The Inscription of Word Gempeng and 899 as Petirtaan Jolotundo's Cultural Identity

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Article Info

Abstract

Petirtaan Jolotundo is one of two *petirtaans* (sacred bathing places) on Mount Penanggungan. It is an important archaeological heritage site, known for having the oldest recorded date in the Penanggungan Mountain area—899 Saka or 977 AD. Within the *petirtaan* is an inscription carved on its eastern wall, visually prominent and written in Old Javanese (Kawi) script, containing the word *Gempeng* and the number 899. This research aims to uncover Petirtaan Jolotundo's cultural identity through the interpretation of these two inscriptions. The study was conducted at the site of Petirtaan Jolotundo, located in Biting Hamlet, Seloliman Village, Trawas District, Mojokerto Regency, East Java Province. This qualitative research adopts a case study approach, focusing specifically on Petirtaan Jolotundo. Data collection techniques include observation, literature review, and interviews. The data analysis method follows an interpretative qualitative approach, applying Norman Fairclough's theory of critical discourse analysis, which comprises three levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The results of this study show that the inscriptions—*Gempeng* and 899—serve as cultural markers that reveal the identity of Petirtaan Jolotundo and the Old Javanese community. These inscriptions highlight the community's role in shaping and preserving the site's cultural significance across generations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Petirtaan is a form of classical archaeological heritage developed in Indonesia from the 8th to the 15th centuries AD. A *petirtaan* is a pool or water reservoir building associated with Hinduism. The water in these structures is considered holy and is believed to originate from four sacred rivers channeled from Mount Mahameru [1]. According to Hinduism, water is a form of connection with the gods and a favored place of the gods, and the dwelling place of the gods is in places that contain water such as locations close to lakes, rivers, mountains, parks, and close to springs [2]. The form of a *petirtaan* is categorized into three, namely the form of a spring or watering place that has not undergone changes, a form that has undergone some changes and the form of a whole artificial building that does not have a water source [3].

Petirtaan Jolotundo is one of the sacred sites on Mount Penanggungan in East Java. It is one of two *petirtaans* on the mountain that continues flowing with water from the spring. A unique feature of Petirtaan Jolotundo is the inscriptions carved on its walls and its distinctive ornaments, representing a continuity of ornamental art traditions from Central Java to East Java. The sacredness of Petirtaan Jolotundo is evident in its function as one of the two *petirtaans* on Mount Penanggungan and the symbolic importance of water within the mythology surrounding Mount Penanggungan and its sanctuaries. Water holds dual symbolism, depending on its function as *amerta* or *tirtha*. According to the Samudramanthana story in the version of *Tantu Panggelaran*, Mount Penanggungan—identified as the summit of Mount Meru—produces *amerta* through the churning of the ocean. Petirtaan Jolotundo embodies both aspects of *tirtha* and *amerta*. The water sourced from the mountain's slopes, a manifestation of *amerta,* also serves as a means for purification and spiritual preparation for pilgrims, embodying the concept of *tirtha* [4].

In archaeology, inscriptions are commonly found on various archaeological remains, particularly on the walls of temple buildings. These inscriptions may consist of both written characters and numbers in the Old Javanese language. The distinction between an inscription and a *prasasti* lies in their medium: an inscription refers to writing or numbers chiseled into the walls of a building, while a *prasasti* refers to writing or numbers carved onto objects such as stone, brick, metal, and so on. Inscriptions serve as representations that provide insight to anyone who sees, reads, or hears them. Texts are social spaces where two fundamental social processes occur simultaneously: cognition and the representation of the world, along with social interaction [5]. When viewed through the lens of Norman Fairclough's concept of discursive representation, the inscriptions at Petirtaan Jolotundo are not merely chiseled texts; they carry meanings that were deliberately crafted to legitimize and shape the cultural identity of the community at that time. These meanings can be examined using Fairclough's critical discourse framework. Inscriptions on temple buildings play a crucial role in revealing the identity of the structure. They help to uncover the social, political, ideological, religious, and cultural contexts that shaped the era in which the building was constructed.

On the eastern wall of the shrine, an inscription is carved in Old Javanese (*Kawi*) script. The inscription on the northern side of the east wall reads the word *Gempeng*, while the inscription on the southern side of the east wall indicates the year 899. Compared to other inscriptions at Petirtaan Jolotundo, these two stand out due to their vast size, in contrast to the more miniature, more discreet inscriptions found elsewhere. Likely, these inscriptions were deliberately crafted to be visually prominent, placed on the eastern wall to be perceived as visual objects. In this way, they can be "consumed" through the lens of language. These inscriptions show how information about the monument's identity is transferred, directly or indirectly. Although Petirtaan Jolotundo no longer serves its original function, the archaeological remains act as tangible evidence, providing a portal that connects various discourses. These discourses carry messages or meanings, symbolically expressing the identity of the ancient Javanese community.

Identity is a construct that encompasses all aspects of who a person is and how they perceive themselves, including factors such as spiritual, moral, social, emotional, cultural, aesthetic, mental, and physical development. It is shaped by gender, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability, religion, and nationality [6]. Identity can be a distinctive characteristic of an individual and a shared trait among members of a particular social group or category. It involves how individuals or groups see and define themselves and how others perceive and explain them. Identity is not an innate or fixed attribute, but somewhat fluid, dynamic, and diverse [7]. Identity is a product of past experiences within social, cultural, and economic contexts. It is a process of synthesizing past relationships that leads people to seek recognition of their existence, whether individually or as a group, within a specific place and time [8]. In other

words, identity represents how people conceptualize who they are, what kind of people they are, and how they relate to others [9]. Identity is a dynamic relationship between ancestral heritage, including elements such as oral traditions, literature, and beliefs, and the languages that help give rise to a specific cultural identity [10].

Culture is dynamic, constantly evolving, interacting, conflicting, and exchanging with other cultures [11]. Culture is closely tied to identity, shaping how people see themselves and others [12]. Cultural identity is rooted in shared historical experiences and standard cultural codes, which provide a sense of unity within a stable, fixed, and sustainable framework of reference and meaning, even amidst conflict and changing historical circumstances [13]. Cultural identity is a phenomenon continuously taking shape within specific social and cultural contexts. It also suggests that cultural identities are an integral part of socio-cultural reality. It is helpful to break down cultural identity into different levels or dimensions to understand this complexity better [14]. Cultural identity can be defined as an individual's understanding of their place within the spectrum of cultures, and the purposeful behaviors directed towards gaining enrollment and acceptance into a particular group. It also encompasses the distinctive features of that group, which automatically assign an individual's membership within it [15].

Language plays a crucial role in the construction of online identity [16]. The relationship between language and culture is complex; language serves as both a vehicle for culture and one of its essential components. While both language and culture are pervasive concepts, they resist simple, comprehensive definitions. Culture characterizes a society as an identifiable community and encompasses a variety of elements, including language, history, geography, religion, political systems, literature, architecture, folklore, traditions, and beliefs [10]. The construction of meaning through language, whether in terms of understanding the world, social relations, or social identity, is inherently ideological. This is because language, as a means of communication, often seeks to establish relations of domination within society [17].

The inscriptions carved on the eastern wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo—the word *Gempeng* and the year 899—serve as linguistic texts and identity markers for the monument. The language used in these inscriptions reflects the socio-political, ideological, religious, and cultural circumstances surrounding the construction of Petirtaan Jolotundo. By applying Fairclough's model, it is possible to interpret how linguistic forms (Old Javanese) and visual semiotics, such as the size and placement of the inscriptions, signify cultural and temporal dominance.

Identity is multifaceted, as identities are produced and sometimes imposed upon individuals and groups through dominant discourse practices and ideologies. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the political and ideological contexts in which identities are presented [18]. Literature, in its broadest sense, involves writing and publication and the cultural and identity exchanges that develop within these practices [19].

The use of Old Javanese (*Kawi*) in the inscriptions on the eastern wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo illustrates how language shapes and preserves the cultural identity of the Old Javanese community. These two inscriptions—*Gempeng* and the year 899—serve as markers of identity through the medium of language. Therefore, this research is significant for understanding how these inscriptions contribute to the cultural identity of Petirtaan Jolotundo, particularly through the lens of Norman Fair clough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This study aims to explore the cultural identity of Petirtaan Jolotundo through the inscriptions of the word *Gempeng* and the number 899. Applying Fairclough's CDA model is crucial in this context to understand how these inscriptions function as discursive practices that construct, reinforce, and transmit cultural identities and social structures that existed during the Old Javanese period. Specifically, this research will address two key points: first, an analysis of

how the inscriptions of *Gempeng* and 899 in Petirtaan Jolotundo reflect cultural identity, and second, a Critical Discourse Analysis of these inscriptions as representations of the cultural identity of Petirtaan Jolotundo.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted at Petirtaan Jolotundo, located in Biting Hamlet, Seloliman Village, Trawas District, Mojokerto Regency, East Java Province. The study follows a qualitative research approach, using a case study methodology focused on Petirtaan Jolotundo. The data collection techniques employed in this research include observation, literature review, and interviews. The data analysis method utilized is an interpretative qualitative approach, applying Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. Fairclough's CDA framework consists of three main dimensions: the textual, discursive, and social dimensions [20]. Critical Discourse Analysis is a specialized approach within discourse analysis that examines the discursive conditions, components, and consequences of power dynamics, particularly the abuse of power by dominant or elite groups and institutions [21]. Critical Discourse Analysis aims to uncover the ideological assumptions embedded in texts or speech, revealing how power is enacted and reproduced through language [22].

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how language is used to reveal societal power imbalances. Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis involves three levels of analysis; first, Textual analysis (micro)-This involves a detailed text description. Discourse practice (meso) – This focuses on interpreting the relationship between the process of discourse production and the text and third, Socio-cultural practice (macro) – This level explains the relationship between discourse processes and broader social processes. Fairclough's approach emphasizes language as a social practice, contributing to social and cultural analysis. His framework connects textual analysis with the broader social context, bridging the micro level of language with macro social dynamics [22].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Inscriptions of The Word Gempeng and 899 Saka in Petirtaan Jolotundo

Petirtaan Jolotundo is a rectangular pool measuring 18.10 meters by 12.50 meters. The pool is enclosed by three walls: the north, east, and south walls, while the west side is open, serving as the front of the temple. This layout indicates that Petirtaan Jolotundo faces west. The western boundary of the pool is marked by a wall made of river stones (split stone), a result of Dutch colonial restoration efforts. However, the restoration was incomplete, as the original form of Petirtaan Jolotundo could not be fully reconstructed due to a lack of sufficient data. The water source for the petirtaan is located at the upper rear of the east wall. Water is channeled into the chamber pools and terraces, eventually flowing into the main pool through small showers [23]. According to Bosch, the story reliefs at Petirtaan Jolotundo consist of 16 panels. Panels 1 to 13 depict scenes from the Mahabharata, while panels 14 to 16 are based on stories from the *Khatasaritsagara*. The content of the reliefs, along with the discovery of metal plates inscribed with the names of the gods Isana and Agni, suggests that the religious background of Petirtaan Jolotundo is Hindu [24].

Figure 1. Petirtaan Jolotundo
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

Three walls of varying heights enclose Petirtaan Jolotundo, resulting from the stones that initially formed the structure no longer being intact. These three walls are the north, south, and west walls. The north and south walls have been lowered toward the west side, while the highest wall remains the eastern wall, which is oriented north-south. The upper surface of the east wall is adorned with a *pattha*, a decorative feature that serves as a termination at the top of the wall. As a structure with significant sacred value during its time, Petirtaan Jolotundo also asserts its power and sanctity through its design. One example is the inscription on the eastern wall, which includes *Gempeng* and the year 899. This inscription acts as a visual discourse, reinforcing and legitimizing the building's cultural and spiritual identity.

Figure 2. The Eastern Wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

The eastern wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo holds particular significance, serving as the sacred backdrop of the temple and symbolically separating the ritual space from the outside world. It is treated, unembellished, with the plain surface only interrupted by a broad cornice and two inscriptions. These inscriptions are chiseled in stylized characters, each 0.60 meters high, and placed on slabs that protrude slightly from the wall. The first inscription, located on the southern half of the wall, marks the date 899 (*Saka*), while the second, on the northern half, reads *Gempeng*. This inscription was recovered and restored to its original

position in 1921 [25]. The design of the inscriptions is deliberately understated, emphasizing spiritual simplicity. However, despite their simplicity, these inscriptions serve as powerful symbols of the cultural identity of the ancient Javanese people, embedding this identity within the monument itself.

Figure 3. The *Gempeng* Inscription
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

Figure 4. The 899 Inscription
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis of the Inscription of the Words Gempeng and 899 as Cultural Identity of Petirtaan Jolotundo

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is an interdisciplinary approach to language in use, which aims to advance our understanding of how discourse figures in social processes, social structures, and social change. CDS draws heavily on social theories and seeks to develop a critically contextualised approach to linguistics which identifies issues of ideology, power, and inequality as central to our field of study [26]. Fairclough sees discourse analysis as oscillating between a focus on specific texts and a focus on what he calls the order of discourse, the relatively durable social structuring of language which is itself an element of the relatively durable structuring and working of social practices [27].

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals power, domination, and inequality practiced, reproduced, or resisted through written texts and conversations within social and political contexts [28]. The context in this framework refers to all the factors outside the text that

influence its use, such as the participants involved, the circumstances during the text production process, and the intended function of the text. Context can encompass historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects relevant to both the production and interpretation of the text [22].

There is a three-dimensional framework for analyzing the linkages within discursive events. Each discursive event consists of three facets: a spoken or written language text, an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of the text, and a piece of social practice. These are three complementary perspectives to understand a complex social event [29]. By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis, which involves textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, we can examine the linguistic characteristics of the inscriptions. This approach also allows us to explore how the inscriptions are produced, distributed, and consumed, while analyzing the broader socio-cultural and political context in which these discourses operate. This framework helps reveal the cultural identity of the ancient Javanese community reflected in the *Gempeng* and 899 inscriptions at Petirtaan Jolotundo.

3.2.1 Textual Analysis

In the cultural studies paradigm, "text" is not limited to writing; it extends to other forms that carry meaning. In literary works, symbols are imbued with meaning, and these cultural symbols must be interpreted. Cultural studies emphasize that identity is not static; rather, it is a dynamic and negotiated process. Moreover, identity is influenced by various factors, such as race, class, and education [30]. The connection between language and its social context implies that language use and social conduct are governed by social and ideological rules specific to certain communication contexts. Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck [31] refer to these as "interactional" or "language regimes." The way these regimes regulate language use also reflects specific "orders of indexicality" [32], pointing to a hierarchy in the social evaluation of pragmatically meaningful language patterns. Particular forms of language may be regarded as more prestigious or influential than others [33].

Text analysis is a crucial component of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis encompasses more than just the linguistic analysis of text. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on both continuity and change at a more abstract and structural level and examines specific texts [27]. Fairclough views texts on multiple levels, suggesting that a text describes an object and defines it. Linguistic analysis of the text involves examining vocabulary, semantics, sentence structure, and how words are combined to convey meaning [34]. In Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the textual dimension pertains to analyzing language features within the text. This includes the structure, word choice, language style, and grammar used, all of which help reveal how language reflects or perpetuates power and ideology [20].

In Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, during the stage of text analysis (description), it is essential to examine the linguistic features, as well as the form and structure of the word *Gempeng* and the number 899 found on the eastern wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo. The inscription of the word *Gempeng* and the number 899 on the east wall are parallel elements, but a throne separates them. The word *Gempeng* is positioned on the north side of the throne, while the number 899 is on the south side. By analyzing the linguistic features of the inscription, we observe that a specific language is used. To understand the linguistic phenomena, we must focus on the vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure present in the inscription.

Figure 5. The Inscription of *Gempeng* and 899 in Eastern Wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

Both inscriptions have garnered the attention of scholars, with one interpretation suggesting that the word *Gempeng* means destroyed, devastated, or crushed. This interpretation, however, may not require further elaboration, as the location where the word *Gempeng* is carved reveals its true meaning. The word *Gempeng* is used to signify the destruction of a rock hill to create Petirtaan Jolotundo. The number 899 carved on the same wall is believed to indicate that this destruction occurred in 899 *Saka*, or 977 AD [35]. Another perspective, based on an interview with Munandar, proposes that the word *Gempeng*, which denotes destruction or crushing, could also symbolize a deep sense of sorrow or sadness. This interpretation suggests that the ruler may have deliberately constructed the Jolotundo Bathing Place at that time to commemorate an influential figure who is thought to have passed away in 899 *Saka*, or 977 AD.

However, when viewed through the lens of critical discourse analysis and textual analysis, the words *Gempeng* and *899* in Petirtaan Jolotundo can be seen as symbols of an event tied to the legitimization of the ruler during the ancient Javanese period, serving to make it memorable and permanent within the building. In the inscription, the word *Gempeng* means destroyed, devastated, or crushed. When examining the form of the letters used in the word *Gempeng*, which are in Old Javanese or Kawi script, carved on the north side of the eastern wall, we can infer that these letters carry an exceptional contribution to the textual meaning of the word. The meaning embedded in *Gempeng* is believed to refer to a person or an event related to the construction of Petirtaan Jolotundo. The number *899*, carved on the south side of the eastern wall in the same Old Javanese or Kawi script, is also strongly suspected to be connected to *Gempeng*. These two inscriptions form a unity from a historical linguistic perspective.

Based on the characteristics and physical form of the inscription, including the material, style, and writing position, there is a clear relationship between the word *Gempeng* and the number 899. These two elements, placed on the same wall, suggest that the use of Old Javanese or Kawi script not only reflects the language of the time but also serves as a marker of cultural identity for the Old Javanese community. The language used in the inscription of *Gempeng* acts as an instrument for legitimizing the power of the ruler of that era. It functions not only as an ornamental feature of the building but also as a means of producing meaning and reflecting a civilization that had developed writing and a distinct cultural identity. Including the number 899 goes beyond merely marking a year; it also signifies a crucial historical event, intentionally carved to commemorate and legitimize significant actions related to the ruler of that time.

3.2.2 Discursive Practice

In Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, during the stage of discursive practice (interpretation), it is essential to understand how the production, distribution, consumption, and intertextuality are related to the inscriptions of the word *Gempeng* and the number *899* at Petirtaan Jolotundo. These inscriptions, located on the east wall of Petirtaan Jolotundo, are part of a monumental building that was likely deliberately constructed by a ruler with the highest authority of the era. As a religious structure with impressive architectural techniques, Petirtaan Jolotundo could only have been realized by those in positions of power. The ruler behind its construction likely had a specific agenda, possibly commemorating influential figures or rulers in their time. Petirtaan Jolotundo thus represents not only the technical and artistic prowess of the time but also the social hierarchy and class structure of Ancient Javanese society. It is a powerful tool for legitimizing the ruler's authority and serves as a visual marker of the ruler's political and spiritual influence. Furthermore, the building's design, along with its architectural ornamentation steeped in Hindu symbolism, reflects the ruler's hegemony over the culture and religion of the era, suggesting a deliberate imposition of their authority through religious and cultural means.

Figure 6. Petirtaan Jolotundo
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

The process of spreading and distributing culture through the word *Gempeng* and the number *899* in Petirtaan Jolotundo serves as both a medium of information and a means of promotion for those who see, read, or hear about the inscription. In ancient times, this information may have been aimed at a specific social class; however, in the modern era, these inscriptions have become a valuable source of historical documentation for a broader audience. Today, the inscription reaches scholars and the general public, contributing to the understanding of history and culture. Furthermore, the inscription plays a significant role in preserving Indonesia's cultural heritage. It serves as a resource for academic study and is an essential element in the tourism industry, helping people connect with the past. The existence of Petirtaan Jolotundo reinforces the cultural identity of the Indonesian nation, linking future generations to their historical and cultural roots. For tourists and the local community, the inscription acts as a bridge, connecting past generations with the present. It offers valuable insights into the cultural and religious practices of the Ancient Javanese people. In terms of consumption, the inscription conveys messages and symbols that reflect the richness of history, art, and spiritual values, acting as concrete evidence of the existence and legacy of the Ancient Javanese community.

3.2.3 Social Practice

Identity construction of a community is shaped through its social interactions. This perspective suggests that identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic, continually negotiated process, influenced by the temporal, historical, locational, cultural, and interactive factors that shape social actors' experiences [36]. As an associative social process, contact between groups enables members to collaborate, resolve disagreements, and adjust their original characteristics to fit the surrounding environment better [23]. Critical discourse analysis is a powerful method for investigating all facets of language use within political and social contexts. It goes beyond examining the relationships between literary forms; CDA also explores the connection between textual structures and their role in shaping societal dynamics [37].

Analyzing the social practices in the inscriptions of the word *Gempeng* and the number 899 at Petirtaan Jolotundo using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis will focus on the broader socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts. This involves understanding how the two inscriptions can interact with social structures, power relations, and cultural identity. The word *Gempeng* is a word in Old Javanese that reflects social practices in the past, which is a symbol of identity and power authority at that time. The Old Javanese language used is a form of intellectual progress in the language field, namely, reading and writing of the Old Javanese community in communicating with fellow communities or civilizations bound by language. The writing of *Gempeng* in Petirtaan Jolotundo is one way for the rulers of the Old Javanese period to legitimize their power through text and become a symbolic tool as a link between the ruler and the gods through the sacred building.

Figure 7. Petirtaan Jolotundo
[Source: Fatihah, 2023]

The dating of 899 Saka is the earliest chronological reference found among the archaeological remains on Mount Penanggungan. This date is significant when viewed in the context of the socio-political developments of the 10th century AD. The Petirtaan is strongly believed to have been used for religious rites, primarily by certain social classes, contributing to the site's exclusivity and sacredness. For the general public, who did not have access to Petirtaan Jolotundo, the site was perceived as a magical and otherworldly place. The presence of the two inscriptions highlights symbols of cultural identity that were legitimized through text, reflecting the time's social, cultural, and political contexts. Moreover, these inscriptions reaffirm the noble values upheld by the ancient Javanese community, aligned with the cultural and political policies set by the ruling authorities of that era. As a sacred space for worship, the religious practices carried out at the monument

were by the Hindu religion, underpinning the monument's significance. Thus, the influence of religion permeated both the sacred and secular practices of the people during this period.

4. CONCLUSION

The inscription of the word *Gempeng* and the number *899* at Petirtaan Jolotundo materializes the cultural identity and political power through monumental discourse, embedding elite authority within the sacred landscape of the site. By applying Fairclough's critical discourse framework, this study reveals how these inscriptions functioned as discursive tools for encoding ideological, ritual, and dynastic meanings for those who encountered them, whether by seeing, reading, or hearing stories about the inscriptions. The text inscribed on the monument reflects the exercise of authority, conveying sacred messages and reinforcing the hegemony of the ruler's power. The use of Old Javanese or Kawi—the official language of the period—serves as a marker of cultural standard, social class, and the social practices of the Old Javanese community. The inscriptions represent a historical moment, embodied in the Petirtaan Jolotundo structure, a symbolic marker for those who encounter it. It communicates the legitimacy of power, ideology, cultural identity, and religion, all of which contribute to shaping and preserving the significance of Petirtaan Jolotundo across generations and time.

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