

Rejang Sutri: The Magical Dance of The Myth of Queen Ratu Gede Mecaling

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ABSTRACT

The development of ceremonial dance in Bali is inseparable from various underlying factors. The formation of sacred ceremonial dances sometimes arises from beliefs within the community, such as myths, disasters, vows, territorial legitimacy, the legitimacy of a figure, divinity, and so on. The development of these dances is believed to bring prosperity and inner peace, thus fostering a vibrant presence in human life. Similarly, the emergence of the Rejang Sutri dance in Batuan Village, which is rooted in myth. Myth strongly influenced the formation of Rejang Sutri, a legacy of sublime local wisdom, and its function as a dance to ward off disaster. This ward off disaster is the negative aura of the plague spread by Ratu Gede Mecaling, which coincides with the arrival of the fifth month (sasih kelima) through to nine month (sasih kesanga), estimated to be from October/November to March of the following year. The residents of Batuan Village, Gianyar regency, an ancient village in Bali, have inherited an oral tradition that states that Ratu Gede Mecaling lost a battle against I Dewa Babi, a retainer of the Dewa Agung Anom Sirikan, who initially reigned in Batuan Village and later built a palace in Sukawati. Ratu Gede Mecaling uttered vows, curses, and mystical revenge for the Batuan community, which were ward off in harmony with the Rejang Sutri performance. Furthermore, a series of other ceremonies related to this ritual are also performed in Batuan Village, such as Gocekan (cockfighting), mecaru at the village border and at each village entrance, and several other rituals.

KEYWORDS

Myth, Rejang Sutri dance, Avert Disaster, Batuan Village



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Introduction

Mythos or mythology are traditional or legendary stories, often about gods, supernatural beings, or heroes, that explain the universe, natural phenomena, or the origins of a culture, and were believed to be true by their followers in the past. In a broader sense, myths can also refer to folklore that conveys important values or collective beliefs considered true within a community or society, although nowadays they are often regarded as inaccurate or false stories; some even describe myths as a discourse leading to misinformation. Myths generally pertain to events that occur in the universe (cosmic) or in the realm of the gods. In general, the characteristics of myths include: 1) set in the past, meaning that myths are typically set in a past time and considered real events; 2) containing interpretations, meaning that myths provide explanations about the origins of the universe, natural events (such as seasons), or natural phenomena that

could not be understood at that time. 3) supernatural figures, which often involve gods/goddesses, demigod beings, or legendary heroes who possess extraordinary powers. 4) conveying values and teachings, where myths aim to convey religious experiences, moral values, or patterns of behavior considered important to a community and are accepted/inherited as truth. Based on the consensus of belief, the society supporting the myth considers it to have truly happened and not merely a fictional story.

As Sumaryono (2017:51-52) states, myth is something that is alive and becomes part of the social life of a community or ethnic group. Myth is a part of human culture, present in almost all ethnic groups, because it tends to be part of a belief system or conviction that influences the life system of the community. According to Bonnefoy (1993), Van Peursen (1976), and Twikromo (2006) (as cited in Sumaryono, 2017:51-52), myths are understood differently by Asian societies. Myths are influenced by the cultures and religious systems of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese tradition. Myths are a part of the living components of culture and are supported by a religious life that is far from fictional depiction, and in some ethnic groups, they are even believed to have truth.

Myth as a story provides guidance and direction to a group of people. Myths are also related to supernatural things (invisible things), and therefore through myths, humans can take part in the events around them and respond to the forces of nature. Myths in Asian culture intersect with the religious system, social organization, and the historical development of culture. Since myths exist over a long historical span, they are often believed as if they are real and true. Myths are models of human relationships with the supernatural. Myths are human efforts to depict supernatural trajectories within the world. Hadi (2006: 102) also emphasizes that myths or mystical elements are often defined as a collection of stories, some of which are facts that need no doubt, and some are fantasies; consisting of several living stories that can be understood with feelings, various kinds of pictures, ceremonies, and various symbols.

The people of Indonesia inherit oral myth traditions such as the myth of Nyi Roro Kidul as the ruler of the southern sea, so the surrounding communities hold offering ceremonies. Additionally, there are myths such as Malin Kundang, Roro Jongrang, Sangkuriang, inhabited large trees, lakes, rivers, sacred mountains, prohibitions against sweeping at night, cutting nails at night, sitting on pillows, or collecting trash without immediately disposing of it, Barong and Rangda, Kebo Iwa, and so on, which are still believed today. Therefore, myths are a form of interpretation and indirectly serve the function of providing explanations, guidelines/norms for life, instilling cultural values, and heightening awareness of the mysteries of nature, even though they are not based on scientific facts.



Figure 1. Rejang Sutri, Batuan Village
Document: Budiarsa, 2024

Origins from Myth

In Batuan Village, Gianyar, there is a myth believed to be the source of the creation of the Rejang Sutri Dance, which is still performed today. This oral tradition tells the story of the arrival of a prince from the Gelgel-Klungkung kingdom in Bali, named Ida I Dewa Agung Anom Sirikan, accompanied by his chief minister named I Dewa Babi, Ki Pulasari, Ki Meranggi, and several accompanying villagers. At that time, entering the 17th century (1658 AD), he began building a palace in the Baturan (Batuan) area, while there was already a respected local figure in Batuan named Ratu Gede Mecaling who had a palace in the Tegallinggah-Jungut area.

The political power at the time influenced the king's paradigm, because it was impossible for a single region to have two main figures, so on one occasion the king had the opportunity to oust Queen Gede Mecaling. According to the myth or oral tradition that developed, it was suspected that at one time Queen Gede Mecaling harmed a merchant from outside Batuan Village with her black magic, causing the merchant who sold goods daily in the Batuan area to die. The news spread quickly and eventually reached the king. By the king's order, I Dewa Babi was sent to investigate and to find out as soon as possible whether the news was true. The key signal from the king was that Queen Gede Mecaling could be expelled from the Batuan area if she was truly guilty

The two people met, one holding the king's mandate, and the other firmly holding his territory of power. A verbal confrontation occurred, followed by quarrels, and then they tested each other's strength or supernatural powers. On one side, Queen Gede Mecaling already knew and understood the purpose of the official's visit, which was to remove her. The powers of I Dewa Babi and Queen Gede Mecaling were tested through a roast pig (babi guling). Usually, with a roast pig, both of its legs must be tied with banana leaf ropes (stripped ropes) when it is rolled. However, in this contest of supernatural powers, the roast pig with one pair of legs tied with peel ropes was chosen by Queen Gede Mecaling, and the other pair tied with thread was chosen by I Dewa Babi. Logically, the thread would break quickly if exposed to fire, yet what happened was that the peeled rope burned and broke first. According to the agreement, the rope that breaks first is the loser and must willingly leave the Batuan Village. Ultimately, by upholding the promise, Ratu Gede Mecaling left Batuan Village due to his defeat and then crossed the southern sea of Bali to settle in Jungut Batu. 'Jungut' comes from his banjar, while 'Batu' originates from the word Batuan (his native village). In Tegallingah-Jungut, there is a sacred building believed to be associated with Ratu Gede Mecaling. It is believed that I Dewa Babi victory was due to the blessing or power from Pura Dalem Alas Arum, Batu Madeg temple, and Puseh temple-Ratu Ngurah Agung temple of Batuan village.

Queen Gede Mecaling, who was displaced and moved to a new area, settling in Jungut Batu, felt upset, angry, and vengeful, thus uttered a curse against the people of Batuan, stating that anyone from Batuan who came to her territory would be doomed, and that during the fifth to ninth months of the Balinese calendar, she would spread disease and seek a sacrifice (*tetadahan*) from Batuan. Feeling threatened by invisible supernatural powers, and out of responsibility and caution for the safety of her people (both physical and spiritual), the customary leaders together with the Batuan community (artists) created a sacred dance, performed by women, which later became known as the Rejang Sutri dance.

Ritual

A ritual is a ceremonial act or celebration associated with specific beliefs or religious systems, distinguished by its sacred qualities that evoke a profound sense of reverence—thus constituting a spiritual experience (O'Dea, 1995, in Hadi, 2006: 31). Religious rituals are performed at designated times and places, involving extraordinary actions and the use of sacred ritual objects (Hadi, 2006: 31).

In relation to *Sutri*, the ritual is conducted to invoke protection and well-being for both the villagers and the wider cosmos. Fundamentally, the offerings and ceremonial acts are intended to dispel negative energies believed to originate from *Ratu Gede Mecaling*. This constitutes the primary function of the *Rejang Sutri* ritual of protection, performed

annually between the fifth and ninth months of the Balinese lunar calendar. The entire Batuan traditional community participates with deep devotion in this series of sacred observances.

Performed by women from childhood through adulthood, *Sutri* dancing takes place throughout this ritual period. The term *Sutri* derives from the words *su* (pure) and *istri* (woman), signifying “pure woman,” “virtuous woman,” “sanctified woman,” or “woman chosen by the deities.”



Figure 2. Ritual Rejang Sutri Dance of Batuan
Document: Budiarsa, 2024

As in the year 2025, Sutri will be held on Thursday, October 30, 2025, *Wraspati Kliwon*, *Wuku Warigadian*, *Kajeng Kliwon Enyitan* and will end (*masineb*) on Thursday-*Wraspati Kliwon-Wuku Kelawu*, March 19, 2026, coinciding with the celebration of the holy day of the Saka year 1948. It will be presented for approximately 4 months of the gregorian calendar, except during Nyepi, as all Hindus observe *Catur Brata Panyepian*. Other rituals include ceremonies to hold *Gocekan* (cockfighting), ceremonies at the sacred buildings of Ratu Bagus Saung, Ratu Ngurah Agung, Ratu Puseh-Desa of Batuan, and thand at *Sanggar Tawang-Wantilan* during the Sutri period. *Mecaru* on the holy day of *Kajeng Kliwon* is carried out three times consecutively at the entrance gate (*angkul-*

angkul) of the residents. In the context of this presentation, Rejang Sutri is an art ritual that functions as a protective dance, As (Bandana, 2009: 2) explains, "ritual" means related to rites; "rites" refers to procedures in religious ceremonies, and "tolak bala" is a religious (Hindu) ceremony which in its implementation uses mantras or chants and takes the form of a ritual aimed at repelling/preventing disasters, misfortunes, and calamities that may befall families and communities.

The Batuan community (*krama*) on the first day took place at the Wantilan Pura Desa-Puseh Batuan after offering offerings and prayers, all residents asked for *tirtha* (holy water), then *nunas laban*, a mixture of white rice with *lawar* dough that had been offered in advance at Ratu Ngurah Agung and at Sanggar Tawang which is located in the Northeast of the wantilan temple of Batuan Traditional Village by the head. When the beginning until the implementation of *nangkluk merana* ceremony (2 months) rejang Sutri was presented wearing *madya* traditional clothing, namely *kebaya* and called rejang *bogol*. After the implementation of *nangkluk merana* as a sign of the start of the rejang Sutri *payas* (make up) dance performance. Of the eight (8) *banjar*, one (1) *tempekan*, and *sekaa Santi* took turns offering offerings, scheduled by the traditional village administrator, then outside the fixed schedule of the village administrator, it can be carried out by studios/communities/individuals by still reporting in advance to the traditional village. The offerings are usually in the form of steamed *sanganan/jaje* (cakes) accompanied by other offerings in the form of fruit, *arak*, *berem*, cigarettes, packaged drinks, and others.

When Ngembak Geni which is the *panyineban* (finished) Sutri there are also a series of ceremonies carried out, such as offerings, rejang dewa dancers male, rejang Sutri dancers female dancers danced by the leaders and several residents, dancing while carrying ceremonial equipment such as incense/*pasepan*, *canang sari*, *arak*, *berem*, *toyo ning*, and others. The meaning is symbolic of rwa bineda, purusha-predhana, sekala-niskala, microcosm-macrocosm, dualism of belief that is inseparable in human life. This dance is a symbol of gratitude for the abundance of grace and salvation, from *sesuhunan* (the gods who reside in the Pura Desa-Puseh Batuan). After a series of rejang Dewa and rejang Sutri wearing traditional clothes, continued with the dancing of rejang Sutri who has been fully decorated. The Sutri dance is accompanied by a set of gamelan gong kebyar, using the song/*gending Pangawak Legong Kraton Lasem*. Starting from the western tip to the eastern tip of the wantilan, which ends with the striking of a gong. As Budiarsa (2024: 28-29) explains;

The Sutri Rejang dance is accompanied by a set of gamelan gong kebyar with the song pangawak legong kraton lasem, accompanied by juru tandak, this dance is danced by women from children to the elderly, danced every day starting at 19.00 WITA until finished, located in the wantilan (jaba sisi) Pura Desa and Puseh Desa Pakraman Batuan.

With a simple movement pattern, this Sutri dance begins to be danced / ngawit masolah before sasih / the fifth (five) month by looking for a day / rerahinan or auspicious day according to the Hindu calendar, kajeng kliwon, by offering several ceremonials and upakara facilities. We can see the performance in October / November until March (the following year), and finishes (nyineb / ngeluhur) coinciding with the holy day of Ngembak Geni the day after Nyepi Day, the celebration of the Saka new year of Hinduism. Usually at this time, the Memendet/Rejang Dewa dance is also performed, with Sutri wearing traditional clothing, starting at 7:00 PM until finished. The supporters (pangempon) for Sutri's existence are Banjar Puaya, Banjar Jeleka, Banjar Tengah, Banjar Pekandelan, Banjar Dentiya, Banjar Delodtunon, Banjar Peninjoan, Banjar Jungut, and one *tempekan*/Tri Wangsa group. These nine banjars, as a supporting unit, are divided into four groups (*tempekan*) which take turns performing it according to a mutually agreed system.

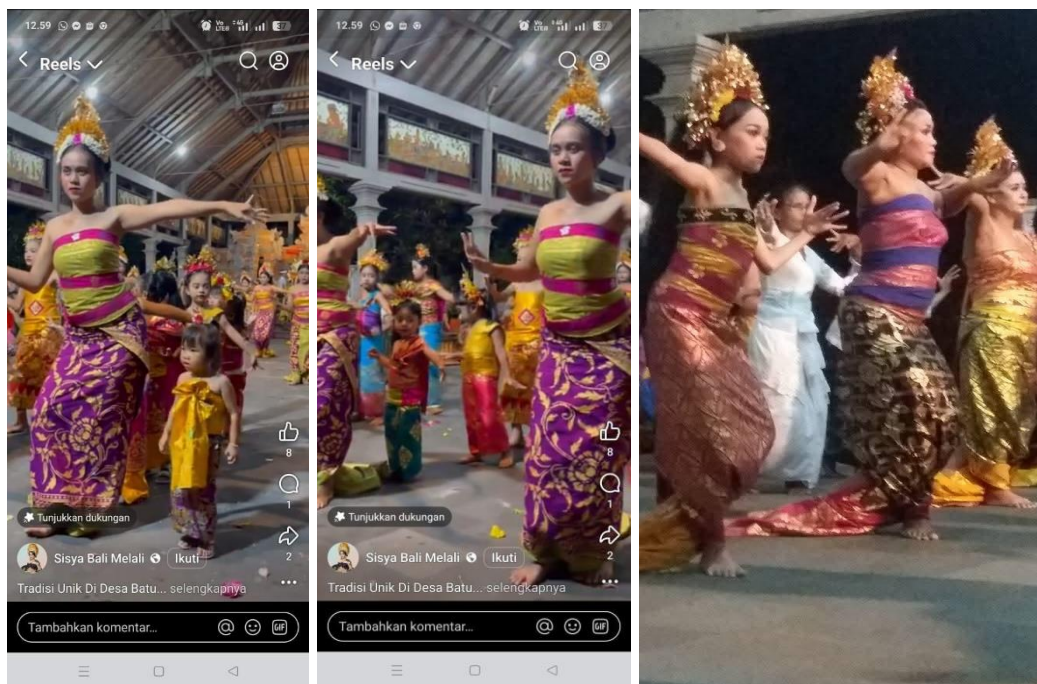


Figure 3. Rejang Sutri Dance of Batuan village
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Taboos

A *taboo* refers to a prohibition—whether in the form of words, objects, or actions—deemed undesirable, dangerous, or improper by a particular social, cultural, or religious group. Such prohibitions are typically passed down through generations as expressions of local wisdom, serving to maintain social harmony and prevent misfortune.

In the belief system of the Batuan Village community, several taboos are observed alongside ritual practices, particularly during the *Rejang Sutri* ceremony. These taboos, transmitted orally from generation to generation, include prohibitions such as sleeping on a mattress or couch; instead, individuals must sleep beneath the bed. It is also forbidden to respond indiscriminately when someone calls out in the evening (*sandi kala*) or at night. Residents are not allowed to leave piles of garbage after sweeping, especially along roads or alleys believed to be the sacred pathways (*bantas/gang panji*) of *Ratu Gede Mecaling*.

During the *Rejang Sutri* dance (*masolah*), children who play or move among the dancers must not be scolded or restrained, as they are believed to embody the mystical energy of *Sutri* and are associated with the sacred infant statue in Sakah-Batuan Kaler Village. Likewise, it is forbidden to mock or criticize any *Sutri* dancer, whether for perceived lack of skill or physical imperfections. Moreover, making a promise to visit the temple (*nangkil*) and failing to fulfill it—especially when made on behalf of a small child—is strictly prohibited, as it is believed to cause serious consequences for the child, including unexplained crying, restlessness, or abnormal behavior.

Conclusion

The myth of *Ratu Gede Mecaling* is symbolically embodied in the *Rejang Sutri* dance of Batuan Village. The creation of this dance is rooted in the local myth and functions both as a sacred spectacle and as moral-spiritual guidance for the community. Conceptually, the myth represents a macrocosmic dimension embedded within the collective belief system of the Batuan people, while the *Rejang Sutri* performance manifests the microcosmic aspect through ritual practice.

Rejang Sutri is regarded as a sacred dance endowed with supernatural power, performed to avert misfortune and restore cosmic balance. The performance also embodies moral and character education, as children are directly involved in the ritual from an early age. Through these sacred artistic expressions, positive ethical and social interactions are cultivated—strengthening both vertical (human-divine) and horizontal (human-human) relationships. Ultimately, the ritual art of *Rejang Sutri* is believed to foster harmony and contribute positively to the spiritual and social life of the Batuan Village community.



Figure 4. Cake (*jaje/sanganan*) Kukus, and rejang Dewa-Sutri
Document: Budiarsa, 2025



Figure 5. cake and fruit, rejang dewa-Sutri dancer
Document: Budiarsa, 2024

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