

THE MEANING OF THREE DRAGONS ON PADMASANA TIGA ARCHITECTURES IN BESAKIH TEMPLE, BALI INDONESIA

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THE MEANING OF THREE DRAGONS ON *PADMASANA TIGA* ARCHITECTURES IN BESAKIH TEMPLE, BALI INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Three dragons are the most famous snake of Gods among a thousand other dragons. Anantabhoga, Basuki and Taksaka are three dragons that are often used as decorative items in Padmasana architecture. Padmasana Tiga in Penataran Agung Besakih Temple is a symbolic place of God, applying these three dragon icons as decoration. The purpose of this study is to reveal the meaning of the three dragons and how they are placed on Padmasana architecture. The meaningful step is carried out through two stages, the first stage is explanation and the second stage is interpretation of meaning. The results show that the shape of the dragon is more towards therio-anthropomorphic, the merging of animal and human forms in divine visuals that is difficult to imagine. Its symbolic function is as a tribute to the cosmic principles of the universe, and serves to strengthen the architectural representation of Padmasana Tiga as an embodiment of the universe. At the bottom of the padmasana is Anantabhoga, the dragon that carries the earth bound around the sea on its head, as an endless cosmic cohesion coil, is an element of Perthiwi (a solid substance) in the formation of the universe. The dragon in the court area that surrounds ancient turtles (Bedawang Nala) is Basuki, symbolic of safety and prosperity, the flow of living water, as an element of Apah (liquid substance). While the dragon perched at the top level of the padmasana is the Dragon Taksaka, a depiction of the air/atmosphere that sends rain to earth, as an element of Bayu (air). The three dragons are a description of some cosmic principles of the universe that provide prosperity to all creatures in the world, as well as symbolic ties to worldly life that are difficult to break.

Keywords: Three dragons, cosmic principles, Padmasana Tiga architecture

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Balinese architecture has its origins in the teachings of Hinduism, for centuries its development has adopted several iconic symbols which are part of Hindu iconography imbued with spiritual meaning. Hindu symbols are visual representations of transcendent and spiritual divine. Symbol language develops when an attempt is made to represent something that is beyond the normal human mind's ability to understand or express it. Thus a transcendent reality is expressed in the form of symbols. Three dragons are Hindu symbols that were born created thousands of years ago, are expressions of certain points, where two realms meet, transcendental nature (*nişkala*) with material nature (*skala*). According to Elliade (1987), the representation of dragons in pictures, sculptures and narratives in literature is manifested in three forms, namely: theriomorphic; anthropomorphic; or therio-anthropomorphic.

Padmasana Tiga contained in the Penataran Agung Besakih Temple functions as the position of God, a representation of the great soul of the universe (Anonymous, 2000, Dwijendra 2008, 2010). In physical form it contains Hindu symbols that have become world legends. Three dragons adorn the base (*tepas*) and the apex (*sari*) in *Padmasana Tiga* architecture. The presence of three complete dragons and the placement

of dragons like this is rarely seen in other *Padmasana* architecture. The combination of three dragons is very interesting to explore the meaning contained in it. This understanding can be used as a basis in building *Padmasana* architecture, useful for designers and architects in efforts to incorporate local identity into contemporary design. Thus it is expected to create new forms that are in accordance with the present, but still have an identity or identity.

The initial step of the research was to observe Besakih Temple. Besakih Temple consists of 18 temples; Penataran Agung Besakih Temple is the main one. *Padmasana Tiga* is in the 2nd *mandala* of 7 *mandalas* in this temple. In order to understand the meaning and placement of the three dragons, two stages of meaning are carried out. The first stage is explanation, this meaning is literal, clearly describing the occurrence of the present form, understanding the static form and discovering the fundamental functions of the observed form (Idedhyana 2020). The second interpretation stage is a phenomenological reflective interpretation, looking critically and fundamentally at the object under study by establishing a relationship in a life view of the symbol user community, or the religious foundation behind the birth of symbols. This is a symbolic step that is dynamic, continues to grow, in accordance with the expansion of researcher's insight through library studies and structured interviews with experts who understand the architecture of padmasana and Hindu symbols contained in this sacred building.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Setting

The study was conducted at Besakih Temple in Besakih Village, Rendang District, Karang Asem Regency, Bali Province, Indonesia. *Padmasana Tiga* is found in the main temple, Penataran Agung Temple, located on Mandala II (Figure 1).

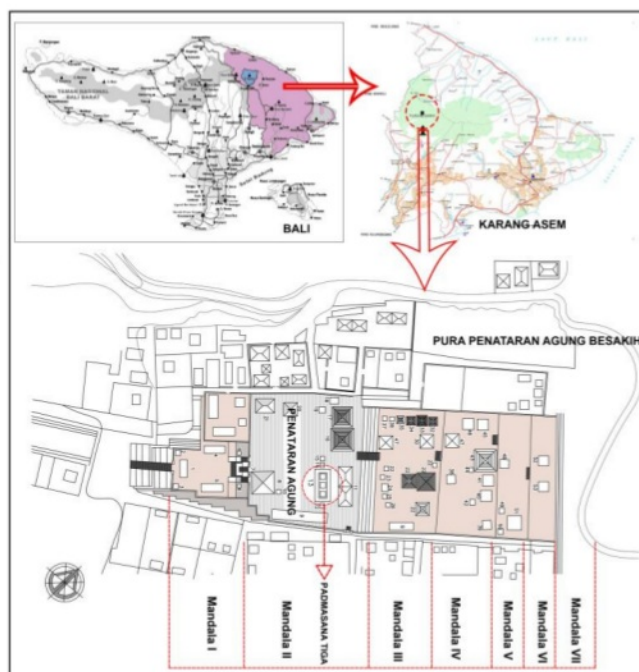


Figure 1. Research Setting

Source: Modifications from Bapeda-Level Bali (1999); Google Map (2020)

The main building in Penataran Agung Besakih Temple is *Padmasana Tiga*, consisting of three levels (*palih*). The base is called *tepas*, the body is *batur*, while the peak is called *sari*. The first dragon is on the

left and right side of the stairs that lead to the altar. The second dragon is on the altar of *Padmasana Tiga*, apparently wrapping an ancient turtle (*Bedawang Nala*). The third dragon is perched on the left and right sides of the *rona* (empty space) at the top of padmasana (Figure 2).

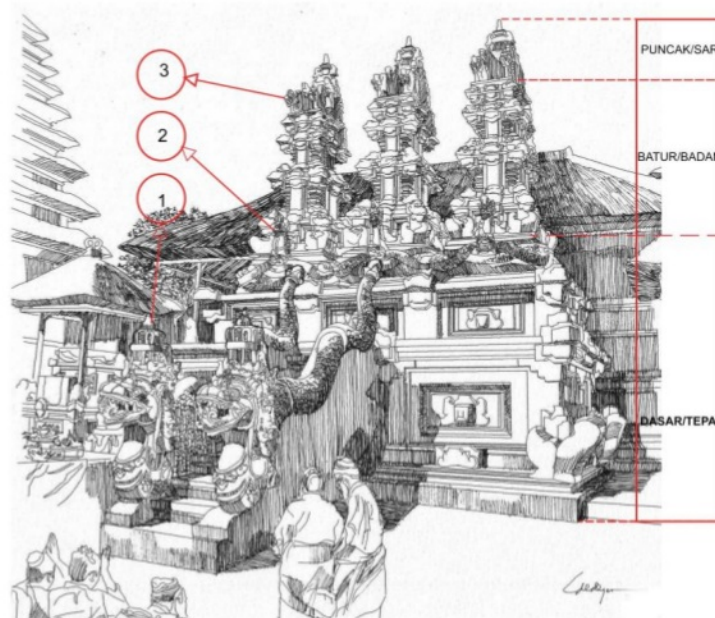


Figure 2. Padmasana Tiga and Three Dragons
Source: Author (2020)

B. Form and Function of Dragons

The worship of the Tree God and the Snake God is perhaps the first in the world, as important in the early stages of the development of human civilization. Snake worship is somewhat contrary to the *Vedas*, *Shiva* (continuation of *Rudra* in the *Vedas*) is sometimes depicted holding a cobra in his hand, twisting around his neck or intertwined with his hair, but in all these examples snakes are weapons, instruments of terror, not objects of worship (Fergusson, 2004). The Sanskrit word '*naga*' means snake or dragon. In early post-Vedic Sanskrit literature, dragons are referred to as a class of half-God creatures with their bodies half-human and half-snake, sometimes in the form of whole humans, Dragons are *Sesa*, *Vasuki* and *Taksaka* (Monier-Williams, 1899). Dragon occupies its own place in the religious life of Indian society, as evidenced by the discovery of pottery at *Harappa*, depicting two men worshipping a god sitting on a chair, visible behind him a cobra taking part in worshipping the gods (Mahalingam, 1965). In the initial stages the dragon form is theriomorphic, the shape of the snake chosen entirely to replace something that is supreme (divine). This stage of the snake is divine and is worshiped in ancient civilizations. The next stage of the dragon form is therio-anthropomorphic, combining snakes and humans as depictions of something that is divine. snake icon takes place as a means of worship. From this picture, it can be seen from ancient times that the dragon took its own place in the efforts of humans to improve their civilization.

The position (placement) of Dragon of Anantabhoga, Basuki and Taksaka in *Padmasana Tiga* cannot be determined, before understanding its meaning. The form described is a physical form that can be observed visually. The faces of the three dragons are almost the same, their positions and postures are different. The first dragon appeared to be a complete snake with its head adorned with a crown, its mouth gaping with the flames, located on the left and right sides of the stairs leading to the altar. The second dragon is on the altar, the face is the same shape as the first dragon, seen being wrapped around a giant tortoise called

Bedawang Nala. The third dragon is perched above on the left and right sides of the *rong* (empty space at the top of padmasana). The shape is not entirely clearly sculpted, the head is the same as the other two dragons, on the body there is a winglike shape (the dragon is not completely carved) (Figure 3). The forms of the three dragons in *Padmasana Tiga* are therio-anthropomorphic, ancient snakes given human identity, the shape of the snake is more dominant, the human element is only slightly visible in the crown and jewelery worn on the dragon. These three dragons are aesthetically pleasing, decorating the shapes presented. It functions symbolically in an effort to complete the Padmasana architecture representation as a picture of the universe. The three dragons have an important role in describing some cosmic principles of the universe.

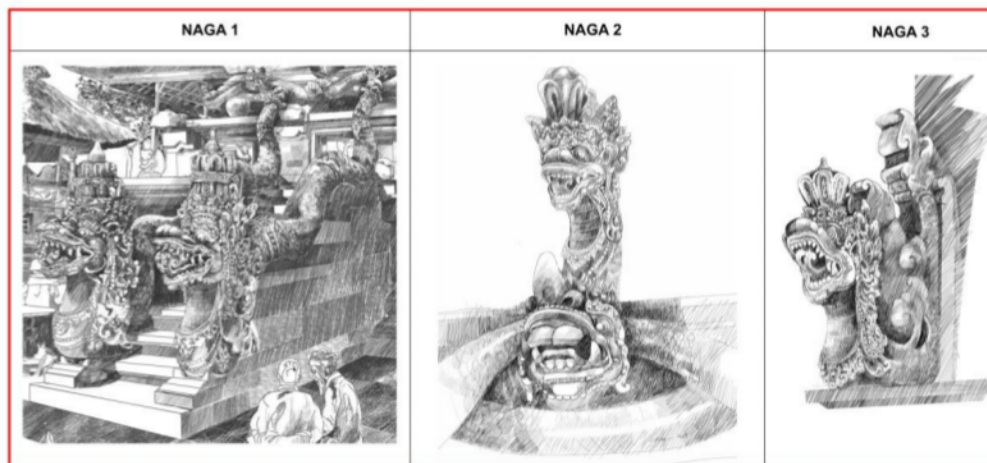


Figure 3. Three Dragons in *Padmasana Tiga*
Source: Author (2019)

C. Meaning of the Three Dragons

The name of the Dragon God does not appear in the Vedas, but is called '*Serpas*' along with the term understood by some as representative of atmospheric phenomena. The sun and the dragon are connected with springs, rivers and lakes, even with the ocean (Oldham, 1905). The dragon hatched from 1000 eggs given by *Kasyapa* to his wife *Kadru*. 500 years later hatched into a thousand dragons, the oldest being Anantabhoga, his younger brother Basuki, and the third Taksaka (Anonymous, 1997); (Zoetmulder, 2005); (Debroy and Debroy, 2001). *Kadru's* eldest son was Dragon *Sesa*, in charge of caring for his younger siblings, but he was disappointed and then left worldly life, becoming a firm and pious ascetic. *Brahma* came to confer divine powers on *Sesa* to carry the earth bound on his head, covering the world with endless scrolls. *Sesa* entered the gap of the earth, since then the earth and the sea with all its contents were in the head of Dragon *Sesa* (Vogel, 1926).

After Ananta held the earth her name became Anantabhoga (Zoetmulder, 2005). Ananta means: endless; infinite. As a cohesion force of divine power that does not materialize (Margaret and Stutley, 1977). Bhoga means food, Ananta bhoga means a food source that never runs out (Mardiwarsito, 1990); (Sudibyoprono, tt). Ananta entered the underworld which consists of seven layers called the *Sapta Petala* realm. In '*Vayu Purana*' the nature described below is called *Patala*. These worlds are: *Atala*; *Sutala*; *Vitala*; *Gabhastala*; *Mahatala*; *Sri Tuning*; and *Patala*. Dragons and *asuras* (giant) live here, the levels of *Atala* to *Mahatala* are occupied by *asuras*, the *Sritala* level is occupied by Dragon Basuki, Dragon *Sesa* is in *Patala* (Figure 4) (Debroy and Debroy, 2001). *Sesa* is a large dragon who has raised Mount Mandara in the story of the screening of the Mandara Giri in the Ocean of Mantana and Basuki twisting the mountain as a spin. *Sesa* is a thousand-headed serpent, his body is white, his head carries the earth, crowned with thousands of gems, a picture of strength energy and endurance. *Sesa* or Ananta is the king of all fanged creatures,

Basuki is the king of all dragons, Taksaka is the king of snakes (Vogel, 1926). From this it can be summarized that Ananta, also called Sesa, is tasked with carrying the earth-bound sea, an endless coil of energy, the embodiment of the earth which provides food for all creatures in the world. In the five elements of creation Anantabhoga is *Perthiwi* (solid substance).

In the mythology "*Siwagama*" and "*Sri Purana Tattwa*" it is said that there was a catastrophe in the world, *Brahma* moved into the earth to become Anantabhoga, Vishnu glided into the ocean as Basuki, and Iswara shot into the sky in the form of Taksaka (Putra, 1998). Vasuki is the leader of a thousand-headed dragon. On the island of Bali, he is known as Basuki, calculated and respected by fishermen who sail the oceans. Basuki is often associated with the sea god Baruna (Sanskrit Varuna) (Vogel, 1926). Based on the ejection of *Prekempa Gunung Agung*, Dragon Basuki incarnation of Lord Vishnu, its tail is a mountain rising to the sky, its head resting in the ocean moving the whole ocean to evaporate into clouds, its scales grow into dense trees in the forest (TimRedaksiBaliPost, 2006). According to Sudibyoprono (tt) Basuki called *Wasu*, he was the God of salvation, detached and escaped from all evil and error, his form was a white snake.

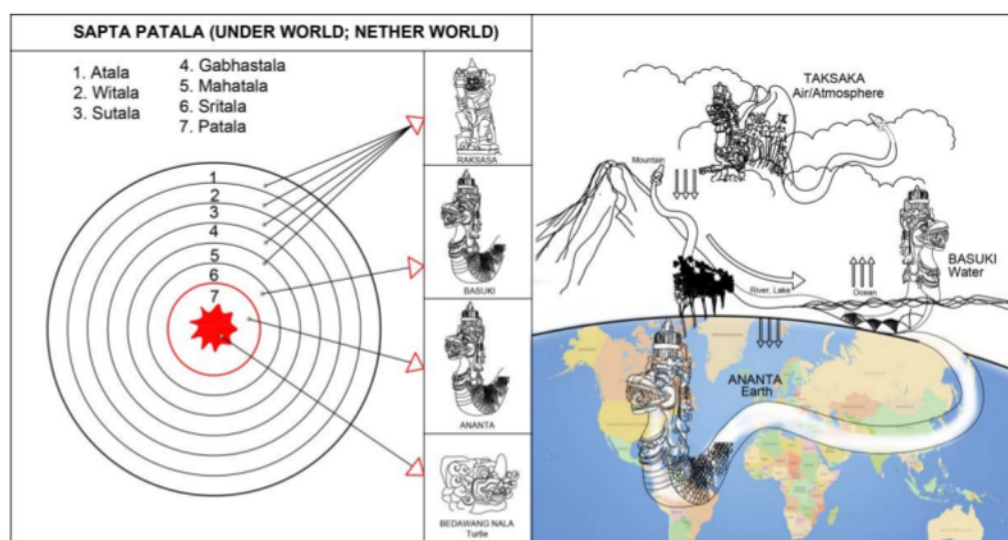


Figure 4. Sapta Patala and Three Dragons in the Universe

Source: Illustration author (2020) from *Vayu Purana* (Debroy and Debroy, 2001); *Prekempa Gunung Agung* (Tim Bali Redaction, 2006)

Dragon or snake god, lives underground and is related to strength, fertility and renewal. Unlike giants, dragons are worshiped for fertility and well-being (Pattanaik, 2003). The later story is somewhat different is *Adisesa* (also called Sesa or Ananta) with a thousand snake heads being Divine, a couch/mat for Vishnu when he sleeps in a sea of milk (Jones and Ryan, 2007). Ananta or Sesa is associated with Vishnu, then Basuki is associated with Shiva. During the screening of Mount Mandara, Basuki released the most dangerous poisons, which could scorch the Gods and all nature. Shiva sacrificed, swallowed all of Basuki's poison until his neck was blue. The next story is Basuki as a necklace in Shiva's neck. Basuki or Vasuki is the king of all dragons, as Sesa's head is a thousand snakes. Thus the dragon at the bottom of *Padmasana Tiga* is Anantabhoga, his position must be below because the world is in his head. The dragon that wraps around *Bedawang Nala* is Basuki, the king of the dragons that regulates the movement of the layers of the earth's crust, the dragon that brings salvation, the dragon which in myth is the most powerful straps that can never be broken. Basuki embodiment of living water, representative of *Apah* (liquid substance).

Taksaka is one of the few dragons whose names are mentioned in Vedic Literature. Both in Atharva-Veda and in various Sutras that seem to be forgotten in the post-Vedic period. In hymns, Taksaka is a cosmic principle. Get the gift of strength to cure diseases and all types of poisons, especially snake bites (Vogel,

1926). Taksaka is the most poisonous dragon of all dragons. In Hindu literature the story of Taksaka appears in the book *Adi Parwa* which tells of Dragon Taksaka's duty to kill King Parikesit, Dragon Taksaka biting King Parikesit, king too burns to ashes, Dragon Taksaka immediately flies into the sky (Zoetmulder, 2005). Taksaka is like a bright blue pearl, believed to be a producer of rain derived from its snake hood (Margaret and Stutley, 1977). Taksaka is always depicted in the stories of *Adiparwa*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as flying dragons, in Bali depicted with wings and two legs, there are also no legs. Taksaka is similar to the European dragon which is widely present in the entertainment world as a terror dragon. Taksaka is symbolic of a combination of poison and medicine. The most unique dragon, combining elements of snake, bird and human. Thus the dragon at the top of *Padmasana Tiga* is Taksaka, the representative of *Bayu* (air).

CONCLUSION

The form of the Three Dragons in *Padmasana Tiga* is therio-anthropomorphic, the shape of the more dominant snake animal, its human impression is slightly visible in the crown decorations, necklaces and bracelets on the dragon that were usually worn by kings at the time the work of art was made. The function of these three dragon icons is as aesthetic decoration to enhance and support the majesty of *Padmasana Tiga*. Its main function is as a symbolic prostration and human respect for the cosmic principle of the universe which has provided worldly prosperity. These three dragon icons also serve to strengthen the *Padmasana Tiga* architectural representation as a picture of the universe.

Dragon Ananta (Sesa; Adi Sesa; Anantabhoga) is the oldest and largest dragon, as the Dragon God who holds the earth-bound sea on his head, he is at the core of the earth (*Patala*). Ananta describes the earth itself as a representative of the *Perthiwi* element (solid substance), one of the five elements making up the universe. Ananta is also described as an endless or endless cosmic coil. Thus the lowest dragon flanking the stairs up to the altar is the Anantabhoga dragon. Dragon Basuki or Vasuki is the Dragon King, a representation of the wealth of the earth, symbolic of well-being and safety. Basuki is the water of life, from the spring to the ocean, the representative of the element *Apah* (liquid substance). Basuki as the king of all dragons who bring blessings and salvation, as a strap that can not be broken, Basuki must control the movement of *Bedawang Nala* (shifting earth plates). Thus the dragon in the *Padmasana Tiga* area is the Basuki dragon. Dragon Taksaka the most venomous terror dragon, always told of flying, a fusion of birds and snakes. Taksaka symbolic poison as well as symbolic medicine (in the story of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, dragons often help treatment), describes two things that are contradictory but one unit. Taksaka is a dragon that represents atmosphere, air or cloudy rain, representative of the element of *Bayu* (air). Thus the dragon left and right of the rong at the top of *Padmasana Tiga* is the Taksaka dragon.

Dragons are a description of some cosmic principles that give everything for the welfare of living things. On the other hand, the dragon is a bond, a picture of human desire, this desire is never satisfied (the dragon's mouth is always gaping), so the dragon is also symbolic of worldly bonds that are difficult to let go of.

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