



# Tri murti symbolism in candi prambanan: Revealing the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in hindu cosmology

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Prambanan Temple, as a world cultural heritage site, is a silent witness of the Tri Murti worship in Hinduism. Tri Murti, which consists of Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Preserver), and Shiva (Redeemer), is represented by three main temples in the Prambanan Temple complex, namely Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple. **Methods:** This research aims to reveal the symbolism of Tri Murti in Prambanan Temple and its relationship with the Hindu cosmological cycle that includes creation, maintenance, and dissolution. The approach used is qualitative with analytical descriptive method, which examines the architectural structure and arrangement of the three main temples as a representation of the cycle of the universe. **Findings:** The results show that the arrangement and selection of the three temples illustrate the concept of Hindu cosmology related to the three stages of the life of the universe. This discovery not only confirms the spiritual significance of Prambanan Temple as a place of worship of Tri Murti, but also enriches our understanding of Hindu teachings in the context of architecture and space. In conclusion, Tri Murti worship at Prambanan Temple makes an important contribution to the theory of Hindu cosmology and has significant implications for the preservation of Hindu culture and religious practices in Indonesia. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study reveals the unique connection between Tri Murti symbolism and the Hindu cosmological cycle in Prambanan's architecture, which has been rarely explored in previous research.

**KEYWORDS:** cosmic cycle; hindu cosmology; prambanan; temple; tri murti.

## 1. Introduction

Prambanan Temple, located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is one of the largest and most important temple complexes in Southeast Asia. Recognised as a world heritage site by UNESCO, Prambanan Temple is not only famous for its architectural beauty, but also as a centre of worship in the profound Hindu tradition. Within this complex, the worship of the Tri Murti, consisting of Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Preserver), and Shiva (Redeemer), is depicted through three main temples, namely Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple. These three temples are arranged in a way that reflects the cycle of the universe in Hindu cosmology of creation, maintenance, and dissolution (Macdaniel, 2015; Surpi, 2020).

The Tri Murti concept is a core teaching in Hinduism that describes three aspects of divine power that maintain the balance of the universe (Saraswati, 2017). However,

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although many studies have discussed Prambanan Temple in the context of its history, architecture, and function as a place of worship, very few studies have examined the symbolism of Tri Murti specifically, especially related to the relationship between temple architecture and the concept of Hindu cosmology that includes the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution (Ratni, 2020). This indicates a gap that needs to be bridged in order to enrich the understanding of Prambanan Temple in both cultural and spiritual contexts.

In addition, most existing studies emphasise the historical and archaeological aspects of Prambanan Temple, without giving enough attention to the spiritual symbolism contained in the spatial arrangement and architecture of the temple. Some studies, such as the one by Macdaniel (2015), do discuss the relationship between Prambanan Temple and the worship of Hindu deities, but they focus more on the general aspects of religion and do not examine in detail how the temples depict the Hindu cosmological cycle. Research by Hall (1980) also provides insight into the relationship between architecture and religion at Prambanan Temple, but it is still limited to the influence of Hinduism on Javanese society, and has not touched deeply on cosmological symbolism in the context of this temple.

The understanding of Tri Murti and the cosmic cycle in the context of Prambanan Temple not only involves architectural aspects, but also touches on social, emotional, and religious aspects that are very important in the lives of Hindus. Hindu cosmology, which includes concepts of creation, maintenance, and dissolution, is known as Trimurti, consisting of the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma is the creator of the universe, Vishnu is the sustainer of life, and Shiva is the dissolver or Purifier of the universe to start a new cycle. This concept not only contains philosophical value, but also reflects the repeating cycle of the universe, a view of uninterrupted life (*samsara*). In the context of Prambanan Temple, Tri Murti symbolism can be found in the three main temples dedicated respectively to Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma. These temples serve as cosmic representations of the ever-repeating cycle of life, presented in an organised and meaningful architectural form.

In addition, Tri Murti worship also has a dual function in the social life of Hindus. On the one hand, the ritual of worship plays an important role in achieving spiritual liberation or moksha, which is the main goal of Hinduism (Bodewitz, 2019). But on the other hand, these rituals also serve as a means to maintain social and emotional well-being. According to Eliade (1969), worship in Hinduism is not only related to achieving liberation, but also provides inner peace and social protection for its followers. Ritual worship at Prambanan Temple, as a place of worship, is not only a way to get closer to God, but also a means to obtain blessings and prosperity in daily life.

Temple architecture, as a physical form of Hindu cosmology, implies a close relationship between space, time, and the universe (Krom, 1923). Soekmono (1981) argues that temples are not just buildings of worship, but also symbols of a larger cosmic structure. The main temples in Prambanan, namely the Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma temples, contain deep meanings related to the principles of Hindu cosmology and the role of each god in maintaining the balance of the universe. This organised and symmetrical architectural structure provides a picture of the order of the universe, as well as illustrating the relationship between the physical world and the metaphysical world.

Although previous studies such as those conducted by Kramrisch (1946), Hardjana (2003) and Surpi et al. (2023) have discussed the relationship between Prambanan Temple architecture and cosmic symbolism, not many have explored the deeper relationship between the worship of Tri Murti and the social and emotional life of Hindus today. This research aims to fill the gap by examining how this cult remains relevant in the social lives of Hindus, as well as how it functions as a mechanism to gain inner peace, balance emotions, and strengthen social relationships between individuals.

Furthermore, there is a void in the literature regarding the role of Tri Murti worship as a means to address the social and emotional challenges of contemporary Hindus. Ritzer (2004) points out that religious rituals are not only an expression of faith, but also an attempt to gain psychological and social well-being. Further understanding of how the worship of Tri Murti plays a role in helping Hindus live their lives in a more calm and

balanced manner, in the face of social and personal pressures, would contribute significantly to filling the gap in the existing literature (Kaisar, 2024).

Moreover, although many studies have addressed the architectural and historical aspects of Prambanan Temple, few studies have addressed the relationship between the physical structure of the temple and the cult rites performed there. This research aims to answer the question of how the cult rituals performed at Prambanan Temple can deepen Hindus' understanding of the cosmic cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in their daily lives. It will also explore how the teachings of the Tri Murti remain relevant in contemporary Hindu religious traditions, as well as how this cult provides moral and spiritual guidance for contemporary Hindu society.

By combining these key concepts and theories, this research will provide new insights into the symbolism of Tri Murti at Prambanan Temple, while addressing gaps in the literature related to the understanding of Hindu cosmology, the role of worship in social and emotional well-being, and the relevance of Tri Murti teachings in contemporary Hindu religious traditions.

In general, the literature on Prambanan Temple tends to focus more on the historical aspects, architecture, and cultural context during its heyday. This causes a lack of studies that specifically discuss the symbolism of Tri Murti in the context of Hindu cosmology. Although some studies, such as those conducted by Hall (1980) and Macdaniel (2015), touch on the relationship between temples and Hindu teachings, research on how Prambanan Temple represents the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution through the architecture and arrangement of the temple is still very limited. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by deeply analysing the Tri Murti symbolism in Prambanan Temple and its relation to Hindu cosmology.

This research aims to dig deeper into the Tri Murti symbolism reflected in Prambanan Temple, as well as how the arrangement and structure of the main temples illustrate the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in Hindu cosmology. The main objectives of this research are to identify the Tri Murti symbolism reflected in the structure and arrangement of Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple. Secondly Analyse the relationship between the architecture of Prambanan Temple and Hindu cosmology, emphasising the cycle of the universe involving creation, maintenance, and dissolution. Thirdly Find the relationship between the symbolism of the Tri Murti gods in Prambanan Temple and the Hindu worldview, which connects the creation of the universe with human life.

Based on the existing background and research gap, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that the arrangement of Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple in Prambanan Temple represents the cycle of creation, maintenance, and fusion in Hindu cosmology. The three main temples not only function as places of worship, but also as symbols of the Hindu worldview that connects the universe with human life.

This research is expected to make a new contribution to the study of Prambanan Temple, especially in the context of the relationship between architecture and the teachings of Hindu cosmology. The findings of this research are also expected to provide deeper insights into how Prambanan Temple plays a role in the preservation of culture and spiritual appreciation of Hindu society in Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach that aims to understand the symbolism of Tri Murti at Prambanan Temple in relation to Hindu cosmology, especially the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution. The qualitative method was chosen because this research focuses on understanding spiritual and historical meanings and contexts that cannot be measured by quantitative methods. This approach allows the researcher to explore the symbolism contained in the structure and architectural arrangement of Prambanan Temple and how the concept of Tri Murti is realised through architectural aspects and religious rites.

The specific locations in this study are Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple, each of which represents an aspect of the Tri Murti in Hindu cosmology; Shiva as the Melter, Vishnu as the Preserver, and Brahma as the Creator. The research sample includes the architectural structures of these three main temples, as well as relevant literature on Prambanan Temple and Hindu cosmology, which includes books, journal articles, and archaeological sources that explain the history and symbolism of Prambanan Temple.

Data collection was conducted through several techniques. First, literature study was used to collect information from books and journal articles that discuss Prambanan Temple and Hindu cosmology. Researchers referred to works such as Hall (1980) and Macdaniel (2015) that discuss the symbolism of temple architecture in the context of Tri Murti. Second, the researcher conducted field observations at the Prambanan Temple site to observe and document symbolic elements in the architecture, including spatial arrangement, temple orientation, and ornaments that can reveal the meaning of Hindu cosmology. Third, researchers will conduct interviews with archaeologists, historians, and religious figures who have knowledge of Prambanan Temple and Hindu symbolism. These interviews aim to get more in-depth views from the experts regarding their understanding of the meaning of Tri Murti in Prambanan Temple. Fourth, this research also involves text analysis of relevant Hindu scriptures, such as the Bhagavad Gita and Purana, to understand the concept of Tri Murti in the context of Hindu cosmology and its relation to architectural symbolism at Prambanan Temple.

After data collection, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes found in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis was used to identify key themes that emerged from architectural observations, expert interviews, and text analysis. Some of the main themes expected to emerge related to the Tri Murti symbolism at Prambanan Temple are: the concepts of creation (*Brahma*), maintenance (*Vishnu*), and dissolution (*Shiva*); the role of temple architecture in reflecting Hindu cosmology; and the relationship between visual and spiritual elements in the representation of Tri Murti.

The analysis process begins with reading and understanding the data as a whole, then the researcher will categorise the data in the form of themes relevant to the research. These themes are then analysed to understand how Tri Murti symbolism is reflected in temple architecture and how the concept of Hindu cosmology is interpreted in Javanese culture. The researcher will explore the relationship between the temple structure, the representation of divine figures, and the teachings of Hindu cosmology contained in religious texts.

To increase the validity and validity of the findings, this research uses triangulation techniques. Triangulation is done by comparing findings from various data sources, such as field observations, interviews with experts, literature studies, and text analysis. By using various data sources, this research aims to ensure that the findings obtained can be accounted for and have stronger evidence. In addition, the researcher will conduct member checking, which is asking for confirmation from the experts interviewed to verify the findings and interpretations that have been made.

This research also pays attention to research ethics by maintaining the confidentiality of the information obtained, especially from interviews with experts. All interview participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and asked to provide written consent before participating. With this methodology, it is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to understanding the symbolism of Tri Murti at Prambanan Temple and how representations of Hindu cosmology are realised in the architecture and religious practices present at the site.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Significance of prambanan temple

Prambanan Temple is the largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia located in Sleman Regency, Yogyakarta. This temple is not only an amazing architectural masterpiece, but also an important spiritual, cultural, and historical symbol in the development of Hinduism in the archipelago. Based on archaeological research and historical studies, the temple was founded in the 9th century AD by King Rakai Pikatan and served as a centre of worship to Trimurti, the main deities in Hinduism: Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma.

Prambanan Temple has a very beautiful and complex architecture. The main complex consists of three large temples dedicated to Hindu deities, namely Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple. Shiva Temple is the largest of the three, symbolising the highest aspect of Hinduism, the attainment of moksha or spiritual freedom. Each temple not only reflects the worship of a particular deity but also has various reliefs depicting stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics, which are the core of moral and ethical teachings in Hinduism (Surpi et al., 2024).

In this context, Prambanan illustrates the importance of harmony in the spiritual and social life of Hindu society, where gods are worshipped in a highly structured form and in accordance with Hindu cosmology. These temples served as places to perform religious ceremonies and meditation, which in turn strengthened the religious beliefs and cultural identity of the people at that time.

In addition to its religious significance, Prambanan Temple also has enormous cultural value in the context of Indonesian history. This temple is a legacy of the Hindu Mataram kingdom that ruled at that time. Its existence is not only the centre of royal power, but also reflects the cultural interaction between India and Indonesia through the influence of Hinduism that entered the archipelago since the 4th century AD (Heine-Geldern, 1956).

Along with the times, Prambanan Temple suffered severe damage from an earthquake in the 16th century, which left the complex neglected until the 19th century, when massive restoration efforts began. This restoration was not only carried out by the Dutch colonial government, but also by various international and Indonesian parties to maintain the historical and cultural values contained in the site (Azra, 2001).

Prambanan Temple can also be understood in the context of the ideology of Unity in Diversity' or *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* which is the principle of life of the Indonesian nation. As the largest Hindu religious site, Prambanan reflects the religious traditions that developed in Indonesia even though Hinduism is now not the majority religion. This demonstrates the diversity of religions and cultures intertwined in the history of the Indonesian nation, and how various religions and beliefs can coexist despite their different backgrounds.

In a broader perspective, Prambanan is not only a world heritage site recognised by UNESCO, but also a symbol of past greatness that influenced the development of Indonesian culture until today. With further study of this complex, people can understand more about how Hindu beliefs fused with local culture in Indonesia.

As a whole, Prambanan Temple is a symbol of the pinnacle of Hindu culture in Indonesia, which not only has outstanding architectural value but also contains deep spiritual, social, and historical values. Its existence is a testament to the importance of cultural interaction between Indonesia and India in the past as well as a witness to the development of Hinduism in the archipelago. Therefore, Prambanan Temple has great significance, both from a religious, cultural, historical perspective, and as part of Indonesia's national identity.

#### 3.2 Tri murti symbolism and cosmic representation in prambanan temple

This research focuses on the Tri Murti symbolism manifested in Prambanan Temple, by examining the relationship of each temple to the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in Hindu cosmology. Based on findings from architectural and relief analyses,

the three main temples at Prambanan - Shiva Temple, Vishnu Temple, and Brahma Temple - present a profound picture of each deity's function in maintaining the balance of the universe and their relationship to the cycle of life.

### *3.3 Shiva temple: representation of consolidation in the cycle of life*

Shiva temples are revered as the god of destruction or dissolution in the cycle of life, which illustrates an important concept in Hindu cosmology, namely the samsara cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Shiva as the god of destruction refers not only to destruction in the physical sense, but rather to the transformative process that leads to birth and renewal. In Hindu cosmology, destruction is an integral part of creation and maintenance, necessary to keep the universe in balance (Eliade, 2003).

In Shiva Temple, a large statue of Shiva holds a trident (trishula), which symbolises the three aspects of Shiva's power: destruction (dissolution), protection, and renewal. The trident also serves to maintain the balance between the material world and the spiritual world, given that Shiva is the link between the two worlds. The reliefs in Shiva Temple depict various myths of destruction, including the story of Ravana being conquered by Shiva, a symbolisation of controlling destructive energy in the world. The worship of Shiva by Hindus reflects their understanding of the importance of dissolving the negative aspects of their lives in order to achieve spiritual renewal (Flood, 1996). Surpi & Ratni (2023) assert the Shiva Temple is the largest and most prominent among the three main temples in the Prambanan Temple complex. As a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, who in Hinduism acts as the transformer of the universe, the size of Shiva Temple reflects its highest position in the Trimurti. The size of Shiva Temple at 47 metres high, 20 metres long and 20 metres wide makes it stand out from other temples. This is because this sacred building complex has a sivaistic concept.

### *3.4 Vishnu temple: a balanced representation of maintenance and life*

Vishnu Temple, which depicts the god of the universe, serves as a symbol of the balance and sustainability of this world. In Hindu cosmology, Vishnu is seen as the god who maintains the order of the world and ensures that the rta (cosmic principle or universal order) is maintained (Olivelle, 2004). Vishnu maintains the balance between destructive and creative forces, and protects the world from the threat of destruction. The function of Vishnu worship at Prambanan Temple is to ask for protection and welfare. Hindus see him as the regulator of harmony in their lives.

The statue of Vishnu sitting on a dragon snake illustrates the relationship between the ruler of the universe and the natural elements that support life. The dragon snake symbolises Ananta, immortality and resilience, as well as a connection with the underworld which in Hindu mythology is believed to be the source of life. Vishnu worship gives devotees the realisation that life requires not only physical maintenance, but also moral and spiritual maintenance. Every action in this world should be based on the principles of dharma, which will ensure balance and harmony in life (Smith, 2009). Vishnu Temple as a representation of worship to Lord Vishnu as the guardian of life. In Hindu cosmology, Lord Vishnu is in charge of supporting and safeguarding this creation and ensuring that cosmic processes run normally and fairly. For life, Vishnu is the guardian and plays a role in upholding virtue against evil that arises as a natural form in the cosmic process.

### *3.5 Brahma temple: representation of creation and renewal*

Brahma, as the creator god in Hindu cosmology, begins the cycle of life through the creation of everything in the universe. The Brahma Temple in Prambanan, with its four-faced statue of Brahma, symbolises diversity in creation, which includes the four aspects of life: spiritual, physical, moral, and social. Brahma's four faces face the four corners of the world, symbolising the presence of creation in every aspect of human life and the universe.

The worship of Brahma at Prambanan Temple illustrates the important role of the creator god in giving existence to all forms of life. In Hindu cosmology, creation is not regarded as a one-time event, but rather as a recurring and ongoing process (Mendoza, 2021). Each birth is a new process of creation, connecting the individual to the larger cycle of life and death. The worship of Brahma enables devotees to understand the importance of creating a life in accordance with the principles of dharma and to appreciate existence as part of the larger cycle of nature (Zimmer, 1951).

Surpi et al. (2024) stated that Brahma Vishnu and Siva are cosmic representations of the cycles of the universe pedestal. In Hindu cosmology, Brahma is the initial God in charge of the creation process, then the entire creation will be maintained and supported by Lord Vishnu and then when the cosmic process controlled by time makes the creation no longer function properly, then Lord Siva is in charge of melting it back, restoring its originality and carrying out renewal. In Hindu cosmology this cosmic process takes place in a cyclic manner and God as the support of the universe controls this entire evolutionary process (Kaur et al., 2024).

The existence of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma temples in Prambanan not only reflects the splendour of Hindu architecture, but also shows the deep belief in the function of each deity in Hinduism. These temples, of varying sizes, reflect the position of the gods in the religious and spiritual hierarchy, and demonstrate the balance that exists in Hinduism regarding the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of the universe and all that it contains, including human existence.

Table 1. Comparison of three temples and hindu cosmological symbolism

Temple	Representations of Hindu Cosmology	Function of Veneration	Life Cycle Aspects
Siwa Temple	Redeemer	Demolition and Renewal	Death, Transformation, Rebirth
Wisnu Temple	Preserver	Life Protector	Equilibrium, Protection
Brahma Temple	creation	Creation of the Universe	Creation and the Nativity

Table 1. illustrates a comparison of the three main temples at Prambanan Temple and the Hindu cosmological symbolism contained in them. These three temples each represent a different aspect of the cycle of life and its role in Hindu worship.

Shiva Temple, the aspect of Consolidation. Shiva Temple is symbolic of the dissolution aspect of Hindu cosmology, which refers to the process of destruction and renewal. In the Hindu view, Shiva acts as a god of destruction who not only destroys, but also enables renewal through the process. Therefore, Shiva worship focuses on the aspects of death and transformation. This refers to the belief that through destruction, new life can emerge, mirroring the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). The function of Shiva worship for devotees is to attain renewal and cleansing, both in their spiritual and physical lives, as well as pleading for release from the endless cycle of suffering.

Vishnu Temple, worship as the Maintenance aspect. Vishnu Temple represents the maintenance aspect of Hindu cosmology, which relates to Vishnu's role as the protector of life and the keeper of the balance of the universe. As a god who nurtures and protects the world, Vishnu serves to maintain harmony and balance between the forces of good and evil. Vishnu worship leads to protection for devotees, helping them avoid calamities and crises in life. In relation to the cycle of life, Vishnu symbolises the protection of the birth and development of life, as well as ensuring that cosmic law (*dharma*) continues according to His terms.

Brahma Temple, Creation. Brahma Temple represents the creation aspect of Hindu cosmology, which deals with the creation of the universe and everything in it. As the creator god, Brahma plays a role in starting the cycle of life by creating the world and all living things. Brahma worship focuses on the aspects of creation and birth, with the aim of gaining blessings in creating something new, be it in the form of life, work or thought. In the cycle

of life, Brahma symbolises the beginning, birth and formation of everything that exists, including the beginning of each individual.

This table illustrates the deep connection between the three main deities in Hindu cosmology Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma and aspects of the cycle of life. Each temple has symbolism that reflects that deity's role in maintaining the balance of the universe and supporting devotees in the various phases of their lives, from creation, to maintenance, to dissolution. These three aspects are intertwined and create an inseparable cycle, depicting the journey of the universe and human life in the view of Hindu cosmology.

The discussion of Rta and Dharma in the Vedic tradition provides a very insightful view of the interrelationship between Hindu cosmology and human life, especially in the context of your research on Tri Murti worship at Prambanan Temple. Rta, as the cosmic ordering principle of the universe, governs all aspects of life and is a central principle in the wider Vedic tradition. Dharma, originally a part of rta, develops into a practical guide for human daily life, providing ethical and moral rules that serve to maintain order and harmony in the cosmos.

In the context of research on Prambanan Temple, the symbolism of Tri Murti in Prambanan Temple (*Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma*) can be understood as a representation of various aspects of the broader Hindu cosmology, which is closely related to the concepts of Rta and Dharma. The three deities in the Tri Murti-Siwa, Vishnu, and Brahma-play a role in various important phases of the universe's cycle: creation, maintenance, and destruction. The concept of Rta organises and maintains the balance of the entire universe, and each deity has a specific role to play in ensuring that order is maintained. Brahma, as the creator god, is responsible for creating and initiating the cycle of nature. Vishnu, as the sustaining god, guards and protects life to keep it in accordance with the principles of Rta. Shiva, as the god of destruction, serves to destroy or remodel the old order to make room for renewal and continuation of the natural cycle. Each of these roles can be seen as the practice of the Rta principle in the larger cosmic life.

In the development of Hindu thought, dharma became more concrete and applicable to everyday human life, as described in the literature on dharma as a moral and ethical guide. Man, as the only being capable of transgressing Rta, is required to live in accordance with Dharma, which includes his moral, social and religious duties. This understanding can be applied to the Tri Murti worship at Prambanan Temple, where every individual who comes to worship or contemplate Hindu teachings at this temple, is expected to understand and practice the principles of Dharma. Dharma is not only related to moral duties and obligations, but also to the management of human relationships with the cosmos, including with Rta.

Dharma, as a guide to life, is very important in maintaining the balance of the universe, which is directly related to the worship of Tri Murti at Prambanan Temple. Each deity in the Tri Murti not only represents cosmic power but also symbolises the manifestation of Dharma in aspects of human life, be it in the act of creating (*Brahma*), preserving (*Vishnu*), or destroying (*Shiva*). Dharma, in this case, becomes the bridge between the cosmic order (*Rta*) and daily human actions. By practising the principles of Dharma, humans will endeavour to harmonise their lives with Rta, ultimately creating harmony in both individual lives and the universe as a whole.

Prambanan Temple, as the largest Hindu worship site in Java, reflects the implementation of Hindu cosmology in human life. The worship of Tri Murti at Prambanan Temple is not only a religious ritual, but also a means to remind people to practice Dharma. Every aspect of the temple's architecture and symbolism invites devotees to understand and appreciate the principle of Rta that governs the universe and apply it in their daily lives through the practice of Dharma.

Overall, an understanding of Rta and Dharma in the context of Prambanan Temple provides an in-depth look at the interconnections between Hindu cosmology, Tri Murti worship, and the moral practices that govern human life. Your research can further explore how Tri Murti worship reflects these principles in the wider cosmic order, as well as the important role of Dharma in maintaining the harmony and balance of the larger universe.



By exploring the interconnections between Rta, Dharma, and Tri Murti worship, this research not only enriches our understanding of Hindu cosmology, but also provides practical insights into how these concepts translate into daily living practices for Hindus.

The results of this study show that the Tri Murti symbolism in Prambanan Temple is not merely a figurative representation of Hindu deities, but also reflects the deep principles of Hindu cosmology. Each god, Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, has a very important role in the cycle of life, which is closely related to the concept of *samsara*, the unbroken cycle of life and death in Hinduism. Any worship of one of these three deities serves as a means for devotees to connect themselves with the cosmic forces that govern the universe.

The Shiva temple, which serves as a symbol of dissolution, depicts the concept of death and destruction as a process that not only destroys, but also makes room for rebirth. This is in line with the Hindu teaching that every ending is a new beginning. Shiva's worship function becomes relevant for Hindus facing life's challenges, which teaches them to accept change and find renewal in every event.

The Vishnu temple, which is a symbol of providence, depicts the balance in life that is the basis for the continuity of the world. Vishnu worship reminds Hindus of the importance of maintaining balance in life, both in human relationships with nature and with others. In Hindu cosmology, everything must be in order (*rta*), and Vishnu is the guardian of that order. Vishnu worship is not only for protection, but also to maintain justice and morality in life.

The Brahma temple, which symbolises creation, emphasises the importance of creation in every stage of life. The worship of Brahma gives Hindus an understanding of creation that is not limited to the physical aspect, but also includes creation in the moral and spiritual aspects. Each individual, through re-creation in each birth, has the opportunity to evolve and achieve liberation (*moksha*) through a deep understanding of dharma and karma.

This research complements previous studies that state that Prambanan Temple is not only a religious site, but also a representation of Hindu cosmology that describes the cycle of life (Irawan, 2015). The results of this study also support the theory that the architecture of Prambanan Temple not only contains religious values but also a vehicle for cosmological education for Hindu society in the past. As said by Rohit (2019), Tri Murti symbolism in temple architecture is closely related to the teachings of the three in supporting cosmic balance.

This research makes a new contribution to our understanding of Tri Murti symbolism in Prambanan Temple, especially in relation to the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in Hindu cosmology. There are several aspects that become new findings in this research that enrich the existing literature and provide a deeper perspective on the role of Prambanan Temple in Hindu religious practice and its relationship with the cosmology of the universe.

### *3.6 Deeper connection of tri murti with cosmic life cycle*

One of the main findings that emerged in this research is a deeper understanding of Tri Murti's relationship with the deeper cosmic life cycle, namely creation, maintenance, and dissolution in Hindu cosmology. While previous research has identified the basic functions of each of the Tri Murti deities, this study demonstrates that the three do not simply operate as separate deities, but collectively form an indivisible cosmic cycle that governs the universe as well as individual lives within a larger context. The findings emphasise that the worship of each deity—Shiva as dissolution, Vishnu as protector, and Brahma as creator—is a unity that reflects the continuous and dynamic flow of life in both worldly and spiritual life.

This concept enriches Hindu cosmological theory by adding a more complex temporal dimension, i.e. a clearer view of the relationship between the gods' roles in creating, sustaining, and ultimately restoring life in the recurring cycle of the universe (*samsara*). This research also shows how each life phase of birth, life, and death is embodied in the architectural symbolism of Prambanan Temple, as well as in the rituals and worship held by Hindus.

### *3.7 Prambanan temple's architectural symbolism as a means of cosmic reflection*

This research also found that the architecture of Prambanan Temple functions as a concrete symbolism of Hindu cosmology, where the physical structure of the temple is not merely a place of worship, but also illustrates the role of the gods in creating, sustaining, and releasing life back into the cosmic cycle. Specifically, these new findings identify that Prambanan Temple is not only a place of worship for Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, but also symbolises the process of creation, maintenance, and dissolution itself.

This differs from common interpretations that focus more on the deity structures as individual figures, worshipped separately. This research shows that Prambanan Temple as a large architectural site is the material manifestation of such cosmic processes, where each of the main temples (*Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma*) are interconnected and form a unity that represents the cyclical rotation of the universe (González-Reimann, 2009). This research introduces a new view that the worship and meditation of the three deities at Prambanan Temple provides devotees with a direct reflective experience of creation, maintenance, and dissolution as inseparable processes in the universe.

### *3.8 The function of tri murti advancement in maintaining the social and emotional balance of devotees*

Another prominent finding of this research is a new insight into the function of Tri Murti worship in the social and emotional context of Hindus. The research found that the worship of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma is not only concerned with achieving spiritual goals and merging with the universe, but also has profound implications for the social and emotional well-being of devotees. Shiva worship, which focuses on dissolution and destruction, provides devotees with a way to escape from difficulties, traumas, or obstacles that hinder their lives. Vishnu worship, with its nurturing aspect, provides a sense of protection and well-being, which is instrumental in maintaining social balance, especially in societies that are still strongly tied to tradition and custom (Jhunjhunwala, 2021).

Meanwhile, Brahma worship-which focuses more on creation and renewal-played an important role in giving hope and inspiration for devotees to embark on new projects, both in personal and collective life. The research found that Tri Murti worship practices are not only aimed at pure spiritual attainment, but also at balancing various aspects of the devotee's life, whether in dealing with emotional challenges, social, or worldly achievements. These findings suggest that worship rituals at Prambanan Temple are more complex than mere religious ceremonies: they function as profound psychological and social mechanisms in maintaining individual life balance in Hindu society.

### *3.9 The influence of tri murti cult in facing contemporary contexts.*

Another new finding is the influence of Tri Murti worship at Prambanan Temple in the present social and religious context. In the modern era, where human life is coloured by global challenges, such as climate change, social tensions, and existential challenges, Tri Murti worship provides solutions to deal with the existential crisis. Understanding the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in the context of personal, family, and community life is increasingly relevant, especially in providing guidance for individuals seeking meaning and direction in their lives.

In addition, this research opens up the possibility of utilising Tri Murti rituals and symbolism as a means of reconciliation and healing for communities facing social disintegration and economic uncertainty. These findings can be utilised by the development of more comprehensive educational and religious policies in integrating traditional Hindu values with contemporary challenges, thereby contributing to the effort of forming a more harmonious, balanced, and global-minded society.

Overall, this research introduces several new findings that enrich our understanding of Prambanan Temple and Tri Murti symbolism in Hindu cosmology. The discovery that

Prambanan Temple functions not only as a place of worship, but also as a manifestation of a larger cosmic cycle, as well as the role of Tri Murti worship in maintaining the social and emotional balance of Hindus, is an important contribution that has not been widely explored in previous literature. The findings provide new insights into how Hindu cosmology interacts with the daily lives of devotees and its relevance in today's social, emotional, and cultural contexts.

Theoretically, this research provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between architecture, religious symbolism, and cosmology in Hindu culture, particularly in the context of Prambanan Temple. It underscores the importance of viewing architecture as a medium to convey broader religious teachings, which are not only limited to physical aspects but also include spiritual and cosmic dimensions.

Practically, the results of this research can contribute to the preservation of cultural sites, especially in increasing public understanding of the philosophical meanings contained in Prambanan Temple. In addition, this research can provide insight to temple visitors, both from academics and Hindus, about the importance of understanding the cycle of life in the context of worship to Tri Murti.

#### 4. Conclusions

This research aims to reveal the symbolism of Tri Murti in Prambanan Temple in relation to the cycle of creation, maintenance, and dissolution in Hindu cosmology. Through thematic analysis and in-depth interpretation of the worship functions of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, several main findings were found that answer the hypothesis and problem formulation of this research.

**Integration of Tri Murti with the Cosmic Life Cycle.** The first finding confirms that the Tri Murti symbolism at Prambanan Temple depicts three main stages in the Hindu cosmic life cycle: creation (Brahma), maintenance (Vishnu), and dissolution (Shiva). These three deities not only function separately, but are also interrelated and form an inseparable cycle in human life and the universe. The worship of each deity at Prambanan Temple reflects the spiritual needs of worshippers to understand and interact with the universe through the various phases of their lives—from birth, to maintenance, to death and renewal. This result confirms the Hindu view of the eternal cycle of the universe, which continues to rotate and repeat endlessly (samsara), and shows the crucial role of Hinduism in providing guidance on life and death.

**The Function of Veneration in Promoting Spiritual and Worldly Wellbeing.** The second finding shows that the worship of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma has a dual function in the lives of Hindus: on the one hand, as a means to obtain spiritual blessings, and on the other hand, to obtain worldly protection and well-being. The worship of Shiva, as the god of dissolution, gives devotees the hope of attaining enlightenment and freeing themselves from the sufferings of life, while the worship of Vishnu as the protector provides a sense of security and well-being. The worship of Brahma, as creator, connects devotees with the origins of life and helps them understand the meaning of creation and their duty in the world. This suggests that cult rituals not only focus on the spiritual dimension, but also provide social and emotional stability for individuals, which in turn supports balance in worldly life.

**Implications for Religious Research and Practice.** The third finding provides new insights into the close relationship between Tri Murti worship and Hindu cosmological concepts in social and religious settings in society. This research underscores the importance of a deeper understanding of the symbolism and meaning of worship rituals at Prambanan Temple, which can be applied in the development of religious practice, religious education, and cultural preservation. These implications are particularly relevant in the context of cultural heritage preservation and the development of culture-based tourism that introduces Hindu philosophy to the wider community. In addition, the findings also suggest that Tri Murti worship can be used as a means of reflection for individuals in facing various life challenges and understanding their place in the cycle of life.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that authorities and religious institutions develop a more holistic approach in teaching Hindu cosmology and worship practices to the younger generation. This is important for maintaining cultural heritage and strengthening religious identity. In addition, further research on the role of Prambanan Temple in the social life of past and present Hindu communities is needed to better understand the changing dynamics of religion and culture in Indonesia.

**Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research:** This research is limited to analysing the symbolism of Tri Murti in Prambanan Temple and related aspects of Hindu cosmology. Future research could expand the scope by examining the relationship between the worship of other Hindu deities, such as Lord Ganesha, and other aspects of human life and existence in Hindu cosmology. In addition, further research into the rituals and ceremonies performed at Prambanan Temple could also provide a deeper understanding of the practical application of this symbolism in the lives of Hindus today.

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