

The Reactualization of Saiva Siddhanta Theology in Nusantara Hindu Religious Practice: A Historical-Philosophical Analysis and Doctrinal Transformation

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Abstract: *This study examines the reactualization of Saiva Siddhanta theology within the context of Nusantara Hindu religious practice through a historical-philosophical approach. It investigates how classical doctrinal structures—particularly the metaphysical triad of Pati–Paśu–Pāśa, the concepts of mala, divine grace (anugraha), and liberation (mokṣa), as well as the ritual system of the Āgamas—have been transmitted, interpreted, and transformed in the Indonesian archipelago. The research analyzes the historical transmission of Śaivism to Java and Bali, the process of textual translation and cultural adaptation, and the reinterpretation of Siddhānta theology in local cosmology and ritual practice. Furthermore, it explores doctrinal reformulation in modern Indonesian Hinduism, especially in response to state institutionalization, monotheistic discourse, and identity negotiation within the framework of Pancasila. The findings demonstrate that theological transformation in Nusantara Hinduism is not a rupture from classical tradition but a dynamic process of reinterpretation and negotiation. Saiva Siddhanta remains a foundational theological matrix, yet it undergoes contextual reformulation to accommodate socio-political structures, educational systems, and contemporary religious identity. This study contributes to broader discussions on religious adaptation, doctrinal continuity, and theological transformation in Southeast Asian Hindu traditions.*

Keywords: Saiva Siddhanta, Nusantara Hinduism, doctrinal transformation, theological negotiation, Pati–Paśu–Pāśa, Indonesian Hinduism.

Introduction

Saiva Siddhanta represents one of the most systematic and theologically sophisticated traditions within the broader landscape of Śaivism. Emerging from the confluence of Sanskrit Āgamic revelation and Tamil devotional theology between the 8th and 13th centuries CE, Saiva Siddhanta developed a structured metaphysical and soteriological system centered on the triadic ontology of *Pati* (Lord Śiva), *Pasu* (the individual soul), and *Pāśa* (the bonds of impurity) (Davis, 1991; Goodall, 2004). Its philosophical orientation is often characterized as pluralistic realism or dualistic theism, affirming the eternal distinction between God and soul while maintaining the possibility of liberation (*mokṣa*) through divine grace mediated by ritual initiation and disciplined practice (King, 1995).

Historically, Saiva Siddhanta achieved institutional consolidation in South India, particularly in Tamil regions, where temple ritual, monastic orders, and scriptural commentarial traditions flourished. The Tamil *Śaiva Siddhānta* scholastic tradition systematized the canonical *Āgamas* and produced extensive exegetical literature articulating metaphysics, cosmology, ritual theology, and epistemology (Goodall, 2004). However, recent scholarship has emphasized that what is often regarded as “classical” Saiva Siddhanta is itself the result of historical processes of canon formation and theological reinterpretation, especially during the colonial and post-colonial periods (Klöber, 2017). This insight underscores a crucial methodological premise: Saiva Siddhanta is not a static doctrinal system but a historically evolving theological discourse.

When Śaiva traditions spread to Southeast Asia, particularly to the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara)—they encountered distinct cultural matrices, political formations, and indigenous cosmologies. Archaeological and textual evidence from Java and Bali indicates that forms of Śaivism were already prominent during the classical Hindu-Buddhist polities of the 8th to 14th centuries, such as Mataram and Majapahit (Acri, 2016; Hunter, 2007). Old Javanese texts, including *Tattva* literature and ritual manuals, attest to the assimilation and reinterpretation of Indian Śaiva metaphysics within local cosmological frameworks. These textual traditions demonstrate that Śaiva Siddhanta was not merely transplanted but translated, conceptually and ritually, into new symbolic universes.

The Nusantara reception of Saiva Siddhanta thus involved processes of acculturation and theological transformation. In Bali, where Hinduism has continued as a living tradition, Śaivism became deeply integrated with ancestor worship, indigenous ritual systems, and agrarian cosmology (Lansing, 2006; Ramstedt, 2014). Rather than preserving the strict scholastic dualism articulated in South Indian texts, Balinese Hindu theology developed a more synthetic orientation that harmonizes Śaiva metaphysics with local ritual pragmatics. The concept of *Siwa Tattwa*, for example, integrates metaphysical speculation with ritual cosmology and ethical practice, functioning less as an abstract philosophical doctrine and more as a lived cosmotheistic framework embedded in communal life.

The modern period introduced additional layers of reinterpretation. Following Indonesian independence, Hindu communities—especially in Bali—faced the necessity of articulating their tradition within a national framework that recognizes only religions affirming belief in a single supreme God. This political and legal context catalyzed theological reformulations that emphasized monotheistic expressions such as *Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa*, while simultaneously retaining Śaiva cosmology and ritual structure (Ramstedt, 2014). Scholars have noted that this development represents a strategic theological negotiation: it reframes classical Śaiva ontology in a way that aligns with state ideology while preserving continuity with inherited metaphysical categories.

Such developments invite critical scholarly inquiry into the nature of doctrinal continuity and transformation. If Saiva Siddhanta in South India is defined by its precise metaphysical distinctions and ritual orthopraxy, how should one interpret its Nusantara manifestations, where indigenous cosmology, ancestral rites, and local theological constructs reshape its expression? Are these developments instances of doctrinal dilution, contextual inculturation, or creative theological rearticulation? Addressing these questions requires a historical-philosophical approach that situates doctrinal evolution within broader socio-cultural dynamics.

Recent scholarship on transregional Śaivism highlights the importance of examining mobility, translation, and localization in the formation of religious traditions (Acri, 2016; Cox, 2017). Rather than assuming a unidirectional diffusion from India to Southeast Asia, scholars increasingly recognize multidirectional exchanges and adaptive reinterpretations. The Nusantara case exemplifies this dynamic: Śaiva Siddhanta concepts such as liberation, ritual purification, and divine grace were integrated into existing ritual ecologies, generating hybrid theological formations. In this sense, the “reactualization” of Saiva Siddhanta in Nusantara is not merely a revival of past doctrine but an ongoing process of contextual embodiment.

Furthermore, philosophical analysis reveals that the Nusantara adaptation of Saiva Siddhanta may subtly shift its ontological emphases. Classical Siddhanta maintains a strong distinction between God and soul even in liberation (King, 1995). In contrast, Balinese theological discourse often expresses divine immanence in cosmological terms that approach a more integrative or pantheistic orientation (Ramstedt, 2014). This does not necessarily negate Siddhanta dualism but reframes it within a cosmological symbolism shaped by local ritual consciousness.

The study of such transformations contributes not only to regional religious studies but also to broader theoretical discussions on theology and modernity. Religious traditions confronted with new political, cultural, and epistemic environments must negotiate between fidelity to inherited doctrines and responsiveness to contextual realities. Saiva Siddhanta in Nusantara thus provides a compelling case study of doctrinal resilience and adaptive reinterpretation.

In light of these considerations, this research aims to analyze the historical trajectories and philosophical transformations of Saiva Siddhanta theology within Nusantara Hindu religious practice. By examining textual traditions, ritual systems, and modern theological discourse, the study seeks to clarify how core Siddhanta categories, *Pati*, *Pasu*, and *Pāśa*, are reinterpreted within Indonesian Hinduism. Ultimately, this investigation contributes to understanding how theological systems travel across cultures, undergo reinterpretation, and remain meaningful within evolving socio-religious landscapes.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in historical-philosophical inquiry and comparative textual hermeneutics. The methodological approach integrates intellectual history with doctrinal analysis to examine the transformation of Saiva Siddhanta theology within Nusantara Hindu religious practice. Primary sources include classical Saiva Siddhanta scriptures—particularly selected Śaiva Āgamas and their medieval commentaries—as well as Old Javanese *Tattva* texts and Balinese theological manuscripts (*lontar*). These materials are analyzed through a contextual hermeneutical framework in order to identify both doctrinal continuity and reinterpretation in core theological categories such as *Pati*, *Pasu*, *Pāśa*, divine grace, and liberation (*mokṣa*) (Goodall, 2004; Klöber, 2017). Historical analysis is employed to trace the transmission and localization of Śaiva metaphysics from South India to the Indonesian archipelago, with particular attention to processes of translation, adaptation, and canon formation (Acri, 2016; Hunter, 2007).

In addition to textual analysis, this research adopts a contextual theological and socio-historical perspective to interpret how doctrinal elements are embodied within contemporary Nusantara Hindu practice. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed studies on transregional Śaivism, Balinese Hinduism, and modern religious reform in Indonesia (Cox, 2017; Ramstedt, 2014). Analytical procedures include thematic categorization of metaphysical concepts and comparative philosophical examination between classical Siddhanta dualism and Nusantara cosmotheistic expressions. Rather than treating doctrinal change as deviation, this study interprets transformation as a dynamic process of theological rearticulation shaped by socio-political negotiation and cultural integration (Lansing, 2006; Ramstedt, 2014). Through this interdisciplinary methodological synthesis, the research aims to demonstrate that Saiva Siddhanta in Nusantara functions as a historically adaptive theological system rather than a static orthodoxy.

Discussion

The Doctrinal Foundations of Saiva Siddhanta

Saiva Siddhanta is one of the most structured theological and philosophical systems within the South Indian Śaiva tradition. At the core of its teaching are three metaphysical realities known as *Pati*, *Paśu*, and *Pāśa*, which collectively form the doctrinal foundation of this school. In this tradition, *Pati* refers to God as the supreme reality and the cause of all; *Paśu* is the soul or individual self that is bound; and *Pāśa* denotes the bonds that restrain the soul from full freedom—namely *āṇava*, *karma*, and *māyā*—which explain the existential limitation of human beings within the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) (Davis, 1991; Goodall, 1998). Its metaphysics is not merely speculative but presents a structured map of spiritual transformation from bondage to liberation.

In Saiva Siddhanta, God (*Pati*) is not only the creator but also the sustainer and regulator of karmic order. Śiva is described as *sat-cit-ānanda* (being-consciousness-bliss), omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent yet immanent within the cosmos (Klostermaier, 2007; Flood, 1996). Unlike Advaita Vedānta, which regards ultimate reality as non-dual and considers multiplicity as ultimately illusory, Saiva Siddhanta affirms a realist pluralism in which God, soul, and bondage are all ontologically real and eternally distinct (Goodall, 1998; King, 1995). The triadic structure of *Pati-Paśu-Pāśa* thus defines its metaphysical identity: God as absolutely free, the soul as conscious but limited, and bondage as the conditioning factor that obscures the soul's innate awareness.

The concept of *Paśu* describes the individual soul as intrinsically conscious yet experientially bound. Although the soul is beginningless and eternal, it is obscured by three impurities (*mala*): *āṇava mala* (the primal impurity causing finitude and egoity), *karma mala* (impurity generated by action and moral causality), and *māyā mala* (the material and cognitive limitation arising from phenomenal existence) (Davis, 1991; Flood, 1996). These impurities veil the soul's true knowledge and bind it to *samsāra*. The theological project of Saiva Siddhanta is to analyze the nature of these bonds and prescribe the means for their removal through divine grace and disciplined practice.

Soteriologically, liberation (*mokṣa*) is attained when the impurities are removed and the soul gains direct experiential knowledge of Śiva (*śivajñāna*). However, liberation is not achieved solely through ritual performance or moral effort; it ultimately depends upon divine grace (*arul*), which activates salvific knowledge within the soul (King, 1995; Klostermaier, 2007). Grace does not negate human effort but perfects it. Spiritual disciplines such as ritual worship, devotion (*bhakti*), meditation, and ethical conduct prepare the soul for the descent of grace.

Authoritative scriptures such as the *Śivajñānabodham* of Meykandar and the Śaiva Āgamas provide the doctrinal and ritual foundation of this system (Goodall, 1998). The Āgamas are regarded as revealed texts that articulate cosmology, temple ritual, initiation, yoga, and metaphysical doctrine. They function as both liturgical manuals and philosophical treatises, integrating ritual practice with theological reflection (Flood, 1996).

Ritual in Saiva Siddhanta is not merely external devotion but a soteriological process. Temple worship (*pūjā*), initiation (*dīkṣā*), mantra recitation, and meditative practices are understood as transformative acts that weaken karmic bondage and orient the soul toward divine realization (Davis, 1991). Ritual thus mediates metaphysical truth into lived religious experience.

In conclusion, Saiva Siddhanta presents a holistic theological system integrating metaphysics, soteriology, and ritual. Its affirmation of the real distinction between God, soul, and bondage establishes a coherent philosophical framework. Liberation is achieved not through metaphysical abstraction alone but through disciplined practice culminating in divine grace. This synthesis of philosophical realism and ritual praxis explains its enduring vitality within Śaiva communities (Flood, 1996; Klostermaier, 2007).

Historical Transmission of Śaivism to the Nusantara

The transmission of Śaivism to the Nusantara—particularly Java and Bali—constitutes one of the most significant episodes in the transregional history of Hindu religious thought. Rather than representing a simple diffusion of Indian religious forms into Southeast Asia, the historical evidence suggests a complex process of translation, adaptation, and symbolic transformation. Between the 8th and 14th centuries, Śaiva traditions became deeply embedded within the political, ritual, and literary cultures of Javanese and later Balinese courts. This process unfolded through maritime trade networks, priestly mobility, royal patronage, and the circulation of Sanskrit and Old Javanese texts (Acari, 2016; Hunter, 2007).

Epigraphic and archaeological evidence from Central Java during the Mataram period (8th–10th centuries) indicates the presence of Śaiva temple complexes and priestly institutions that were closely aligned with South Indian ritual models. The construction of monumental temple sites such as Prambanan demonstrates not only architectural inspiration from Indian prototypes but also the institutionalization of Śaiva ritual systems within Javanese court culture (Miksic & Goh, 2017). However, the transmission of Śaivism was not limited to temple ritual. It also involved the translation of metaphysical and cosmological concepts into Old Javanese literary forms, particularly within the genre known as *tattva* literature.

Old Javanese *tattva* texts represent a crucial phase in the localization of Śaiva metaphysics. These texts, composed between the 10th and 15th centuries, articulate complex theological doctrines derived from Sanskrit Śaiva traditions, including Saiva Siddhanta and related tantric currents (Acri, 2016). However, rather than simply reproducing Indian doctrinal categories, Javanese authors reconfigured them within indigenous cosmological frameworks. For example, Śiva is frequently presented not only as the transcendent Lord but also as a cosmic principle embedded within a hierarchical universe structured according to local notions of sacred geography and kingship. This adaptation illustrates what scholars describe as “textual translation,” a process that entails conceptual reinterpretation rather than literal linguistic rendering (Hunter, 2007).

One of the defining features of Śaiva transmission in Java was its integration into royal ideology. Śiva was not merely worshipped as a deity but was symbolically linked to kingship and state authority. The concept of *devarāja*—the divine king—emerged as a political theology in which the ruler embodied or was ritually associated with Śiva’s cosmic authority (Acri, 2016). This symbolic transformation represents a significant adaptation of Śaiva metaphysics. In South India, Saiva Siddhanta emphasizes the ontological distinction between *Pati* (Lord) and *Pasu* (soul), yet in the Javanese context, royal ritual often dramatized a closer identification between divine and human sovereignty. Such developments reveal the flexibility of Śaiva categories when transplanted into new socio-political environments.

The Majapahit period (13th–15th centuries) further consolidated the synthesis of Śaiva and Buddhist traditions in Java. Textual and iconographic evidence demonstrates a high degree of theological integration, sometimes described as Śiva-Buddha syncretism (Acri, 2016). Rather than dissolving doctrinal distinctions, this synthesis often involved symbolic parallelism, in which Śiva and the Buddha were understood as complementary manifestations of ultimate reality. This integrative tendency laid the groundwork for later Balinese religious formations, where Śaiva elements became interwoven with local ritual cosmology and ancestor veneration.

Following the decline of Majapahit and the Islamization of Java, many Śaiva-Buddhist priestly and literary traditions migrated to Bali. In Bali, Śaivism did not disappear but was preserved and transformed within a predominantly Hindu cultural setting (Ramstedt, 2014). Balinese religious texts—including *lontar* manuscripts—continued to transmit Śaiva metaphysical concepts while adapting them to local ritual life. The Balinese concept of *Siwa Tattwa*, for example, reflects clear continuity with Śaiva doctrinal structures, yet it is articulated within a cosmology that emphasizes cyclical time, ritual balance (*rwa bhineda*), and ancestral continuity (Lansing, 2006).

Cultural adaptation in Bali also involved the integration of Śaiva theology into agrarian ritual systems. The famous subak irrigation networks, while primarily agricultural institutions, were embedded in temple rituals dedicated to deities associated with fertility and cosmic balance (Lansing, 2006). Although not explicitly framed in technical Saiva Siddhanta terminology, the cosmological logic underlying these systems resonates with Śaiva notions of divine immanence and cosmic order. Here, symbolic transformation occurs at the level of lived practice rather than textual doctrine.

A key aspect of this transmission was linguistic translation. Sanskrit theological vocabulary was rendered into Old Javanese and later Balinese idioms, often accompanied by semantic shifts. Terms such as *tattva*, *ātman*, *śakti*, and *mokṣa* were recontextualized within local metaphors and ritual symbolism (Hunter, 2007). This linguistic adaptation did not necessarily distort doctrinal meaning but reoriented it toward a performative and cosmological framework intelligible to local communities. The result was a distinctive Nusantara Śaivism that retained recognizable metaphysical structures while embedding them in indigenous categories of meaning.

Modern scholarship increasingly emphasizes that such transformations should not be interpreted as degeneration or syncretistic confusion. Instead, they reflect processes of “vernacularization,” whereby transregional religious systems are reformulated through local epistemologies (Acri, 2016). Śaivism in the Nusantara exemplifies this dynamic: Indian metaphysical schemas were neither passively adopted nor entirely replaced, but selectively reinterpreted in response to local ritual ecology, political authority, and cosmological imagination.

In contemporary Indonesia, particularly in Bali, these historical processes continue to shape religious identity. Modern Hindu discourse often rearticulates classical Śaiva categories within the framework of national ideology and interreligious dialogue (Ramstedt, 2014). Thus, the historical transmission of Śaivism to the Nusantara is not merely a closed chapter of medieval history but an ongoing narrative of reinterpretation. Textual translation, cultural adaptation, and symbolic transformation remain central mechanisms through which Śaiva theology sustains its relevance.

In conclusion, the transmission of Śaivism to the Nusantara illustrates a multidimensional process involving maritime exchange, textual reinterpretation, royal patronage, ritual adaptation, and linguistic transformation. Old Javanese and Balinese texts functioned as mediators between Sanskritic theology and local cosmology, producing hybrid yet coherent religious formations. This history challenges simplistic diffusionist models and instead reveals a dynamic interplay between transregional doctrine and local cultural creativity. Śaivism in the Nusantara, therefore, should be understood as a historically adaptive tradition whose continuity depends precisely on its capacity for contextual transformation.

Reinterpretation of Siddhanta Theology in Nusantara Hindu Practice

The reinterpretation of Saiva Siddhanta theology in Nusantara Hindu practice represents not merely a continuation of classical doctrine but a creative reconfiguration shaped by historical, cosmological, and socio-political conditions. While classical Saiva Siddhanta articulates a structured metaphysical triad of *Pati* (Lord), *Pasu* (soul), and *Pāśa* (bondage), its Nusantara expressions—particularly in Bali—reframe these ontological categories within a ritual cosmology deeply informed by indigenous symbolic systems, ancestral veneration, and performative religiosity. This reinterpretation involves subtle yet significant shifts in ontology, cosmology, and theological emphasis.

In classical Saiva Siddhanta, ontology is structured around the eternal distinction between God and soul. Śiva as *Pati* is the omniscient, omnipotent, and transcendent Lord, ontologically distinct from individual souls, which remain dependent even in liberation (Flood, 1996). Liberation (*mokṣa*) does not collapse this distinction but perfects the soul's participation in divine consciousness through grace. However, in Nusantara Hinduism, particularly in Balinese theology, divine reality is frequently articulated through a more integrative cosmological model. The Supreme is often expressed through the concept of a singular ultimate principle that manifests in multiple deities and cosmic functions. This formulation does not explicitly negate Siddhanta dualism but tends toward a more cosmotheistic or panentheistic expression in ritual discourse (Hooykaas, 1973).

Balinese ritual cosmology is structured by principles such as *rwa bhineda* (complementary duality), *tri hita karana* (three causes of well-being), and the spatial orientation of sacred geography (*kaja*–*kelod* axis). These symbolic systems reinterpret metaphysical distinctions in spatial and ritual terms. For instance, rather than emphasizing the ontological gap between *Pati* and *Pasu*, ritual life often dramatizes their interrelation through temple festivals, offerings, and cyclical ceremonies that affirm divine immanence within natural and communal order (Howe, 2005). The divine is encountered not only as transcendent Lord but as an immanent presence permeating landscape, ancestors, and ritual space.

This cosmological shift does not eliminate Siddhanta categories but redistributes their emphasis. The concept of *Pāśa*—bondage through ignorance and karmic limitation—becomes embedded in ritual purification practices (*melukat*), rites of passage (*manusa yadnya*), and temple cycles (*odalan*). These ritual forms function as cosmological correctives, restoring balance between visible and invisible realms rather than exclusively focusing on metaphysical liberation (Eiseman, 1990). Liberation itself, while acknowledged doctrinally, is often subordinated in everyday practice to communal harmony and cosmic equilibrium.

Another significant reinterpretation concerns the concept of divine grace (*anugraha*). Classical Saiva Siddhanta maintains that liberation is impossible without Śiva's grace, mediated through initiation (*dīkṣā*) and ritual discipline (Flood, 2003). In Nusantara practice, however, grace is frequently experienced through ritual efficacy and ancestral blessing rather than solely through formal initiation. Priestly mediation remains important, but ritual agency is distributed across community participation. Offerings (*banten*) symbolize reciprocal exchange between humans and divine forces, suggesting a relational rather than strictly hierarchical theology (Hooykaas, 1973).

Theological reinterpretation also appears in conceptions of divine multiplicity. Classical Siddhanta recognizes Śiva's various forms while maintaining His ontological supremacy. In Bali, divine plurality is elaborated through a complex pantheon integrated into temple networks and village organization. Deities associated with mountains, oceans, agriculture, and ancestors are ritually interconnected. Rather than viewing these figures as subordinate manifestations in a strict metaphysical hierarchy, Balinese practice often presents them as functionally interdependent expressions of a unified sacred reality (Howe, 2005). Theological discourse thus becomes relational and ecological.

Modern developments further shape this reinterpretation. During the twentieth century, Indonesian Hindu leaders reformulated theological language to align with national religious frameworks requiring monotheistic affirmation. This process encouraged systematic articulation of a singular supreme divine principle while preserving traditional ritual plurality (Picard, 2011). Such reformulation required reinterpretation of Siddhanta ontology within modern theological vocabulary. The distinction between transcendent Lord and multiple manifestations was expressed in ways compatible with national ideology, illustrating how political contexts influence theological expression.

The cosmological imagination of Nusantara Hinduism also introduces temporal reinterpretation. Classical Siddhanta often frames liberation in eschatological terms—release from rebirth into eternal communion with Śiva. In contrast, Balinese ritual time is cyclical and regenerative. Ceremonial calendars emphasize recurring renewal rather than linear transcendence (Eiseman, 1990). This cyclical temporality subtly reframes soteriology: spiritual progress is embedded in communal continuity rather than exclusively in individual transcendence.

Ontological shifts are further visible in the relationship between human and divine embodiment. In Siddhanta theology, the soul remains ontologically distinct from God even in liberation. In Nusantara ritual performance, however, sacred dance, trance states,

and temple possession rituals temporarily collapse experiential boundaries between human and divine presence (Howe, 2005). These performative phenomena suggest a phenomenological reinterpretation of ontological distinction—while doctrine may preserve difference, ritual experience dramatizes intimacy and immediacy.

Importantly, such reinterpretations should not be construed as doctrinal inconsistency. Rather, they demonstrate the adaptability of theological systems when embedded within new cultural ecologies. The Nusantara reinterpretation of Siddhanta theology reflects what religious theorists describe as localization—the creative translation of universal categories into particular symbolic environments (Flood, 1996). Ontology becomes cosmology; metaphysics becomes ritual ecology.

In sum, the reinterpretation of Siddhanta theology in Nusantara Hindu practice involves three interrelated transformations. First, ontological dualism is reframed within integrative cosmological symbolism. Second, soteriological emphasis shifts from individual liberation toward communal harmony and ritual balance. Third, divine transcendence is complemented by strong expressions of immanence within sacred geography and ancestral continuity. These shifts do not abolish Siddhanta foundations but reinterpret them in ways that sustain theological coherence within local religious life.

The Nusantara case thus challenges rigid binaries between orthodoxy and adaptation. It reveals theology as a living discourse that negotiates between inherited metaphysical structure and embodied ritual practice. Saiva Siddhanta, when recontextualized in Nusantara Hinduism, becomes less a scholastic system of abstract metaphysics and more a cosmological grammar organizing communal life, sacred space, and ritual time. Such reinterpretation underscores the dynamic capacity of theological traditions to endure precisely through transformation.

Doctrinal Transformation and Theological Negotiation in Modern Indonesian Hinduism

The transformation of Hindu theology in modern Indonesia cannot be understood apart from the political and legal framework that emerged after independence in 1945. Unlike premodern religious formations, which operated within courtly and ritual cosmologies, modern Indonesian Hinduism developed within a nation-state that formally recognizes only religions that affirm belief in one supreme God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*). This constitutional principle, enshrined in the Pancasila ideology, created a theological challenge for Balinese and other Hindu communities whose religious life historically operated through plural ritual expressions, ancestral veneration, and localized temple networks (Bagus, 2005; Hefner, 2011). The need to articulate Hinduism in a way compatible with state requirements catalyzed significant doctrinal reformulation.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Balinese religion was primarily organized through customary law (*adat*), temple federations, and priestly lineages rather than centralized doctrinal institutions. The emergence of the Indonesian republic required religious communities to define themselves in standardized terms recognizable to bureaucratic administration. In response, Hindu leaders established institutional bodies that would later become formalized under national religious governance. The Parisada Hindu Dharma (later Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia, PHDI), founded in 1959, played a central role in systematizing Hindu doctrine for national recognition (Bakker, 1993). Through publications, theological congresses, and educational reform, PHDI articulated a doctrinal framework that emphasized monotheism while retaining ritual plurality.

One of the most consequential theological negotiations concerned the formulation of a single supreme divine principle. To align with state ideology, Hindu intellectuals elaborated the concept of an ultimate divine reality expressed in terms compatible with monotheistic discourse. While classical Śaiva and other Hindu traditions affirm a supreme metaphysical principle, their articulation does not always conform to exclusive monotheism. The Indonesian reformulation emphasized a unified supreme divinity as the source of all manifestations, framing polytheistic elements as symbolic expressions rather than independent gods (Bakker, 1993). This theological reframing allowed Hinduism to meet legal criteria without abandoning its ritual heritage.

This process represents what scholars describe as “religious standardization” or “textualization,” whereby fluid ritual traditions are reorganized into codified doctrinal systems (Hefner, 2011). In modern Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs requires officially recognized religions to possess sacred texts, prophets or founders, standardized doctrines, and ethical codes. Consequently, Indonesian Hindu leaders identified canonical texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gītā, and certain Śaiva scriptures as authoritative references, even though historical Balinese practice had relied more heavily on ritual manuals and local *lontar* manuscripts (Schiller, 1996). The transformation thus involved selective elevation of scriptural sources to fit national religious typologies.

Educational reform further institutionalized doctrinal transformation. Hindu theology became part of formal curricula in public schools and universities, requiring systematic theological articulation comparable to Islamic and Christian instruction (Hefner, 2011). Textbooks presented Hinduism as a coherent monotheistic religion with structured dogma, ethical commandments, and standardized ritual categories. This pedagogical shift reinforced a more uniform theological identity across diverse Hindu communities in Indonesia.

The negotiation of religious identity also occurred in interreligious contexts. As a minority religion within a predominantly Muslim nation, Indonesian Hinduism developed apologetic strategies emphasizing philosophical depth, ethical universalism, and compatibility with modern values (Schiller, 1996). Public discourse highlighted concepts such as harmony, tolerance, and spiritual pluralism, positioning Hinduism as aligned with national unity. Theological language thus became dialogical, shaped by engagement with Islamic, Christian, and secular intellectual frameworks.

Importantly, these transformations did not eliminate internal diversity. Instead, they created a layered religious identity operating simultaneously at local, national, and global levels. At the village level, ritual life continues to revolve around temple festivals, ancestor ceremonies, and communal offerings. At the national level, Hinduism is presented as a unified doctrinal system aligned with Pancasila. At the global level, Indonesian Hinduism participates in transnational Hindu networks, engaging with Indian and diasporic communities (Rai, 2012). This multilevel negotiation illustrates the adaptive capacity of theological traditions in plural political environments.

The institutionalization of Hinduism also reshaped priestly authority. Traditional Brahmana priests historically mediated ritual and cosmological knowledge through hereditary transmission. Modern institutional structures introduced bureaucratic and academic forms of religious leadership, including theologians, educators, and state-recognized religious officials (Bakker, 1993). Authority thus became partially decentralized and professionalized. This shift reflects broader processes of modernization, in which religious expertise becomes subject to certification, curriculum, and public accountability.

Another dimension of doctrinal transformation concerns ritual rationalization. In the mid-twentieth century, reformist movements within Balinese Hinduism sought to simplify ritual practices perceived as overly elaborate or economically burdensome (Schiller, 1996). These reforms emphasized inner devotion and scriptural study alongside traditional offerings. Such movements illustrate internal theological debate over the balance between ritual orthopraxy and spiritual interiority. The reinterpretation of ritual significance demonstrates that doctrinal negotiation is not only external (between religion and state) but also internal (within the community itself).

Contemporary developments continue to shape theological discourse. Globalization, tourism, and digital communication expose Indonesian Hindu communities to diverse interpretations of Hindu philosophy. International yoga movements, Indian devotional organizations, and global Hindu networks influence theological self-understanding (Rai, 2012). These interactions generate new forms of identity that integrate local ritual heritage with broader Hindu philosophical frameworks. Thus, doctrinal transformation remains ongoing rather than confined to the early post-independence period.

Scholars note that these negotiations exemplify how religions adapt to secular governance structures while preserving symbolic continuity (Hefner, 2011). Indonesian Hinduism demonstrates that theological reformulation need not entail doctrinal rupture. Instead, it often involves rearticulation—expressing inherited metaphysical categories in new conceptual idioms. The affirmation of a singular supreme deity, for example, can be interpreted not as abandonment of classical theology but as strategic emphasis within a plural doctrinal repertoire.

In conclusion, doctrinal transformation in modern Indonesian Hinduism reflects a dynamic interplay between state regulation, institutionalization, and identity formation. The requirement of monotheistic affirmation prompted theological clarification and standardization. Institutional bodies such as PHDI formalized doctrine and education, shaping national religious identity. Interreligious engagement and globalization further influenced theological articulation. Yet beneath these transformations, local ritual cosmology and symbolic systems persist, demonstrating continuity amid change. Modern Indonesian Hinduism thus exemplifies theological negotiation as a creative process of adaptation within the framework of a pluralistic nation-state.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that doctrinal transformation in modern Indonesian Hinduism is not a rupture with tradition, but rather a dynamic process of theological negotiation between classical metaphysical heritage and the demands of the modern nation-state. The reformulation of theology has occurred primarily within the context of the need for official recognition in the Indonesian legal system, which requires adherence to the principle of Belief in One Supreme God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*). In this context, Hindu intellectuals and religious leaders have rearticulated classical theological teachings into a monotheistic language compatible with the ideology of Pancasila, without entirely abandoning traditional cosmological and ritual structures. The concept of the One Supreme God has been emphasized as the highest reality and the source of various divine manifestations, so that the plurality of *devatā* is understood as a symbolic expression of transcendent unity.

The institutionalization of religion through the establishment of organizations such as the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI), the development of religious education curricula, and the standardization of doctrines and ritual practices has shaped Indonesian Hinduism into a religion that is doctrinally and administratively structured. This process has produced a more systematic, textual,

and normative theological framework compared to earlier forms of practice that were primarily rooted in customary law (*adat*) and local community traditions. Formal education and state regulation have played significant roles in constructing a more uniform national Hindu identity, while simultaneously strengthening the social and political legitimacy of Hindus within modern Indonesian society.

At the same time, this study affirms that such transformation has not erased internal diversity or distinctive local characteristics. At the practical level, ritual life, the structure of traditional village communities, and cosmological symbolism continue to serve as the spiritual foundation of the community. What has occurred, therefore, is not total homogenization, but rather a rearticulation of theology across two interconnected spheres: the normative-state domain and the cosmological-communal domain. This negotiation illustrates the capacity of Indonesian Hinduism to maintain symbolic continuity while engaging in conceptual adaptation.

Ultimately, doctrinal transformation and theological negotiation in modern Indonesian Hinduism reveal that religion is not static but responsive to social, political, and global change. Modernization, globalization, and interreligious dialogue continue to influence how Hindus understand their theology and identity. Contemporary Indonesian Hinduism may thus be understood as the product of a creative process that integrates Śaiva tradition and Nusantara heritage within the institutional framework of the modern state, forming a religious identity that is simultaneously historical, contextual, and open to ongoing development.

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