

Pamali 'Don't Sit in Front of the Door' as the Boundary of Javanese Women's

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Abstract

Pamali is often found in Javanese society, for example, pamali related to women sitting in front of doors. This expression is advice for women, but it also regulates women's lives. This article aims to examine the role of pamali in prohibiting women from sitting on doorsteps as an unwritten rule governing the domestic behavior of Javanese women. This study focuses on the symbolic meaning of this prohibition and the function of doorsteps as boundaries between women's private and public spaces. This study uses a literature review method, analyzing various relevant literature on pamali culture, the symbolism of doors in Javanese households, and the social values contained therein. The results of the discussion show that pamali functions as a form of persuasive social control, conveyed through advice and oral traditions passed down from generation to generation. The prohibition against women sitting in front of the door is not a meaningless prohibition, but rather reflects the Javanese cultural perception of women as guardians of family honor and modesty. In the Javanese cultural context, doors have symbolic meaning not only as physical entrances and exits, but also as social boundaries that separate the world of men (public space) from the world of women (private space). As a result, this pamali serves as a means of moral education that reinforces the position of women in the social and cultural structure. Although some people have begun to view this pamali as merely a traditional legacy, it functions not only as an unwritten rule but also as a reflection of the social system and views of Javanese society, which prioritizes harmony, ethics, and balance in communal life.

Keywords : Boundary; Javanese women; *pamali*; social control

Introduction

In general, people often receive advice or prohibitions from their parents or elders throughout their lives. Advice not only serves as guidance or a form of concern for someone, but can also be a tool in efforts to pass on values and manners in social life. Usually, the older generation reminds the younger generation not to act recklessly or to maintain boundaries in their behavior by considering traditional and moral values. Parents and elders are responsible for conveying and instilling noble values in their successors.

Javanese society has a culture that is deeply rooted in cultural heritage and value systems, so it cannot be separated from the traditions and value systems that have been passed down from generation to generation. Social life is often guided by various pieces of advice or behavioral guidelines. Cultural heritage is conveyed in various forms and ways, such as through oral transmission from generation to generation.

Javanese society upholds the values of politeness and etiquette as guidelines for interacting with others. The principle of *unggah-ungguh* serves as a reference for individuals in speaking, behaving, and acting in accordance with the norms that apply in society. These values not only function as moral rules, but also reflect the personality and cultural identity that continues to be passed down from generation to generation (Nugroho, 2021, p. 47).

Javanese society is always surrounded by various forms of advice, prohibitions, and unwritten rules that serve as moral guidelines for actions and behavior.

Values of politeness and etiquette are passed down from generation to generation and practiced not only as customs, but also as a form of respect for the heritage of ancestors, which is considered to have profound meaning. By preserving and adhering to these teachings, Javanese society strives to maintain balance in life while showing respect for the culture that has shaped their way of thinking and social order to this day (Noorzeha & Lasiyo, 2023, p. 119). These values not only guide social relationships in general, but also shape society's views on the role and status of women. Through teachings of modesty, Javanese society instills rules of behavior that require women to always be mindful of their words, attitudes, and awareness of boundaries that are considered appropriate. Therefore, these teachings serve not only as ethical guidelines, but also as tools for shaping social discipline that regulates how women should appear and act in accordance with respected cultural values.

Verbally, ethical values are often conveyed in the form of advice or prohibitions as reminders for people to behave in accordance with cultural norms. These messages are often implied. These prohibitions are known as *pamali*, which are commands that forbid actions considered unethical. The expression *pamali* comes from the Sundanese language, has the same meaning as *pantrang* and *cadu* (prohibition or taboos), and is widely recognized in Javanese society. In the Javanese society, this expression is usually said with the word 'aja' means 'don't'. The message is reinforced with convincing or frightening statements to make it easier to remember or accept. The function of this delivery method is to control behavior through prohibitions that are often accompanied by threats (Achmad in Dini et al., 2024, p. 163; Sriwati et al., 2022, p. 2361). This has proven effective in shaping individuals with good ethics (Syarubany et al., 2021, p. 575).

Pamali culture in society takes various forms of prohibition. One manifestation that is still very much ingrained in today's life is the prohibition for women to sit in front of the door. The prohibition against sitting in front of the door has a profound meaning when linked to Javanese culture regarding space and the social role of women. In general, doors are only considered as complements to the house that serve to protect the contents of the house from things that come from outside. However, doors also serve as a clear boundary between public and private spaces. This boundary has a significant symbolic influence on social interactions, reflecting how the layout of physical space can shape social life and interpersonal relationships (Septiani et al., 2025, p. 151).

Traditionally, women's roles have been more often associated with the domestic sphere, which is considered the domain of modesty and family honor (Ati'ianah, 2024, p. 882). Therefore, the prohibition against sitting in front of doors not only emphasizes politeness, but also serves as a reminder that women should not be between public and private spaces, which is symbolically considered inappropriate. This reinforces the idea that women must not to be seen moving freely outside or in public spaces. Women's mobility appears to be restricted not only when they are outside the home but also within their own homes.

Based on the background description above, this article aims to examine the role of the prohibition for Javanese women not to sit in front of the door as an unwritten rule that regulates women's movements within the home. Therefore, this article focuses on discussing the meaning of the prohibition of sitting in front of the door and the symbolic meaning of the door as a boundary between public and domestic spaces for women, as well as how *pamali* controls women's behavior in everyday life. The researcher uses three research questions to help answer the problems and objectives of this article. First, what is the meaning of the prohibition “not to sit in front of the door” for women? Second, how does this prohibition provide social control over women's daily lives? Third, how has this prohibition been instilled so that it has been passed down to the present day?

Based on several previous studies have discussed *pamali* and the position of women in Javanese culture. Research conducted by Umayah et al. (2019) focusing on myths that are still believed by pregnant women in Muara Aman to this day, it was found that these *pamali* serve to foster awareness and mutual respect. Other studies emphasize the importance of inherited *pamali* as a foundation for ethics, which are adapted to the younger generation (Vinata et al., 2025). In addition, Hermawati (2007) discussed the division of space in Javanese households, which places women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere.

Although many have discussed the concept of *pamali* and the position of women in Javanese households, no one has specifically discussed the relationship between the *pamali* “do not sit in front of the door” and social control over women. Unlike previous studies, the researcher wrote this article by combining symbolic meaning with social control, which emerged as an effort to regulate women's behavior in accordance with prevailing values and norms.

Method

The researcher used a literature review method in compiling this article. According to Zed (Sari & Asmendri, 2020, p. 42), the process of writing an article using various sources without using field sources is a literature study method. The use of the literature study method is carried out by collecting various literature sources relevant to the research discussion, then analyzing them before using them as reference material.

The first step for researcher using the literature review method is to find several literature sources that can support research on “*Pamali* ‘Don't Sit in Front of the Door’ as a Boundary for Javanese Women at Home.” The selection criteria for sources are leading journal articles and books that discuss about *pamali* and the position of women in the domestic sphere. The collected sources are then systematically analyzed and reconstructed to assess their accuracy, credibility, and relevance. Source analysis is conducted by testing the accuracy and credibility of sources through cross-referencing with various sources to verify facts. Furthermore, the researcher ensures that the collected sources are proven to be relevant and factual so that can be integrated into a coherent discussion. Thus, this method helps researcher in compiling a discussion that is in line with the objectives and issues in this article.

Finding

Pamali “Don't Sit in Front of The Door” in Women's Live

Older generations or parents often forbid their children from violating social norms, this is generally referred to as a taboo or *pamali*. *Pamali* is a form of traditional belief that contains prohibitions against certain words or actions that are considered inappropriate. This culture lives and thrives as part of an oral culture that has been passed down from generation to generation, and serves as a moral guideline in Indonesian society. Almost every tribe in the archipelago has its own form of *pamali*. Some have similar meanings, but others differ according to cultural values and local contexts. Despite their diversity, the core of this belief system remains the same, namely prohibitions against actions that are believed to bring disaster, curses, or bad luck if violated. Therefore, *pamali* not only functions as a customary prohibition, but also as a means of social education that instills values of caution, respect for norms, and balance in society life. In the findings, the author should narrate the correlation of the results with those of previous studies as a comparison (Ulandri et al., 2022, p. 138).

Pamali can generally be understood as unwritten rules in society. This expression refers to prohibitions that regulate human behavior so that people do not do things that violate long-held and accepted norms. Through *pamali*, society instills moral boundaries that serve to regulate human behavior in accordance with norms of decency and social order. In addition, *pamali* also serves as a means of cultural education that shapes individuals characters to be disciplined, cautious in their actions, and able to adapt to the moral values upheld by the society in their environment (Ulandri et al., 2022, p. 140).

Pamali not only serves as advice or prohibitions that regulate, but based on its function, *pamali* has several important functions in the social life of the society. These prohibitions aim to make a person understand the limits of their behavior and the extent to which they can act in accordance with prevailing values and norms. *Pamali* also serves to protect individuals or communities from harm. Although not explicitly stated, *pamali*, when interpreted deeply, serves to protect from harm. In addition, the application of *pamali* is an effort to preserve and maintain cultural heritage, because *pamali* that continues to be conveyed and applied ensures that it continues to spread so that it will not be forgotten (Purnamasari, 2024, pp. 71–74).

The form of attitude or behavior that is repeated routinely and then agreed upon in social life can also be interpreted as the origin of why *pamali* can arise in a culture. However, people who live in the same environment and culture do not always immediately agree with this. Some still consider these customs incompatible with their way of thinking because they are considered unreasonable (Asni, 2023, p. 460). Otherwise, people who believe in these customs consider them acceptable and view them as *pamali* that contain prohibitions or advice to guide them towards a better life. *Pamali* is then used as a guideline for building a more polite and ethical social life with others (Kamilia, 2025, p. 33).

Prohibitions or *pamali* are a form of folklore. *Pamali* can be considered part of oral folklore that originates from a society's belief system. This culture is passed down through oral tradition and daily practices that are not explicitly written in the rules of life. For some people, *pamali* is considered a *pamali* and must not be violated, as it is believed to have certain consequences, while others see *pamali* as merely a myth or cultural heritage from their ancestors in the past (Asni, 2023, p. 11).

In Indonesia, many *pamali* have emerged or developed from various ethnic groups. The first example is in Javanese culture, where there is a prohibition against pregnant women sitting near doors. This prohibition is conveyed by explaining the difficult fate that will be faced by such women. According to this prohibition, if a pregnant woman deliberately sits near or in the middle of an open door, the delivery process will be difficult or less smooth (Sarbaini, 2021, p. 81). This prohibition demonstrates that *pamali* function as a mechanism of social control that utilizes narratives of fear to regulate women's behavior within the household.

Prohibitions against pregnant women are usually conveyed verbally, for example, "*Aja lungguh ing tengah lawang, marai bayine iwuh metu!*" This expression uses Javanese language and means "don't sit in the middle of the door, or your baby will have difficulty coming out (difficult labor)!" *Pamali* is not only used to scare the person being advised, but in this case it also shows concern and serves as a reminder not to act carelessly. When pregnant women sit in uncomfortable places, such as doorways, which are usually narrow and have a lot of people passing by, it raises concerns that something could happen that could endanger the pregnancy and the woman herself (Dini et al., 2024, p. 171).

The second *pamali* relates to future marriage, namely "*ora apik cah wuedok lunggo nang ngarep lawang,*" which means "It is not good for a girl to sit in front of the door". One of the most common *pamali* found in various tribes in Indonesia is the *pamali* related to marriage. This prohibition has existed since the days of the kingdom. Since then, the understanding of the importance of women as one of the determinants of family honor has made women very careful in their actions and words. If a woman acts carelessly, the family name can be tarnished. Therefore, since ancient times, *pamali* have been closely related to women. In addition, the function of *pamali* is to protect women from crimes that can occur at any time (Dini et al., 2024, p. 171).

The position of women in the home has always been closely linked to the domestic sphere, especially the kitchen. The prohibition on approaching or standing at the door, as an open space inside the house, shows that women are completely excluded from public spaces. Therefore, many women spend their time in less visible spaces, such as the kitchen or the back of the house, and are prohibited from being in the front area or other places that may attract public attention. In addition, there is a well-intentioned argument that restricting women's presence in public spaces is intended to prevent undesirable things, such as crimes against women, from happening. However, it is not uncommon for these restrictions to be imposed to hide children.

The *pamali* that forbids women from sitting in front of the door continues to be observed today, as it is perceived as a means of instilling manners and ethical conduct. Within the society, the door holds an important role as the main point of entry and exit of the house. Therefore, sitting in that area is considered inappropriate since it may hinder those who pass through. Traditionally, women have also been regarded as symbols of family honor, and thus their behavior is expected to embody modesty and safeguard their parents' reputation (Aryzona et al., 2021, pp. 257–258). The expression "*aja lungguh ing ngarep lawang, marai angel jodoh!*" or "*do not sit in front of the door, otherwise you will have difficulty finding a husband!*" has been passed down from generation to generation as a traditional warning. This prohibition underscores the importance of proper ethics and decorum, as sitting in front of

the door is considered impolite and contradicts the door's primary function as the entrance and exit of the house (Dini et al., 2024, p. 171).

In Javanese tradition, there are various forms of *pamali* related to matters of marriage, one of which is expressed in the saying, "*Perawan aja ngadeg utawa lungguh neng ngarep lawang, mengko iso dadi perawan tuwa,*" meaning "A young woman should not stand or sit in front of the door, or she will become a spinster". This expression is not merely a belief without reason, but rather one imbued with moral teachings that emphasize the importance of modesty and proper conduct for women. Through such prohibitions, parents seek to instill appropriate behavior in their daughters so that they understand their boundaries and learn to respect their surroundings. Sitting on the doorstep is considered impolite, as it may obstruct others and create an impression of disorder. Thus, this *pamali* serves as a subtle means by which Javanese society educates women to maintain proper demeanor, appearance, and honor in the eyes of the society (Samingin & Asmara, 2016, p. 38).

The prohibition against sitting in front of the door carries moral significance and encourages Javanese women to adhere to social ethics and norms. Literally, the door serves as an entry and exit to the house. However, from a Javanese cultural perspective, the act of sitting at the doorway is considered inappropriate for young women, as it obstructs movement and contradicts the functional meaning of that space. Such behavior is interpreted as a symbol of disorder and discourtesy, and within the social context, it is perceived as a sign of poor upbringing. Essentially, this prohibition serves as a reminder for women to conduct themselves properly, as improper behavior is believed to hinder the arrival of a suitable partner or discourage potential suitors (Laila & Zakiyah, 2023, p. 129).

In Javanese society, *pamali* functions as a powerful means of regulating behavior, as it is transmitted through mythical stories and reinforced by a sense of fear inherited across generations. Those who experience this cultural transmission rarely question the underlying reasons behind *pamali*, beyond what has already been conveyed through oral tradition. Acceptance and obedience toward a *pamali* are cultivated through the repetition of these narratives in daily life. When a mother advises her daughter not to sit in front of the door, the advice is not merely an attempt to preserve tradition but also a way of teaching that women are responsible for maintaining harmony and dignity within both the household and themselves. *Pamali* thus serves as an unwritten rule that conveys values of modesty and propriety, particularly concerning women's bodily conduct and movement within Javanese culture.

Furthermore, this belief reflects how the society instills values of order through physical and symbolic representations. The door not only functions as an architectural element but also as a spatial marker with representational meaning in structuring social order, determining who may pass through, who waits, and who guards. The presence of women near the doorway is often perceived as potentially obstructive to movement, drawing unnecessary attention, or even being inappropriate due to its openness and visibility. Thus, this prohibition reinforces moral teachings for women to remain modest and unobtrusive within spaces associated with the public sphere.

Pamali as an Implicit Boundary of Women's Sphere

Javanese society enforces a prohibition against sitting in front of doors as a symbolic social norm to regulate everyday behavior.. Passed down from generation to generation, *pamali* is conveyed in a subtle and implicit manner to communicate notions of appropriate conduct. In Javanese culture, *pamali* is not merely a coercive rule but a moral prohibition intended to instill politeness and to reinforce values concerning the boundaries of women's sphere within the household.

Most *pamali* in Javanese culture are oriented toward regulating women's behavior, although some are applied more generally to all members of society. This tradition illustrates how the Javanese social order is constructed upon patriarchal values that position women as figures responsible for maintaining propriety and the family's honor (Sarmidi, 2015, pp. 555–559). The *pamali* expression “do not sit in front of the door” is not merely a moral message passed down from generation to generation, but also a form of social discipline that regulates the boundaries of women's movement in everyday life.

On the other hand, the existence of *pamali* can be understood as a social instrument that regulates the balance between the individual and the surrounding social environment. Expressions such as “*ora ilok*” function to admonish and remind individuals, especially women, not to act beyond the boundaries of what is considered appropriate by society. Through this mechanism, society shapes social habits that require women to maintain proper behavior, speech, and spatial conduct in accordance with cultural norms. Nevertheless, along with the passage of time and changing patterns of thought, some of these rules have gradually lost their binding power. Today, *pamali* is more commonly regarded as a cultural heritage that reflects the Javanese society's perception of propriety and the social roles of women within their sphere (Wulandari in Sari, 2023, p. 55).

In Javanese culture, the concept of a house is understood as a dwelling that shelters human life and serves as a place of residence. However, the house is also perceived as a reflection of the moral values of its inhabitants. The Javanese regard the house as a symbolic entity that mirrors the identity and way of life of those who reside within it (Djono et al., 2012, p. 273). The spatial arrangement within a Javanese house takes into account specific rules and characteristics that correspond to the respective positions and roles of men and women (Fajrina et al., 2017). This division of space is a form of social arrangement that sets boundaries based on gender differences, where men usually occupy open spaces and interact with the outside world, while women take care of and stay in closed spaces (Filiani & Antariksa, 2018, p. 13). Through this division, Javanese society instills the understanding that women should be in a position that reflects modesty, calmness, and domestic harmony.

The division of space within a house reflects a hierarchy that determines who has the right to occupy or use certain areas. Traditional Javanese houses have a division of space that is rich in social and cultural meaning. In general, houses are built in three main parts, namely the front room, the middle room, and the back room. However, the first two spaces are often understood as a single unit because they both function as public areas. Therefore, Javanese houses can be understood through two main spaces: the outer space (front) and the inner space (back). Thus, Javanese houses are basically divided into two main spaces: the outer space, which is open to the social world, and the inner space, which is private and functions as the domestic domain of the family (Nugroho, n.d., p. 66).

The front of the house has a public orientation and functions as a space to display honor and social order, where differences in status and social formality are symbolically demonstrated. This space is synonymous with the masculine realm, as it is considered to have direct contact with the outside world and represents the family's reputation. On the other hand, the back of the house is considered more tranquil and private, and is closely related to women's activities. This separation subtly creates a boundary between masculine and feminine spaces without written rules. This is where *pamali* are used as a form of social discipline to keep women within boundaries that are considered appropriate. Prohibitions such as “do not sit in front of the door” are one way to reinforce these boundaries, which are considered a dividing line between public and domestic spaces, the world of men and women (Nugroho, n.d., p. 67).

In Javanese culture, doors are not only used as entrances and exits, but also have symbolic meanings that reflect social order and boundaries. The prohibition against women sitting in front of doors is often interpreted as a form of politeness to prevent others from blocking the door or seeing people passing by. However, behind this seemingly simple reason lies a deeper understanding of the position of women in the social order. Doors are considered a transitional space between the outside and the inside, each representing the male and female domains

The presence of women sitting near the door creates an ambiguous impression. By definition, ambiguous means unclear because the meaning or message conveyed cannot be understood properly (Suwarna, 2022). Based on this, the position of women sitting near the door also causes confusion as to whether they are outside or inside, because they are sitting on the boundary between the two areas. Their presence in this border space is considered to have the potential to disrupt the balance of the social order that has been established through values of modesty and cultural norms. Therefore, this prohibition serves to reinforce the symbolic boundaries of where women should be and how they should position themselves in their social space. Thus, the door becomes an unspoken boundary marker that keeps women within the space that is appropriate to Javanese cultural norms, values, and honor.

Geertz views culture as a system consisting of rules, guidelines, and directions for living that serve to guide and control human behavior in everyday life through mutual agreement within society (Susanti, 2024, p. 101). Culture is not only seen as a symbolic heritage, but also as a social tool that encourages individuals to act in accordance with prevailing values and norms. In Javanese culture, *pamali* can be considered a concrete manifestation of this control system. Through prohibitions passed down from generation to generation, society creates a code of ethics that aims not only to maintain decency and honor, but also to preserve social balance in society life.

Social control in society through belief in *pamali* is persuasive rather than coercive. This form of control is manifested through advice, warnings, and the instilling of moral values, so that everyone understands the limits of their behavior in social life. Belief in *pamali* not only regulates personal behavior, but also strengthens social control in society, which maintains harmony between fellow citizens, neighbors, and the surrounding environment. The existence of *pamali* reflects a deep cultural awareness as a form of obedience that emphasizes the importance of balance, order, and harmony as the foundation of Javanese society (Andriyani et al., 2024, p. 50).

In this modern era, traditional norms in the lives of the younger generation often face significant challenges. Traditional norms like *pamali* are rarely considered something that must be obeyed as advice or oral traditions that promote ethical values, but rather are considered something that does not need to be paid attention to. This is influenced by the wave of globalization that affects the mindset and behavior of the younger generation, who consider traditional norms to be outdated and incompatible with today's modern world. The younger generation, who are very open to outside cultures, often disregard traditional values, including *pamali*. Compared to this openness, *pamali* are seen as barriers between them and their freedom to interact with the outside world. However, some people still consider *pamali* to be important and must be maintained and preserved. Therefore, *pamali* are now also seen as attitudes that shape moral values, manners, and ethical teachings in public interactions (Vinata et al., 2025, p. 23).

Conclusion

The *pamali* “do not sit in front of the door” is not merely a myth or a belief, but a symbol of social discipline that both restricts and protects women, ensuring they remain within spaces that conform to cultural norms. This consistent with the general public’s understanding of women as representatives of family identity, honor, and morality, which leads to the enforcement of various rules to uphold that image. This study highlights three key findings regarding this cultural phenomenon: *pamali* “do not sit in front of the door” functions as a behavioral regulatory instrument that restricts women’s mobility while teaching propriety, the *pamali* as both a restriction and a form of protection, and the continued enforcement of the *pamali* to this day, which is still upheld through fear, advice, or stories.

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