

MAHASIVARATRI AS INTEGRAL HINDU SPIRITUALITY: ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, AND AXIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This article examines Mahasivaratri as an integrated form of Hindu spirituality through ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives. Ontologically, Mahasivaratri is interpreted as a sacred symbol of the union between human consciousness and the Absolute Reality, where Śiva represents the cosmic principle that transcends and permeates the universe. Epistemologically, the observance demonstrates a holistic model of spiritual knowledge derived from scriptural authority, ritual symbolism, ascetic practice, and contemplative experience, indicating that religious praxis functions as a transformative method of knowing. Axiologically, the celebration embodies ethical, spiritual, and ecological values, including self-discipline, compassion, mental purification, and harmony with nature. The study employs qualitative textual analysis of Hindu scriptures, classical literature, and traditional commentaries, including Nusantara sources, to interpret symbolic and theological meanings. The findings reveal that Mahasivaratri is not merely an annual ritual but a comprehensive spiritual system designed to facilitate inner transformation, moral refinement, and cosmic awareness. The concept of anugraha (divine grace) emerges as a central theological principle that links metaphysical truth with existential experience, emphasizing that spiritual liberation arises through inner purification and disciplined practice. Therefore, Mahasivaratri can be understood as a paradigm of integral Hindu spirituality that unites metaphysics, knowledge, and ethical life within a single transformative religious framework.

Keywords: Mahasivaratri, Śiva, Hindu philosophy, ontology, epistemology, axiology.

INTRODUCTION

An ideal scientific study should encompass three principal domains of philosophy of science: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology examines the object of study; epistemology explains the methods and frameworks of scientific reasoning; while axiology investigates the values and benefits of the research. In this study, the ontological object is the celebration of Mahasivaratri as represented in various textual sources and traditions. The epistemological approach is conducted through analysis of the questions “why” and “how” the ritual is understood theologically and scientifically. The axiological aspect examines the spiritual, social, and ecological benefits of the observance of Mahasivaratri.

In spiritual discourse (Narayana, 2026), absolute truth is understood as Brahman, the all-pervading reality that encompasses everything. All manifestations arise from truth and ultimately return to truth. This metaphysical doctrine affirms that the highest reality is

singular and indivisible, even though it is manifested in diverse cosmic forms. This principle is expressed in the mahāvākya sarvam khalvidam brahma, which asserts the ontological unity between the universe and the Absolute Reality.

Within the Hindu theological and cosmological framework, the highest reality is understood as the Universal Soul that manifests itself in various divine aspects in order to explain the relationship between the Absolute and the universe. The Upanishadic teachings describe four understandings of Brahman: as the transcendent reality (Brahman), the personal God (Isvara), the cosmic spirit (Hiranyagarbha), and the cosmic principle that generates the universe (Viraj), demonstrating that the Absolute can be comprehended through its cosmic functions. Within this differentiation, the aspect of Isvara is manifested in three divine functions—creation, preservation, and dissolution—represented by Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Among these, Shiva holds a particularly strong symbolic position, especially through the concept of the cosmic dance (Shivatandava), which symbolizes the dynamic cycle of the cosmos. This symbolism later became the foundation for the development of various forms of bhakti and religious celebrations, including Mahashivaratri, as theological as well as spiritual expressions of devotees in interpreting the presence of God within the cosmos (Donder 2007).

The Sivaratri holy day is not merely understood as a religious calendar celebration, but also as a spiritual moment rich in theological and philosophical meaning. Differences in the timing of its observance across various regions demonstrate the flexibility of Hindu tradition in adapting religious practices to local calendrical systems and geographical contexts without diminishing the essence of its teachings. Thus, Sivaratri affirms the universal spiritual dimension of Hinduism—namely, the call for introspection, self-purification, and the deepening of awareness of the presence of divine reality. Through the practices of tapa, japa, and brata that accompany it, this celebration becomes a means of inner transformation that guides human beings toward a life more aligned with dharma and the ultimate spiritual goal.

The discussion of Mahasivaratri is grounded in the structure of Hindu sacred literature, which is classically classified into two main categories: Śruti as authoritative revelation and Smṛti as traditions of interpretation and elaboration. The Śruti group includes the corpus of the Vedas along with the Upanisads, while Smṛti encompasses the Itihāsa, Purāna, and other disciplines of religious knowledge. Textual references to Mahasivaratri primarily develop within the realm of Smṛti, especially through the epic narrative of King Citrabhanu, who in a previous life as a hunter attained spiritual transformation through an unintentional act of worship to Śiva—a story that affirms the supremacy of inner intention over ritual formalism. Variations of similar narratives in the Purāṇic literature emphasize ascetic practices such as fasting, night vigil, and lingga worship as means of purifying consciousness.

In the Nusantara context, the integration of these doctrines is reflected in the Old Javanese work Kakawin Sivaratrikalpa, which marks the process of theological adaptation of the Śaiva tradition within a local cultural environment. Thus, the entirety of these textual sources provides both a conceptual and historical foundation for understanding Mahasivaratri as a universal spiritual praxis oriented toward the inner transformation of human beings (Suamba, 2013).

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that Mahasivaratri functions not only as an individual ritual but also as a collective practice that reinforces social cohesion and the continuity of tradition. The celebration emphasizes the importance of introspection, self-

discipline, and devotion, making the religious experience arising from the practice both educational and transformational. In the Nusantara context, local adaptations such as those found in the Kakawin Sivaratrikalpa highlight the flexibility of Hindu tradition in responding to local socio-cultural conditions without diminishing its theological essence. Thus, Mahasivaratri emerges as a bridge between sacred texts, ritual practices, and social dynamics, enabling Hindus to attain spiritual realization while preserving their cultural identity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a library research approach. The data are derived from classical Hindu literary sources—Itihasa, Purana, and Upanisad—as well as Nusantara texts such as kakawin. The analysis is conducted through textual hermeneutics to interpret the symbolic and theological meanings embedded in ritual narratives. The theoretical framework integrates philosophical hermeneutics, religious symbolism theory, phenomenology of religion, and comparative theology in order to correlate metaphysical concepts found in sacred texts with lived religious practices, thereby producing interpretations that are both textually grounded and contextually relevant. Additionally, this approach allows for a critical engagement with both historical and contemporary perspectives, ensuring that the study situates Mahasivaratri within a dynamic interplay of tradition, culture, and modern religious experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Mahasivaratri possesses a depth of philosophical meaning that can be understood through three principal dimensions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. From an ontological perspective, the essence of Mahasivaratri lies in its function as a symbolic medium for the union of the human microcosm with the divine macrocosm. Within the framework of Hindu metaphysics, Śiva is understood as a cosmic reality that both transcends and permeates the universe, so that acts of worship are not merely devotional rituals but existential contemplations on the nature of being.

This idea is consistent with the teachings of the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, which affirm that God is the cause, sustainer, and innermost essence of the cosmos, as well as with the theological descriptions in the Śiva Purāṇa that portray Śiva as the absolute principle who is both the origin and the ultimate goal of all existence. A similar view is also reflected in the Bhagavad Gītā, which declares that the divine reality is present within and pervades the entire universe. Thus, the Mahasivaratri ritual functions as a means of internalizing cosmic consciousness within the individual—a spiritual process that guides human beings from empirical awareness toward metaphysical realization.

Academically, these texts interpret Shivaratri as a theological-philosophical symbol of the transformation of consciousness rather than merely a nocturnal ritual phenomenon. The term ratri (night) is understood not as literal darkness, but as a liminal condition that enables human beings to transition from mental attachment toward spiritual clarity. The cosmological explanation of the Chaturdashi lunar phase—when the mind, symbolically represented, undergoes a “waning”—is interpreted as a metaphor for the reduction of mental activity, allowing the inner self to become more receptive to the Divine. Thus, the night of Shivaratri is understood as a sacred moment that symbolically supports contemplative practice and spiritual discipline.

This view is consistent with the classical philosophical idea of the divine triad of

values (the divine triadic values refer to the concept of three fundamental pillars of theology that are interrelated, often analogous to triadic structures in theology or philosophy of religion. In the Hindu context, as in the earlier discussion of Mahasivaratri, this may be understood as the triad of Śiva: creation (sṛṣṭi), preservation (sthiti), and dissolution (saṁhāra), which together form the divine cosmic cycle). Plato proposed the concept of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as attributes of ultimate reality, which in the Vedantic tradition finds its parallel in the Upanishadic formulation Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. Within this framework, Shivam represents the principle of auspiciousness or existential purity that mediates between the ontological dimension (truth) and the aesthetic dimension (beauty) (Narayana, 1997).

Therefore, from a scientific-hermeneutic perspective, Shivaratri can be understood as a symbolic religious construct that integrates cosmology, ethics, and mysticism. It is not merely a traditional holy day, but a meaningful framework that directs humanity toward collective spiritual praxis—meditation, social virtue, and service—affirming that a truly meaningful day is one in which divine consciousness is manifested in concrete action.

Epistemologically, the study finds that knowledge of Mahasivaratri is acquired through the integration of various sources of religious authority, namely sacred texts, oral traditions, ritual symbolism, and meditative experience. This indicates that Hindu epistemology is holistic, combining rational, symbolic, and mystical dimensions. Ascetic practices such as fasting, night vigil, and control of speech function as epistemic methods that enable the transformation of consciousness, so that spiritual knowledge is not only understood conceptually but also realized through direct experience.

According to Amit Ray (2025), Linggāṣṭakam is a revered Hindu hymn consisting of eight verses that praise the greatness of the Śiva Liṅga as a symbol of Lord Śiva's glory. This powerful devotional stotram was composed by Adi Shankaracharya, the eighth-century philosopher who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta. The hymn is commonly chanted during rituals of Śiva worship, especially on the festival of Śivarātri. The text of Lingga Astakam is a stotra (hymn of praise) consisting of eight verses that glorify the Śiva Liṅga as a symbol of eternity and the grace of Lord Śiva. This text is often associated with the tradition of Siwa Rudram in the Hindu scriptures, particularly in the context of Liṅga worship that is believed to destroy sin, suffering, and worldly illusion. The following is a quotation of the original Lingga Astakam text from Śaiva sources:

*brahmamurāri surārchita liṅgaṃ
nirmalabhāsita śōbhita liṅgaṃ /
janmaja duḥkha vināśaka liṅgaṃ*

*tatpraṇamāmi sadāśiva liṅgaṃ // 1
dēvamuni pravarārchita liṅgaṃ
kāmadahana karuṇākara liṅgaṃ /
rāvaṇa darpa vināśana liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāśiva liṅgaṃ // 2*

Meaning:

I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, the destroyer of the cycle of saṁsāra, worshiped by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and the gods, with sacred words and

sincere devotion. I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, the destroyer of desire, the subduer of Rāvaṇa's pride, adored by the gods and the sages, the granter of wishes and the source of boundless compassion.

*sarva sugandha sulēpita liṅgaṃ
buddhi vivardhana kāraṇa liṅgam /
siddha surāsura vandita liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāsīva liṅgam // 3*

*kanaka mahāmaṇi bhūṣita liṅgaṃ
phaṇipati vēṣṭita śōbhita liṅgam /
dakṣasuyajña vināśana liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāsīva liṅgam // 4*

Meaning:

I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, adorned with the fragrance of flowers, which enhances the strength of intellect, virtue, and the radiance of wisdom, thereby subduing the gods and the siddhas; the Liṅga embellished with gold and various jewels, encircled by the divine serpent, and the destroyer of Dakṣa's sacrificial rite,

*kuṅkuma chandana lēpita liṅgaṃ
paṅkaja hāra susōbhita liṅgam /
sañchita pāpa vināśana liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāsīva liṅgam // 5*

*dēvagaṇārchita sēvita liṅgaṃ
bhāvair bhaktibhirēva ca liṅgam /
dinakara kōṭi prabhākara liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāsīva liṅgam // 6*

Meaning:

I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, worshiped by the gods with pure thoughts and devotion, whose splendor is like millions of rays of the sun; I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, smeared with turmeric and sandal paste, adorned with a garland of lotus flowers, capable of erasing the accumulated sins of many past lives.

*aṣṭadalōparivēṣṭita liṅgaṃ
sarvasamudbhava kāraṇa liṅgam /
aṣṭadaridra vināśana liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāsīva liṅgam // 7*

*suraguru suravara pūjita liṅgaṃ
suravana puṣpa sadārchita liṅgaṃ /
parātparam paramātmaka liṅgaṃ
tatpraṇamāmi sadāśiva liṅgaṃ // 8*

Meaning:

I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, surrounded by eight lotus petals, the destroyer of eight types of suffering, the cause of the manifestation of all creation; I bow to the Liṅga, the eternal protector, the embodiment of supreme spiritual consciousness, worshiped by the gods and gurus with a variety of flowers from the heavenly garden.

*liṅgāṣṭakamidam puṇyam yaḥ paṭhēśśiva sannidhau /
śivalōkamavāpnōti śivēna saha mōdatē //*

Meaning:

Whoever recites these eight verses before the Śivalinga will attain Śivaloka and enjoy eternal bliss together with Lord Śiva.

From an axiological perspective, the core essence of Mahasivaratri lies in its capacity to serve as a medium for moral and spiritual renewal. The symbolic story of the hunter who receives spiritual grace emphasizes that inner transformation is far more significant than one's past moral record. The series of ritual practices performed also cultivate self-discipline, emotional control, and ethical conduct toward others. Symbolically, even the reduction of consumption and activity during ascetic observances conveys an ecological message, highlighting harmony between humans and the universe. Within this transformative framework, the concept of anugraha (divine grace) becomes a crucial foundation for understanding both the theological dimension and the practical value of the celebration.

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In Hindu philosophy, this concept is closely associated with divine love that guides the soul out of illusion toward the awareness of ultimate truth. From an axiological perspective, the teachings in Kakawin Siwaratrikalpa by Mpu Tanakung during the Majapahit Kingdom emphasize that anugraha (divine grace) is the highest spiritual value, directly impacting human life. This understanding is further reinforced through the symbolic stories at the core of the text's teachings (Suamba, 2013), demonstrating that divine grace operates through the transformation of consciousness rather than merely

through formal rituals. Thus, anugraha is understood as both a theological and pedagogical principle, guiding humans to integrate metaphysical, ethical, and existential dimensions in their spiritual journey.

Human beings are not merely their bodies. They also possess the mind, intellect, and Ātman. It is the combination of all these elements that constitutes true humanity. When the balance among these four components is disturbed, humans fall into problems. When humans maintain the balance among these four elements, the nation will prosper. Human transformation is based on the transformation of the mind. When humans transform, the nation transforms as well. When the nation changes, the world changes. Therefore, if the world is to be changed, mental transformation must occur at the individual level. The human mind must be filled with love. The mind is an extraordinary entity. When filled with wisdom, it elevates a person to sainthood. When associated with ignorance, it becomes an agent of death. Hence, it has been stated that the mind is the cause of either bondage or liberation for humans. All changes in education and other fields must begin with the transformation of the mind (Narayana, 1997).

The analysis of this excerpt shows that the conceptual framework is built upon a synthesis of the theology of divine love, spiritual anthropology, and transformational ethics within Hindu philosophy. From an axiological perspective, reference to the Kakawin Siwaratrikalpa by Mpu Tanakung during the Majapahit Kingdom emphasizes that anugraha (divine grace) is regarded as the highest value, serving as a transformative principle that connects the metaphysical dimension with human existential reality. Within this framework, divine love is not merely a theological concept but an ontological force that enables the soul to emerge from avidyā (ignorance) toward awareness of ultimate truth.

From an anthropological-philosophical perspective, the text presents a model of human structure as an integral whole—body, mind, intellect, and ātman—which reflects the Hindu holistic view of human nature. The balance among these elements is positioned as a prerequisite for individual and social harmony, so that internal disharmony is understood as the root of external crises. This premise affirms the microcosm–macrocosm principle: the transformation of the individual produces collective transformation, which ultimately has cosmic repercussions. Thus, the change of the world is not seen merely as an external project but as a logical consequence of a revolution in personal consciousness.

From an epistemological and ethical perspective, the emphasis on the mind as the determinant of bondage or liberation highlights the central role of manas in Hindu spiritual psychology. The mind is understood as an ambivalent instrument—it can serve as a means of enlightenment when filled with wisdom, or as a source of destruction when dominated by ignorance. Therefore, mental transformation is positioned as the foundation for all reforms, including those in education and social order. In conclusion, the text articulates an integral spiritual paradigm: divine love as the source of value, anthropological balance as a prerequisite for harmony, and the transformation of the mind as the method for universal change.

The story of Lubdhaka demonstrates that the grace (anugraha) of Lord Śiva is not only metaphysical but also ethical and transformative: humans are invited to realize their divine potential, rise from existential despair, and move toward spiritual perfection. The essence of anugraha lies in its liberating power—releasing humans from inner darkness, moral suffering, and worldly attachments—through the practice of brata as a discipline for controlling the senses and ego. Thus, anugraha is not merely a passive gift but a principle of value affirming that life's trials serve as spiritual education, obstacles function as a means

of self-purification, and ascetic discipline is the path to the highest human goal (mahāpuruṣārtha) (Agastia, 2001).

This text demonstrates that Mahasivaratri is not merely a religious celebration, but a system of spiritual praxis that unites the dimensions of metaphysics, knowledge, and ethics within a single framework of integrated religious experience. Thus, the ritual can be understood as an integrative model of Hindu spirituality, emphasizing both the interior transformation of the individual and cosmic balance.

Carrying the theme “The Month of Śiva for Spirituality, Peace, and Harmony,” the Prambanan Shiva Festival 2026 is an annual celebration commemorating the sacred day of Śivaratri, observed by Hindus each year as an act of devotion to Lord Śiva. Beyond its religious significance, the festival also reinforces the role of Prambanan Temple as a UNESCO World Heritage site and a spiritual center for Hindu devotees, while simultaneously highlighting the devotion (bhakti) of Hindu communities across Indonesia through the worship processions.

The Mahasivaratri prayer procession serves as the pinnacle of the entire Prambanan Shiva Festival. Mahasivaratri is regarded as the night of Lord Śiva’s greatness, a special time for Hindus to deepen their spiritual practice. The worship rituals begin with the chanting of sacred prayers, fasting, and reflection on ethical values, virtue, forgiveness, and Lord Śiva’s grace. This sacred procession is held from midnight to early morning, from 00:00 to 03:00 WIB, providing a contemplative moment for devotees to draw closer to Lord Śiva. After this series of rituals, the worship activities continue with various supporting ceremonies that further reinforce the spiritual and cultural significance of Mahasivaratri.

The celebration of Mahasivaratri at Prambanan Temple represents more than an annual religious ritual; it functions as a comprehensive spiritual praxis that integrates metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological dimensions of Hindu tradition. Observed during the Prambanan Shiva Festival 2026, from January 17 to February 15, this festival provides a space for Hindus from the Nusantara region and beyond to engage collectively in cultural and spiritual practices (<https://kemenpar.go.id>). Under the theme “The Month of Shiva for Spirituality, Peace, and Harmony,” the festival emphasizes introspection, self-discipline, and devotion, transforming ritual observances into an educative and transformational experience.

From a theological and spiritual perspective, Mahasivaratri is a sacred moment for internalizing divine consciousness through fasting, chanting, meditation, and reflection on ethical values such as virtue, forgiveness, and divine grace. The nocturnal observances, performed from midnight to the early hours, create a contemplative environment for devotees to cultivate closeness to Śiva. Anthropologically and culturally, the festival functions as a social integrator, reinforcing community cohesion and sustaining the continuity of Hindu traditions while highlighting the adaptability of Hindu ritual practices in local Nusantara contexts, as reflected in adaptations such as the Kakawin Sivaratrikalpa.

Furthermore, the festival situates Prambanan Temple not only as a religious center but also as a symbolic cultural heritage site, demonstrating the interrelation of spirituality, culture, and institutional authority. The ritual sequences exemplify experiential epistemology, where spiritual knowledge is realized through disciplined practice rather than mere conceptual understanding. From an axiological standpoint, Mahasivaratri embodies moral, spiritual, and ecological values, underscoring the transformative potential of divine grace (anugraha) in guiding personal, social, and cosmic harmony.

In conclusion, Mahasivaratri at Prambanan serves as an integrative model of Hindu

spirituality, combining metaphysical insight, practical discipline, and ethical reflection. It affirms that religious festivals can simultaneously foster spiritual development, cultural preservation, and social cohesion, thereby bridging the sacred and the social while promoting individual and collective transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Mahasivaratri is a religious phenomenon possessing profound philosophical and theological significance within the framework of ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontologically, Mahasivaratri represents the metaphysical awareness of the unity between human beings and the absolute reality, wherein Śiva is understood as the cosmic principle that transcends yet pervades all existence. The ritual is not merely a symbolic tradition but a contemplative medium that enables individuals to internalize divine consciousness within themselves.

Epistemologically, Mahasivaratri demonstrates that spiritual knowledge in the Hindu tradition is integrative—combining the authority of sacred texts, ritual symbolism, ascetic practices, and inner experience. Knowledge does not remain at the level of conceptual understanding but attains existential realization through spiritual disciplines such as tapa (austerity), japa (mantra repetition), and brata (vows/observances). Thus, religious practice functions as an epistemic method that transforms human consciousness from the empirical level to the transcendent.

Axiologically, this celebration embodies ethical, spiritual, and ecological values that affirm its relevance to contemporary life. Self-discipline, control of the senses, compassion, and harmony with nature become practical values internalized through ritual practice. The concept of anugraha occupies a central position as a transformative principle, emphasizing that divine grace operates through the process of purifying the human mind. The individual transformation resulting from these practices is understood as the foundation for social and cosmic change, thus integrating spirituality with ethical responsibility toward the world.

Thus, Mahasivaratri can be understood as a model of integral spirituality within the Hindu tradition—a religious praxis system that unites metaphysics, knowledge, and values into a cohesive transformative experience. It is not merely an annual sacred celebration, but a theological paradigm that guides humans toward self-realization, cosmic harmony, and a life grounded in divine consciousness.

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