposes that can be used to meet human needs. Gie (2004, p. 47) explaining the three functions contained in art, namely spirituality, education, and communication, it appears that spirituality is the oldest function. Prehistoric societies worshiped gods, spirits, or something special by playing instruments and singing. Thus, gamelan serves a spiritual purpose, bringing people closer to the gods they worship. Various art forms, particularly gamelan or traditional Karawitan, have always been associated with religious activities. As cultural elements, the religious system and the arts are inextricably linked, with the implementation of ritual activities such as religious ceremonies in Bali always accompanied by the display of various types of art. Religious activities are almost always accompanied by artistic performances. As generally found in Bali and especially in Ubud Village, religious ritual activities always involve various components in the tradition of community life. The involvement of various components of the community is a form of implementation of religious emotions that have been embedded in themselves, both individuals and groups. The awareness that is owned encourages every human being to always get closer to God. As an effort to approach this, various procedures are carried out by the community in accordance with their respective *swadarma* and abilities.

Based on *swadarma* from a gender perspective, in the implementation of religious ceremonies men and women take on their respective roles. Women take more care of *banten*, while men prepare and make food, and organize facilities and infrastructure for the ceremony [28, p. 85]. Along with the development and dynamics of society in Ubud Village, women are not only focused on certain fields, but also participate in the implementation of religious ceremonies in the three *kahyangan* temples of Ubud Village, such as Puseh Temple, Village Temple, Dalem Temple, and *sad kahyangan* temples such as Gunung Lebah Temple. The presence of Female *Sekaa Gong* shows evidence that women are capable of doing the same activities as men, one of which is playing gamelan to complete a series of religious rituals. The activities of Female *Sekaa Gong* in the current context are still believed to be pure cultural creativity. In its presentation, the *musicians* are not solely oriented to the wages or results received. The point is that they carry out moral obligations to support ritual activities sincerely. In addition to expressing artistic instincts and high dedication to offerings to God Almighty, the *musicians* give themselves sincerely to the beliefs they believe in. By contributing to the ritual performance, they gain inner satisfaction. This is because sincere offering is a form of devotion and the underlying motivation. The courage to perform in the form of *ngayah* by presenting *Karawitan* works for Female *Sekaa Gong* is a matter of pride, that what is pursued during the training process can be shown in real results so that the purpose of activity as Female *Sekaa Gong* can provide value for the person and for the supporting community. As stated by Gie [29, p. 47], the values inherent and contained in art, such as extrinsic and intrinsic beauty values pursued by humans will indirectly be felt by the artists involved in it.

3.4.2. Building Social Solidarity

The expression *salunglung sabayantaka paras-paros sarpanaya* (difficult and joyful moments are carried together) is one of the values of Balinese local wisdom that has become a deeply

rooted social capital in the lives of people in Bali. According to Giddens [30, p. 248] social capital is an informal value conception where people have social relationships with mutual expectations based on the values of honesty, decency, loyalty, and so on. This implies that in a community group, trust and honesty are key to the sustainability of their relationships. Through the activities of Female *Sekaa Gong*, a sense of kinship and brotherhood is formed to provide mutual support and help each other is one form of solidarity, both in joy and sorrow. As a bond of solidarity, social capital is needed by behaving honestly, sincerely, and responsibly to build one's trust with others. Trust will be able to build individual sensitivity to strengthen relationships and social relations among the Female *Sekaa Gong* musicians or with other community members. When learning and playing gamelan, the *musicians* are open to accepting each other, giving each other, and appreciating their different functions and responsibilities, without the need for feelings of *superiority* and *inferiority*.

The togetherness between the *musicians* of Female *Sekaa Gong* is reflected in the orchestration of the gamelan. Gamelan Smaradhana features a variety of instruments with different forms and functions that are interdependent. This specific relationship is a bond of solidarity and in a broader scope holds life values to create a sense of togetherness, openness, and independence. Cooperation between musicians is needed in the presentation of a piece of music, not emphasizing individualistic attitudes even though there are different roles and functions. So that the presentation is realized, Djelantik's opinion [31, p. 18] is referred to in accordance with aesthetic principles, such as *unity*, *prominence* and *dominance*, and *balance*. These principles are often used as 'guidance' that the solidarity that grows and develops in social life is embedded in playing the gamelan. The development of social solidarity among family and community members is important in the midst of increasing individualism, which is a closed independent behavior in the era of globalization. In this context, traditional organizations such as Female *Sekaa Gong* can build social solidarity to traditionalize Balinese local wisdom values.

3.4.3. Expansion of Traditional Roles

Referring to Capra [32, p. 36] related to the stereotype of women, that they are creatures full of subtlety, coolness, cooperation, and intuitiveness, so it is very appropriate to be given a domestic role which includes activities as caregivers or educators of children in the family environment. This idealized role has been traditionalized, resulting in the idealized image of women as nurturers of children. This idealized image influences women's choice to pursue the arts. Thus, giving women the opportunity to become *musicians* is essentially an extension of the traditional role of women, namely as caregivers in the family environment, into the realm of the arts, so that their gender roles become professionalized [25]. The expansion of the role of women by forming Female *Sekaa Gong* shows that women have the potential and ability in the field of Balinese Karawitan. Although there is still a gap in quantity and quality, it has shown that women have almost the same credibility as men. The existence of women's activities in the world of Balinese Karawitan is one form of expanding the role of women in exploring the potential of women's resources. Admittedly, the activities of women in Balinese Karawitan still seem to follow the steps of men, and the feminine totality has not yet emerged in these activities. Exploration of feminine characteristics in *Karawitan* activities is needed, so that the increase in roles and forms of activity can display the full characteristics of women. The emergence of women into the Balinese Karawitan scene has resulted in an expansion of the previously constructed order of cultural values and norms. The most dominant expansion is from an aesthetic point of view, which positively impacts the development of Balinese Karawitan, namely giving rise to a 'new aesthetic' form full of feminine nuances, certainly a form of enrichment for the development of Balinese *Karawitan* aesthetics.

3.4.4. Preservation of Cultural Values

Quoting Koentjaraningrat's opinion [33, p. 25], culture can be preserved through cultural experience and cultural knowledge. *Cultural experience* is a cultural preservation carried out by directly engaging in a cultural experience. *Cultural knowledge* is a cultural preservation carried out by creating an information center about culture. In addition to these two steps, cultural preservation can be done through cultural recognition, strengthening the role of government, improving the quality of human resources in advancing local culture, and maintaining local

culture. The involvement of female musicians in utilizing gamelan Smaradhana provides an artistic experience that consciously and unconsciously has played itself as a cultural preservationist. On the other hand, the appreciation of the audience also provides a cultural experience and hones the sensitivity of the audience to the aesthetic value of gamelan Smaradhana in its position as a cultural preservationist. The work of the *musicians* and the appreciation of the Smaradhana audience is a direct manifestation of the *cultural experience* step in the context of *cultural* preservation.

Nurjatisari [34, p. 172] states that artistic diversity must be further developed so that it can be present globally, as a factor in strengthening identity. In this case, traditional culture such as art has an important role in strengthening identity and becoming the foundation of community development. The culture of Ubud Village with its uniqueness and richness of aesthetic elements places Ubud Village as a tourist destination to preserve, develop, and create works rooted in traditional art to ensure the preservation of Bali's cultural heritage. Gamelan Smaradhana is a *cultural knowledge* with artistic information. At least three pieces of cultural knowledge are contained in this 'new barungan' classification of *Karawitan* Balinese Karawitan: *first*, the existence of gamelan Smaradhana in the midst of the dynamics of Balinese performing arts; *second*, the musicality of Smaradhana as a result of the creativity and innovation of the artists; and *third*, the ritual function and function in the current context. The three cultural knowledge it contains, shows gamelan Smaradhana as a cultural preservationist. Its existence as a performing art with its innovations, informs about the offer of aesthetic concepts constructed from the values of traditional Balinese Karawitan. The preservation of culture by maintaining and promoting local arts and culture can be seen in the use of gamelan Smaradhana, which is still based on the values of Balinese musical tradition. Elements of *Gong Kebyar*, *Smara Pagulingan*, *Gambang* and others, are adopted and elaborated in various musical compositions that still show the identity and expression of Balinese music.

4. Conclusion

The modern development of Balinese Karawitan has yielded a profound transformation, particularly evident in the increasing participation of women in gamelan performance—a phenomenon that is both remarkable and indicative of broader societal shifts. This development should not be merely framed as a 'gender' issue; rather, it represents a rational adaptation to contemporary circumstances, reflecting the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The presence of Female Sekaa Gong signifies an ongoing quest to cultivate an artistic expression that harmonizes new spatial and temporal dimensions with the tenets of contemporary aesthetics. This pursuit embodies the potential for evolution through innovation and transformation, all while steadfastly adhering to the core values of Balinese cultural heritage. In the competitive global landscape, the Female Sekaa Gong transcends its initial solidarity, evolving into a formidable entity that extends its influence and scope. The artistic endeavors of the Female Sekaa Gong in Ubud Village serve not only as a conduit for creative expression but also as a vital process for reinforcing cultural identity amidst the challenges posed by rapid progress. In an era characterized by globalization and the swift advancement of technology and communication, the continued artistic creativity of the Female Sekaa Gong is poised to illuminate the path of cultural preservation and growth. It is crucial to recognize that reducing women's roles to mere participants in individualized Western culture, with its emphasis on materialism and leisure, represents a significant cultural loss. Such a perspective undermines the profound contributions of women to the cultural arts, particularly in the context of traditional Balinese music and dance. Restoring the cultural equilibrium disrupted by such reductionist views is far more challenging and costly than fostering organizations like the Female Sekaa Gong, which are dedicated to the enrichment and fortification of cultural values. In conclusion, the integration of women into the realm of Balinese Karawitan through the Female Sekaa Gong exemplifies a significant cultural progression. This movement not only enhances the richness of Balinese arts but also reinforces the cultural identity and resilience of the community in the face of global challenges. The sustained support and development of such initiatives are imperative for the continued vitality and diversity of Balinese cultural heritage.

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