



## THE LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONS OF THE *TOLAK BALA* MANTRA IN THE BABADAN VILLAGE

*Struktur Bahasa dan Fungsi Sosial-Religius Mantra Tolak Bala di Desa Babadan*

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### Abstract

Oral tradition in the form of tolak bala mantras represents a form of local wisdom within Javanese society, reflecting the spiritual relationship between humans, nature, and God. This study aims to examine the linguistic structure, symbolic meaning, and socio-religious functions of tolak bala mantras in Babadan Village, Werungotok District, Nganjuk Regency, East Java. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method and was conducted on October 4, 2025. The data consist of mantra utterances and interview results involving five informants, including one village elder, two community leaders, and two local residents. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and note-taking techniques, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model with triangulation. The findings reveal that the tolak bala mantra reflects religious syncretism between Islamic teachings and Javanese local beliefs, functions as a form of spiritual protection, and serves as a medium for preserving cultural identity through symbolic, repetitive, and performative language structures. The implications highlight the importance of preserving mantras as oral cultural heritage that reinforces religious values, ecological awareness, and social identity.

**Keywords:** javanese community; linguistic structure; oral tradition; socio-religious functions; tolak bala mantras

### Abstrak

Tradisi lisan berupa mantra tolak bala merupakan bagian dari kearifan lokal masyarakat Jawa yang merefleksikan hubungan spiritual antara manusia, alam, dan Tuhan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji struktur bahasa, makna simbolik, serta fungsi sosial-religius mantra tolak bala pada masyarakat Desa Babadan, Kecamatan Werungotok, Kabupaten Nganjuk, Jawa Timur. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dan dilaksanakan pada 4 Oktober 2025. Data penelitian berupa tuturan mantra dan hasil wawancara dengan lima informan yang terdiri atas satu sesepuh desa, dua tokoh masyarakat, dan dua warga. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, serta teknik simak dan catat, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman dengan teknik triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mantra tolak bala merepresentasikan sinkretisme religius antara ajaran Islam dan kepercayaan lokal Jawa, berfungsi sebagai doa perlindungan spiritual, serta menjadi sarana pelestarian identitas budaya melalui struktur bahasa yang simbolik, repetitif, dan performatif. Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pelestarian mantra sebagai warisan budaya lisan yang memperkuat nilai religius, kesadaran ekologis, dan identitas sosial masyarakat.

**Kata-kata kunci:** fungsi sosial-religius; mantra tolak bala; masyarakat jawa; struktur bahasa; tradisi lisan

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with rich cultural diversity, one of which is reflected in its oral traditions, such as mantras. In folklore studies, oral tradition is understood as a cultural practice transmitted from generation to generation and functions as a medium for conveying values, norms, and belief systems within a community. As part of oral tradition, mantras are not merely sacred utterances but also serve as a repository of local wisdom preserved by indigenous communities (Caesarine & Setyaningsih, 2023).

In Babadan Village, Werungotok District, Nganjuk Regency, this oral tradition remains preserved through the recitation of *tolak bala* mantras before entering forest areas. For the people of Babadan, the forest is not only perceived as an ecological space but also as a sacred domain with spiritual dimensions. Therefore, interaction with the forest requires a form of safety protocol in the form of orally transmitted expressions passed down through generations as a means of respect and self-protection.

A review of previous studies indicates that research on mantras has been conducted from various perspectives. Caesarine & Setyaningsih (2023) and Febriyanto et al. (2021) highlight the function of mantras as a means of maintaining social harmony and as a form of supplication for divine protection. Meanwhile, Wigranto et al. (2023) and Bano (2018) emphasize the aspect of religious syncretism in mantras as an integration of local beliefs and religious values. On the other hand, Yanti et al. (2024) reveal challenges in the preservation of mantras due to shifting values in modern society.

However, most of these studies tend to focus on linguistic aspects or the general functions of mantras within ritual contexts. Therefore, there remains a research gap concerning the specific function of *tolak bala* mantras as part of the oral tradition that reflects the relationship between humans and nature in everyday life. The biocultural approach proposed by Gavin et al. (2015) emphasizes the importance of integrating culture and environment in understanding local practices; however, its application to the context of *tolak bala* mantras remains underexplored.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to position *tolak bala* mantras not merely as ritual texts but as part of a cultural knowledge system that embodies ecospiritual values. This perspective aligns with the framework proposed by Pascual et al. (2023), which emphasizes that sustainability depends on how humans interpret and value nature within cultural contexts. Specifically, this study examines how the community of Babadan Village maintains the practice of mantras as a strategy for self-protection and as a form of environmental ethics in their interaction with forest areas.

The urgency of this study is grounded in the reality that oral traditions in Babadan Village are at a critical point due to the disruption of intergenerational transmission. As described by Yanti et al. (2024), the threat of extinction of oral traditions is increasingly evident among younger generations in rural areas, who tend to perceive such practices as irrational superstition. Without in-depth scholarly investigation, the philosophical values of prudence and respect for nature embedded in *tolak bala* mantras are at risk of disappearing. Therefore, this study is crucial in revitalizing the meaning of mantras as local wisdom that remains relevant in maintaining ecological balance in the future.

This study aims to demonstrate that the existence of *tolak bala* mantras in East Java is not merely a remnant of past mysticism but rather a reflection of a dynamic and adaptive belief system. Through a qualitative approach, this research explores how communities use mantras

as a medium of communication with supernatural forces to ensure collective safety. By uncovering the latent functions of these mantras, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of cultural and human ecology studies, while also strengthening the discourse on the importance of integrating cultural values into global environmental conservation policies.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Oral Tradition and Folklore**

Oral tradition is a fundamental part of culture that is transmitted from generation to generation through verbal media and social practices. It encompasses myths, legends, prayers, and mantras, which function as a means of transmitting values, norms, and belief systems within a community. In modern folklore studies, oral tradition is not merely understood as a legacy of the past but as a dynamic social mechanism for maintaining collective identity and cultural continuity (Duranti, 1997; Hanks, 2018).

According to Danandjaja (1984), folklore is a part of collective culture that is disseminated and transmitted across generations, either orally or through demonstration accompanied by gestures or mnemonic devices. Folklore is characterized by its anonymity, formulaic patterns, and tangible social functions within the community. In this context, mantras are categorized as oral folklore due to their verbal structure and their use within specific ritual contexts in Babadan Village.

According to Finnegan (2012), in her study of oral literature, she emphasizes that oral texts such as mantras never exist in isolation; they are always embedded in performance and the social context of their speakers. Mantras continue to persist as part of local wisdom because they function not only as linguistic expressions but also as symbolic media that connect humans with God, nature, and supernatural forces (Caesarine & Setyaningsih, 2023; Wigraranto et al., 2023). This study employs the linguistic anthropology approach of Duranti (1997) and the communicative practice framework of Hanks (2018) as its theoretical foundation to understand mantras as part of an oral tradition that is both contextual and performative.

### **Linguistic Structure of Mantras**

The linguistic structure of mantras in this study encompasses elements such as sacred diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm, which contribute to the suggestive power and sacredness of ritual utterances. These four elements are essential because mantras operate not only through lexical meaning but also through sound patterns and linguistic forms believed to possess spiritual power.

Sacred diction refers to the selection of words that carry religious and symbolic meanings, such as *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, *aamiin*, *lemah sangar*, and *kayu angker*. These expressions create a sacred atmosphere and reinforce the spiritual legitimacy of the mantra. Seli (2021) explains that diction in mantras plays a crucial role in determining symbolic power, as ritual language is closely tied to the value system of a community. This is further supported by Maharani et al. (2020), who state that ritual mantras contain symbolic codes and cultural meanings collectively understood by the supporting community.

Repetition functions to strengthen belief, suggestion, and spiritual intention through the recurrence of words or sounds such as *aamiin* and *yaulyala*. Foley (2017) emphasizes that repetition in oral tradition serves to reinforce meaning, facilitate memorization, and enhance the performative force of utterances. In the context of mantras, repeated sounds are believed to amplify spiritual protective power.

Rhyme and rhythm create phonetic harmony that enhances the psychological and spiritual effects of mantras. Forth (1988) explains that ritual language is characterized by

patterns of parallelism, repetition, and structured sound, which function to produce aesthetic effects while reinforcing performative power in ritual practices. This aligns with Hanks (2018), who argues that the effectiveness of ritual language lies not only in the meaning of words but also in the performativity of sound and pronunciation. Recent studies further indicate that sound structures in mantras are key elements in maintaining their suggestive power within local cultural practices (Yanti et al., 2024; Febriyanto et al., 2021). In this study, the analysis of the linguistic structure of mantras is grounded in Foley's (2017) theory of language performativity and Hanks's (2018) framework of communicative practices, which view language as a symbolic act with social and spiritual effects.

### **Socio-Religious Functions of Mantras**

The socio-religious functions of mantras in this study refer to their roles as prayers for protection, instruments of social cohesion, and means of cultural preservation. Mantras are not only understood as sacred utterances but also as symbolic acts that have tangible consequences in social life. Mantras function as a supplication for safety addressed to God before entering forest areas. The use of Islamic phrases such as *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* indicates that mantras are perceived as prayers that possess religious legitimacy, rather than merely magical practices. Seli (2021) explains that mantra practices in local communities often undergo a process of Islamization in meaning, transforming them into forms of prayer oriented toward spiritual devotion to God. This demonstrates that mantras serve as a medium of spiritual communication between humans and the divine.

From a social perspective, mantras function as a medium for transmitting cultural values, honoring ancestors, and reinforcing local identity. The tradition of reciting mantras is passed down through village elders, who act as custodians of cultural authority. Alfaris et al. (2025) assert that oral ritual practices play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity and strengthening social solidarity through intergenerational transmission. Mantras also possess ecological and cultural functions, as they teach respect for nature as a sacred space that must be preserved in balance. Gumelar (2024) states that in indigenous traditions, the relationship between humans and the environment is grounded in moral and ethical awareness, which positions nature as an integral part of a life system that must be maintained through cultural values and ritual practices. In this context, mantras serve as a means of instilling ecological ethics and expressing respect for forest spaces as part of the community's cosmological system.

The analysis of these functions is based on performative speech act theory, which views utterances as social actions. Emphasize that ritual utterances gain their power when they are believed in and legitimized by the community. In this study, this theoretical framework is operationalized by viewing mantras not merely as verbal texts but as symbolic actions used to attain safety, maintain social harmony, reinforce cultural identity, and sustain the belief system of the Babadan community. This study employs performative speech act theory (Foley, 2017) as its primary analytical framework, viewing utterances as social actions that gain force through the collective beliefs of the community.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the linguistic structure and socio-religious functions of *tolak bala* (protective) mantras among the community of Babadan Village, Werungotok District, Nganjuk Regency, East Java. A qualitative approach is used because this study aims to understand cultural phenomena in depth within their natural context (Creswell, 2021). The research was conducted on October 4, 2025, within a community that continues to maintain the practice of reciting mantras before entering forest areas.

The research data consist of *tolak bala* mantra utterances, interview results, and socio-

cultural information related to their use. Primary data sources were obtained from five informants, including one village elder, two community leaders, and two local residents who still understand and practice the mantra. Informants were selected purposively based on their involvement and knowledge of the mantra tradition.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and note-taking techniques. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner for 30–45 minutes using an interview guide, with results recorded directly in field notes. Observations were carried out during the practice of mantra recitation, while the recitations were also recorded using a digital audio recorder to ensure the accuracy of linguistic data, particularly in identifying diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm.

The analysis of linguistic structure was conducted using a descriptive linguistic approach by identifying elements of sacred diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm as components that form the performative power of the mantra. The analysis of socio-religious functions was carried out by interpreting the relationship between the use of the mantra, the community's belief system, and the accompanying socio-cultural practices.

Data analysis followed the model of Miles & Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview data and mantra utterances were classified and coded (e.g., Data 1, Data 2, etc.), then analyzed based on the themes of linguistic structure and socio-religious functions. The researcher acted as the primary instrument by maintaining interpretive consistency through repeated examination of field notes and comparison between interview and observational data.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information across informants, while technique triangulation involved cross-checking interview, observation, and documentation data. The findings of this study imply that linguistic and socio-cultural approaches can be integrated to understand mantras as both an oral tradition and a living cultural practice within the community.

## DISCUSSION

### *Religious Syncretism in the Structure of Mantras*

This subsection discusses the forms of religious syncretism reflected in the structure of the tolak bala mantra. The analysis focuses on the integration of Islamic elements and local Javanese beliefs within ritual language practices.

#### **Data 1**

*“Bismillahirrahmanirrahim silla milla yauyala singo buntut semingkah semingkilo  
lemah sangar kayu angker dadi towo aamiin aamiin aamiin yauyala”*

The structure of the mantra in Data 1 shows the presence of a construction of religious syncretism that is not merely a combination of Islamic elements and local beliefs but also forms a system of meaning that mutually reinforces each other functionally. The presence of the phrase *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* represents theological legitimacy within the Islamic framework, while non-lexical sound elements such as *silla milla yauyala*, as well as natural symbols such as *lemah sangar* and *kayu angker*, indicate the continuity of the local cosmology of Javanese society. This combination reflects the intersection between religious belief systems and local traditions within a living cultural practice (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Saddhono et al., 2016).

These findings indicate that syncretism in the mantra is integrative in nature, not merely the addition of elements, but a unification of meanings that operate within a coherent symbolic system. In this context, the language of the mantra cannot be understood solely through semantic meaning but also as a performative practice that produces spiritual effects through

sound, rhythm, and repetition (Foley, 2017; Hanks, 2018). Thus, the effectiveness of the mantra does not depend on its literal meaning but on how the utterance is produced and believed within the socio-cultural practices of the community.

The elements *silla*, *milla yauyala*, and the repetition of *yauyala* show the dominance of phonological aspects over lexical meaning. This emphasizes that the power of the mantra lies in the performativity of sound, where repetition and rhythm function to strengthen suggestion and the collective belief of the community in spiritual protection (Foley, 2017). In oral traditions, repetitive sound patterns not only function as linguistic aesthetics but also as a medium to strengthen memory, spiritual intention, and the effectiveness of rituals (Fatonah et al., 2025; Hanks, 2018).

In addition, the use of natural symbols such as *lemah sangar* and *kayu angker* shows that the structure of the mantra also represents the cosmological relationship between humans and nature. Nature is understood not as a passive object but as an entity that possesses spiritual dimensions and certain powers, thus requiring respect through symbolic practices. In this context, the mantra functions as a medium of communication between humans and transcendent forces associated with natural spaces (Putri et al., 2024; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

Thus, the structure of the *tolak bala* mantra in the Babadan community not only functions as a sequence of ritual utterances but also as a symbolic system that integrates religious, cosmological, and psychological elements. This integration shows that the mantra is part of a cultural knowledge system that continues to live and is reproduced through oral practices and the collective beliefs of the community (Foley, 2017; Hanks, 2018; Lubis & Saleh, 2024).

### ***Spiritual Functions and Protective Aspects of Mantras***

This subsection examines the spiritual functions of the mantra as a medium of protection and supplication for safety. It also explains how the community perceives the mantra as part of their religious and cultural practices.

#### **Data 2**

*“Mantra itu bukan jimat. Sing penting niate. Nek mlebu alas yo kudu pamit, njaluk slamet marang Gusti Allah.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025)

Data 2 shows that the *tolak bala* mantra in the Babadan Village community is not understood as a magical practice in a narrow sense but rather as a form of religious expression oriented toward supplication to God. The statement *“mantra itu bukan jimat”* emphasizes a shift in meaning from magical practice to a spiritually grounded practice based on intention, where the primary power does not lie in the object or the text of the mantra itself but in the religious awareness of the speaker. This indicates that the mantra has undergone a process of Islamization of meaning and functions as a prayer that holds theological legitimacy within the community's life (Saddhono et al., 2016; Seli, 2021).

The use of the phrase *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim* in the mantra strengthens its monotheistic orientation and indicates that ultimate protection originates from God. This affirms that the mantra does not contradict religious teachings but rather becomes a form of prayer integrated into local cultural practices. This phenomenon reflects an adaptive form of religious syncretism, in which Islamic values are internalized into oral traditions without eliminating the cultural identity of the community (Putri et al., 2024; Saddhono et al., 2016).

In addition to functioning as a medium of communication with God, the mantra also has an ecological dimension related to the relationship between humans and nature. The act of entering the forest is understood as a situation that carries risks, both physical and spiritual, thus

requiring inner preparedness through the recitation of the mantra. In this context, the mantra functions as a form of respect toward nature as well as a request for permission from the forces believed to inhabit it. This practice indicates that the community perceives nature as a sacred space with cosmological dimensions, rather than merely a physical environment (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

Thus, the function of the *tolak bala* mantra in the Babadan community can be understood as a multidimensional mechanism of spiritual protection, encompassing the relationship between humans, God, nature, and the social community. The mantra not only functions as a prayer but also as a cultural practice that strengthens religious awareness, fosters a sense of security, and maintains harmony between humans and their environment. These findings confirm that the mantra constitutes a living belief system that continues to adapt within the social context of the community (Foley, 2017; Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

### ***Symbolism in the Language of Mantras***

This subsection explains the symbolic meanings embedded in the language of the mantra. The discussion highlights how natural and spiritual symbols represent the cosmological worldview of the Babadan community.

#### **Data 3**

*“Alas kuwi ora mung wit-witan. Ono sing nunggu, dadi nek nyebut lemah sangar kuwi ateges kudu eling lan ngajeni.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025).

Data 3 shows that the language used in *tolak bala* mantras contains symbolism that represents the community's cosmological perspective on the relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural forces. Expressions such as *lemah sangar* and *kayu angker* do not merely refer to the physical condition of nature but also carry symbolic meanings that position the forest as a sacred space with spiritual dimensions. In this context, nature is understood as a living entity possessing certain powers, thus requiring attitudes of respect and caution in interacting with it (Saddhono et al., 2016; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

This symbolism indicates that the language of the mantra functions as a medium for representing the cosmological values of the community. The mention of natural elements in the mantra is not descriptive but normative, as it conveys ethical messages regarding how humans should behave toward the environment. Therefore, symbols in the mantra act as cultural devices that regulate collective behavior while maintaining the balance of relationships between humans and nature (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

In addition to meaning-based symbols, the mantra also employs sound symbolism that is non-lexical in nature, as seen in the use of the word *yauyala*.

#### **Data 4**

*“Yauyala kuwi kudu tembung sing duwe arti cetha, nanging swarane sing nggawe ati luwih tentrem.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025).

Data 4 shows that sound elements in the mantra have a symbolic function that does not depend on lexical meaning but rather on the phonological effects they produce. Sounds such as *yauyala* can be categorized as *magical sounds*, namely phonetic sequences believed to possess suggestive power and to influence the psychological condition of the speaker. In oral traditions, this phenomenon indicates that ritual language operates through sound resonance that shapes inner experience and collective belief (Foley, 2017; Sihombing et al., 2023).

The repetition of sounds in the mantra also functions to strengthen its performative effects and to create a more solemn psychological condition. Repetition not only aids memorization in oral traditions but also deepens spiritual intention and reinforces the suggestion of protection believed to be contained in the mantra. In this regard, the effectiveness of ritual language lies not only in its meaning but also in how sounds are organized and performed within the practice (Fatonah et al., 2025; Hanks, 2018).

Thus, symbolism in the language of *tolak bala* mantras is multidimensional, encompassing both semantic and sound-based symbols that operate simultaneously in constructing the community's belief system. The language of the mantra functions not only as a means of communication but also as a representation of local cosmology that connects humans with nature and transcendent forces. These findings confirm that symbols in oral traditions play an important role in sustaining cultural values, spiritual experiences, and the collective identity of the community (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Putri et al., 2024; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

### ***Structure and Function of Mantra Language***

This subsection analyzes the linguistic structure of the mantra through diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm. These linguistic elements contribute to the performative and spiritual power of the ritual utterance.

#### **Data 5**

*“Bismillahirrahmanirrahim silla milla yauyala singo buntut seminggah semingkilo  
lemah sangar kayu angker dadi towo aamiin aamiin aamiin yauyala”*

Data 5 shows that the linguistic structure of the *tolak bala* mantra in the Babadan Village community is systematically organized and not random. This structure is constructed through linguistic elements such as diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm, which collectively form the performative power of the mantra within ritual practices. In the study of oral traditions, such formulaic structures function to maintain the consistency of utterances while also enhancing the effectiveness of the mantra within the cultural context of the community (Fatonah et al., 2025; Saddhono et al., 2016).

In terms of diction, the mantra is dominated by the use of words related to nature and supernatural forces, such as *lemah*, *sangar*, and *angker*. The selection of this diction indicates that the language of the mantra is not neutral but is rich in symbolic meaning that represents the community's cosmological perspective on the environment. Nature is positioned as a space with spiritual dimensions; therefore, the mention of its elements in the mantra functions as both recognition and respect for the forces believed to exist within it (Rupiassa et al., 2024; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

The element of repetition appears prominently through the recurrence of phrases such as *aamiin aamiin aamiin* and *yauyala*. This repetition not only strengthens the linguistic structure but also serves as a means of deepening spiritual intention and creating a more solemn psychological atmosphere. In oral traditions, repetition is a formulaic strategy that plays a role in enhancing the suggestive power of utterances while facilitating intergenerational transmission (Fatonah et al., 2025; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

Furthermore, rhyme and rhythm in the mantra create a harmony of sound that reinforces both the aesthetic and performative effects of ritual language. Regular sound patterns generate phonetic resonance capable of influencing the emotional and spiritual condition of the speaker. In this regard, the language of the mantra operates not only through semantic meaning but also through phonological aspects that contribute to shaping the spiritual experience of the community (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

Thus, the linguistic structure of the *tolak bala* mantra functions not only as a form of

linguistic expression but also as a performative mechanism that connects language, belief, and social practice within the community. The integration of diction, repetition, rhyme, and rhythm demonstrates that the power of the mantra lies in the relationship between linguistic form and the collective beliefs that accompany it. These findings confirm that the structure of mantra language is an integral part of the cultural system that sustains the continuity of spiritual values and community identity (Fatonah et al., 2025; Rupiassa et al., 2024; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

### ***The Transmission Process and Cultural Relevance***

This subsection discusses the oral transmission of the mantra across generations within the community. It also examines the cultural relevance of the mantra in maintaining local identity and traditional values.

#### **Data 6**

*“Mantra iki ora ditulis. Biasane diwariske karo wong tuwo menyang sing dipercaya lan wis siap batine.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025).

Data 6 indicates that the transmission process of the *tolak bala* mantra within the Babadan Village community is conducted orally through a selective mechanism that involves considerations of spiritual readiness and social legitimacy. This tradition is not openly transmitted to all members of the community but is instead entrusted only to individuals who are deemed to possess the necessary spiritual capacity and cultural responsibility. This suggests that the transmission of the mantra is not merely a transfer of text but also a transfer of symbolic authority and embedded cultural values associated with its practitioners (Foley, 2017; Hanks, 2018).

In the context of oral tradition, such a transmission mechanism reflects the presence of a social control system that preserves the authenticity and sacredness of the mantra. Knowledge is maintained not only through memory but also through collective legitimacy granted to specific individuals. Therefore, the continuity of the mantra heavily depends on the presence of cultural agents, such as village elders, who serve as custodians of tradition as well as mediators between older and younger generations (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Schniter et al., 2018).

Amid social change, the relevance of the mantra remains intact because the community does not merely perceive it as a relic of the past but as a practice that continues to hold functional significance in everyday life. The belief in the mantra as a form of spiritual protection demonstrates that this tradition is adaptive and capable of surviving within the dynamics of modernization. The sustainability of oral traditions is largely determined by their ability to adapt without losing the essential values that underpin them (Hartanto, 2023; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

Thus, the transmission process of the *tolak bala* mantra functions not only as a mechanism of cultural transmission but also as a strategy for preserving the value system, identity, and belief structure of the community. This tradition demonstrates that local knowledge remains relevant in modern life as long as it is supported by sustainable social practices and strong cultural legitimacy (Foley, 2017; Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

### ***Challenges to Preservation***

This subsection describes the challenges faced in preserving the *tolak bala* mantra tradition in modern society. The discussion focuses on the effects of modernization, limited documentation, and declining intergenerational understanding.

**Data 7**

*“Saiki akeh bocah enom sing mung ngerti tradisine, nanging ora ngerti maksute mantrane.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025)

Data 7 indicates a decline in the younger generation's understanding of the symbolic meaning and spiritual function of the *tolak bala* mantra. Younger individuals tend to recognize the mantra merely as part of cultural tradition, without comprehending the religious, cosmological, and philosophical values embedded within it. This phenomenon reflects a shift in meaning within oral traditions, from something originally sacred and functional into merely a cultural symbol that has lost its interpretative depth (Dhani et al., 2019; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

This shift cannot be separated from the influence of modernization, which encourages changes in societal mindsets toward more rational and pragmatic orientations. In this context, the practice of mantras is increasingly perceived as irrelevant to modern life, leading to a decline in their social legitimacy among younger generations. Cultural studies suggest that value transformations in modern societies often result in the reduction of meaning in traditional practices, especially those related to spiritual and symbolic dimensions (Gelfand et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there is a difference in perspective between older and younger generations in interpreting the mantra. For the older generation, the mantra is understood as a prayer with spiritual power and ethical value, whereas for some younger individuals, it is viewed merely as cultural heritage without practical function. This difference highlights an interpretative gap that has the potential to weaken the transmission of values within oral traditions (Fatonah et al., 2025; Lubis & Saleh, 2024).

**Data 8**

*“Yen sing ngerti wis ora enek, mantrane iso ilang mergo ora tau dicathet.”*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025)

Data 8 shows that the absence of documentation poses a serious threat to the sustainability of the *tolak bala* mantra. Traditions that rely entirely on oral transmission are highly vulnerable to extinction if not supported by systematic documentation efforts. Dependence on individual memory and the authority of elders places cultural knowledge in an unstable position, especially when adequate regeneration does not occur (Schniter et al., 2018; Suhardi & Huda, 2023).

In addition to internal factors, globalization and the dominance of popular culture also contribute to narrowing the space for oral traditions to survive. Local cultural practices are often marginalized by the rapid spread of modern culture, which is more accessible and appealing to younger generations. As a result, the mantra not only faces textual threats but also experiences a weakening of its function as a system of local knowledge that regulates human relationships with the environment and spiritual life (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Batubara, 2024).

Thus, the primary challenge in preserving the *tolak bala* mantra lies not only in maintaining its form but also in sustaining the meaning embedded within it. Without revitalization efforts involving documentation, cultural education, and active community participation, oral traditions are at risk of experiencing a degradation of meaning and losing their social function. Therefore, the preservation of the mantra requires a comprehensive, community-based approach to ensure its continued relevance in the face of social change (Lubis & Saleh, 2024; Batubara, 2024; Wang et al., 2021).

### ***Social and Cultural Values***

This subsection explains the social and cultural values contained in the mantra tradition. The findings show that the mantra strengthens ecological awareness, social solidarity, and cultural identity within the community.

#### **Data 9**

*"Nek maca mantra sadurunge mlebu alas, awake dewe dadi luwih eling nek alam kuwi kudu dihormati."*

(S, sesepuh desa, wawancara pribadi, 4 Oktober 2025)

Data 9 indicates that the *tolak bala* mantra functions not only as a prayer for protection but also as a medium for instilling social and cultural values in the life of the Babadan Village community. The recitation of the mantra before entering the forest fosters collective awareness of the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and God. In the study of oral traditions, ritual practices are understood as a means of internalizing social and spiritual values that are transmitted across generations within a community (Fatonah et al., 2025).

Moreover, the recitation of the mantra represents values of prudence and respect for nature as a sacred space with ecological and spiritual dimensions. The forest is not merely understood as a physical environment but also as part of the community's cosmological system. In this context, ritual utterances function to shape collective norms while reinforcing ecological awareness in human interactions with the environment (Husin et al., 2025; Rupiassa et al., 2024).

The mantra also serves as a social binder through intergenerational transmission. This process does not merely transfer oral texts but also conveys moral values, social norms, and the cultural identity of the community. Oral traditions play a crucial role in maintaining social solidarity and strengthening community cohesion through cultural practices that are continuously preserved (Emilia et al., 2018; Wigrahanto et al., 2023).

On the other hand, the use of the Javanese language, natural symbols, and traditional expressions in the mantra highlights the role of ritual language as a medium for preserving local cultural identity. The language of the mantra serves as a tool for sustaining collective memory as well as the community's knowledge system. This aligns with studies suggesting that the use of local languages in ritual practices contributes to the continuity of cultural values and ecological knowledge passed down through generations (Putri et al., 2024).

The role of village elders as custodians of tradition further reinforces the social function of the mantra. Elders not only transmit the textual form of the mantra but also instill values of prudence, respect for nature, and adherence to customary norms. In cultural transmission studies, traditional authority plays a significant role in maintaining the continuity of values and social structures through the inheritance of oral knowledge (Hidayat, 2025; Lubis & Saleh, 2024).

Thus, the social and cultural values embedded in the *tolak bala* mantra extend beyond its spiritual function, serving as an instrument for fostering ecological awareness, strengthening cultural identity, and maintaining social cohesion within the community. These findings affirm that ritual practices in oral traditions play a strategic role in preserving collective identity and sustaining cultural values amid social change (Wigrahanto et al., 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the *tolak bala* mantra in the Babadan Village community is not merely a ritual utterance but a part of a living cultural knowledge system rich in meaning. The linguistic structure of the mantra, formed through sacred diction, repetition, rhyme, and

rhythm, affirms that its power lies in the performativity of sound and the collective beliefs of the community. Moreover, the presence of religious syncretism reflects the integration of Islamic values and local cosmology, positioning the mantra as a medium of spiritual communication between humans, God, and nature. In addition, the mantra also serves social, cultural, and ecological functions, such as strengthening cultural identity, maintaining social solidarity, and fostering ecological awareness in human interactions with the environment.

However, this study has several limitations, particularly in the limited number of informants and the focus on a single research site, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study primarily emphasizes linguistic aspects and socio-religious functions without deeply examining the performative aspects of the ritual in practice. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to expand the research scope by including more diverse locations and participants, as well as to explore mantra practices through interdisciplinary approaches, such as performative ethnography or in-depth cultural ecology studies. The implications of this study suggest that mantras, as part of oral tradition, play a strategic role in maintaining the balance between humans, culture, and nature and thus should be integrated into cultural preservation efforts and sustainable environmental policies in the future.

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