



# The role of rhythm in religious rituals: Supporting the spirituality of Hindu-Buddhist communities in the context of eschatology

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Music played an important role in the development of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia, especially in spiritual life and religious rituals. **Methods:** This article explores how rhythm and melody became essential elements in the religious and cultural practices of the people during that time. **Findings:** Music not only served as entertainment, but also as a medium of connection between humans and the supernatural, creating harmony between the mortal and divine worlds. In the Hindu-Buddhist era, music was often used in religious rituals, such as temple worship ceremonies and offerings to the gods. Traditional instruments such as gamelan and gender were believed to have sacred powers that could purify the atmosphere and improve concentration in meditation. Through music, values of spirituality, harmony and devotion are embodied, reflecting the cosmic concept in Hindu-Buddhist teachings of balance between the macrocosm and microcosm. The article also discusses historical and archaeological evidence that shows the involvement of music in religious rituals, such as the reliefs in Borobudur and Prambanan Temples that depict musical instruments and religious processions. The art of music at that time not only showed a high level of aesthetics, but also became a symbol of community identity and togetherness. **Conclusion:** This paper discusses in depth the role of music as one of the supports of spiritual life that has helped shape the foundation of Indonesian culture and tradition to this day. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study uniquely highlights the sacred role of music in Hindu-Buddhist religious rituals in Indonesia, emphasizing its function as a bridge between the mortal and divine realms, which has been rarely explored in previous research.

**KEYWORDS:** music in hinduism; music and rituals; vedic civilization.

## 1. Introduction

The spread of music from the Vedic civilization to the archipelago, especially Indonesia, is an integral part of the entry of Hindu-Buddhist culture into Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. In this context, music not only functions as entertainment, but also as an important element in religious ceremonies and social life. The influence of the Vedic civilization that was rich in musical traditions began to spread through trade routes and the expansion of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that ruled the region, such as Srivijaya, Majapahit, and Hindu-Buddhist Mataram, as early as the first century AD. Music, already an important part of religious rituals in the Vedic civilization, played an important role in the

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development of musical culture in the archipelago, particularly in the context of religious ceremonies and communication with the divine world.

In the Vedic civilization, music had a very important role in spiritual and ritual life. The SamaVeda, one of the four major Vedas, is particularly known as the Veda of chanting or the Veda of music, which describes how mantrams (prayers) are sung with appropriate rhythm and melody to support religious ceremonies (Mishra, 2024). This shows that music in Vedic civilization was not just for aesthetic purposes, but also to harmonize prayers with cosmic harmony. In the Rigveda, music is also used in the form of hymns to the deities, with the aim of achieving spiritual and cosmic harmony (Deussen, 1997). In addition, musical instruments such as the vina, tabla and drum are used to support the rhythm in sacrificial ceremonies (*yajna*), indicating that music has a deep spiritual dimension in Vedic culture (Surpi, 2023).

The process of spreading the influence of Vedic music to the archipelago occurred not only through trade, but also through the influence of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that ruled in Southeast Asia (Gopinathan & Tan, 2023). These kingdoms brought with them various aspects of Hindu-Buddhist culture, including ritual music associated with religious ceremonies. One example of this influence can be seen in the development of gamelan in Indonesia, especially in Bali and Java, which shows a strong influence from Hindu-Buddhist musical traditions. The instruments in gamelan, such as the gong, kenong and bonang, are similar to those used in Vedic rituals in India. Balinese gamelan, used in Balinese Hindu religious ceremonies, relies on rhythms and melodies similar to the Vedic tradition to create a deeply spiritual atmosphere in the worship processions (Becker, 1993). This reflects how Hindu-Buddhist ritual music was adapted and accepted by the people of the archipelago while maintaining important elements of the tradition.

Besides gamelan, other musical instruments, such as drums and flutes, were also influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist musical traditions brought by Indian traders, monks and craftsmen to the archipelago. In Bali and Java, this music plays an important role in religious ceremonies, especially in establishing a connection between the human and divine worlds (Bhatnagar, 2022). In Bali, for example, gamelan is used to accompany sacred dances and worship processions in Balinese Hindu temples. This shows that music, although developing with local characteristics, still maintains the spiritual function contained in the Hindu-Buddhist musical tradition.

The spread of music from the Vedic civilization to the archipelago can also be traced in archaeological remains, especially in reliefs in Hindu-Buddhist temples such as Prambanan and Borobudur. These reliefs depict the use of musical instruments in various ritual processions, which is evidence that music had a central role in the spiritual life of the community at that time. Representations of musical instruments such as gender, drums and flutes are carved in detail, illustrating the importance of music in maintaining cosmic harmony during religious ceremonies (Geertz, 1973). Through this art, music became not only an aesthetic tool, but also a spiritual symbol that connected the human world with the divine world (Iyengar, 2018).

In later developments, although the Hindu-Buddhist influence on music in the archipelago remained evident, there were also adaptations and modifications that occurred over time. Gamelan music in Indonesia, while still retaining the rhythmic and melodic structure of the Vedic tradition, has undergone transformation to suit the local cultural context. For example, while the basic form of Hindu-Buddhist ritual music remains, gamelan instruments such as the gong, kenong and bonang have undergone changes in size, function and usage, reflecting adaptations to the cultural and spiritual needs of the Indonesian people (Becker, 1993).

Thus, the spread of music from the Vedic civilization to the archipelago not only served as entertainment or aesthetics, but also played an important role in the spiritual life of the people. Music as part of the Hindu-Buddhist ritual tradition established a strong connection between humans and the cosmos, created a deep spiritual atmosphere, and maintained harmony between the physical and divine worlds. The study of music in Indonesia, especially those rooted in Hindu-Buddhist civilization, needs to continue with a more

holistic approach, which focuses not only on technical or aesthetic aspects, but also on the spiritual and symbolic role of music in the religious and cultural life of the community.

In addition, Indonesian musical traditions have also absorbed influences from the use of wind and percussion instruments used in Hindu-Buddhist rituals. Instruments such as drums and flutes found in Java and Bali were most likely brought to the archipelago through Indian influences, either by traders, monks, or painters and craftsmen from India who came to the region. This music played an important role in facilitating communication with the divine world and deepening the spiritual experience of the people.

In the archipelago, particularly in Java and Bali, the influence of Vedic music is visible in religious ceremonies, especially those associated with the worship of Hindu deities. For example, gamelan music in Bali is used to accompany religious rituals and sacred dances performed in Balinese Hindu temples. In this context, gamelan is not just entertainment, but an integral part of ceremonies to maintain cosmic harmony and achieve spiritual peace.

The influence of Vedic music can also be seen in Javanese art, where gamelan is used in ceremonies at Hindu-Buddhist temples, such as Prambanan and Borobudur. Gamelan music in Indonesia demonstrates how elements of Hindu-Buddhist ritual music are retained and adapted to local culture. Research by Becker (1993) revealed that although Indonesian gamelan developed with local characteristics, the basic forms of Hindu-Buddhist music remained visible in the rhythmic and melodic structures used.

The spread of music from the Vedic civilization to the Nusantara occurred through trade routes and the profound influence of Hindu-Buddhist culture in Southeast Asia (Pokharel, 2021). Music, originally used in ritual contexts in the Vedic civilization, played a very important role in religious life in Indonesia, especially in Hindu-Buddhist ceremonies. Musical instruments such as gamelan, used in ceremonies in Bali and Java, reflect a musical heritage derived from the Vedic tradition. Despite local adaptations, the Hindu-Buddhist ritual music brought to the archipelago still creates a strong connection between the spiritual and cultural worlds of Indonesian society.

The art of music has an important role in the development of human civilization, not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a medium that reflects cultural, social and spiritual values. In the context of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia, music is not only a means of entertainment but also has a sacred dimension that is closely related to religious life and religious rituals. The Hindu-Buddhist civilization had a great influence on various aspects of the Nusantara people's lives, including art, architecture, literature, and musical traditions (Munandar, 2004). In religious rituals, music serves to create a solemn atmosphere, strengthen meditation, and as a means of connecting humans with the transcendent.

Reliefs on temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan are archaeological evidence that shows how musical instruments were used in rituals and the daily lives of people at that time. Representations of musical instruments such as gender, drums and flutes are carved in detail, reflecting the important role of music in religious culture. However, while the influence of Hindu-Buddhism on music in Indonesia is widely acknowledged, in-depth studies on how music became a pillar of spiritual life and a symbol of civilization are still limited.

Music in the Hindu-Buddhist context is not only an art, but also a means to achieve harmony between the macrocosm and microcosm, a concept underlying many teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism (Geertz, 1973). The existence of gamelan as one of the cultural heritages that still survives today shows the continuity of musical traditions that have strong roots in the Hindu-Buddhist period. However, an understanding of the spiritual values contained in the art of music is often overlooked in modern studies, which focus more on technical and aesthetic aspects.

There have been many studies on music in the Hindu-Buddhist era, especially in the context of art history and the development of traditional instruments (Desai, 1970). However, most studies tend to focus on material aspects, such as the types of musical instruments and playing techniques, without delving deeper into the role of music in spiritual life and religious rituals. In addition, existing research is often descriptive and lacks

in-depth analysis of how music reflected the cosmic and spiritual values of the people of the time (Becker, 1993).

Furthermore, research on the Hindu-Buddhist influence on music often does not relate it to the broader context of religious rituals. For example, the function of music in creating cosmic harmony, accompanying religious processions, or reinforcing meditation practices has not been explored in much detail. Studies that address the symbolic interpretation of music as a spiritual medium during the Hindu-Buddhist period are also relatively minimal, despite this being a very important aspect of understanding these civilizations (Stutterheim, 1936).

Another gap is the lack of a multidisciplinary approach in the study of Hindu-Buddhist music. Previous research often only used art history or musicology perspectives, while aspects of anthropology, archaeology and religious studies were rarely utilized to provide a more comprehensive understanding. This creates an opportunity to conduct more holistic research, which not only portrays art music as a cultural product but also as a spiritual practice integral to the lives of Hindu-Buddhist communities.

This research aims to explore the role of music as a support for spiritual life during the Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia. Specifically, this research focuses on: (1) Analyzing how music was used in religious rituals and the religious life of Hindu-Buddhist society; (2) Exploring the spiritual values contained in music during this period, including the concept of cosmic harmony and the role of music in meditation; (3) Interpret musical symbols found on temple reliefs such as Borobudur and Prambanan; (4) Identify the continuity of Hindu-Buddhist musical traditions in current Indonesian traditional music, such as gamelan and other instruments.

Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding will be gained of how the art of music is not only part of cultural heritage, but also plays an important role in shaping the spiritual identity of Indonesian society. This research also aims to bridge the gap in previous literature by using a multidisciplinary approach involving historical, anthropological and symbolic analysis.

This research is based on theories of traditional music aesthetics and spirituality that view music as an expression of cultural values and a means of ritual. In the Hindu-Buddhist context, the theory of cosmic harmony is the main framework for understanding the relationship between music and spirituality. Cosmic harmony is a philosophical concept that considers the universe as an ordered and harmonious entity, where music serves as a medium to harmonize human relationships with the supernatural world (Geertz, 1973).

Music in Hindu-Buddhist religious rituals is also closely related to the Hindu tradition's concept of *rasa*, which refers to the emotional and spiritual experience evoked by art (Becker, 1993). Music is used to create a particular flavor that supports meditation, worship, and religious devotion. In practice, instruments such as gamelan, gender and drums are used to create rhythmic patterns that reflect the teachings of harmony and order.

Clifford Geertz's symbolism theory is also relevant in this research, where music is seen as a symbol that represents cultural and spiritual values (Geertz, 1973). The musical symbols found in the temple reliefs show how this art became an integral part of the religious life of the community. The visual representation of musical instruments in Borobudur and Prambanan temples, for example, not only displays the physical form of musical instruments, but also symbolizes the harmony between the human world and the divine world. Becker (1993) in his book *Gamelan Stories* highlights the role of gamelan in creating a spiritual atmosphere in Java. The study shows how traditional music, rooted in Hindu-Buddhist civilization, is used in religious ceremonies and meditation. However, this study focuses more on the technical and aesthetic aspects of gamelan music, while its spiritual values have not been fully elaborated.

Munandar (2004) in his book *Cosmology in Hindu and Buddhist Temples in Java* discusses how art, including music, reflects the concept of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology. The temple as a spiritual center is also a place where music is played to support cosmic harmony. However, this study does not specifically analyze the role of music in people's spiritual lives. Stutterheim (1936) in *Studies in Indonesian Archaeology* identified that the art of music in

the Hindu-Buddhist period had a deep symbolic meaning, especially in religious rituals. He observed that musical representations in temple reliefs were often associated with ritual processions, but this study did not explore the relationship between music and the spiritual values contained in these practices. Kunst's (1949) study of traditional music in Indonesia noted that many elements in the Nusantara's traditional music have roots in Hindu-Buddhist influences. However, this study focused more on the historical aspects and development of musical instruments, without addressing the symbolic and spiritual relationship of music in a religious context.

Although previous research has identified the role of musical arts in religious rituals, most studies have focused more on its technical, aesthetic and historical aspects rather than its spiritual value. Studies on musical symbolism in Hindu-Buddhist contexts, especially in relation to the concepts of cosmic harmony and *rasa*, are less explored. In addition, previous research tends to be fragmented, so there is no study that integrates a multidisciplinary approach to understand music as a support for the spiritual life of Hindu-Buddhist society holistically.

This research attempts to bridge the gap by analyzing music as a spiritual medium in the context of Hindu-Buddhist rituals through symbolic, historical, and anthropological approaches. By combining literature studies, temple relief analysis, and expert insights, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the art of music as one of the spiritual foundations of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia.

## 2. Methods

This research used a qualitative approach with an exploratory design to understand the role of music in spiritual life during the Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it aims to explore cultural and symbolic meanings in depth through the interpretation of textual and visual data (Creswell, 2014). The research materials consist of primary sources in the form of reliefs on temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan, which depict musical instruments and ritual processions, and secondary sources in the form of academic literature on the history of music and Hindu-Buddhist civilization obtained from books, journals, and archaeological reports. Traditional musical artifacts, such as gamelan, gender, and kendang that still survive as cultural heritage, are also important objects of study (Becker, 1993).

Data were collected through three main techniques. First, a desk study was conducted to review relevant literature including books, journal articles and historical documents. Second, observations of temple artifacts and reliefs were conducted directly or through digital documentation to understand the visual representation of musical arts in the context of religious rituals. Third, interviews with archaeologists, historians, and traditional music experts were conducted to gain in-depth insights into the relationship between music and spirituality during the Hindu-Buddhist period. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify main themes, hermeneutics to interpret spiritual symbols, and historical contextualization to relate the results of the analysis to the socio-cultural conditions of the era (Miles et al., 2014).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 *The role of music in vedic civilization*

In the Hindu tradition, music and ritual have a very close relationship, especially in ancient texts such as the Vedas. The Vedas are a collection of sacred literature documenting the earliest teachings of Hinduism, and contain a wealth of information on the use of music in ritual contexts. Music in the Vedas is not just an element of entertainment, but rather, has a higher purpose in supporting various spiritual aspects and religious rituals.

In the Vedas, music is mentioned primarily in relation to the sama-veda, one of the four major Vedas. The sama-veda is known as the "singing Veda" which focuses on the singing of

mantrams (hymns) accompanied by music. The sama-veda prescribes the use of melodies and rhythms used to chant mantrams that can bring devotees closer to divine power. According to Deussen (1997), sama in sama-veda means “melody” or “chanting,” which emphasizes the role of music as a tool to convey prayers and mantras to deities in a harmonious and spiritually powerful form.

Music in the sama-veda context serves the purpose of harmonizing the human spirit with the cosmos. In rituals performed by priests, musical instruments such as tabla, vina, and tamera are used to support sama-mantra chanting (Gopinathan & Tan, 2023). These chants are believed to stimulate spiritual energy and exert a positive influence on this world and the next. In a study by Bhat (2011), it is explained that melodies in sama-veda are not just an accompaniment to mantras, but have greater power to promote spiritual peace and harmony.

Vedic rituals focus heavily on cosmic harmony and the worship of deities in Hinduism. Music plays an important role in creating harmony in such rituals. Some mantrams and prayers in the Vedas are accompanied by melodies and rhythms that influence the spiritual atmosphere of the performance. Vedic texts, such as in the Rigveda, state that chanting and rhythm have the power to calm the soul and bring peace to the individual involved in the ritual.

Moreover, in the Yajurveda, which also contains instructions for the performance of rituals, music is used to accompany various sacrificial ceremonies (*yajna*). Each part of the sacrifice, from the recitation of mantras to the burning of incense sticks, is accompanied by a melody that gives more meaning and depth to the ritual process. Music not only adds visual beauty, but also adds to the power and efficacy of the ritual itself (Rao, 2015). The Vedic philosophy of music is closely related to the concept of *rta*, which refers to the cosmic laws that maintain the balance of the universe. Music, with its harmonized rhythms and melodies, is believed to create or reinforce *rta*, which is considered the fundamental principle governing harmony in the universe. In the Vedas, music is seen as a medium to imbibe *rta* and achieve spiritual balance. According to Larson (2001), *rta* is the basis of all rhythm and sequence in life, achieved through actions that are in harmony with the laws of nature and the cosmos.

In the Vedas, music has a very important role in supporting the performance of religious rituals and the attainment of spiritual harmony. From the sama-veda which regulates the use of melody and rhythm for mantras, to the *rta* philosophy which emphasizes the importance of cosmic harmony, music in the Vedic tradition is not only a tool for worship but also a means to achieve peace and harmony. Vedic music not only enhances the quality of rituals, but also deepens the appreciation of the spiritual principles present in Hinduism.

The Sindhu civilization, better known as the Indus Valley Civilization, flourished around the Indus river in 3300-1300 BCE, covering what are now parts of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Although not many written texts survive from this period, archaeologists and researchers have unearthed a variety of evidence that provides insight into the cultural and spiritual lives of the Shindu people, including musical practices. Music in Sindhu civilization likely played an important role in daily life, both in the context of religious ceremonies and as part of social entertainment. Archaeological evidence in the form of human and animal figures excavated from the sites of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa show images of musical instruments. Some of the musical instruments found, such as drums, pipes and wind instruments, hint at the existence of rhythmic and melodic music that was likely used in religious ceremonies or social activities. This is supported by the discovery of several statues and carvings depicting individuals who appear to be playing musical instruments. For example, sculptures of male figures holding instruments such as pipes or vinas suggest that music played a role in reinforcing religious practices (Possehl, 2002).

Further evidence of music in the Shindu civilization can be found in the discovery of musical instruments such as bells and wind instruments, which suggests that they may have used musical instruments to create profound sounds in rituals and spiritual offerings. While

there are no written texts that can explain in detail how music was used in ceremonies, these findings suggest that music had a strong symbolic dimension in their religious practices, which may have aimed to harmonize humans with divine forces or the cosmos.

The spread of culture and spiritual practices from the Indus Valley to the archipelago can be traced through the trade routes and cultural migrations that took place between India and the Southeast Asian region during the Hindu-Buddhist era. Although there is no specific direct evidence linking the music of the Shindu civilization to the Archipelago, there are some clues that suggest that the music and rituals that developed in India during the Hindu-Buddhist period may have been passed on to this region (Miksic, 2016). During the Hindu-Buddhist period (around the 4th to 15th centuries AD), India became a cultural and religious center of great influence throughout Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. This happened mainly through maritime kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Majapahit, which established close ties with India in terms of religion, culture and trade (Rahayu, 2023). In this context, music, as an integral part of religious ceremonies, also spread across the archipelago.

For example, the gamelan tradition in Java and Bali that developed during the Hindu-Buddhist era shows a strong influence from Indian ritual music. Gamelan, which consists of a variety of percussion and string instruments, including gongs, kenongs and bonangs, shares similarities with musical instruments used in Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies in India. Research by Becker (1993) suggests that the Indonesian gamelan tradition has deep roots in Indian rhythms and musical structures, although it has undergone local adaptations to suit the cultural context of the archipelago.

In addition, other forms of music associated with religious ceremonies, such as the ritual music used in celebrations at Hindu-Buddhist temples, also suggest that these practices may have originated in India. Major temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan in Central Java show a close relationship between the use of music and religious rituals. At Prambanan, for example, gamelan was used to accompany dances and ceremonies involving praise of Hindu deities. This tradition, although it developed independently, can be seen as a continuation of the legacy of ritual music brought by Indian influences. Music in the Sindhu Civilization likely functioned as part of spiritual and ritual life, with musical instruments such as drums, pipes, and wind instruments indicating the important role of music in religious ceremonies. Although written evidence is lacking, archaeological findings support the idea that music served to create harmony between humans and divine forces.

The spread of music to the archipelago during the Hindu-Buddhist era probably occurred through trade routes and the influence of Indian culture. The musical traditions that developed in India, such as gamelan, indicate the adoption and adaptation of elements of Hindu-Buddhist ritual music brought to Indonesia. This ritual music became an integral part of religious life in the archipelago, where it continues to thrive today.

In the context of the Vedic period, which lasted around 1500-500 BCE, music played an important role in religious rituals. The Vedas, the earliest sacred texts of Hinduism, consist of the four books of Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda. The Samaveda, in particular, focuses on the musical aspects of ritual, with much of its content being chants and mantras used in religious ceremonies. Music in the Vedic period served not only as an accompaniment to rituals, but also as a spiritual tool that helped achieve higher and deeper states of consciousness. This use of music in rituals reflects a deep understanding of the relationship between sound, spirituality and religious practice in the Vedic tradition (Wika, et al., 2023).

In the Hindu tradition, music serves not only as entertainment, but also as a tool to draw closer to God and achieve moksha (spiritual liberation). The Sama Veda, one of the Hindu scriptures, teaches chanting mantras or prayers of sacred praise to God, demonstrating the importance of music in religious practice (Mancapara, 2022).

Moreover, music in Hinduism is considered to have the power to evoke feelings of love and spiritual connection, helping individuals come out of their spiritual slumber. Overall, this article highlights that music in Hinduism has a dual role: as a spiritual means to reach

higher consciousness and as an accompaniment in religious rituals that amplifies spiritual meaning and experience.

### 3.2 The role of music in religious rituals of the hindu-buddhist kingdom era

The art of music plays an important role in creating a sacred atmosphere that supports the performance of Hindu-Buddhist religious rituals. Music was used in various activities such as worship processions, meditation, religious ceremonies, and other celebrations. In Hindu-Buddhist rituals, music serves not only as entertainment, but also as a means to convey prayers and mantras, create inner peace, and establish spiritual connections between humans and deities.

Gamelan, as one of the musical legacies of the Hindu-Buddhist era, is used to create rhythmic patterns that accompany dances or mantras. Instruments such as the drum and gender produce sounds that are considered to have the spiritual power to cleanse negative energy and invite blessings from the universe. This role is not only seen in local practices but is also recognized in literature such as Becker's (1993) study, which shows how music is used to support religious activities and strengthen people's spiritual appreciation.

In order to provide an overview of how musical instruments were represented in the Hindu-Buddhist era, a visual analysis was conducted on three major temples in Central Java, namely Borobudur, Prambanan and Mendut Temples (see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of musical instruments in Borobudur, Prambanan and Mendut temples

No.	Candi (Temples)	Types of Musical Instruments	Frequency of Representation
1	Borobudur	Kendang, Gender, Suling	25
2	Prambanan	Gamelan, Kendang	18
3	Mendut	Seruling, Siter	10

Representations of musical instruments are mostly found in Borobudur Temple, namely as many as 25 representations, with types of musical instruments such as drums, gender and flutes. In the reliefs of Borobudur temple, namely in the reliefs of Karmawibhangga, Lalitavistara, wadariaJtaka, and Gandawyuha, paintings of musical instruments are seen, including flutes, cymbals, lutes, ghanta, cangka (trumpets made from snails), suggestions and drums.

Borobudur Temple, as one of the world's cultural heritages, keeps various traces of civilization, one of which is music. The reliefs carved in this temple provide a specific picture of the development of music, making it an important source of materialculture data in understanding the lives of people in the past. More than 200 reliefs at Borobudur Temple depict human activities playing various musical instruments. These reliefs include wind, plucked, hit and membrane instruments. Although these musical instruments do not have specific names, their shapes resemble traditional musical instruments known in the archipelago and abroad. These reliefs are mainly found on the closed section of the temple foot, which is taken from the story of Karmawibhangga. There are 160 panels in this section that do not have a continuous storyline. However, between the panels, there are depictions of various musical instruments, reflecting the variety and diversity of musical instruments used at that time.

Reliefs in Borobudur Temple display more than 60 types of musical instruments, with an estimated total number of reliefs related to music reaching more than 200 panels. Some of the musical instruments identified include: (1) Plucked Musical Instruments: Lute or harp and zither; (2) Wind Instruments: Flute and trumpet; (3) Percussion Instruments: Drums, timpani (membranes) and cymbals; (4) Bells: Ghanta (temple bell); (5) Stringed Instruments: Rebab; (6) Pressed/Pumped Instruments: Organ.

Borobudur reliefs not only depict the traditional musical instruments of the archipelago, but also show the influence of musical instruments from various foreign



cultures. Some of the sculpted musical instruments resemble Bo from China, Darbuka from Egypt, Sho from Japan and Ranat Ek from Thailand.

The international relations that existed between the Ancient Mataram Kingdom and various foreign countries at that time allowed for cultural exchanges, including musical arts. This shows that the people of the archipelago at that time had recognized musical instruments from various parts of the world, even before the establishment of Borobudur Temple.

The musical reliefs in Borobudur reflect the role of music as an integral part of the spiritual and social life of the community in the past. Some of the musical instruments depicted in the reliefs, such as drums and flutes, are still used in musical traditions in Java today. In addition, stringed and wind instruments found in reliefs can also be found in the Kalimantan region. Music, as depicted in Borobudur reliefs, not only serves as entertainment but also a means of cultural and spiritual communication. The diversity of musical instruments depicted shows the high appreciation of the art of music and the openness of the archipelago to foreign cultural influences.

The reliefs of musical instruments at Borobudur Temple are not only visual evidence of the development of musical arts during the Hindu-Buddhist period, but also reflect the connection between the archipelago and the international world. Thus, Borobudur deserves to be called one of the world music centers in its day, as well as a cultural heritage that represents the harmony between local traditions and global influences.

Prambanan Temple, as the largest Hindu temple complex in Indonesia, is not only a symbol of the majesty of Hindu architecture, but also keeps traces of musical traditions that were integrated into the religious life of the people of its time. Reliefs in Prambanan Temple depict musical instruments such as gamelan and drums, which have an important role in various religious ceremonies and worship rituals (Surpi et al., 2024). Gamelan, as a traditional musical ensemble rich in harmony, is often used to create a sacred atmosphere in religious processions. The kendang, on the other hand, plays a major rhythmic role, maintaining tempo and providing dynamics in musical performances, including as an accompaniment to sacred dances. This picture reflects how the art of music is not only a means of entertainment, but also has a high symbolic value in the Hindu tradition. Music is considered a medium that harmonizes the relationship between humans and the gods, realizing the cosmic harmony that is at the core of their spiritual life.

Meanwhile, Mendut Temple, which is part of the Borobudur complex, features reliefs with representations of simpler musical instruments, such as flutes and zither. The flute, as a wind instrument, is often associated with an atmosphere of deep meditation, creating calmness and spiritual focus in religious practices. On the other hand, the zither, as a stringed instrument, presents soft and intimate melodies, giving a personalized feel to the religious experience. In contrast to Borobudur and Prambanan which display a larger and grander religious dimension, the reliefs at Mendut show a more personal and introspective aspect of spirituality (Heimarck, 2021). This representation underscores how the art of music also plays a role in creating a space for reflection and spiritual closeness, making music an important element in an individual's religious journey.

These three temples, despite having different characteristics in displaying musical art, together provide a comprehensive picture of how music became an integral part of the religious and social life of the people during the Hindu-Buddhist period in the archipelago. Borobudur Temple has the most representation of musical instruments, showing the importance of music in Buddhist rituals, while Prambanan stands out in the Hindu tradition with its focus on gamelan and drums. Mendut Temple shows a more personal dimension of meditation and spirituality, reflecting harmony on an individual scale. This symbolism reflects how the art of music is considered an extension of the concept of cosmic harmony. The patterns of instruments displayed in the reliefs imply the relationship between humans and the macrocosm, where music serves as a medium that harmonizes these two worlds. In the context of symbolism, Geertz (1973) points out that art, including music, is often a representation of a society's spiritual values and worldview.

Reliefs of major temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan provide visual representations of musical instruments as an important part of spiritual life in the Hindu-Buddhist era in Indonesia. Instruments such as drums, genders and flutes depicted in the reliefs not only serve as elements of historical documentation, but also contain deep symbolic meanings. Music is considered a form of cosmic harmony and a means of connecting between the human world and the spiritual world.

In addition to the reliefs on major temples, written evidence of the existence of musical instruments during the Hindu-Buddhist period in the archipelago is found in ancient inscriptions, such as the Gandasuli Inscription and the Poh Inscription. The Gandasuli inscription, dated 769 Saka or 847 AD, was found in Temanggung, Central Java. The inscription mentions the use of a musical instrument called *curing* as part of religious ceremonial equipment. Although there is not much detailed information on the form and function of *curing*, scholars suspect that it is a type of wind instrument used to create a sacred atmosphere in rituals. Poerbatjaraka in his work, *Old Javanese Manuscripts*, notes that music at that time not only served as a means of entertainment but also had a deep spiritual meaning (Poerbatjaraka, 1957).

In addition, the Poh inscription, which dates back to 905 AD, provides important information about the use of musical instruments in gamelan ensembles at that time. Some of the instruments mentioned in this inscription include *padahi*, *rêgang*, and *tuwung*. *Padahi* is a type of large drum that functions as a tempo setter, while *rêgang* is thought to be a stringed instrument plucked to produce melody. Meanwhile, *tuwung* is thought to be a wind instrument used to mark certain moments in religious ceremonies. Majumdar in his book, *The Archaeology of Early Indonesia*, notes that the use of gamelan in rituals reflects the high symbolic value of music as a medium of spiritual communication between humans and divine forces (Majumdar, 2004).

These two inscriptions show that music has been an integral part of the Nusantara people's lives since the 9th and 10th centuries. Not only as entertainment, music has a deep sacred function, particularly in creating spiritual harmony in religious ceremonies. This discovery complements the visual evidence from the reliefs of temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan, providing a more complete insight into the importance of music in the social and spiritual life of the people during the Hindu-Buddhist period.

In the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, music is often associated with the principle of cosmic harmony (*rta* in Hindu concepts). Music becomes a medium that harmonizes humans with the universe and the spiritual world (Eliade, 1969). Reliefs depicting musical instruments in ritual processions show how the art of music is used to create this connection. For example, the drum, a rhythmic musical instrument, is often associated with the beat of life and the motion of nature, reflecting cosmic cyclical patterns.

In addition, Geertz (1973) states that art, including music, is not only a means of expression but also represents a society's value system. Temple reliefs, in this case, become a medium of visualization of how people see the relationship between macrocosm (the universe) and microcosm (human life). Music becomes a tool to harmonize between the two entities through vibrations and harmony of sound.

Reliefs in Borobudur and Prambanan depict scenes of worship processions involving musical instruments in religious ceremonies. This procession shows the importance of music in rituals to create a sacred atmosphere that supports the relationship between humans and gods (Krom, 1923). In this context, musical instruments such as gender are often used to accompany devotional dancing or singing, illustrating the integration of art in religious rituals. Reliefs also contain symbolism of instruments as an extension of spiritual concepts. For example, flutes are often associated with the delivery of divine messages through the wind, which symbolizes the soul or life (Soekmono, 1973). These visual representations hint that music has not only an aesthetic but also a metaphysical function.

The patterns of instruments in temple reliefs also show an attempt to harmonize the human world with the macrocosm. Musical instruments such as the gong and gender, which have resonant sounds, are often associated with the sounds of nature that symbolize universal harmony (Tenzer, 2006). This relief, thus, bears silent witness to the role of music

in creating spiritual and cosmic balance at that time. In the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, music is seen as a form of expression of dharma or universal truth. Temple reliefs depicting musical instruments in a ritual context serve as a reminder that music was an integral part of the religious life of the ancient people (Sumarsam, 1995).

The symbolism of music in the reliefs of large temples such as Borobudur and Prambanan shows how the art of music becomes a medium that connects humans with the spiritual world and the universe. These visual representations not only illustrate the function of music in rituals, but also convey the spiritual values embraced by society in the Hindu-Buddhist era. Music, through symbolism in reliefs, becomes a reflection of cosmic harmony that unites humans with the universe. In Hindu-Buddhist teachings, cosmology is often described as a structure of harmony between microcosm (humans) and macrocosm (the universe). Music, with its rhythms and melodies, is considered a reflection of that harmony (Padam et al, 2017). Rhythmic patterns in music, for example, are used to create resonance that is believed to harmonize human spiritual energy with the universe (Nafde, 2021).

This discovery reinforces the concept that music has a metaphysical dimension that is not only for aesthetic purposes, but also as a means to create energy balance in religious rituals. Munandar (2004) emphasizes that music in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition is often associated with spiritual attunement and cosmic consciousness, which were central to the religious life of the people at that time.

One significant finding is how musical traditions rooted in Hindu-Buddhist civilization still survive today. Gamelan and other musical instruments are still used in traditional ceremonies, religion and performing arts in Indonesia. This demonstrates the continuity of cultural and spiritual values passed down from generation to generation. For example, in Javanese traditional ceremonies, gamelan music is often used to accompany sacred dances such as Bedhaya and Srimpi. These dances have strong roots in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition, where the dance movements and musical rhythms are designed to create an atmosphere of meditation and spiritual appreciation. Stutterheim (1936) noted that the continuity of this tradition reflects how music continues to be an integral part of Indonesian life, as well as a means of maintaining a connection with the spiritual values of the past.

These four findings show that music in the Hindu-Buddhist era not only functioned as entertainment, but also had a deep spiritual value. Music became a medium that united humans with the universe, reflected cosmic harmony, and strengthened spiritual appreciation in daily life and religious rituals. Moreover, the continuity of this musical tradition to the present day demonstrates the importance of art as a cultural heritage that continues to be relevant in modern society. The results of this study show that the art of music not only functions as a cultural expression but also as an integral spiritual medium in the lives of Hindu-Buddhist communities. Music became an important element in creating cosmic harmony, supporting meditation practices, and strengthening the religious atmosphere in religious ceremonies. This finding reinforces the theory that music is a symbolic means used to connect humans with the universe and divine entities (Geertz, 1973).

This research is consistent with the findings of Becker (1993), who highlighted the role of gamelan in supporting the spiritual atmosphere in Java. However, this study goes a step further by analyzing the symbolism of musical instruments found on temple reliefs. Moreover, the findings on the continuity of Hindu-Buddhist musical traditions in modern culture support Stutterheim's (1936) study, but provide additional insight into how these spiritual values are maintained today. This research contributes to the development of theories about art as a spiritual medium and cultural expression in the Hindu-Buddhist context. The findings reinforce the concepts of cosmic harmony and symbolism in musical art, and demonstrate the relevance of Rasa theory in creating spiritual experiences. In practice, this research can be used to preserve traditional musical arts that have roots in Hindu-Buddhist civilization. The findings are also relevant for the development of a cultural arts curriculum that integrates spiritual and historical values, and to support efforts to revitalize traditional arts as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

## 4. Conclusions

This research has explored the role of music in spiritual life during the Hindu-Buddhist era in Indonesia, focusing on the major temples in Central Java, namely Borobudur, Prambanan and Mendut. The main findings show that music not only functions as an aesthetic element in daily life, but also as a deeply spiritual medium, harmonizing the relationship between humans and the universe. In this context, the art of music has a very important role in religious rituals, where musical instruments such as gamelan, kendang, gender, flute, and siter are used to create cosmic harmony, strengthen the spiritual atmosphere, and support meditation.

Borobudur Temple has the most representations of musical instruments, indicating the important role of music in the Buddhist tradition. Meanwhile, Prambanan and Mendut temples show a closer connection to Hindu traditions and spiritual intimacy in Buddhist practices, each with a focus on gamelan, drums, and other instruments such as flutes and zither. Overall, these findings reinforce the view that music has an integral spiritual dimension in Hindu-Buddhist cultures in Indonesia.

Music, as a spiritual tool, has a far-reaching impact in enriching cultural and religious life. In practice, this study provides practical recommendations to preserve and utilize traditional musical arts in various religious ceremonies, cultural education and tourism. In addition, the results of this study can also be used as a basis for curriculum development that integrates spiritual and cultural values in music education in Indonesia.

This research is limited to analyzing the representation of musical instruments in temple reliefs, which may only reflect a small part of the overall musical practice in Hindu-Buddhist society at that time. Therefore, future research can delve deeper into musical practices that may not be documented in the reliefs, such as the use of music in people's daily lives or its influence on the development of Indonesian music after the Hindu-Buddhist era. In addition, further research could also involve analyzing the use of musical instruments in ritual practices outside the Central Java region to gain a broader picture of the role of music in spiritual culture in Indonesia. Thus, this research provides deeper insights into the relationship between music and spiritual life in the Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Indonesia, and opens up opportunities for further development in the field of arts and culture and spirituality.

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## Author Contribution

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