

Javanese in Buddhist Devotion: Linguistic Identity and Spiritual Depth in *Puja Bhakti*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of the use of Javanese language in the practice of *Puja Bhakti* at Giri Surya Monastery, Yogyakarta, on the spiritual experience of Buddhists. A qualitative research method was used, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observation of the ritual practices. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify themes related to the factors and benefits of using Javanese in *Puja Bhakti*. The main findings of this study show that the use of Javanese—especially in the recitation of prayers and chanted *mantras*—deepens the meaning of the prayers, creates a more vibrant atmosphere of worship, enhances concentration, and helps devotees achieve inner peace. This practice also strengthens devotees' emotional connection with both Buddhism and their local culture. The implication of this study is that integrating local languages into religious practices can enrich the spiritual experiences of devotees, deepen their understanding of religious teachings, and help preserve local culture. The originality of this study lies in its focus on the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti*, which has not been widely discussed in Buddhist literature. It also contributes to the study of religion by linking local language and culture in the context of worship.

Keywords: Buddhism; Local Culture; Javanese Language; *Puja Bhakti*.

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INTRODUCTION

Puja Bhakti in Javanese, conducted at Vihara Giri Surya, Yogyakarta, is a spiritual practice that combines elements of Buddhism with the unique local culture of Java. In Indonesia, cultural diversity is an integral part of religious life (Ansari, 2024), and the Javanese language is a strong cultural element in the daily lives of the Javanese people (T. A. Pamungkas & Rigianti, 2023). The use of Javanese in this *Puja Bhakti* ritual is not merely a means of praying, but also reflects how Buddhism adapts to the local culture to provide a more profound and relevant worship experience for its devotees (Widodo, 2024). In this context, the practice of *Puja Bhakti* not only enhances the understanding of Buddhism

(Yadnyawati, 2024), but also resonates emotionally with the people through a language and culture they have long known and cherished.

This phenomenon is particularly interesting because, in many contexts, religion and culture often go hand in hand, creating a mutually beneficial relationship between the two (Kurniawan, 2017). At Vihara Giri Surya, Buddhists use the ancient Javanese language in praying, which contributes to a more vibrant atmosphere of worship. The use of a language that is familiar to them allows devotees to focus more deeply and absorb the meaning of every word spoken in prayer, fostering a stronger emotional connection. This illustrates how local culture, in this case, Javanese, enriches religious practice and offers a distinct experience compared to the more common use of Indonesian or Pali.

From a social perspective, the practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese also reflects the importance of cultural preservation within a religious context (R. D. Paramita, 2020). In the midst of globalization and rapid cultural change, Buddhists in Java are making efforts to preserve local languages and traditions through their religious practices. Although Buddhism often utilizes international languages such as Pali and Sanskrit, the integration of Javanese into these rituals demonstrates the devotees' commitment to maintaining their cultural identity while enriching their spiritual experience. This highlights the importance of preserving local wisdom in religious contexts, as it enhances the spiritual dimension and simultaneously strengthens the sense of community among devotees. Thus, *Puja Bhakti* conducted in Javanese or the mother tongue can be seen as a form of cultural preservation (Purnomo, 2019), which provides a unique and meaningful experience for the community of Vihara Giri Surya.

Several previous studies have explored the implementation of religious rituals within the context of local culture. For example, studies on the use of local languages in religious practices in Bali (Suweta, 2019; Tristananda, 2019) highlights the emotional connection between devotees and prayers chanted in their native languages (Luwih, 2025; C. Pamungkas, 2014). Other studies emphasize the significance of music in religious rituals (Iswanto, 2015; Suharyanto et al., 2020), such as the use of *gamelan* in Balinese Hindu worship practices (Darmawan & Krishna, 2020; Darya, 2019; Parmajaya, 2020).

In the context of Buddhism, some studies discuss the influence of local culture on worship practices (Sriyadi, 2022; Widodo, 2024), but the use of Javanese language in *Puja Bhakti* remains underexplored. Most of the existing literature tends to focus on ritual aspects without engaging deeply with the cultural dimensions. Studies on *Puja Bhakti* itself more commonly refer to the use of Indonesian or Pali (Salamah, 2020), while the incorporation of Javanese in prayers and mantras has received little scholarly attention. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by providing a deeper understanding of how the Javanese language and culture influence and enhance the spiritual depth of Buddhist worship at Vihara Giri Surya.

This study aims to explore the factors that motivate Buddhists to perform *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese and to examine its impact on their spiritual experience. It seeks to identify how the use of the local language enhances devotees' understanding of prayers and strengthens their connection to Buddhism. Furthermore, the study investigates how chanted recitations influence the

atmosphere of worship and contribute to a deeper sense of inner peace among practitioners.

The integration of the Javanese language in *Puja Bhakti* rituals is believed to significantly enhance the spiritual experience of Buddhist devotees. This belief is grounded in the understanding that language is not merely a tool of communication, but also a medium through which meaning, emotion, and cultural values are conveyed (Berger, 1967; Fishman, 1972). When devotees recite prayers in Javanese—a language rich in metaphor, moral idioms, and philosophical nuance—they are not simply performing a ritual act, but engaging in a culturally embedded spiritual dialogue. The familiarity of the mother tongue fosters emotional intimacy with sacred texts, enabling deeper absorption and internalization of meaning, as supported by the phenomenological theory of lived religion (Ammerman, 2014). Moreover, the aesthetic qualities of Javanese—including its rhythmic flow and symbolic vocabulary—contribute to a more solemn and immersive atmosphere of worship. This aligns with Eliade's (1959) view that ritual and sacred language function as hierophanies—manifestations of the sacred within the profane world. Such heightened concentration and emotional resonance allow devotees to experience a sense of transcendence and a deeper connection to Buddhist teachings, one that extends beyond the ritual space into their everyday ethical lives. Therefore, the use of Javanese in Buddhist worship is not merely a linguistic choice but a spiritual strategy—one that bridges cultural heritage with religious depth.

METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is Buddhists who practice *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese at Vihara Giri Surya, located in Dukuh Wiloso, Girikarto Village, Kapanewon Panggang, Gunung Kidul Regency, Yogyakarta. The main focus of this research is to understand the factors that encourage them to perform *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese. The research employs a qualitative approach (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018), as this method allows for an in-depth exploration of the factors that motivate the practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese. Furthermore, qualitative methods were selected because they provide a broader understanding of subjective experiences (Ardayan et al., 2023) and offer researchers the flexibility to explore spiritual feelings that cannot be captured by quantitative methods.

The data sources for this study consist of informants, specifically devotees who actively participate in *Puja Bhakti* at Giri Surya Monastery. Data were collected through interviews with several randomly selected respondents (Sumargo, 2020). These interviews aimed to explore their spiritual experiences and perspectives on the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* worship. In addition to the interviews, observations of the *Puja Bhakti* rituals were conducted to further understand the atmosphere in the temple during the worship practice.

The data collection technique employed semi-structured interviews (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024), wherein the researcher prepared open-ended questions that allowed respondents to express their experiences more freely. These interviews were conducted directly with devotees participating in *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese. Moreover, direct observation of the implementation of *Puja*

Bhakti at the monastery was also carried out to observe how this practice is implemented and how it affects the atmosphere within the monastery.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman analysis technique. First, the researchers performed data reduction on the interview results, simplifying them into the relevant themes. Next, the simplified themes were organized and presented as descriptive narratives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese and its impact on the spiritual lives of Buddhists. The final step in the data analysis process was drawing conclusions from the presented data (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese as a Fusion of Worship and Culture

Puja Bhakti is a form of worship that holds deep meaning within the Buddhist tradition (Bawono, Nyanasuryanadi, & Prasetyo, 2023). It is not limited to prayer and meditation alone but is also enriched by practices that incorporate elements of local culture and art, such as the recitation in Javanese. The practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese has distinctive characteristics, where prayers and mantras, recited in ancient Javanese, are not merely spoken but also sung, a practice known in Javanese as *Nembang*. The recitation utilizes traditional Javanese melodies, such as *Dandanggula*, *Asmarandana*, *Pucung*, and others, which add a unique touch and deepen the meaning of the worship (Mardiyono, interviewed by sukma, 10 May 2022).

In the implementation of *Puja Bhakti*, Buddhists in Java are not only invited to engage in silent contemplation, but also to absorb each word with full sincerity and emotion, supported by the beauty of the accompanying music. One of the opening elements of the ritual is the recitation of *Ujup Sesaji*, a prayer of supplication used to begin the service. *Ujup Sesaji*, recited in ancient Javanese, contains wishes and requests for blessings of peace, wisdom, and protection from the Buddha. This process provides a profound initial experience within the *Puja Bhakti* sequence, establishing a connection between the devotees and a higher spiritual power (Mardiyono, interviewed by sukma, 10 May 2022).

The recitation in this *Puja Bhakti* not only relies on a soft and solemn voice, however, by being sung, the atmosphere of worship becomes more vibrant. The chosen ancient Javanese songs have characteristics that align with the purpose of meditation and prayer. For example, *Dandanggula*, with its soft and repetitive melody, is well-suited to create inner calm and deepen concentration during worship. Meanwhile, *Asmarandana*, with its more dynamic rhythm, is used to express gratitude and devotion to the Buddha. *Pucung*, a simpler and gentler song, serves to conclude the worship with a calm and peaceful atmosphere. All of these songs encourage devotees to enter a meditative state, providing an opportunity for the mind and heart to become one with the prayers being recited.

Puja Bhakti in Javanese also has a significant impact on the atmosphere within the temple. In this practice, every element of the prayers, meditation, and chanting contributes to the creation of peace and harmony. The atmosphere in the temple becomes more intense and imbued with positive energy, which can be felt

by every devotee present (Mardiyono, interviewed by Sukma, 10 May 2022). Thus, it can be said that the implementation of Puja Bhakti using Javanese demonstrates how local traditions can enrich the spiritual life of devotees. By incorporating the ancient Javanese language in the recitation of prayers, devotees not only feel closer to Buddhism, but also contribute to maintaining and preserving a cultural heritage that has existed for centuries. The Javanese language, with its rich philosophies and meanings, enriches the worship experience, deepens the understanding of the prayers, and provides devotees with a way to engage with the prayer more intensely. The recitation of prayers in Javanese not only beautifies the worship, but also serves as a means to strengthen the connection between the faithful and their cultural traditions.

Puja Bhakti in Javanese is a worship practice that combines prayer, meditation, and the beauty of music to deepen the spiritual experience of Buddhists. Through the recitation of prayers sung using ancient Javanese songs, the atmosphere of worship becomes both vibrant and peaceful. The recitation fosters deeper concentration and enables devotees to feel closer to the Buddha's teachings. Additionally, the use of ancient Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* enriches the worship experience and helps preserve local cultural traditions imbued with spiritual meaning (Turyanto, 2019). This practice is not merely a personally profound act of worship but also enriches the existing cultural heritage, making it an integral part of the spiritual life of Buddhists in Java.

2. Factors that Encourage Buddhists to Perform Puja Bhakti in Javanese

Provides ease in understanding the meaning of prayers

Puja Bhakti in Javanese has become a highly valued spiritual practice among Buddhists, particularly in Java, due to its ability to unify meaning, inner peace, and the sacred atmosphere within the temple. One of the primary reasons many Buddhists choose to perform *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese is to attain a deeper understanding of the meanings embedded in the prayers. The use of Javanese fosters emotional closeness and facilitates more profound comprehension, as devotees are able to internalize each word with sincerity (Dayu, Suharno, & Purnomo, 2021). Moreover, the Javanese language possesses a richness of expression and nuanced intonation that enhances the spiritual significance conveyed through the prayers.

One particularly significant element in *Puja Bhakti* is the chanted recitation of prayers and mantras. This form of recitation not only brings tranquility to the heart but also enhances the overall spiritual atmosphere within the temple. Many devotees report experiencing a more serene and contemplative ambiance when prayers are chanted in a gentle and rhythmic manner. For instance, one devotee interviewed shared that during *Puja Bhakti* conducted in Javanese, he felt a stronger connection to the prayers being recited, noting that the melodic intonation transported him into a state of inner calm and spiritual peace (Mardiyono, interviewed by Sukma, 10 May 2022).

Chanted recitation offers significant psychological and spiritual benefits. Accompanied by melodic intonation, the recitation of prayers becomes not only more harmonious but also more effective in enhancing the concentration of

worshippers. The fusion of music and prayer facilitates the entry of devotees into a meditative state, thereby fostering a deeper sense of connection with the Buddha. This practice cultivates a more profound spiritual atmosphere, guiding devotees toward an elevated state of inner tranquility and heightened spiritual awareness.

The atmosphere within the temple is also significantly influenced by the practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese. Beyond serving as a physical space for worship, the temple transforms into a spiritual environment imbued with positive energy. The emotional state of the devotees becomes noticeably calmer and more serene, even among first-time visitors. As one devotee noted, the temple feels more spiritually vibrant when *Puja Bhakti* is conducted in Javanese: “We feel a greater sense of calm and a deeper connection to the Buddha’s teachings through the softly chanted prayers” (Marsinem, interviewed by sukma, 11 May 2022).

Thus, the Javanese language, with all its richness and subtlety, provides greater depth to the practice of *Puja Bhakti*. Each word in Javanese carries profound meaning, enabling devotees to internalize the prayers more effectively. Moreover, the language encompasses various life philosophies that resonate strongly with Buddhist values—such as respect, peace, and reverence for the universe. Therefore, the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* not only enhances the spiritual experience of devotees, but also facilitates a deeper engagement with Buddhist teachings in their daily lives.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that *Puja Bhakti* conducted in Javanese offers a more profound and emotionally resonant spiritual experience. The use of Javanese in prayers, particularly when chanted, fosters a worship atmosphere that is both serene and spiritually engaging. Devotees report feeling a stronger connection to the teachings of the Buddha and experiencing a deeper sense of inner peace. Thus, *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese is not merely a form of ritual practice, but a meaningful spiritual journey that strengthens the devotee’s relationship with Buddhism and cultivates genuine tranquility within the heart.

Benefits in inner cleansing

Puja Bhakti in the Javanese tradition is not merely a religious ritual, but a profound spiritual practice that plays a significant role in the process of inner purification. This practice offers substantial psychological and spiritual benefits, particularly in managing and transforming negative emotions that commonly arise in daily life. Emotions such as anger, anxiety, hatred, and envy often serve as obstacles to achieving inner peace. In this context, *Puja Bhakti* provides a reflective space for individuals to purify and regulate these emotions, thereby facilitating the removal of mental defilements that impede spiritual development (Amalia & Rahman, 2023).

In general, the primary aim of *Puja Bhakti* is to enhance one’s relationship with the divine as well as with oneself (Hian & Jelita, 2025). Within this practice, individuals are encouraged to focus on their positive qualities and cultivate a deeper connection with a higher spiritual power. One of the most effective methods employed in *Puja Bhakti* is meditation or breath control, which serves to improve concentration, calm the mind, and reduce emotional disturbances.

Through the development of such self-regulation, negative emotions that commonly arise can be mitigated or even eliminated.

Several participants who regularly engage in *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese reported positive changes in their emotional regulation. One devotee, for instance, shared that this practice provided a space for emotional control and inner calm; when facing problems, he felt more patient and less prone to anger (Mardiyono, interviewed by Sukma, 10 May 2022). This suggests that *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese plays a significant role in alleviating negative emotions that often contribute to stress and tension in daily life.

Puja Bhakti in the Javanese tradition extends beyond a mere religious ritual; it serves as a profound spiritual practice aimed at the purification of the mind. This practice offers significant psychological and spiritual benefits, particularly in managing and transforming negative emotions that commonly arise in daily life. Emotions such as anger, anxiety, hatred, and envy often serve as obstacles to achieving inner peace (Muryadi, interviewed by sukma, 12 May 2022). In this context, *Puja Bhakti* provides a reflective space for individuals to purify and regulate these emotions, thereby facilitating the removal of mental defilements that impede spiritual development.

Besides, the psychological benefits of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese tradition are significant and well-documented. This practice offers individuals the opportunity to reflect on and focus on the positive aspects of life, which can help reduce stress and promote inner peace. One devotee noted that participating in *Puja Bhakti* allowed her to concentrate more on positive thoughts and worry less about uncontrollable circumstances, leading to a greater sense of tranquility (Marsinem, interviewed by Sukma, 11 May 2022). This indicates that *Puja Bhakti* not only has spiritual significance but also positively impacts daily life by enhancing mental and emotional well-being. The practice fosters emotional resilience and provides a structured method for emotional regulation, contributing to overall mental health. Engaging in such devotional practices can lead to improved emotional balance and a more harmonious life.

Thus, *Puja Bhakti* in the Javanese tradition serves as an effective tool for alleviating negative emotions and purifying the mind. Through this practice, individuals can attain deeper inner peace and cultivate serenity in confronting life's challenges. *Puja Bhakti* offers benefits not only in the spiritual realm but also in daily life, enhancing mental health and improving relationships with oneself and others. The practice emphasizes focusing on virtues and spirituality, enabling individuals to overcome negative emotions, eliminate vices, and live more harmoniously.

Creating a more solemn and lively atmosphere

Puja Bhakti in the Javanese tradition holds profound significance in one's spiritual life. It serves not only as an act of devotion to the divine and ancestors but also as a means to attain inner peace and alleviate emotional burdens. A key component of the *Puja Bhakti* ritual is the recitation of the sacred *Paritta*, performed through chanting (Lestari, 2023; Wati, Poniman, & Taridi, 2022). This recitation adds an emotional depth to the practice, fostering a solemn and vibrant

atmosphere within the monastery, thereby enriching the participants' spiritual experience. The practice offers various psychological and spiritual benefits, such as enhancing comprehension of the teachings embedded in the *Paritta* and aiding in the calming of the mind (Karniawan, Sutrisno, & Acep, 2022).

Many participants who regularly engage in *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese report that this ritual not only connects them with the divine but also enhances their understanding of the meanings embedded in each word of the *Paritta*. Each *Paritta* recited or listened to during the ritual contains Dhamma teachings (Dayu et al., 2021), which often resonate deeply and offer a more profound perspective on life and spirituality. One devotee expressed, "Every time I perform *Puja Bhakti*, I feel as though I am conversing directly with my ancestors, which imparts a sense of inner peace and tranquility" (Marsinem, interviewed by sukma, 11 May 2022). This statement illustrates that *Puja Bhakti*, particularly with the recitation of the *Paritta* in Javanese, provides individuals with a space to solemnly explore spiritual teachings and experience a deeper sense of peace.

One distinctive feature of Javanese *Puja Bhakti* is the melodic recitation of the *Paritta*. When chanted with melody, the *Paritta* enhances the atmosphere within the monastery, making it more vibrant and conducive to focused reflection. The melodic element adds an emotional depth to the recitation, allowing each word to resonate more profoundly with the listener. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the Dhamma teachings and strengthens the practitioner's connection to the teachings. As one devotee expressed, "Every time I perform *Puja Bhakti*, I feel as though I am conversing directly with my ancestors, which imparts a sense of inner peace and tranquility" (Muryadi, interviewed by Sukma, 12 May 2022). This statement underscores that the melodic recitation of the *Paritta* in Javanese *Puja Bhakti* provides a space for individuals to solemnly engage with spiritual teachings and experience a profound sense of peace.

Thus, it can be concluded that *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese, incorporating the chanted recitation of the *Paritta*, functions not merely as a religious ritual but also as a means to cultivate solemnity and inner peace. This practice aids participants in gaining a deeper understanding of the spiritual teachings embedded in the *Paritta*, internalizing the significance of each word, and fostering a stronger connection to the Dhamma. The melodic recitation enriches the spiritual experience by adding an emotional depth, creating a more vibrant and reverent atmosphere within the monastery. Consequently, *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese transcends its role as a religious ceremony, serving as a pathway to enhanced spiritual well-being.

Making it easier to understand the meaning of the *Paritta*

Puja Bhakti in the Javanese tradition is a religious ritual practiced by Buddhists, particularly within the Javanese community, involving the recitation of prayers in Javanese, known as *Paritta*. Beyond serving as a means to attain blessings and accumulate good karma (Azizah, Muchlizun, Abror, & Hidayatullah, 2022), *Puja Bhakti* holds profound cultural significance and exerts a notable influence on both spiritual and social aspects of life. In this practice, devotees engage not only in performing the rituals but also in reflecting upon the meanings

embedded in each prayer chanted, thereby experiencing a deep and transformative impact.

For devotees who regularly perform *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese, this ritual not only provides a sense of fulfillment and happiness, as they feel a deeper understanding of the meanings within the chanted *Paritta*, but also fosters inner peace. As an integral part of Javanese culture, *Puja Bhakti* is deeply rooted in local religious and cultural traditions that impart values of virtue, morality, and social harmony. The prayers within *Puja Bhakti*, in addition to serving as a means of communication with the divine, also serve as reminders to engage in righteous actions and contribute positively to others. This practice encourages individuals to become more introspective, reflecting upon and internalizing the virtues encapsulated in each prayer, thereby leading to a profound understanding of the importance of goodness in daily life.

From a psychological perspective, many devotees report experiencing positive effects after participating in *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese. They often feel calmer, more peaceful, and better equipped to manage daily concerns. This process fosters a deeper connection to their religious teachings and enriches their inner lives. This was evident in interviews conducted by the researcher with devotees who regularly engage in this ritual. One devotee shared that after participating in *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese, she felt more purposeful and at peace in her daily life (Marsinem, interviewed by Sukma, 11 May 2022).

This ritual also exerts a positive social impact. *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese strengthens interpersonal relationships within the community by promoting values of care, empathy, and mutual support. It encourages individuals to share positive energy, thereby fostering social harmony. Furthermore, this practice contributes to the preservation of local culture, as the Javanese language utilized in the ritual is an integral component of regional wisdom passed down through generations. Consequently, *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese functions not only as a means of worship but also as a medium for cultural preservation and the reinforcement of Javanese cultural identity within the context of Buddhism (Muryadi, interviewed by Sukma, 12 May 2022).

Thus, it can be concluded that *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese has a profound impact on individuals' lives. This ritual encourages devotees to delve deeper into their religious teachings, internalize the meanings of each prayer chanted, and attain inner peace and happiness. Additionally, the practice strengthens social bonds among participants and contributes to the preservation of valuable local culture. Through increased understanding and engagement in these rituals, devotees feel more connected to their religious and cultural heritage, leading to more meaningful and peaceful lives.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that the use of Javanese in the practice of *Puja Bhakti* significantly influences the spiritual experiences of Buddhists. Javanese serves not only as a medium for prayer communication but also enhances the depth of meaning, concentration, and emotional connection of practitioners to Buddhism. The chanted prayers create a more vibrant, solemn, and peaceful worship atmosphere. These findings indicate that the practice strengthens cultural

identity, facilitates inner purification, and establishes a spiritual space that is more personal and relevant to the daily lives of the congregation.

The results of this study underscore the profound interconnection between language, culture, and personal religious experiences. The use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* transcends mere linguistic choice; it represents a form of spiritual appreciation deeply rooted in tradition and cultural identity. Javanese, rich in metaphors, life philosophies, and subtle nuances, enables devotees not only to articulate prayers but also to internalize their meanings profoundly. As Fishman (1972) observes, local languages embody symbolic values that shape collective consciousness and community identity. In the context of worship, the use of Javanese fosters a sense of spiritual closeness among practitioners. Ammerman (2014) further elucidates that lived religion encompasses the embodied and enacted forms of spirituality that occur in everyday life, including rituals that draw on familiar symbols and language. Therefore, the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* facilitates the internalization of Buddhist values, allowing devotees to experience religion holistically—engaging body, mind, and emotions. Moreover, the aesthetic aspect of reciting prayers in traditional *langgam* aligns with Eliade's (1959) concept of hierophany, where the sacred manifests through recognized and revered cultural forms. This ritualistic expression transforms the ordinary into the sacred, providing a tangible connection to the transcendent.

This finding is consistent with previous studies showing how traditional rituals that blend religious and cultural elements serve as moral compasses and spiritual anchors for communities. For instance, Al-Mufid (2025) demonstrated that the Bangbarongan tradition in West Java, while rooted in local cultural performance, embodies religious emotions and ethical values that foster unity, emotional resonance, and moral growth among its practitioners.

This study aligns with previous research emphasizing the significance of local languages in enhancing individuals' spiritual experiences during religious rituals. For instance, the use of Balinese in Hindu ceremonies has been shown to deepen emotional connections with religious texts and create a more intimate sacred atmosphere (Dewi et al., 2024; Suwija, 2024; Utami et al., 2023). Similarly, in Morocco, the Berber community employs Islamic poetry in their native language to transmit religious and cultural values, fostering a sense of spiritual closeness (Rausch, 2006). In the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā tradition of Bengal, the use of Bengali enriches spiritual metaphors, facilitating a deeper understanding of religious teachings (Hayes, 2018). However, this study distinguishes itself by focusing on the context of Buddhism and the use of Javanese, an area less explored in existing literature. Most studies on Buddhist *Puja Bhakti* rituals have concentrated on the use of Indonesian or Pali (Maharani, 2023; S. Paramita, 2020; Salamah, 2020), without delving into the strategic role of local languages as cultural and spiritual elements.

Thus, this study provides a new perspective that broadens the discourse on the function of language in religious practice. Within Liddicoat's (2012, 2023) theoretical framework, local languages in religious rites are not merely mediums for conveying meaning but are also regarded as sacred objects that reinforce the religious and cultural identity of communities. The integration of Javanese into *Puja Bhakti* enhances the depth of prayer comprehension and fosters a more

contextual and inclusive spiritual space, particularly for individuals who internalize Buddhist teachings through their ancestral culture. Consequently, beyond enriching spiritual experiences, the use of Javanese in this context serves as a strategy for preserving local cultural heritage, which holds significant theological and social value in contemporary religious practices.

The profound implications of this finding underscore that religion is inextricably linked to the cultural context in which it exists and evolves. Within the theoretical framework of the social construction of religion, as proposed by Berger (1967), religion does not exist in a vacuum but is socially constructed through symbols, language, and rituals rooted in the cultural realities of society. The use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* exemplifies this concept, wherein the local language functions as both a theological and cultural medium, deepening the community's spiritual engagement. This perspective aligns with Ammerman's (2014) lived religion approach, which emphasizes that authentic religious experiences are manifested in daily practices through personally meaningful symbols, including the language employed in prayer. By integrating Javanese into religious rituals, practitioners not only preserve cultural heritage but also facilitate a more intimate and contextually relevant spiritual experience.

Beyond serving as a means of communication, local languages function as markers of spiritual and cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging to both religion and community. In this context, the practice of *Puja Bhakti* in Javanese can be understood as a form of inculturation of Buddhist teachings through local wisdom. This practice not only revitalizes the values of the Dhamma but also reinforces cultural resilience. As Liddicoat (2023) emphasizes, the use of local languages in religious rituals plays a crucial role in maintaining the relevance of religious teachings amidst social change. It also serves as a form of resistance to the homogenizing pressures of globalization, which tend to standardize cultural practices and languages. Therefore, this finding confirms that local languages such as Javanese not only ensure the continuity of tradition but also enable individuals to experience religion in a more intimate, reflective, and contextually meaningful manner.

Although the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* has been shown to enrich the spiritual experiences of congregants and strengthen cultural connectedness, this practice faces significant challenges, particularly among the younger generation. While many worshippers report a deeper sense of inner peace and solemnity when engaging in rituals conducted in their mother tongue, linguistic trends in Indonesia indicate a shift in language preference among youth, who are increasingly more familiar with Bahasa Indonesia than with local languages. In regions such as coastal Java, West Papua, and among the Totoli and Betawi communities, local languages are gradually losing their function within familial, educational, and social spheres due to the dominance of Bahasa Indonesia and the influences of urbanization and digital technology. This shift is particularly evident in the declining use of Javanese among younger generations, where Bahasa Indonesia is often adopted as the primary language, leading to a weakened intergenerational transmission of the Javanese language and a diminished sense of local identity (Fatinah et al., 2025; Ibrahim, Saputra, & Hardianti, 2024; Reza, Rohmah, & Ismail, 2024; Suharyo, 2017).

This phenomenon not only raises concerns about the preservation of local languages but also threatens the sustainability of culturally rooted worship practices, such as *Puja Bhakti* conducted in Javanese. Andriyanti (2019) observes that many young individuals experience a cultural identity crisis, influenced by a strong orientation towards national identity through the Indonesian language, while the use of local languages is perceived as less socially relevant. Furthermore, Aziz et al. (2020; 2021) highlight that despite an awareness of the importance of preserving heritage languages, the practice of using local languages at home has declined significantly, particularly among young parents. This trend indicates a weakening of intergenerational transmission of local languages, which poses a challenge to the continuity of traditional religious practices that rely on these languages for their cultural and spiritual significance.

Consequently, the sustainability of *Puja Bhakti* practices in Javanese hinges on the capacity of religious and cultural communities to bridge the spiritual needs and linguistic preferences of younger generations. Reflective strategies to consider include integrating Javanese into digital media platforms, developing creative and participatory prayer training programs, and fostering cultural pride through cross-generational education. If these challenges are not addressed adaptively, the disengagement of younger individuals could undermine the cultural and spiritual continuity that has been transmitted through language.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the use of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* practices at Vihara Giri Surya in Yogyakarta significantly enhances the spiritual experiences of Buddhist devotees. The incorporation of the Javanese language in the recitation of prayers and chanted mantras allows practitioners to internalize the meanings more profoundly and emotionally. Chanting prayers in traditional Javanese melodies fosters a more vibrant and solemn atmosphere during worship, thereby deepening concentration and facilitating inner peace. Consequently, this practice not only enriches the spiritual experiences of devotees but also reinforces their connection to both Buddhism and their local cultural heritage.

This research contributes meaningfully to Buddhist studies by offering a novel perspective on the integration of local languages, particularly Javanese, into worship practices. The utilization of Javanese in *Puja Bhakti* at Vihara Giri Surya exemplifies the preservation of local culture within a religious context—a facet that has received limited attention in prior Buddhist scholarship. The findings demonstrate how incorporating elements of local culture into worship practices can enhance devotees' spiritual experiences, deepen their understanding of religious teachings, and aid in preserving indigenous cultural wisdom.

However, this study has certain limitations regarding the scope of data, as it is confined to a single monastery in Yogyakarta. This constraint may affect the generalizability of the findings to *Puja Bhakti* practices in other monasteries. Additionally, the study involved interviews solely with devotees who actively participate in Javanese-language *Puja Bhakti*, which may not fully represent the perspectives of all Buddhists in Java. Future research should consider expanding to include multiple monasteries and a more diverse group of respondents to provide

a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of local language use in Buddhist worship practices.

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