



Reconstructing Theology in practice: Aguron-guron as the renewal of Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa leadership

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ABSTRACT

Background: The *aguron-guron* system forms *Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa* priests through a master-disciple relationship between a *Guru Nabe* and a candidate priest, culminating in initiation (*diksa*). Existing studies mostly treat it as pedagogical structure, genealogical practice, or aesthetic experience, and rarely ask whether the faith it transmits still functions as a living ethical foundation rather than inherited dogma. This study reads *aguron-guron* through Hasan Hanafi's theological reconstruction, understood as a critical stance toward heritage, modernity, and lived social reality. **Methods:** This qualitative field study with a theological approach was conducted in Denpasar between May and November 2025. Data came from in-depth interviews with five purposively selected key informants (four senior *Sulinggih* and one senior lay official of *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI) Denpasar), observation at four *griya*, and documentary study of the *Silakramaning Aguron-guron* and *Siwa Sasana*. Analysis combined Hanafi's framework as an initial lens with descriptive coding. **Findings:** Among these informants, reconstruction appears along three interlocking dimensions. Inherited teaching is re-actualized by each *Guru Nabe*'s judgment, rather than mechanically repeated. Modern pressures are met selectively: digital media are made to serve dharma and formal religious education is recommended before *diksa*, while declining numbers of candidates remain unresolved. On institutional legitimacy, informants connected to PHDI favor its involvement in *diksa pariksa*, whereas one informant regards a nationwide association of *Brahmana Wangsa* descendants as equally legitimate. **Conclusion:** Within the limits of five informants from one lineage in one city, *aguron-guron* appears as an ongoing theological effort, more complete on some dimensions than others, rather than a static heritage under threat. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers an exploratory comparative-theological reading of *aguron-guron* using a framework drawn from Islamic thought, together with a field-based account of differing views on the *griya*-PHDI relationship over priestly legitimacy.

KEYWORDS: *aguron-guron*; Hindu priesthood; *Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa*; theological reconstruction.

1. Introduction

Aguron-guron is the structured, master-disciple system through which a candidate priest (*sadhaka*) of the *Brahmana Wangsa* lineage is formed into a *Sulinggih*, combining ritual apprenticeship under a *Guru Nabe* with a staged initiation (*diksa*). Within Balinese

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Hindu society, this system is understood by practitioners as the sole legitimate gateway into the priesthood, a status carrying both genealogical weight and spiritual authority that shapes a *sulinggih*'s standing for the remainder of their religious life. The term itself denotes a traditional Balinese Hindu pedagogical system built on the balance between *sakala* (manifest) and *niskala* (unmanifest) orientations (Donder, 2009; Titib, 2003), historically comparable to the *padepokan* or *pasraman* models of religious education (Paramartha & Yasa, 2017), and its enactment varies across lineages, including a tantric articulation within the Budha Kasogatan tradition of *Griya Budakeling* (Utama et al., 2019).

The system operates within a specific institutional landscape. *Brahmana Wangsa* priestly authority is traced genealogically to Danghyang Nirartha (Agastia, 1994), and its everyday formation takes place in the *griya*, which serves at once as a priestly residence, a center of spiritual education, and a seat of social authority (Punyatmadja, 2011). Alongside this *griya*-based tradition stands *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI), the highest assembly of Hindu religious authority in Indonesia, whose *Paruman Pandita* brings together *Sulinggih* from multiple *soroh* (clan lineages). *Brahmana Wangsa Sulinggih* also have their own nationwide association, the *Perkumpulan Dharmopadesa Pusat Nusantara* (PDPN), which has issued guidelines for the implementation of *diksa* (Tim Penyusun, 2022). Denpasar, the provincial capital of Bali and the seat of PHDI Provinsi Bali, is therefore a setting in which three sources of authority, the *griya*, PHDI, and the *Brahmana Wangsa* association, operate in close proximity. This makes it analytically productive for asking how a lineage-based system of priestly formation maintains its sacred autonomy while answering to wider institutional and social expectations.

Recent scholarship on this system has expanded along several lines. Suadnyana (2022) documents its kinship-based enactment in Banjar Umadiwang, Tabanan; Ambarnuari et al. (2024) examine its distinctive *pawintenan wiwa* and *nabe siksa* arrangements at *Griya Agung Bangkasa*; Arka et al. (2025) trace the internal dynamics of candidate formation in Denpasar itself; and Wiradnyana (2025) analyzes *Mapulang Lingga* as a tantric-yogic institution of initiation. What these studies share, however, is a focus on *aguron-guron* as pedagogical structure, genealogical practice, ritual technique, or aesthetic experience, leaving a more specifically theological question unasked: whether *aguron-guron* makes traditional faith function actually as an ethical foundation and a motivation for action among the Hindu community it serves, rather than remaining an inherited body of dogma reproduced for its own sake. This is precisely the criterion Hasan Hanafi sets for a living theology (Hanafi, 2000). Normatively, on this standard, a priest formed through *aguron-guron* should function as a living ethical and social authority, not merely as a bearer of correctly executed ritual and genealogy. Empirically, however, field conditions diverge from this standard in several respects: a declining number of guru putra willing to undertake *diksa* (Arka, 2025; Viprajana, 2025), *diksa pariksa* still conducted in most *griya* without administrative record at *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI), and uneven digital adoption across *griya* (Saitya et al., 2026). This gap between what theological reconstruction expects and what fieldwork shows is this study's point of departure.

Theological reconstruction is chosen here rather than theories of modernity such as Giddens (1990), which explain how institutions and authority are transformed under modern conditions but do not take as their criterion whether a tradition remains ethically alive. Hanafi's framework is built around precisely that criterion. Hanafi's project, most fully set out in *al-Turath wa al-Tajdid* (Badruzaman, 2005) and in English in *Islam in the Modern World* (Hanafi, 2000), organizes theological renewal around three interrelated attitudes, or *mawaqif*: toward heritage (*turath*), read critically for the ethical commitments it carries rather than preserved as artifact; toward modernity, engaged selectively rather than imported wholesale or rejected outright; and toward reality (*al-waqi'*), which requires theology to answer to the lived social and institutional conditions of the community it serves. For Hanafi, this reinterpretation is theology's primary task, transforming inherited belief from static dogma into a framework capable of orienting ethical and social action in the present (Hanafi, 2000).

Applying this claim to a Hindu Balinese setting is best understood as an exercise in comparative theology in Clooney's sense: a practice of rethinking one tradition through sustained, structurally attentive engagement with another, undertaken not to equate their doctrinal content but to let one tradition's analytic vocabulary illuminate a dynamic already at work, if not always named as such, within the other (Clooney, 2010). The claim advanced here is accordingly not that *aguron-guron* and Islamic reformist theology share doctrinal content, but that Hanafi's tripartite structure is a heuristic compatible with categories already internal to Balinese Hindu religious reasoning: the principle of *desa kala patra*, which adjusts religious practice to place, time, and circumstance, performs a function structurally similar to Hanafi's demand that theology answer to *al-waqi'*, while the distinction between *sakala* (manifest) and *niskala* (transcendent) dimensions of *dharma* parallels his insistence that theology hold together transcendence and social immanence. This structural compatibility, rather than any claim of shared origin, is what licenses the comparison. This study therefore asks how the *aguron-guron* system of the *Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa* in Denpasar functions as a process of theological reconstruction across the axes of heritage, modernity, and social reality. It contributes a comparative theological reading that brings a framework developed within Islamic thought into dialogue with Balinese Hindu material, and an empirical account of how one urban Balinese priestly lineage negotiates the institutional tension between *griya* autonomy and PHDI oversight.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative field-research design consistent with a theological approach, in which the empirical manifestation of religious life is treated as the primary evidentiary ground (Zulaiha, 2017). Fieldwork was conducted in Denpasar between May and November 2025, across four sub-districts (West Denpasar, South Denpasar, East Denpasar, and North Denpasar). Participants were selected through purposive, key-informant sampling rather than population-based sampling, on the grounds that the institutional questions this study investigates, particularly the negotiation between *griya* autonomy and PHDI oversight, are most authoritatively addressed by those who hold responsibility for them. Five key informants were interviewed: four senior *Sulinggih* and one senior *walaka* (lay, non-priestly) official of PHDI. Of the four *Sulinggih*, two hold office within the *Paruman Pandita* (the council of *Sulinggih*) of PHDI Provinsi Bali and PHDI Denpasar City respectively, one is active in an association of *Brahmana Wangsa Sulinggih*, and one holds no additional institutional office. This composition was fixed by design, giving the study access to *griya*-based religious authority and to PHDI's institutional perspective rather than to a single position. Each interview was conducted individually and in depth, lasting approximately two hours. Observation was carried out at four *griya* connected to the *Sulinggih* informants, and was supplemented by documentary study of relevant *lontar* and *sasana* texts, including *Silakramaning Aguron-guron* and *Siwa Sasana*.

Because the informants were chosen for their positions rather than recruited until no new themes appeared, the adequacy of the data is judged by the relevance of each informant to the questions studied, not by thematic saturation. With five informants, the findings are not statistically generalizable. Points on which informants converged and points on which they diverged were both retained in the analysis. Several steps were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. First, accounts were triangulated across three kinds of evidence: interviews with informants holding different positions in relation to the *griya* and PHDI, observation at four *griya*, and documentary study of *sasana* texts, so that statements about practice could be checked against both observed conduct and normative texts. Second, convergent and divergent accounts were retained side by side rather than reconciled, and interpretive inferences not stated by informants are marked as such in the discussion. Third, informants are identified only by role, in keeping with the verbal consent under which the interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and Balinese, and the excerpts quoted in this article are translations by the authors. Finally, because the authors work within the Balinese Hindu academic community, their

interpretations were made from a position of familiarity with the tradition, which aids access and understanding but also risks taking tacit assumptions for granted; the use of an external theoretical framework and the explicit marking of interpretation were intended in part to counter this risk.

Data were analyzed in two analytically distinct stages. Consistent with the deductive orientation of the theological approach, in which core convictions are engaged with and reinforced through argument and evidence (Zulaiha, 2017), Hanafi's theological reconstruction was adopted from the outset as the study's interpretive lens. However, the specific three-axis structure used to organize the findings, concerning heritage, modernity, and social reality, was not fixed in advance of fieldwork. Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary material were first read and coded descriptively, following procedures of data reduction, classification, and display (Kaelan, 2012). It was only once this descriptive coding had produced a stable set of recurring concerns, namely genealogy and the *guru* triad, generational and technological change, and the *griya*-PHDI relationship, that these concerns were recognized as corresponding to Hanafi's three *mawaqif* and organized accordingly. This sequence was deductive at the level of theoretical commitment but inductive at the level of thematic structure. The coding also followed the tri pramana of Hindu epistemology: observation corresponds to *pratyaksa* pramana, interview and textual material to *agama* pramana, and the interpretive step of relating descriptive categories to the framework to *anumana* pramana (Putra, 2013).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Reconstructing heritage: The Bhisama of Danghyang Nirartha and the living practice of Aguron-guron

The genealogical foundation of Brahmana Wangsa priesthood is traced to Danghyang Nirartha, who served as Bhagawanta to Dalem Waturenggong at Gelgel in the sixteenth century and whose descendants inherited a *bhisama* enjoining them to preserve the purity of the soul and to teach dharma only from a state of spiritual purity: "*Yan hana wwang putra, kabeh amanggih suddha atma, yening tan suddha, tan wenang angirang dharma sasana*" (Agastia, 1994). Read at face value, this *bhisama* looks like precisely the kind of turath Hanafi warns against treating as inert historical artifact: a fixed genealogical mandate, transmitted by blood, closed to reinterpretation. Field data suggest otherwise. As one senior *Sulinggih* explained, mastery of *Puja Mantra* is judged not by rote memorization alone but by correct pronunciation, intonation, and a deep grasp of its spiritual meaning, qualities a *Guru Nabe* must verify individually in each disciple rather than assume from a fixed syllabus. A second senior *Sulinggih*, who holds office within the *Paruman Pandita* of PHDI, described the same sequence in procedural terms: a candidate must first complete *diksa* before being permitted to study *Puja Mantra* in depth, and only after roughly six months of demonstrated competence are the rites of *Ngelinggihang Weda* and *Mapulang Lingga* performed.

As an institution, the *griya* has long been understood not merely as a priestly residence but as a center of spiritual education and cultural transmission across generations (Punyatmadja, 2011). Reactivation of this kind is structurally embedded in the tritunggal of teachers who mediate every candidate's formation within *aguron-guron*: the *Guru Nabe*, who performs the *diksa* and channels *sakti*; the *Guru Waktra*, tasked separately with technical instruction in *mantra*, *wariga*, and *sasana*; and the *Guru Saksi*, who witnesses and legitimizes the initiation (Tim Penyusun, 2022). This triadic structure of authority is itself grounded in *sasana* literature governing priestly discipline and conduct, most notably the *Silakramaning Aguron-guron*, which stipulates the ethical and procedural obligations binding both *guru* and *sisya* (Saitya et al., 2020). Consistency between what the *Guru Waktra* teaches and what the *Guru Nabe* practices, particularly in a core ritual such as *Argha Patra*, is treated as a precondition of a valid and efficacious priesthood; inconsistency between the two is understood to weaken the *sakti* of the *tirtha* the new priest later produces (Saitya et al., 2026). Interpreted theologically, this insistence on internal coherence is not merely a

technical safeguard. It is the mechanism by which heritage is actively reconciled and re-authorized within each teaching lineage, rather than passed down as a uniform script, which is exactly the kind of critical rereading Hanafi holds to be the difference between a heritage that remains ethically alive and one that has calcified into ritual formality (Hamzah, 2013).

Reconstruction is equally visible in the staged temporality of *aguron-guron*: months or years of *Ngangsu Kaweruh* prior to *diksa*, followed by a further six months to *Ngelinggihang Weda* and another six months to *Mapulang Lingga*, each stage functioning as a checkpoint that authorizes an incremental expansion of ritual authority (Wiradnyana, 2025). This structure allows the tradition to insist on strict fidelity to *sasana* while still adapting the pace and content of formation to the spiritual readiness of each *sadhaka*. Accounts of priestly formation likewise describe the *Guru Nabe*'s judgment as central to determining a candidate's readiness at each stage (Suhardana, 2008). According to one senior *Sulinggih*, every *diksita* (*sisya*) is given the same core texts to master, *Siwa Sasana*, *Silakramaning Aguron-guron*, and the corpus of Puja Mantra, but how quickly a given *sadhaka* progresses toward *Ngelinggihang Weda* and even *Mapulang Lingga* depends on how readily that individual absorbs them, a capacity this informant linked explicitly to the *sadhaka*'s level of education. The heritage transmitted is thus fixed in content but adaptive in pace, calibrated by the *Guru Nabe* to each disciple's formation rather than administered on a uniform timetable. In Hanafi's terms, heritage here is not preserved as dogma; it is reactivated, generation after generation, disciple after disciple, as a living pedagogical judgment, precisely the movement from turath to actuality that theological reconstruction requires (Badruzaman, 2005).

Measured against the standard that inherited faith should function actually as ethical foundation and motivation for action rather than as reproduced dogma, this axis of *aguron-guron* largely approaches that ideal: the *bhisama* is kept alive precisely because it is re-authorized rather than merely repeated. Yet field conditions also reveal a latent fragility in this achievement. Because coherence between *Guru Waktra* and *Guru Nabe* is safeguarded informally, through personal trust and lineage reputation rather than through any documented standard, its reliability depends entirely on the individual integrity of each teaching triad. Where that informal safeguard weakens, whether through geographical distance, time pressure, or the declining number of senior *Sulinggih* available to serve as *Guru Waktra* or *Guru Saksi*, the reactivation of heritage risks reverting to exactly the kind of mechanical repetition Hanafi's framework warns against. This vulnerability becomes more pressing once modern pressures are taken into account.

3.2 Confronting modernity: Digitalization, urban Denpasar, and the challenge of regeneration

The second axis of reconstruction concerns *aguron-guron*'s encounter with the forces Hanafi associates with modernity: technological change, urban rationalization, and a more individualist, materialist orientation among the young (Hamzah, 2013). Denpasar's rapid urbanization, and its self-fashioning as a creative, culture-based city, place the *griya* inside precisely the conditions Hanafi treats as modernity's testing ground: a setting where a tradition can no longer assume automatic transmission and must instead compete, deliberately, for the attention and commitment of its own inheritors. A senior PHDI official was among the first to flag this pressure directly, noting that *aguron-guron* in contemporary Denpasar must now equip each *sadhaka* to address the present condition of Hindu society, including the challenges of modernization, the influence of globalization, and the risk of radicalism that *umat* may encounter, so that the *Sulinggih* produced can offer spiritual and ethical solutions relevant to the times without losing the tradition's roots. This concern is consistent with earlier studies, which document a marked decline in the number of *guru putra* willing to undertake *diksa*, attributed to competing professional ambitions, the time demands of formal education and employment, and a broader cultural drift toward pragmatic and consumptive values (Arka, 2025; Viprajana, 2025; Saitya et al., 2026). Because no candidates were interviewed, this study takes the decline as established by those

studies. Read against the expectation that inherited faith should remain an active ethical force, this is precisely where the gap between empirical practice and theological expectation begins to widen most visibly: a *bhisama* that is kept alive through the discretion of the *Guru Nabe* still depends on there being enough *guru putra* willing to receive it, and that willingness is exactly what urban modernity is eroding.

Rather than treating this pressure as simply corrosive, several *griya* in Denpasar have responded with selective adaptation consistent with Hanafi's second *mawqif*, neither uncritical absorption of modern technology nor blanket rejection of it. As a senior *Sulinggih* who holds office within the *Paruman Pandita* of PHDI Provinsi Bali observed, *Sulinggih* increasingly turn to digital media, including recorded *upadesa* and social media platforms, to reach *umat* who might otherwise seek less carefully grounded sources of religious instruction. This pattern accords with studies of Hindu Balinese digital religiosity, which show that sacred authority does not dissolve when relocated to social media but is re-mediated through visual presentation and community validation, even as the relocation introduces tensions between sanctity and commodification that *griya* must manage (Putra, 2026). It also reflects a wider shift in which religious legitimacy depends not only on institutional standing but also on communicative competence and audience proximity (Yuliani, 2026).

Framed theologically, this is the same movement Hanafi describes when he insists that engaging modernity should never mean surrendering the tradition's sacred core to the logic of the technology itself (Hamzah, 2013): here, digital media is made to serve *dharma*, rather than *dharma* being reshaped to fit the demands of the medium. This recommendation also raises a question the informants did not address. Formal education is described as groundwork rather than a criterion for *diksa*, and the final criteria remain *sasana* and genealogy. Yet a credentialed pathway can, over time, acquire its own weight in how candidates are judged, particularly in an urban setting where educational attainment is a ready measure of readiness. Whether formal qualification will remain a preparatory aid or begin to shape recognition alongside genealogy and *sasana* is therefore an open question, and one that bears directly on how selectively modern educational institutions can be engaged without altering the criteria they were meant to serve.

The pressure of formal education cuts the other way as well, shaping how *griya* prepare candidates rather than who may be considered one. All four *Sulinggih* interviewed converged on the same recommendation: that prospective *diksita* from the *Brahmana Wangsa* lineage should first pursue formal religious education, whether through university-level religious studies or at minimum a structured *kawikon* training course, as groundwork before undertaking *diksa* (interviews, Denpasar, 2025). This recommendation leaves the genealogical requirement of *aguron-guron* untouched while adapting its preparatory pathway to a generation for whom structured, credentialed education has become the expected route into any vocation, religious or otherwise. Read through Hanafi's second *mawqif*, this is a further instance of selective engagement: modern educational institutions are drawn into service of the tradition's formation process, rather than displacing the *sasana* and genealogical standards that remain the final criteria for *diksa*.

This convergence, across four of five key informants, on formal religious education as a necessary foundation for *diksa*, together with the move toward digitally mediated outreach, shows *aguron-guron* adapting its means while holding its ends constant: who may become a *Sulinggih* remains governed by genealogy and *sasana*, but how that candidate is prepared, and how the *Sulinggih* they become reaches the wider community, has been reshaped by the educational and technological conditions of contemporary Denpasar. This pattern of selective, means-focused adaptation stands in contrast to a more institutionally consequential question: whether the legitimacy of *diksa* itself, not merely the preparation leading to it, must now also answer to a formal authority beyond the *griya*.

3.3 Reorienting toward social reality: *Griya*, PHDI, and the negotiation of institutional legitimacy

The third axis of reconstruction concerns the relationship between *griya* autonomy and the formal religious institution PHDI, and it is here that the question of whether *diksa* must answer to an authority beyond the *griya* finds its clearest institutional expression. Historically, the authority to conduct *diksa pariksa* has rested with the *Guru Nabe* and the *griya*, understood as a private, sacred transaction between *guru* and *sisya* that does not require external ratification. This remains the dominant self-understanding within *Brahmana Wangsa griya*: *diksa* is a spiritual matter, and its validity is established through *sasana* and through the presence of the *Guru Nabe*, *Guru Waktra*, and *Guru Saksi*, not through administrative registration (Saitya et al., 2026). Read through Hanafi's first *mawqif*, this self-understanding is a consistent extension of *turath*, since the *griya* continues to treat sacred legitimacy as something that heritage alone can confer.

Against this background, a senior PHDI official argued that *diksa pariksa* should ideally involve PHDI. Recording every *diksa* process under PHDI's supervision, the official held, would give a *sulinggih* a double legitimacy, valid spiritually through *griya* tradition and valid administratively through institutional record, without PHDI intervening in the sacred core of the rite itself. The argument rests on PHDI's standing as the highest assembly of Hindu religious authority in Indonesia, and on the credibility that institutional record lends to a *sulinggih*'s standing in a socially heterogeneous city such as Denpasar. Two senior *Sulinggih* who hold office within the *Paruman Pandita* of PHDI Provinsi Bali and PHDI Denpasar City respectively likewise agreed that *diksa pariksa* should involve PHDI (interviews, Denpasar, 2025). This accords with documented practice, in which prospective *Sulinggih* are examined by the local PHDI through *diksa pariksa* (Subawa, 2021).

Not every voice within the *griya* world converged on this position, however, and the divergence is revealing. A senior *Sulinggih* active in a *Brahmana Wangsa* association held that *diksa pariksa* could legitimately be administered either by PHDI or by the *Perkumpulan Dharmopadesa Pusat Nusantara* (PDPN), a nationwide association of *Brahmana Wangsa* descendants, so long as *semeton brahmana* upheld the *bhisama* of Danghyang Nirartha. Taken at face value, this is a claim about fidelity to the *bhisama* rather than about which institution oversees the process. One possible reading, not stated by the informant, is that the preference for PDPN reflects resistance to examination by *sulinggih* of other *soroh* (clan lineages), since PHDI's *diksa pariksa* is conducted through the *Paruman Pandita*, an assembly drawn from multiple *soroh*. If so, it points to an exclusivism that persists within a community long established as the principal genealogical heir to Balinese Hindu priesthood, which this study treats critically rather than endorses.

Read through Hanafi's third *mawqif*, this contested field is a clear instance of theology being pressed to answer to *al-waqi'*, the concrete institutional and social reality in which religious authority must now operate. Hanafi's reconstruction project resists a theology that speaks only to itself; it insists that doctrine answer to the world it is meant to serve, including that world's demand for transparency, accountability, and coordination among institutions (Hamzah, 2013). Measured against this standard, the tension between *griya* and PHDI should not be read as a failure of tradition to adapt, nor as a settled consensus. It is better understood as reconstruction caught mid-process. There is broad recognition that legitimacy conferred within the *griya* alone is no longer sufficient, but no agreement on which institution, with what composition, should extend it. The question is not only whether sacred autonomy and public accountability can be reconciled, but whether an entrenched religious elite is willing to be examined as an equal by other groups.

This reorientation toward social reality is visible beyond the question of *diksa pariksa*. *Griya* continue to function as sites of mediation in family and community disputes, as counsel for *umat* facing personal or moral crisis, and, increasingly, as advocates of an eco-religious consciousness grounded in *tri hita karana*, encompassing concern for water sources, waste management, and adat-based environmental stewardship (Pitana, 2010; Sukarma, 2016; Saitya et al., 2026). This role reflects a broader theological understanding

of the *Sulinggih* as *guru loka*, a spiritual guide whose responsibility extends beyond ritual performance to the moral and social guidance of the wider Hindu community (Wiana, 2007), and *Sulinggih* are likewise described as central figures in transmitting the *upadesa* that guides umat in daily religious practice (Sudharta & Atmaja, 2001).

None of these functions is new in itself. What is theologically significant is that they extend the authority of the *Sulinggih* beyond ritual performance into domains of lived social need, precisely the direction Hanafi's third axis anticipates for a theology that intends to remain ethically actual rather than ceremonially confined.

Taken together, these positions point to the contours of a possible oversight arrangement, though not to a settled one. The proposal that every *diksa* be recorded under PHDI supervision without intervention in the sacred core of the rite marks the minimum on which the PHDI-affiliated informants agree. The remaining disagreement concerns composition: whether examination should be conducted by an assembly drawn from multiple *soroh* or by fellow *Brahmana Wangsa Sulinggih*. An arrangement consistent with both positions would distinguish two functions that the term *diksa pariksa* can blur, namely verification of a candidate's readiness, which the *griya* could retain through the *Guru Nabe*, and administrative recording of the completed *diksa*, which an institution such as PHDI could perform. Whether informants would accept such a separation was not tested in this study.

Taken together, the picture on this third axis is uneven. On everyday social service, mediation, and ecological stewardship, *aguron-guron* already produces *Sulinggih* who act as active social and ethical authorities. On the more consequential question of institutional legitimacy, the relationship between *griya* and PHDI remains contested, divided less between autonomy and oversight in the abstract than between competing answers to who may rightfully examine a candidate for *diksa*. The reconstruction of *aguron-guron* toward social reality is therefore real but incomplete.

3.4 *Aguron-guron as a living reconstructive praxis*

Taken together, the three axes of heritage, modernity, and social reality are not independent developments but a single interlocking process. The reactivation of heritage, carried out through the discretion of the *Guru Nabe* and the internal coherence of the *guru* triad, supplies the theological and genealogical legitimacy that makes engagement with modernity possible without dissolving *aguron-guron's* sacred core. Critical engagement with modernity, in turn, keeps that heritage intelligible and accessible to a generation that might otherwise disregard it, even as the pressure behind declining numbers of candidates remains unresolved. Reorientation toward social reality, most visibly in the still-contested negotiation between *griya* and PHDI over *diksa pariksa*, gives the reconstructed tradition a form of public accountability that heritage and adaptation alone cannot provide, while the *griya's* continuing role in mediation and eco-religious stewardship shows that this reorientation already operates, more quietly, in everyday community life.

Judged by the criterion this study set out to test, whether *aguron-guron* makes traditional faith function actually as ethical foundation and motivation for action, the evidence gathered across the three axes points to a qualified affirmation. Where the *guru* triad functions with integrity, where digital adaptation stays subordinate to *sasana*, and where the *griya* extends its authority into social mediation and ecological concern, *aguron-guron* does what a genuinely reconstructive theology is meant to do: it turns inherited conviction into lived ethical practice rather than reproduced dogma. Where these conditions weaken, whether through the informality of safeguards within the *guru* triad, the decline in candidates, or the unsettled question of institutional legitimacy, the same tradition risks drifting back toward the formal repetition that Hanafi's framework treats as theology's failure mode.

This affirmation must be qualified in a further respect, because Hanafi's framework does not explain the Balinese Hindu case completely, and the points where it strains are analytically informative. First, the framework asks whether heritage, once reread, generates

ethical commitment and social motivation, but the legitimacy of *diksa* rests partly on something that is not reread at all: *sakti* transmitted through the *Guru Nabe*, whose efficacy is understood in *niskala* terms and treated as a precondition rather than an outcome of ethical practice (Saitya et al., 2026). A framework centered on worldly wellbeing, human equality, and social solidarity (Badruzaman, 2005) has no category for this dimension, and this study has therefore read it only through its social consequences. Second, Hanafi's reconstruction presupposes a heritage whose interpretation can be contested and reopened, whereas priestly authority in the *Brahmana Wangsa* is inherited genealogically through the *bhisama* of Danghyang Nirartha. The framework helps expose the exclusivism that surfaces when priestly legitimacy is contested, but it does not explain why the genealogical requirement persists, nor why the informants consulted treated it as untouched even while modernizing other aspects of formation. Third, Hanafi's project is critical and transformative in intent, while much of what was observed here is adaptation of means in service of fixed ends. Describing that as "reconstruction" may stretch the term, and what was found may sometimes be better described as the careful maintenance of continuity. These tensions do not invalidate the comparative reading, but they mark where its explanatory reach ends, and they mean that the three mawaqif are best taken here as a heuristic that organizes the data rather than a theory that fully accounts for it.

The comparison also needs to be read in both directions. Hanafi's *turath* is, in the first instance, an inherited body of doctrine and thought to be reread critically (Badruzaman, 2005; Hamzah, 2013). In the *sasana* literature that governs *aguron-guron*, by contrast, heritage is not only something to be reread but something to be kept in force through the conduct of teacher and disciple: the *Silakramaning Aguron-guron* stipulates the obligations that bind *guru* and *sisya* (Saitya et al., 2020), and the *bhisama* traced to Danghyang Nirartha is carried by descendants who are enjoined to preserve spiritual purity before teaching *dharma* (Agastia, 1994). The Balinese tradition therefore already possesses its own vocabulary for the relation between inherited norm and present circumstance, notably *sasana* as binding conduct and *desa kala patra* as the principle of adjustment. Reading *aguron-guron* through Hanafi does not replace this vocabulary but places it beside his own, and the points of friction between the two, as in *sakti* and genealogical authority, show where Balinese categories do work for which Hanafi's offer no equivalent. A fuller hermeneutic dialogue with Kawi and *tattwa* literature would extend this comparison and remains a task for further research.

Understood this way, *aguron-guron* is best described, among the informants consulted, neither as a fragile inheritance under siege by change nor as a system that has fully reconstructed itself, but as a living reconstructive praxis still in motion: a tradition that keeps renewing its own legitimacy across heritage, modernity, and social reality, with that renewal more complete at some points than at others. It is this unevenness, rather than any simple story of survival or decline, that most accurately characterizes the condition of *Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa* leadership as these informants describe it.

3.5 Limitations of the study

Several limitations bound what these findings can support. First, the evidence rests on five key informants selected for their institutional positions, together with observation at four *griya* connected to the *Sulinggih* among them. This design gives access to both *griya*-based and PHDI perspectives, but it cannot show how widely any view is shared within the *Brahmana Wangsa*, and the convergence of four *Sulinggih* on formal religious education should be read as a pattern within this group rather than an estimate of general opinion. Second, no *guru putra* or candidates for *diksa* were interviewed, and no members of the wider Hindu community were consulted. Claims about declining regeneration therefore rest on earlier studies rather than on first-hand accounts from those whose decisions produce that decline, and how *umat* receive the social roles of the *Sulinggih* remains unexamined. Third, the informants who favor PHDI's involvement in *diksa pariksa* all hold office within PHDI, so their positions may reflect institutional roles as much as theological conviction,

while the divergent view recorded here comes from a single informant and cannot be generalized. Fourth, the study concerns one lineage in one city and says nothing about *Sulinggih* of other traditions or regions. Fifth, the three *mawaqif* organize the data without fully explaining it. These limits mean that the findings are best read as an exploratory account that further comparative research, including research centered on candidates and *umat*, can test.

4. Conclusions

This study read the *aguron-guron* system of the *Sulinggih Brahmana Wangsa* in Denpasar through Hasan Hanafi's theological reconstruction and found, among the informants consulted, that it operates along three interlocking dimensions. Heritage is reactivated through the *bhisama* of Danghyang Nirartha and through each *Guru Nabe*'s discretion, notably in the pace and sequence of formation. Modernity is engaged selectively, with digital media and formal religious education absorbed without surrendering the sacred core, while the decline in candidates remains unresolved. Social reality is addressed through the *griya*'s roles in mediation and ecological stewardship, and through a still-contested negotiation over whether, and how, PHDI should take part in *diksa pariksa*, on which informants held different views.

These findings rest on five key informants and four *griya* connected to a single lineage in one city, and they are not statistically generalizable. They say nothing about other lineages, other regions, or priests outside the Brahmana Wangsa. The informants did not include candidates (*guru putra*) or lay members of the wider community, so claims about declining regeneration draw partly on earlier studies. The comparative reading is offered as a proposition: whether theological reconstruction is a more general feature of living traditions can only be tested by further comparative work, including on other *Sulinggih* lineages and on the points where Hanafi's framework fits Balinese Hindu material poorly. Practically, the findings suggest that a model of *diksa* oversight respecting *griya* autonomy while offering institutional accountability deserves further development.

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Author Contribution

Conceptualization, I.B.S.S.; Methodology, I.B.S.S.; Investigation, I.M.D.; Resources, I.M.D.; Data Curation, I.M.D. and A.W.G.; Formal Analysis, A.W.G.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, I.B.S.S.; Writing – Review & Editing, I.B.S.S. and A.W.G.; Supervision, I.B.S.S.; Project Administration, I.M.D.; Funding Acquisition, I.B.S.S.

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Ethical Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because it employed standard qualitative field-research procedures, namely interviews, participant and non-participant observation, and documentary study of religious texts, involving no medical, invasive, or

experimental procedures, and no vulnerable populations. Formal ethical clearance from an institutional review board is not a standard requirement for social-religious field research of this kind under prevailing research regulations in Indonesia. The research was conducted under an official research permit issued by *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia* (PHDI) Denpasar City, permit number 128/SIP/PHDI-DPS/XI/2025.

Informed Consent Statement

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed that the findings would be published in a book and journal articles. Participants are not identified by name, and their institutional positions are described only in general terms.

Data Availability Statement

The interview transcripts and field notes supporting the findings of this study contain sensitive religious and personal information and are therefore not publicly archived. Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to conditions that protect the confidentiality of research participants.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funder had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used software to assist in organizing field data, structuring arguments, and drafting and language editing of the manuscript, and used Mendeley to assist in reference management and formatting of in-text citations and the bibliography. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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