

Arca Durga Mahisasuramardini: Unveiling The Beauty and Myths Behind The Siwa Temple at Prambanan

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ABSTRACT

This article specifically discusses the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue, from its physical details to its connection with *Roro Jonggrang* in the interpretation of the community. The research methods used in this article are observation and literature study. *Prambanan Temple* is one of the largest Hindu temples ever built in Java. The temple was built in 850 AD by King *Pikatan* and perfected by King *Lokapala* and King *Balitung Maha Sambu*. *Prambanan Temple* is also often known as *Roro Jonggrang Temple*, which comes from the folk tale between Princess *Roro Jonggrang* and *Bandung Bondowoso*. *Prambanan Temple* has three main temples: *Brahma Temple*, *Shiva Temple*, and *Vishnu Temple*. Previous research has only discussed *Prambanan Temple* and the legend of *Roro Jonggrang* in the community's belief, but no research has specifically discussed the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue in *Prambanan Temple* and its connection to *Roro Jonggrang*. In this research, the focus is on the *Shiva Temple*, especially the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue in the north chamber of the temple. This *Durga* statue has interesting details, from the structure and patterns to the ornaments around it. In addition, there is also the story of *Roro Jonggrang* associated with this *Durga* statue.

Keywords: *Prambanan Temple, Shiva Temple, Roro Jonggrang*

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INTRODUCTION

Temples are places of worship for the Hindu-Buddhist community. The embodiment of Goddess *Durga* named *Candika* is the origin of the word *temple* known to the community. Temples are not only used to refer to places of worship of the Hindu-Buddhist community, but in fact they are also used to refer to other buildings such as gates, palaces, bathing places, and so on. The *temple* is a representative of the residence of the gods, namely *Mount Mahameru*. Therefore, *temples* are often decorated with various beautiful carvings. *Temples* are found on the islands of *Java*, *Bali*, *Kalimantan*, and *Sumatra*. In the 8th to 9th centuries AD, the most *temples* were built by the *Mataram* kingdom (Aji, 2018).

Prambanan Temple is one of the largest Hindu temples ever built in *Java*. According to historical records, this temple was built in 850 AD by *Rakai Pikatan* and began to be perfected by King *Lokapala* and King *Balitung Maha Sambu*. *Prambanan Temple* is also often known as *Roro Jonggrang Temple*, which comes from the folklore between the daughter of *Roro Jonggrang* and *Bandung Bondowoso*. *Prambanan Temple* is located in *Prambanan Temple Tourism Park*, *Karangasem* village, *Bokoharjo* village, *Prambanan* district, *Sleman* Regency, *Special Region of Yogyakarta*. *Prambanan Temple* has three main temples, namely *Brahma Temple*, *Shiva Temple*, and *Vishnu Temple*. In addition to the three main temples, in

Prambanan Park there are also small temples such as *Lumbung Temple*, *Bubrah Temple*, *Sewu Temple*, *Sari Temple*, *Kalasan Temple*, and many others (Ibrahim, 1996).

Prambanan Temple has three main temples dedicated to the worship of the *Trimurti*, the three principal gods in Hinduism. According to research conducted by *Maulana Ibrahim* in his book *Kompleks Candi Prambanan dari Masa ke Masa* (Ibrahim, 1996), it is mentioned that among the three *Trimurti* temples, one temple is notably larger. This temple is the *Shiva Temple*, located between the *Vishnu* and *Brahma Temples*. This information suggests that the *Shiva Temple* is the main place of worship compared to the other two deities, *Brahma* and *Vishnu*. In addition, the *Shiva Temple* houses several statues, one of which is the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue.

One of the interesting stories of *Prambanan Temple* is the story of *Roro Jonggrang* and *Bandung Bondowoso*. According to folklore, *Lara Jonggrang* was a beautiful princess who did not want to marry *Bandung Bondowoso*, a giant who had extraordinary powers. *Lara Jonggrang* proposed an impossible requirement, namely asking *Bandung Bondowoso* to build 1,000 temples in one night. Even though it was almost finished, *Lara Jonggrang* managed to thwart the work with deception. As punishment, *Bandung Bondowoso* condemned *Lara Jonggrang* to become a stone statue, which is now known as the *Durga* statue in *Prambanan Temple* (Mubin & Nurcahya, 2014; Sapta Widartono & Fitri, 2017; Setyawan, 2017; Wardoyo, 2020).

The *Durga* statue, which is recognized by the public as the figure of *Roro Jonggrang*, represents an ideal depiction of women during the Hindu-Buddhist period. According to research by *Indrajaja* in his work *Penggambaran Ideal Perempuan Jawa pada Masa Hindu-Buddha: Refleksi pada Arca-Arca Perempuan* (Indrajaja, 2017), it is stated that the *Durga* statue meets six beauty criteria according to Hindu aesthetics. Furthermore, it is mentioned that the *Durga* statue or *Roro Jonggrang* fulfills the *Padmanagara* woman type or the ideal beauty standard of Javanese women. While the article thoroughly discusses the aesthetic values embodied in the *Durga* statue, there are still several aspects that have not been explored in further research, one of which is the patterns of ornaments surrounding the statue. Therefore, this article delves deeper into the *Durga* statue, focusing on its physical form, the story behind the motifs on the statue, and the legend of *Roro Jonggrang*, which is closely associated with the *Durga* statue.

Unlike previous studies that generally discuss *Prambanan Temple* or highlight the *Roro Jonggrang* legend as a popular story in society, this article focuses on the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue in the northern chamber of *Shiva Temple*, *Prambanan Temple* complex. The issue addressed in this article is how the meaning of the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue has developed through the combination of Hindu-Javanese architectural form and the influence of the local story of *Roro Jonggrang* in the collective memory of society. This issue is elaborated through several research questions that explore the analysis of the structure and spatial layout of *Shiva Temple*, the physical details of the *Durga* statue, and how the ornament patterns surrounding the statue reflect the art and religious values in Hindu-Javanese architecture. Additionally, the article also examines how the story of *Roro Jonggrang* and *Bandung Bondowoso* has influenced public views about the *Durga* statue. It further delves into the overlap between the understanding of the figure of *Durga Mahisasuramardini* in Hindu mythology and *Roro Jonggrang* in the Javanese oral

tradition, as well as new interpretations of the statue as a reflection of the ideal woman in ancient Javanese society.

The aim of this research is to provide a more in-depth analysis of the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue in the northern chamber of *Shiva Temple*, covering aspects of the structural layout, physical details, and the ornaments surrounding the statue. Moreover, the article also examines the overlap between the *Roro Jonggrang* myth and the *Durga* figure in its societal interpretation and presents the statue as a representation of the ideal woman in ancient Javanese society.

This study provides several key benefits. First, it contributes to the academic understanding of the cultural and religious significance of *Prambanan Temple*, particularly the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue, within the context of Hindu-Javanese architecture and local myths. By analyzing the statue's symbolism, ornamentation, and its connection to the *Roro Jonggrang* legend, this research enriches our knowledge of the interplay between art, architecture, and mythology in ancient Java. Second, the study offers insights into how local folklore has influenced the perception and interpretation of Hindu deities, specifically the figure of *Durga*, and how it has become integrated into the collective memory of the Javanese people.

METHOD

This study used observational research methods and literature studies. The literature study method is a research method based on data and theories from various literature that has a relationship with research to obtain an accurate theoretical foundation. Literature studies can also be interpreted as collecting data through the study of books, records, journals, and various reports that have been written before. There are several stages of data collection in literature studies, namely source tracing, source clarification, data processing, presenting data, data interpretation, and conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structure and Layout of Shiva Temple

Shiva Temple in Prambanan is the largest main temple in the Prambanan temple area. This temple is located flanked by Vishnu Temple and Brahma Temple with Nandi Temple in front of it. This Shiva temple has a base size of 17 x 17 m and a height of 47 m, standing on a foundation measuring 34 x 34 m. The entire structure of the temple shows the harmony between vertical and horizontal elements, with various ornaments that beautify its appearance. Shiva Temple is divided into three parts: the temple legs (symbolizing the lower world), the temple body (the middle world), and the temple roof (upper world) (Ibrahim, 1996).

The building has four doors facing four corners and features a dynamic variety of fields. Structurally, Shiva Temple consists of a foundation, legs, body, and roof. The foundation has an important role as a support for the entire weight of the building. The establishment of the temple follows the provisions of the book of *Vastucessastra* which prioritizes the determination of location, namely the selection of places that need to reflect the residence of the gods (Haryono, 2004).

The Shiva temple stands on the floor of the foot and has a body profile divided into lower, middle, and upper parts, with niche decorations for statues of the Lokapala gods

(guardians of the cardinal). Each level is decorated with rosettes and tendrils, and in each corner there is a kala headdress. In the Shiva-Siddhanta concept, the temple reflects three aspects of Shiva: Maheswara (mortal world/feet), Sadasiwa (bhuhvarloka/body), and Paramasiwa (zenith/roof). The book Tantu Panggelaran mentions that God Lokapala guards the cardinal direction to protect the world from giant threats, with their statues located at the foot of Shiva Temple (Hatir, 2020; Ito et al., 2021; Lisci et al., 2023; Pappalardo et al., 2022; WARAGAI, 2017).

The body of the Shiva Temple has four chambers, each of which contains a statue of a god who has a relationship with Shiva. Each entrance is equipped with kalamakara, and on the east side are the Nandiswara and Mahakala areas. The main room with the largest area is inhabited by Lord Shiva Mahadeva who stands on the yoni, while the southern, western, and northern rooms contain Agastya, Ganesa, and Goddess Durga standing on the padmasana, respectively. Each door of the room is decorated with a terrible kala statue and ratna ornaments on it (Haryono, 2004).

One of the reasons for naming the temple with the name Shiva Temple is because the main room of the temple measuring 7.14 x 7.14 m displays a statue of Shiva Mahadewa which is beautifully decorated with attributes such as aksamala and camara. This room is larger than the other rooms and is also often used in religious ceremonies. This statue has a height of 3 m, with a yoni-shaped lining facing north and a height of 1 m. Shiva is depicted with a crescent moon on his head and a snake as an upagavata, although some parts of the statue are in a damaged state (Maulana, 1996).

Physical Details of the Durga Statue

In 1733, 1744, 1746, the first reports of European visitors during the palace's trip to Mataram. They found a large hill, from the top of which the tops of the ruins of the main temple were visible. Some statues can still be seen in some side rooms. This includes a statue of Durga, the Girl (Loro Jonggrang), which gave her name to the entire temple complex. The main room is still filled with rubble (Jordan, 1996).

To see the statue of Durga in the present time, it is expected to walk from the front to the statue of the main room where the statue of Shiva is located. Then continue towards circumnavigating it clockwise from the south, west, and finally north following the path of pradaksina (surrounding the structure with the sanctuary on the right side). During the trip, you will find a variety of decorative motifs and ornaments. There are carvings of the gods and reliefs that tell the story of the Ramayana.

The statue of Durga is located to the north of the main chamber where the statue of Shiva is located, indicating its position as Cakti Shiva. The size of this Durga statue is around 10 tunes and 4 anggula (Indradjaja, 2017). The shape of this statue is the only female figure who inhabits 4 other rooms in Shiva Temple. Often this statue is called by the name of the Rara Jonggrang statue. The north room of the floor is rectangular in shape with some decorations in it such as the statue of Durga and the surrounding walls although the shape is difficult to see.



Figure 1 Goddess Durga Mahisasuramardini in the north room of Shiva Temple



Figure 2 The Asura figure to the left of Goddess Durga

The statue of Durga in the Shiva Temple is blackish-gray, has a flat face, her eyes seem to be looking down and she has eight hands. The right hand from top to bottom holds a chakra, a sword, an arrow, and holds a buffalo tail. Then the left hand from top to bottom holds a large snail shell, shield, bow and pulls the hair of a creature known as asura. This Asura looked angry-faced with protruding eyes and an open mouth. This figure has dreadlocks, which is based on a circular motif above his head. The asura's right hand was seen holding a weapon like a club. The unique accessory she wears is a necklace with a skull symbol. Durga was standing on a buffalo smaller than her body, the head of the buffalo was turning to the right. In addition, this statue is shirtless with a slim body. The clothes and decorations used by this statue include a raised crown with an intricate pattern, shoulder bracelets, hand bracelets, ankle bracelets, decorated rosettes, large necklaces with ropes up to the rosette, and jewelry worn on the stomach. It can be said that the statue of Durga in the Shiva temple is sculpted so skillfully and luxuriously.

The naming of the Durga statue in Shiva Temple is not just Durga, but specifically Durga Mahisasuramardini. This is because Durga or the famous name in India, namely Parwati, managed to defeat the creature Mahisasura and capture her incarnation, namely Asura. Mahisasuramardini is a magical of Lord Shiva who is famous in India, worshipped every autumn in the month of Aswina. In the *Devi Mahatmyam* manuscript, it is told that the gods experienced misfortune due to Mahisasura, so they asked for help from Shiva and Vishnu. Out of their anger came a tongue of fire that formed the body of a beautiful woman, Durga. The gods gave him various weapons and attributes: Shiva gave him a trident, Vishnu chakra, and various other gods gave him equipment such as sangkha, spears, and bows. With all these equipment, Durga managed to defeat Mahisasura (Sahai in Maulana, 1996).

Patterns and Ornaments Around the Statue

The variety of ornaments in Shiva Temple is magnificently and delicately sculpted, which can be grouped into several categories. First, there are anthropomorphic motifs, which

include images of the human body such as kala, gana, God Lokapala, dancers, and musicians. Furthermore, there are theriomorphic motifs, which depict the shape of a half-human and half-animal, such as kinara, as well as theriantropic motifs that feature animals such as birds, antelopes, rabbits, and deer. In addition, plant motifs such as banana trees, tendrils, and kalpataru, are also part of this ornamental variety. The selection of the decorative motif is based on the concept that the temple is a manifestation of Mount Mahameru, the symbol of the universe in Hinduism. This decorative motif not only gives a sacred atmosphere to the temple building, but also serves as a communication medium for artists to convey the message of religious teachings to the community (Godts et al., 2023; Oguchi & Yu, 2021; Pope et al., 2002).

Reliefs of the gods from the eight winds (lokapala) also known as the god Dikpalaka. They are depicted dressed in thin and beautiful clothes, sitting cross-legged on a linen. Each god has distinguishing attributes, and they rely on prabha. These gods include: Soma (Kuwera) in the north, Isana in the northeast, Indra in the east, Agni in the southeast Yama, in the south, Nairrta (Surya) in the southwest, Waruna in the west and Wayu in the northwest (Maulana, 1996).

The legs of the Shiva Temple consist of three parts: the lower frame, the wall, and the upper frame. The lower frame consists of several frames, starting with a thicker flat frame as the temple footlining, followed by a kumuda frame and a prominent flat frame. On top of it is a group of cymbals. The temple's foot walls are divided into several decorative areas known as the "Prambanan motif," which feature lion reliefs in niches flanked by kalpataru trees. This niche is decorated with kalamakara, with the head of the kala transformed into a leaf motif. The kalpataru tree is depicted coming out of a jar, with a pair of birds on it and flanked by kinara-kinari and various animals. Above the kalpataru there is an umbrella (chattra) as a symbol of purity. This Prambanan motif is also found at the foot of Vishnu, Brahma, and other large temples (Maulana, 1996).

Makaras on the temple stairs are also not always the same. In the Shiva Temple, the trunk turns into a lion's head and there is a small lion in its jaws. In other temples, the lion's head did exist, but the small lion inside its jaw was replaced by a human figure that appeared in the middle. The makaras in the Shiva Temple rested on patterned socks, while the makaras in the Brahma and Vishnu temples had gana on the front of the base and an elephant kneeling beside it (Jordan, 1996).

At the foot of Shiva Temple, there are 64 reliefs of Prambanan motifs, where lions in niches are sculpted in a rigid and mask-like style. The kalpataru tree that adorns the lion is surrounded by kinara-kinari, as well as animals such as antelopes, rabbits, sheep, deer, geese, peacocks, and sparrows. The upper frame of the temple legs consists of several flat frames, with a wide frame underneath decorated with a variety of tufted strands (guirlande). The topmost frame is a plain crown frame that protrudes forward, with rows of cymbals on top, some of which serve as gutters (jaladwara). This cymbal is decorated with a combination of loop tendrils and bells, which depict the head of the kala in disguise. The size of the cymbal varies, arranged rhythmically with large and small cymbals. On top of the top frame of the temple's foot, there are framing and panels on the outside of the balustrade. The padma frame that is slightly retracted at the back forms the basis for a flat frame with a row of cymbals. The outer wall of the balustrade fence is decorated with niches alternating with panil, each niche

has a kalamakara on it, with makara facing each other. Above the pilasters that flank the niche, there are areas of lions that are intertwined (Maulana, 1996).

Inside the niches of the balustrate wall of Shiva Temple, there are reliefs of dancing figures, usually consisting of two or three figures holding hands. If the central figure is male, then the clamp is female, and vice versa. There are 70 reliefs in total, of which 62 are featuring the movements of the tandawa dance, a dance performed by Shiva, which was learned in India through the book of Natysastra. On the inner side of the balustrade, the Ramayana Reliefs at Shiva Temple, Prambanan Temple complex, consist of 24 panels depicting various scenes with some panels containing more than one story, although the boundaries between them are often invisible or missing. The reliefs carved along the central side of the temple depict the early part of the Ramayana, from the beginning to the time when Rama and his army of monkeys crossed the ocean. The depiction starts from the southern part of the east staircase, following the path of pradaksina (surrounding the structure with the sanctuary on the right side). One of the scenes shows Vishnu Narayana sitting cross-legged on a snake, receiving a complaint from the five gods and an eagle above the surface of the sea, where they ask Vishnu to descend into the deep earth with his avatar as Rama to destroy Ravana. Although this scene is not found in the Kakawin Ramayana, it does appear in Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa story. Another scene shows Dasaratha with his wife and four sons holding an audience, which can be found in the Kakawin Ramayana in the first stanza, scenes 1 and 3 (Sugiyanti, 1999).

The Story of Roro Jonggrang and Bandung Bondowoso

Prambanan Temple or Siwa Gerha is associated by the general public with the story of Roro Jonggrang or the story of roro mendut (Munandar, 2016). In folklore, Lara Jonggrang is the daughter of Prabu Baka who was to be betrothed by Bandung Bandawasa. However, Prabu Baka told Bandung Bandawasa that he could marry Rara Jonggrang if Bandung Bandawasa managed to defeat Prabu Baka in battle. Bandung Bandawasa finally managed to defeat and kill Prabu Baka. However, Roro Jonggrang is not willing to marry the person who has killed his father. However, Roro Jonggrang could not say his refusal, so he gave an impossible requirement, namely to build 1000 temples in one night. These requirements were also almost met, Bandung Bondowoso with the help of the genie almost succeeded in building 1000 temples in one night. However, Roro Jonggrang did a cunning way to thwart Bandung Bondowoso. Roro Jonggrang gathered the women to pound in the mortar and burn the rice straw so that it gave the impression that the sun had risen and it was morning, inevitably the jinn left Bandung Bondowoso with one more temple left that had not been completed. Bandung Bondowoso, who knew that Roro Jonggrang was trying to thwart his business, became angry and cursed Roro Jonggrang to stone. However, with the blessing of Shiva, Jonggrang was transformed into a statue (Iyer, 1998).

If you look further, the records that write about the conflict between the Prambanan Kingdom and the Pengging kingdom are found in the Prambanan chronicle. Babad Prambanan is a Javanese historiographical text copied on March 4, 1927 AD. In one of the passages, the chronicle explains the war between the Pengging Kingdom and the Prambanan Kingdom, as well as the construction of the Roro Jonggrang temple or Sewu Temple (Komala, 2019).

Between Roro Jonggrang or Durga Mahisasuramardini

The existence of the Prambanan temple complex has been written in the diary of C.A Lons, a VOC employee in Semarang in 1733 AD. Based on his records, Prambanan temple at the time it was first reported consisted of only 70 small temples. As for the main building, there are three rooms, two rooms have a statue of Ganesa and a statue of Durga Mahisasuramardini while one room only contains a layer of sculpture in the shape of a Yoni (Ibrahim, 1996). It can be said that the statue of Durga or which is sometimes associated with Rara Jonggrang has been seen long before the restoration of Prambanan temple.

Initially, the mention of Rara Jonggrang on the statue of Goddess Durga came from local residents, but in the writings of J. W IJzerman and Raffles adopted the naming or legend of the community around Prambanan temple. The mention of Roro Jonggrang is apparently still used by N.J Krom and several other Europeans (Ibrahim, 1996). The influence of local legends has an influence on the naming of the Durga statue, but iconographically the name Roro Jonggrang is slightly incompatible with the figure of Durga Mahisasuramardini.

The name Roro Jonggrang means a girl who is as handsome or slender (Iyer, 1998). Apart from Durga's eight hands, the depiction or carving of the curves of the body on the statue of Durga gives an idea of the shape of a woman's body that is slender, not too full or too thin. In Hindu aesthetics, there are four conditions (*sad-angga*) that must be met in order to achieve beauty. The four conditions include *rupabheda*, *Sadrsya*, *Pramana*, *warnikabhangga* (Indradjaja, 2017). All of these requirements have been fulfilled by the statue of Durga Mahisasuramardhini. The statue of Durga Mahisasuramardhini has qualified for *rupabheda*, because it is in accordance with the story in the book of *Devi Mahatmya* where Durga killed a giant (giant) who was transformed into a buffalo (*mahisa*). Then in the second element, namely *Sadrsya*, the statue of Durga has been described as a beautiful figure according to the *Devi Mahatmya* script (Indradjaja, 2017). The third is the requirement regarding the size of the statue or *Pramana*, the Durga statue also meets this requirement because it has a size of 10 *tala*. And the fourth is *warnikabhangga*, this condition cannot be applied to the Durga statue because it concerns the use of color on the painting panels.

CONCLUSION

The *Siwa Temple*, the central structure of the *Prambanan* complex, exemplifies Hindu cosmological concepts through its tripartite symbolic design—base, body, and roof—representing the lower, middle, and upper worlds, respectively, and follows the principles of *Vastucessastra* to emphasize its sanctity as the gods' abode. With four main chambers housing statues of deities associated with *Shiva*, the north chamber features the *Durga Mahisasuramardini* statue, whose placement underscores her role as *Shiva's Shakti* (power). This statue, a masterpiece of Hindu-Javanese art, is richly detailed and iconographically aligned with the *Devi Mahatmyam*, depicting *Durga's* victory over *Mahisasura* and adhering to Hindu aesthetic standards (*sad-angga*), while lavish ornamentation and the temple's *pradaksina* worship route reinforce its religious symbolism as a miniature universe. Over time, the statue's meaning has evolved, blending Hindu iconography with the local *Roro Jonggrang* legend, resulting in dual interpretations: as a divine destroyer of evil and as an embodiment of ideal Javanese feminine beauty, a hybridity popularized by colonial-era accounts and deeply rooted in collective memory despite iconographic differences. The

temple's ornamentation and sacred spatial structure enhance its religious dimension, while the *Roro Jonggrang* narrative adds a humanistic layer ingrained in public perception. For future research, it is recommended to further explore how the *Roro Jonggrang* legend shapes local cultural and religious practices, examine the impact of hybrid iconographies on public understanding of sacred art, and conduct comparative studies with similar temples to assess the influence of local myths and iconography on architectural design and religious practices.

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