

STRIPED SNAKEOF TANAH LOT
Lipi Poleng Tanah Lot

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Dang Hyang Nirarta's Mission in Bali

His name was Nirarta. He was a Brahmin descendant, the brother of Dhangyang Angsoka, and a son to Dhangyang Asmaranatha. Like any other children who were born to Brahmin families, Nirarta spent his childhood and adolescence learning so many different things from several masters. As a student, Nirarta always based his actions and behaviors on certain moral principles: always worshipping and setting his mind on the God, learning and following obediently whatever lessons his masters had to teach him, diligently carrying out his assignments, and never feeling shy to ask anything he did not understand clearly. With all his satisfactory achievements, his masters sang their praises and encouraged him to never stop learning and improving.

“Be like a *sandat* plant. It has strong roots and, with sufficient fertilization, it will bear beautiful flowers. When the flowers turned yellow as ivory, their fragrance spread and the scent will get stronger as they are ineluctably withered.” His master's words always filled Nirarta's head, particularly when he did his routine meditation every night before sleeping. Eventually, Nirarta grew up to be a man of knowledge. He excelled in theology, literature, sociology, and even environmental wisdom. He had a slender

body, clear complexion, naturally curly hairs, sparkly soft gazes, and a handsome face with attractive thick facial hairs on his sideburn and chin. Nirarta ended his bachelorhood by marrying a daughter of a brahma from Daha. Not long after, he was ordained as a brahma himself and granted the title Dang Hyang Nirarta. He was then assigned to carry out a *dharma yatra*¹ in Bali Island. “One of the most important duties of a brahma is to conduct an odyssey and enlighten the society on how to maintaining the harmony of their customs, religions, and environment. Knowledge shall be dedicated for the advancement of civilization.” That was how Dang Hyang Nirarta’s father in law mandated him before he left for his mission.

Plague Outbreak and Healthy Lifestyle

Upon successfully wading through the heavy Rupek Sea, which is now known as Bali Strait, Dang Hyang Nirarta walked through an area of wide and dense jungle. This jungle, located in the western part of Bali Island, is now called Jembrana.

This name is reputedly originated from the word *jimbar warna*, which means a large, dense, and haunted jungle. As he walked through the jungle, passing through its giant, shady, and dense trees, Dang Hyang Nirarta encountered a variety of challenges and obstructions. But underneath them all, the nature seemingly

¹ a religious mission

found its way to give him signs that prevented him from being lost. Dang Hyang Nirarta walked through a small path with bushes on its both sides. The path eventually branched to various directions, and Dang Hyang Nirarta started to be overwhelmed by his doubts and confusions.

“Which path should I take? The right, left, or straight?” Dang Hyang Nirarta whispered in his mind. All of a sudden, a monkey appeared in front of him. While gibbering, “ook... ook...”, the monkey jumped from one tree to another, as if it was showing Dang Hyang Nirarta which branches of path he should take. As he followed the monkey to the east, Dang Hyang Nirarta said, “Thank you, O Monkey. Thank you. Thank you for letting me know which direction I should head in. To commemorate this delightful relationship, I swear that my future descendants will not hurt any monkey, even if they do it to take care of them.”

Finally, Dang Hyang Nirarta arrived in a settlement area. Dogs wandered around, sometimes barking and yelping at every stranger that passed through their masters’ property. Dried leaves scattered under the trees, piling up with broken branches and twigs. There was seen a hen, which with tens of its chicklings were scratching the ground to search termites, their favorite food. This settlement area at the edge of the forest was called Gading Wani Village. There was a sloping river full of big and small rocks. It flowed steadily through the slits between the rocks. Not

far from it was the southern sea of Bali, where the water of Tukad Balian River emptied into.

The green carpet of paddy fields stretched along the side of the sea. They got most of the water from the river. The northern downstream of the river was covered by a dense jungle. The sound of a wolf growling from a far hinted that something was happening in Gading Wani Village. A middle-aged man named Bendesa walked swiftly toward the brahma in the middle of the road. While sitting with his legged crossed and his both palms pressed together over his forehead, Bendesa greeted the brahma.

“Welcome, O Holy Brahma. Please accept my greetings and respects. May God protect us all from evil and misfortune. My name is Ki Bendesa, the headman of this Gading Wani Village”.

“Greetings, Ki Bendesa. May the One Almighty bless you,” Dang Hyang Nirarta replied shortly.

“I am very happy and grateful that you are willing to visit my village. People in this village were currently suffering from the plagues outbreak. Anyone could be infected in the morning or at night, and would die only in several days. People are dying every day,” explained Ki Bendesa stammeringly as tears dropped from both his eyes. They conversation paused. Unconsciously, the two men raised their heads up to stare at two crows flying across the roof of a villager while making caws, “caw...caw...caw....” The

farther the crows flew, the caws eventually faded until they finally disappeared completely. The villagers of Gading Wani believed such appearance of crows as a bad omen; usually, someone who stayed in the house where the crow flew over was about to die.

“My honorable Brahma, I am begging for your help, so that my villagers could be cured from this deadly disease. I and all people in this village are really helpless to face this outbreak. Please help us, O My Noble Brahma,” Ki Bendesa pleaded. His whole body trembled and his face was pale, clearly showing his worry and fear of the never-ending deaths from the rampant outbreak. Dang Hyang Nirarta, which was also known as Dang Hyang Dwijendra, was moved by Ki Bendesa’s words. He could deeply feel all the pain and fear experienced by everyone in Gading Wani Village. To stop the outbreak from claiming more lives, Dang Hyang Nirarta immediately ordered Ki Bendesa to get clean water from a spring using a *sibuh*². The brahma then chanted a spell on the water. He also asked the God Almighty to bestow his blessings. “Splash this water on the infected patient and have them drink three gulps of it.” Dang Hyang Nirarta instructed Ki Bendesa. Dang Hyang Nirarta also ordered Ki Bendesa, together with the villagers who had not been infected, to put *gantén*³ in

² a vessel

³ dregs of chewed betel

each of four corners of the village to drive out the evil spirits that caused the outbreak.

The plague outbreak ceased in no time, and those who were infected healed after they were splashed and drank the holy water. All Gading Wani villagers were filled with joy. Being healthy and having a peace of mind meant that they could continue working as usual. The villagers earned their livelihood by farming on the fields, working the gardens, and herding cattle.

A group of teenagers were seen gleefully gathering. Together they went to the field in front of the village hall to spend the afternoon playing. Some girls enjoyed their time playing *Meong-Meong*, a traditional cat and mouse game, and singing:

Meong-meong alih ja bikule ‘O Cats, catch the mice

bikul gede-gede buin mokoh-mokoh ‘for they are big and fat

kereng pesan ngerusuhin ‘troublesome and disastrous’

juk meng juk kul, juk meng juk kul. ‘catch the mice, catch them’.

The cat and mouse game is a Balinese traditional game played by kids of 6–15 years old while singing a song called “Meong-Meong”. This game, which had to be played together by eight players or more, represented the cat’s (Balinese: *meong*) effort to catch a mouse (Balinese: *bikul*). The leader of the game would choose a player to play the role of mouse and another player to

play the role of cat. Meanwhile, the remaining players would form a circle. The mouse would start from inside the circle and the mouse from outside the circle. The circling kids acted as guardians that protected the mouse from the cat's assault. They would protect the mouse by moving around to the right and left while they were staying in the circle and holding each other's hands and singing the *Meong-Meong* song. A new cat would enter the game to catch the mouse when the singing had reached the *juk meng juk kul, juk meng juk kul* part. The game would be over when the mouse was caught and could be replayed by choosing other players to act as the new cat and mouse.

On the other hand, a group of boys were seen playing *macepet-cepetan* or game of tag. It was a competition of agility, speed, tactic, strategy and stamina in fending off, dodging off, and attaching the opponents.

Fending and dodging off meant to ward off and avoid parts of one's body from getting touched by the opponents. Meanwhile, attacking meant to look for certain parts of the opponent's body to touch, pat, or tap, so that such opponent would be ousted or lose. There was no time limit in the game of tag. The game often kept going until night, especially when the moon was bright. Kids would forget to eat when they were playing, and only stopped when their parents came to call them to eat or to remind them that the night had fallen. The game of tag was played by two teams of

kids that were considerably equal both in strength and number of members.

This was an important aspect to consider because a really tough kid might compare to two or even three common kids in terms of strengths. The cooperation amongst members of each team would be revealed during the battle, and the fanaticism of each team would get heightened. Yet, all of these did not hurt their high sportsmanship. That was why the game of tag was considered very beneficial both as physical exercise and mental building. Gading Wani villagers also showed their sheer merriment by swarming the brahma to kneel and express their gratitude for his help. For his efficacy in curing and eradicating the disease, the villagers named him *Pedanda Sakti Wawi Rauh* (The Newcoming Sacred). All villagers of Gading Wani, young, old, men, and women, were happy to work together building a lodging to the sacred brahma to live in. It was located at Wani Tegeh, still within the area of Gading Wani Village. One after another, they visited the brahma at the lodging and poured him with foods and fruits as a gesture of their gratefulness. Ki Bendesa also visited the lodging and expressed the villagers' wish on their behalf.

“My honorable brahma, all villagers of Gading Wani including myself wish that you are willing to stay in this village.” Unfortunately, the brahma could not grant such wish as he had to continue his mission to wander all across Bali.

“My honorable brahma, we have put you in the highest place of our mind. So even if you cannot grant our wish, please never forget us. Should you be kind enough and the Creator wishes it, please visit us again some time, even for a second. Your presence among us is like a drop of water in a long drought. And, kindly give us some advices and instructions so we can maintain our serenity in life,” asked Ki Bendesa while sitting with his legs crossed and his both palms pressed together on his epigastrium.

It was a good day to continue his journey; so Dang Hyang Nirarta decided to leave Gading Wani Village. But before doing so, he invited all villagers to gather at the garden of the lodging and gave them his advices.

“My children and grandchildren, in order for you to prevent diseases infection and to live comfortably and serenely, you must remember to have a clean and healthy lifestyle. Make sure to maintain the cleanliness and the health, not only of your selves, but also of your environment and your village. By adopting a clean and healthy lifestyle, you can drive away pests, like mice, that can cause diseases.”

While talking, Dang Hyang Nirarta personally looked at each and every face of the people who were sitting there orderly. Men and women were mixed in the crowd. Their eyes were fixated forward, and their ears and palms were wide open. Dang Hyang Nirarta then added. “Human and the nature should be managed

sustainably. Only then will a comfort and peaceful life be achieved, everlastingly to the future generations of our descendants.”

Those who were there together declared their willingness and readiness to do all that the sacred brahma had advised. They were so cheerful; children were playing around and having fun with each other, and parents were whispering to each other about how they admired the brahma. However, the atmosphere turned to be very emotional as they had to let go of Dang Hyang Nirarta that had to continue his journey to the east. It was shown on their faces as no words came out of their mouths.

The Harmony of Life

The ruler of Bali, Dalem Waturenggong, who lived in Gelgel palace had heard that Dang Hyang Angsoka from Java was a brahma that excelled in both theology and leadership. The king, intending to study under the mentorship of Dang Hyang Angsoka, ordered his messenger to go to Daha to request the brahma’s visit to Bali. Yet, Dang Hyang Angsoka turned down the request and instead advised him to learn from his brother, Dang Hyang Nirarta, whom he thought to be finer than himself in both theology and leadership. Besides, Dang Hyang Nirarta happened to be in Bali at the time. Finally, Dang Hyang Nirarta arrived at Gelgel palace. Dalem Waturenggong and his palace officials were very excited to welcome the brahma. All sort of things from betel

to various dishes, drinks, and fruits were served for the brahma who had had a long and exhausting journey for days.

A *bale*, a traditional Balinese lodge, was prepared for the brahma to take a rest. It was in the south, bordering with the royal family's shrine. On the terrace of the lodge, Dalem Waturenggong often spent time conversing with Dang Hyang Nirarta while learning about theology and leadership. Among others, Dalem Waturenggong learned about the key to be a great king: looking both up and down. Looking up meant that a great king should never forget about the greatness, the compassion, and the love of God, and about the holy spirits of the ancestors. Meanwhile, looking down meant to find out the condition and the need of his people and to maintain a harmonious relationship with others. Additionally, it was equally important to conserve natural resources and to utilize them for the best interest of the people.

Every time Dalem Waturenggong listened to the valuable advices, he did not want to be bothered by anyone, including the palace officials, guests, and even any of his people who wanted to see him even for a second. Dalem Waturenggong had learned all the theological and leadership teachings well. Therefore, Dang Hyang Nirarta granted his wish to ordain him as a brahma king. The coronation was attended by kings all over the land, and the peak of the ceremony was celebrated on the fourth full moon (*purnama kapat*). Since then, Dalem Waturenggong as the king of Bali

became more and more popular across the country. His people lived serenely, the country was fertile and had adequate food and clothing, and, equally important, there was no outbreaks of disease. Having spent some time as a *purohita*⁴ in Gelgel, Dang Hyang Nirartha expressed his intention to continue his mission to explore all parts of Bali and asked for Dalem Waturenggong's permission. This time, his spiritual journey was taken by walking down the southern beach of Bali Island, from west to east. It was all based on his observation that both the ruler and people of Bali still lacked attention to *segara*⁵. "The mountain and the sea are two different elements of nature, but are linked to each other. They are inseparable." This idea just came up when Dang Hyang Nirarta wandered around in Gelgel.

Grace and Disasters

Dang Hyang Nirarta arrived in Jembrana, turned south, headed back to east and walked across the southern beach of Bali Island.

When he was walking down the beach, he met a broom-man sitting outside a shrine. The broom-man immediately rose and approached him.

"Greetings, Mr. Brahma. May I ask where are you from and where are you going? You cannot just cross this place. I should

⁴royal brahma

⁵ the sea

warn you that this is a ghostly and sacred shrine where we usually pray. Should anyone cross this place without worshipping at our shrine, they will be mauled by a tiger. So, please make time to pay a prayer for your own safety.” The broom-man explained, as if he intended to impede Dang Hyang Nirarta’s way. Staring at the broom-man’s face, Dang Hyang Nirarta answered him in a gentle voice.

“I am a brahma from Daha, intending to wander through the beach. Since you insist, I might as well do it. Please take me inside the shrine. I am going to pray.”

In front of a *palingih*⁶, Dang Hyang Nirarta sat cross-legged. He took a moment of silence performing a meditation yoga. While Dang Hyang Nirarta was immersed in his solemn meditation, the *palingih* suddenly fell. Dumbfoundedly, the broom-man witnessed this odd but real incident. Regret and guilt started to fill his heart. While bowing his head, the broom-man touched the brahma’s tiptoe and he softly pleaded as he started to burst into tears, “Please forgive me, O my honorable Brahma. Forgive my faulty for trying to impede your way and forcing you to worship. I am begging for your compassion and your willingness to fix our altar for us to pray every day.”

⁶an altar

Compassion struck the brahma's heart. With a pure intention to serve and uphold religious teachings, he agreed to help fix the altar that had been broken in pieces. In no time, the *palinggih* was as intact as before. Dang Hyang Nirarta took off his crown accessory and left his hair unravelling. He pulled out one of his hair and gave it to the broom-man and said.

“Put this piece of hair inside the *palinggih* room and let people worship it (*siwi*), therefore shall they be safe and prosperous.” The broom-man followed all advices and instructions from Dang Hyang Nirarta dutifully. Since then, the Shrine was named Pura Rambut Siwi. A blue sea stretched on the south of Pura Rambut Siwi, with its shore meandering from west to east.

The waves of the water rolled and rumbled and, like bursting, they popped out white foams when colliding with the black-sandy shore. In the meantime, rice fields with their greening paddy leaves in the southern side of the shore waved around following the breeze of sea wind, giving off the scent of freshness to every attracted eye.

“The grace from the nature to all beings.” Dang Hyang Nirarta thought in his mind. He was always awestruck at the beauty of the universe. The sun shined orange on the western sky, it slowly set to hide under the bordering line between the sea and the feet of the sky; a natural phenomenon that hinted that the night was about to come. Dang Hyang Nirarta decided to stay the night in

Pura Rambut Siwi. This news spread among the people who lived in the neighborhood. Knowing that the sacred brahma was going to spend the night in the shrine, they flocked to meet him. Some people wanted his advices on spiritual matters, especially on how to worship God the Almighty and honor the ancestors in order to achieve prosperity in life. Some other people begged him to heal them from their illnesses. And the rest asked guidance in eradicating pests and bugs that attacked their plants or cattle. For all these problems, Dang Hyang Nirarta instructed them to enact a regular ceremony to the God for blessing them with abundant crops. This worship ceremony should be performed at Pura Rambut Siwi every six month on the Wednesday that fell on *Umanis Prangbakat* in Balinese calendar system. The sun on the eastern sky had started to climb up along its orbit. Its light poured very brightly and illuminated the universe, gently touching the skin of those who just woke up from their night sleep. The wind blew from the leaf veins of shady trees, making the perfect complement to the refreshing atmosphere of the morning, like the splash of water from the mountain fountain. That bright morning, Dang Hyang Nirarta intended to continue his journey. Before leaving, he carried out Surya Sewana, a routine obligation of morning prayer to the God of Sun as the source of life. When he was having his moment of silence, he witnessed a light radiating upwards, penetrating the blue sky in the southeast. After praying to God for His Grace and Love, Dang Hyang Nirarta splashed

holy water (*tirta*) to the people who together prayed with him. Afterwards, he walked down the southern beach to the southeast. Palm leaves and *pengrupak* were seen tucked inside the black-and-white scarf he was wearing around his waist.

Dang Hyang Nirarta always brought these two relics with him to everywhere his feet took him. With these relics, many written artifacts were to be created, which were born from the depth of thinking about the Divinity, macrocosmic, microcosmic, and immediate experience. These were time proof knowledge that would be inherited from generation to generation. Their essence served as a mirror for us to reflect the past, see the present, and plan the future.

The Veil of Universe

In middle of his journey, Dang Hyang Nirarta came across an embankment. It was dry, as the water was just flown out. The fields were terraced with equal watering. The sound of water flowing from higher fields to lower fields formed a natural symphony, emitting such a relaxing vibe that would turn the listeners' muscles in the leg, body, and neck to a jelly. Sparrows flew in flocks and then perched on the fields whose paddies started to stoop down but had not fully born its fruit. It would take

another twelve full moons for them to enjoy the *kuma santen*⁷ they really loved.

Suddenly arrived a brood of dragonflies with all their wings quickly fluttered. They flew and floated, and they tried to chase one another. Some of them were yellow, red, and green. Some others were black with white stripes (*poleng*). It was unclear what happened with that brood of happy dragonflies, but abruptly a striped dragonfly dashed to the water and touched it as if it wanted to see closer and tell if it was a clean or dirty water. The other dragonflies followed the striped dragonfly, flying, swirling, and soaking their body. They wagged their wings once in a while to lose the weight of the water on their wings that slowed them down. Not long after, light drizzles started to fall on the land.

“Was the appearance of dragonflies a sign that the rain was about to come?” asked Dang Hyang Nirarta to himself as he accelerated his steps to the east. Having walked long enough, Dang Hyang Nirarta saw someone guiding his cow through a path to the east of a hut. Several steps to the east of the hut towards the seashore, there were seen a lineup of coconut trees, whose distance between trees was not too close. The leaves were dark green, so thick but smooth. Sometimes, the sun light flickered passing through the moving leaves blown by the wind. A dozen of coconut fruits were hanging by the trunks, showing off how fertile they were.

⁷ very young rice

All parts of a palm tree were utilized by people of Bali. The trunk was processed for building materials. The leaves, both old (*slepan*) and young (*busung*), were used to make ceremonial equipment. Meanwhile, the fruit had three layers: the husk, the coir, and the shell. Inside the shell was the milk that could be processed for cooking oil. Even the waste could be used as firings for when they cooked their rice and side dishes. Behind all that, a sense of gratitude came up in Dang Hyang Nirarta's mind.

“Hallowed by Thy Name, the Most Generous One, for providing everything for us human. You are Almighty; or how else could you give milk inside the hard, blackish brown coconut shell.” In his mind, Dang Hyang Nirarta expressed his admiration for the greatness of the Creator.

“The coconut was initially small; it was called *bungsil*, about half a span in diameter. It grows bigger by the day to the size of a bael (*maja*) fruit called *nyuh*.

The milk of a *bungsil* is just a little, but the volume increases when it becomes a *nyuh*. Where does the additional milk come from? Who adds it? This question could only be answered with a firm belief that He exists and bestows His grace to all beings in the universe,” thought Dang Hyang Nirarta. Cracks were seen upon the trunk of the sturdy lineup of palm trees, intermittent from the bottom to the top. A farmer was spotted using the cracks as his footing as he was climbing up the trees to pick a young

coconut (*kuud*). He drew a sickle tucked in his waist, trimmed the husk in crossing directions, and drank the milk. He then scrapped the coconut meat out of the shell and ate it. It was perfect to satisfy his thirst and starvation after working hard weeding out the fields since dawn until the sun was almost right at the top. Speeding up work was not an unfamiliar concept for farmers, especially when the best day to plant rice seeds was about to come. The sun went further to the west. The cow shepherd took a rest inside the hut, lying down on a mat and pillow made of bamboos. Meanwhile, his cow and bull were tied to the coconut trees not far from the hut. Some sickled grass was served to these cows so they would not make any noisy moos out of hunger that would disturb the shepherd's rest. The hut was supported by four pillars of living *santen* trees. It was the reason why people chose it as a shelter to either stay the night or just rest in.

This was so with Dang Hyang Nirarta who finally decided to stop by the hut to take shelter and make a conversation with the shepherd. The smell of cow's urine and manure was so pungent that it distracted the conversation once in a while.

"Which coconut trees that you often use to tie up the cows when resting?" asked the brahma to the shepherd.

"Greetings, Mr. Brahma. I tie up my cows to almost all of those coconut trees, and so does every other shepherd," replied the shepherd politely.

“Some coconut trees not far from here have seemingly dull leaves. There are some black spots. Young leaves on the peak of the tree are also damaged, looking like were attacked by beetles. Besides, they produce only a little and small fruits. Have you rarely or never tied up your cows there?” asked the brahma again, almost probingly. “Never, Mr. Brahma. It was too far from where I shelter,” replied the shepherd shortly. That was the answer that Dang Hyang Nirarta was seeking for. The coconut trees were fertile and had many fruits because shepherds tied their cows to them.

The urine and manure of the cows made a good fertilizer for the trees while they were also protecting the trees from pests. After conversing with the shepherd, Dang Hyang Nirarta continued moving to the east. Far away in the east, he saw a row of hills, getting bigger to the east. At some point, he vaguely saw a peak of mountain soaring high to the sky, with black clouds approaching it. It was none other than Mount Batukaru. The mountain area was home to various trees, both big and small, and different species of animals. This scenery jogged Dang Hyang Nirarta’s childhood memory of learning under a master on a mountain area back in Daha.

“Those branches and twigs have thick leaves. When the leaves are dry, they will fall covering the ground. When the soil is covered by the rest of the leaves and humus, it will protect and absorb

water from the rain. A dense forest is like a roof that protects the ground from being eroded by water when it rains for days. A forest is like a natural dam capable of absorbing, renewing, and releasing water slowly to water springs and rivers.” That what a master once taught him back in Daha Mountains. Looking at the right toward the seashore, Dang Hyang Nirarta saw a row of *pudak* trees lined up neatly. Their roots were long and strong, as if they were ready to withstand any kinds of wave and to protect the field soil from being eroded. The flowers blooms with pleasant fragrance that Dang Hyang Nirarta was moved to approach them. White crown of *pudak* flowers were swayed by the wind and attracted the nearby butterflies. A Barong Butterfly perched on a crown to suck out its honey. His feet accidentally stepped on the pollen so the grains stuck. The butterfly moved to the pistil of another flower and the pollen grains that previously stuck on his feet fell off onto the pistil. That was how a pollination occurred, which led to another *pudak* flower.

“What a marvelous portrait of life! He creates the butterfly to play its role in maintaining the continuity of life in the universe. Butterflies help flowers and fruits to reproduce. Snakes and owls help eradicating rats that sicken and damage paddies. And earthworms help aerate soils and fertilize farmlands,” muttered Dang Hyang Nirarta in his mind. Approaching Nyitdah Village, Dang Hyang Nirarta made a stop at the side of a dam that divided water.

“Water should not be overflowed, but neither should it be undersupplied. Therefore, the water must be evenly spread. Both too much and too less would impact adversely, among others, on rice plants,” Dang Hyang Nirarta advised a farmer who was opening the dam to water its rice plants, as the reproductive season was about to come.

The farmer, who was tall and sturdy with a brown-but-rather-dull skin, just nodded as he tried to contemplate what the brahma just taught him. Something crossed his mind.

“The brahma was right. All living beings need water. Humans, plants, and animals, all need water, but just in the right amount. Plant roots could be damaged by too much water, and would eventually die. It was also the case with rice on the fields. Days of heavy rain could cause a flood without tree roots that absorb the water, and the flood could strike and destroy a village. In fact, that’s what happened with a nearby village just recently.” “Trees play an important part in life. Their roots absorb water, preventing it from flowing around uselessly. Trees hold back the flow of water, allowing more water to be absorbed into the soil. The roots bind together the droplets inside the soil pore, storing it as a reserve to use in the dry season. This ensures the continuous availability of soil water and maintains high discharges of springs, rivers, or lakes, while preventing droughts in the dry season and preventing floods in the rainy season.

Roots could also tie up soil grains to prevent erosions or landslides,” explained Dang Hyang Nirarta in response to the farmer’s question about the role of trees in ensuring water availability and preventing natural disaster.

Striped Snake: Maintaining Natural Balance

Dang Hyang Nirarta kept walking down the southern beach to the southeast until he finally arrived in a place called Kendung Forest. The area was not too large, but full of tall and giant *kendung* trees. There he performed a meditation yoga and prayed for a guidance so he could find the light he once saw. That was when Bendesa Beraban came and reported that an outbreak was attacking rice plants in his village. Dang Hyang Nirarta explained that the outbreak was caused by a monster named Bhuta Bebahung. To slay the monster, he then gave Bendesa Beraban a kris, a traditional dagger that he named Ki Baru Gajah. He also instructed Bendesa Beraban to build a shrine in that place. The shrine was to be called Pura Luhur Pakendungan. During the ceremony, Bendesa Beraban should prepare offerings for the kris and ask the God Almighty to eradicate all pests that were attacking their rice. Following a guidance that he received while meditating in Kendung Forest, Dang Hyang Nirarta finally managed to find the light. Apparently, the light came from a fresh water spring among the splashes of salty sea water. It was located only several steps Kendung Forest.

Not far from the spring, Dang Hyang Nirarta also found a spot with a marvelous and splendid panorama. It was called Gili Beo. In Balinese, *gili* means ‘rock’ and *beo* means ‘parrot’. Accordingly, it was a big rock in a parrot-like shape. There he meditated and worshipped God Baruna, the incarnation of God as the ruler of the sea. Seeing the appearance of a brahma, fishermen came visit Dang Hyang Nirarta and brought him various offerings. As usual, he preached his teachings that would guide them so they could achieve a comfortable, serene, and prosperous life.

“The mountain and the sea are two different aspects of the universe, but are linked to each other. They are inseparable, and even irreplaceable. This cosmic notion is called *rwa bhineda*. The mountain is male, masculine, and paternal, while the sea is female, feminine, and maternal. It is the harmony between these two natures that causes fertility.” The brahma taught the fishermen, who were sitting attentively and listening enthusiastically to every word coming from his mouth.

“Looking at the appearance, the mountain is identical to forests and the sea is to water. The heat of sun light evaporates the sea water. Following the breeze of wind, the vapor moves to the land and further to the mountain. The thick forests cool down the vapor and turn it into clouds. Then the rain pours down, providing water reserve on the springs and rivers. The water will keep

flowing and eventually be emptied into the sea. This cycle combines the two natures, becoming the source of life that allows mankind to live prosperously and harmoniously, physically and spiritually.” Dang Hyang Nirarta added his explanation. The fishermen nodded their head as a sign of their understanding. After listening to Dang Hyang Nirarta’s teaching, the fisherman asked his willingness to stay at their hut for the night. He declined the offer, however, and instead preferred to spend the night on the small but beautiful island. Indeed, the place has beautiful scenery with a typical refreshing sea atmosphere. Besides, from there he could see clearly in all directions. One night, some sprites came and tried to tempt Dang Hyang Nirarta as he was deeply immersed in his meditation. To prevent them from tarnishing the sanctity and solemnity of that place, Dang Hyang Nirarta removed the black-and-white scarf he was wearing around his waist and dropped it to the sea. Due to his supernatural power, all of a sudden the striped scarf transformed into a Striped Snake (*Lipi Poleng*). The following morning, Dang Hyang Nirarta went to Beraban Village to visit Bendesa Beraban and his people. He asked Bendesa and the villagers to build a shrine on the place he had meditated in. It was to be named Pura Luhur Tanah Lot.

Meanwhile, the Striped Snakes living around the shrine was the guardian that protected the sanctity of Pura Luhur Tanah Lot, both physically and supernaturally. This would maintain the harmonious relationship between Tanah Lot as a sea area and

Mount Batukaru as a forest area. Pura Luhur Tanah Lot erected on a rock by the seashore. Nowadays, this shrine has become one of the most famous tourist destinations in Bali that attracts many visitors, both domestic and international tourists. Thanks to the grace of God, this place has several unique natural allures, such as the panorama of sunset and the fresh water spring beneath the shrine. The Striped Snakes of Tanah Lot are actually sea snakes. Characterized by their flat tails identical to fish fin, these reptiles are not aggressive.

They go to the sea at night to find some food, and spend time sleeping on piles of sands inside the coral holes during the day. They can be seen and touched but in a gentle manner that will not disturb their sleep. This ecosystem of Striped Snakes adds the list of Tanah Lot's allures. People of Beraban Village consider the Striped Snakes sacred and hence they have been faithfully maintaining the habitat of the snakes until today. The Striped Snakes are believed to be the guardians of the holy area of Pura Luhur Tanah Lot. Furthermore, the appearance of a red sea snake, which is believed to be queen of the Striped Snakes, is a warning that a disaster is about to come and strike the local community. As a response, they will perform an offering ceremony while praying and asking the God to save them from evil from any calamity.