



P-ISSN 2620-343X E-ISSN 2986-3074

Sabdasastra : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Jawa

URL: <https://jurnal.uns.ac.id/sab/article/view/xxxxx>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20961/sabpbj.v5i2.xxxxx>

PHILOSOPHICAL MEANINGS OF BHISHMA'S ATTIRE IN SURAKARTA STYLE OF ANCIENT PUPPET

Nabil Abdurrahman Taib^{1*}, Djoko Sulaksono²

Department of Javanese Language Education, Teacher Training and Education
Faculty, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia^{1,2}

**Corresponding author:* Nabil Abdurrahman Taib, nabil.taib@student.uns.ac.id

Submitted: 28/06/2025

Accepted: 17/03/2026

Published: 26/09/2026

Abstract

Wayang purwa is one of the cultural legacies still surviving today. One of the characters from wayang purwa is Sage Bhishma. This research aims to identify the elements of Bhishma character's attire, examine the symbolic and philosophical meaning of each of these attire elements, and show how attire is a medium for conveying Javanese cultural values. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive. This research produces various meanings of Bhishma puppet's attire. These Bhishma's attires indicate that the figure is a priest. Cultural values are contained in the meaning of attire. After the research was carried out, it was concluded that each attire of Bhishma puppet has meanings such as a robe meaning humility, rimong symbolizing neatness in entertaining guests, a keris symbolizing courage and heroism, a canela or shoes symbolizing the religious path that must be walked. The meaning that has been obtained can only be described a little because of the lack of sources that can be obtained. Further research is hoped to be able to find the meaning of clothing having not been described in this study.

Keywords: *Bhishma puppet; meaning of puppet attire; wayang purwa.*

Abstrak

Wayang purwa merupakan salah satu warisan budaya yang masih bertahan hingga kini. Salah satu tokoh dari wayang purwa ialah Resi Bisma. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi unsur-unsur busana tokoh Bisma, mengkaji makna simbolik dan filosofis dari setiap elemen busana tersebut, dan menunjukkan bagaimana busana menjadi media penyampai nilai-nilai budaya Jawa. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini berupa kualitatif deskriptif. Penelitian ini menghasilkan makna yang beragam dari busana wayang

Bisma. Busana-busana tersebut wayang Bisma mengindikasikan bahwa tokoh tersebut adalah tokoh pendeta. Nilai-nilai budaya yang terdapat pada makna busananya. Setelah dilaksanakannya penelitian maka didapat kesimpulan bahwa setiap busana wayang Bisma memiliki makna seperti jubah bermakna kerendah hatian, rimong bermakna simbol kerapian dalam menjamu tamu, keris simbol keberanian dan keperwiraan, canela atau sepatu simbol jalan agama yang harus ditapaki. Makna yang telah didapat tersebut baru sedikit yang bisa dijabarkan karena minimnya sumber yang bisa didapat. Harapan untuk penelitian selanjutnya agar bisa mencari makna dari busana yang belum terjabar dalam penelitian ini.

Kata kunci: Wayang purwa; makna busana wayang; wayang Bisma.

Citation: Taib, Nabil Abdurrahman & Sulaksono, Djoko. (2026). Philosophical meanings of Bhishma's attire in Surakarta style of ancient. *Sabdasastra : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Jawa*, 10(2), 45—52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20961/sabpbj.v5i2.xxxx>

INTRODUCTION

Wayang Purwa (ancient puppet) is one of Javanese cultural heritages still persisting until today. In addition to being a traditional entertainment, puppet is also moral education and cultural value disseminating media. One of important figures in *Wayang Purwa* was Bhishma, an old knight well-known for his loyalty, prudence, and life purity. The character is reflected not only on dialog and story plot, but also on the attire worn.

Attire of puppet characters or figures, including Bhishma contains many symbols and philosophical meanings. Each of elements such as crown, *gelung* (bun), *jamang* (a gilded tiara-like crown, worn around the forehead to the side of the head), *sumping* (ear ornament), bracelet, and motif of fabric, is not selected haphazardly (Arisyanto & Prasetyo, 2019). Several studies found that these elements contain profound messages, for example, related to social status, spirituality, or certain moral value (Mudarahayu et al., 2021). In a study of Gatotkaca's attire, for example, clothing reflects strength and bravery, while in Drupadi character it appears to be simple but symbolizes dedication and purity (Putri & Josef, 2020; Setyowati, 2021).

Studies of several motifs of batik used in puppet also confirmed that motifs has symbolical function depending on who wear it or why it is worn (M & Hikmawati, 2018; Pangestu et al., 2024; Soekarba et al., 2021). In the context of Bisma character's attire, the use of white, gold, and knight attribute indicates the character of purity and allegiance to the truth.

In addition to symbol, semiotic and hermeneutical approaches are also used to understand the hidden meanings of puppet attire. Studies conducted on Priangan puppet (Ruslana, 2016), human puppet (*Wayang Wong*) (Azizi & Anggraini, 2020; Kurniyawan & Utina, 2019) indicate that costume is not only a visual complement but also part of cultural narrative. Attire in leather puppet is also a style's identity of a certain region based on environment where the puppet is created (Aji, 2024).

In puppetry tradition, visualization of character is inseparable from *pakem* or rule of shape (Haryana et al., 2021; Subiyantoro et al., 2020). Body and attire's structure of knight character such as Bhishma follows certain rule aiming to feature harmony, balance, and prestige. Other studies even associate attires with Javanese spirituality element, where each of elements is considered as part of way of life and ethical consciousness.

However, the studies specifically investigating the attire of Bhishma character in ancient puppet (*wayang purwa*) are still very limited so far. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. identify elements of Bhishma's attire,
2. study symbolic and philosophical meanings of each element of the attire, and
3. show how attire becomes a medium to deliver Javanese cultural values.

Utilizing a qualitative approach, particularly visual and semiotic analysis, this article is expected to reveal how attire in the puppet not only beautifies the character's appearance but also delivers cultural messages such as ethics and guidance on good manners (Restianto, 2022; Sari & Fahmiana, 2025).

METHOD

Involving research type or model, data/information collecting technique, the method used in this research was descriptive qualitative one. This research used data constituting the result of interview with informants understanding Surakarta style-ancient puppet attire, Ki Purbo Asmoro. Data source includes document, informant, and direct observation. Data source in the form of document was obtained from narrator (*dalang*) and cultural expert, while the data source observed was Bhishma character in leather puppet. Subject of research was taken using purposive sampling technique. Techniques of collecting data employed were observation, document analysis, and interview. The result of observation includes the data concerning general description of Surakarta style-leather puppet attire for Bhishma character. The result of interview includes shape, function, and characteristics of Bhishma's attire. To complement the result of observation and interview, the author used various written sources such as books and journal articles. Technique of analyzing data used was Miles and Huberman's theory including 1) data collection, 2) data reduction, and 3) conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sage Bhishma is the son of Prabu Sentanu, the king of Astina, and Goddess Ganga. Sage Bhishma decided to be a *wadat*, the one that would never have gotten married and would be a priest. Having decided to become an ascetic, he handed over the reins of power – which should have been his – to his half-brother, Abiyasa. Sage

Bhishma often visited Astina to see its condition. He was also believed to be an elder or the one to whom the king asked when he would make a decision for his country.

Bhishma's attire studied in this research is the one worn by the Surakarta-style Bhishma constituting Bapak (Mister) Mawardi's collection. Bhishma character in this style has a typical characteristic different from that in other styles. In Surakarta style, Bhishma character is depicted having a more proportional body shape thereby making it easy to handle during *sabet* or puppet movement. This puppet character shape is very great for battle purpose as its both arms can be moved.

Bhishma's attire consists of clerical robe, with scarf (*rimpong*), kris (*keris*), and shoes. Such attire was sages' and Brahman's, given that Bhishma is a knight having decided to become a brahman. It is related to something called *wanda*, a form of puppet used in certain conditions or scenes (Pratama & Haryono, 2019).



Figure 1. Bhishma Puppet (Private documentation, Mawardi's collection)

This clerical robe is a long piece of cloth covering entire body and arm. It is cut horizontally in the middle. At the bottom it appears slightly parted, revealing the interior. This clerical robe means as modest attire and symbolizes of covering any shortcomings, safeguarding its user inner and outer, and protecting from unseemly gazes (Restianto, 2022). It can be seen from Sage Bhishma's conduct always having maintained proper behavior, hidden his shortcomings, refrained from flaunting his intellect, and safeguarded his inner and outer actions from unseemly gazes.



Figure 2. Bhishma's robe (private documentation, Mawardi's collection)

There is a scarf on Bhishma's shoulder, a long piece of cloth worn around the neck covering the shoulders. This cloth is dangled up to its end. This attire is usually worn by the characters of god, sage, and sage's son. This attire is interpreted as respecting the guest, because *rimong* is an element of attire reflecting modesty, neatness, and harmony (Restianto, 2022). Sage Bhishma as an ascetic wears scarf to reflect that he was always respecting the guest.



Figure 3. Bhishma's scarf (private documentation, Mawardi's collection)

Bhishma character is wearing *kris* with *warangka ladrang* (boat-shaped traditional dagger scabbard) tucked into his waistband. This kris (*keris*) is worn by tucking it into his waistband, exactly above the *sluwar* (trousers). This kris, in addition to being a weapon, also functions as the complement of attire (Afifah, 2021). This *kris* symbolizes peace and heroism. Javanese people have principle that men must have five belongings: *wisma*, *curiga*, *kukila*, *wanita*, *lan turangga* meaning house or residence, kris or traditional weapon, pet bird, wife, and horse or vehicle). This proves that Sage Bhishma is a man of his words.



Figure 4. Bhishma's kris (private documentation, Mawardi's collection)

Bhishma character wears *canela* (shoe)– a footwear made of animal (usually cow or buffalo) leather. In addition, shoe functions to signify that Sage Bhishma is an ascetic. The meaning of shoe symbolizes that to live, human needs strong footstep and hold. The footstep and hold intended is the rules of religion in which he believes. The shoes reminds human to always have good behavior when worshipping God, and to accept everything God has destined for his life. When Sage Bhishma wears shoes, it means that he has had footstep and strong hold in his life. It can be seen in any stances of his life always supporting the truth.



Figure 5. Bhishmas's Canela (private documentation, Mawardi's collection)

Bhishmas's attire aforementioned can reflect high Javanese cultural values. It can be seen from both shape and meaning contained in the attire visible. These values include: 1) *andhap asor* or humility, reflected on the robe meaning hiding his intellect and flaunting his ignorance, 2) attitude of respecting guest reflected on the *rimpong* symbolizing appropriateness of dressing making others happy, 3) bravery reflected on the meaning of *kris* constituting a weapon every man must have, 4) religious values reflected on *canela* symbolizing the true footstep, in this case religion.

CONCLUSION

From the research conducted, it can be concluded that in Bhishma character, there is attire consisting of clerical robe, *rimong*, *keris ladrang* and *canela*. Clerical robe is defined as a modest attire and symbol of covering any shortcomings, safeguarding inner and outer, and protecting from unseemly gazes. Furthermore, *rimong* symbolizes respect for guests, because it is an element of attire reflecting modesty, neatness, and harmony. *Keris ladrang* symbolizes peace and heroism. *Canela* symbolizes that to live, human must have strong footstep and hold. Bhishmas' attire can deliver Javanese cultural values based on the meaning contained within it; for

example, symbol of *andhap asor* ethics indicated with robe, etiquette or *unggah-ungguh* indicated with *rimong*, identity of knight with integrity indicated with kris, and spiritual values indicated with *canela*. The result obtained in this research has only elaborated the meaning of some attires of Bhishma character, while many others have not been elaborated yet. Thereby, further studies are recommended to elaborate the meaning of attire having not elaborated yet here.

REFERENCES

- Afifah. (2021). Pelestarian Budaya Keris di Surakarta pada Era Masa Kini. *ARS: Jurnal Seni Rupa & Desain*, 24(3), 149–158. <https://doi.org/10.24821/ars.v24i3.3420>
- Aji, A. Y. R. (2024). Makna Visual Tokoh Bratasena dalam Wayang Kulit Gaya Pakualaman. *INVENSI: Jurnal Penciptaan dan Pengkajian Seni Volume*, 9(2), 208–224. <https://doi.org/10.24821/invensi.v9i2.11155>
- Arisyanto, P., & Prasetyo, S. A. (2019). Tata Rias Wayang Wong Lakon Wisanggeni Lahir pada Kelompok Wayang Wong Ngesti Pandawa. *Seminar Nasional Seni dan Desain: "Reinversi Budaya Visual Nusantara,"* 321–326.
- Azizi, A. F., & Anggraini, P. (2020). Ricikan Sebagai Representasi Karakter Tokoh Pada Wayang Orang dan Upaya Pengembangannya. *Lensa: Kajian Kebahasaan, Kesusastraan, dan Budaya*, 10(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.26714/lensa.10.1.2020.31-44>
- Haryana, W., Masunah, J., & Karyono, T. (2021). Wanda Wayang Kulit Surakarta in Perspective Visual Communication Design. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Arts and Design Education (ICADE 2021) Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research Series*, 318–323. 10.2991/assehr.k.220601.067
- Kurniyawan, A. W., & Utina, U. T. (2019). Makna dan Fungsi Ricikan pada Busana Wayang Wong Gaya Surakarta. *Jurnal Seni Tari*, 8(2), 176–185. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jst.v8i2.32477>
- M, S. N., & Hikmawati, A. (2018). Motif Batik Tradisional Surakarta Tinjauan Makna Filosofis dan Nilai-nilai Islam. *Al-Ulum*, 18(2), 365–382. <https://doi.org/10.30603/au.v18i2.499>
- Mudarahayu, I. M. T., Sedana, I. N., Remawa, A. A. G. R., & Sariada, I. K. (2021). Estetika Bentuk Busana Pada Lukisan Wayang Kamasan. *Jurnal Panggung*, 31(2), 191–202. <https://doi.org/10.26742/panggung.v31i2.1573>
- Pangestu, M. E., Murtono, T., & Kurniawan, R. A. (2024). Javanese wayang system of signs in batik logo and its role in creating visual brand identity. *Dewa Ruci: Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penciptaan Seni*, 19(1), 37–49. <https://doi.org/10.33153/dewaruci.v19i1.5914>
- Pratama, D., & Haryono, T. (2019). The History of Wanda in the Surakartan Style

- Wayang Kulit Purwa. *American Research Journal of Humanities Social Science (ARJHSS)*, 2(1), 36–41. <https://www.arjhss.com/volume-2-issue-1/>
- Putri, D. R. D., & Josef, A. I. (2020). Kajian Busana Tokoh Drupadi Wayang Kulit Purwa Gagrak Surakarta dengan Pendekatan Estetika. *Texture : Art And Culture Journal*, 3(2), 84–93. <https://doi.org/10.33153/texture.v3i2.2808>
- Restianto, J. I. (2022). *Makna Filosofis Wanda Wayang Dupara dan Relefansinya Sebagai Bahan Ajar Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Jawa di SMA*. Sebelas Maret University.
- Rusliana, I. (2016). Wayang Dalam Tari Sunda Gaya Priangan. *Jurnal Panggung*, 26(2), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.26742/panggung.v26i2.173>
- Sari, A. W. A., & Fahmiana, Y. (2025). Analisis Simbol Filosofi Tata Rias dan Busana Tokoh Suprabawati dalam Wayang Wong Gaya Yogyakarta. *Jurnal Pendidikan Seni & Seni Budaya*, 10(1), 12–20. [10.31851/sitakara.v10i1.15150](https://doi.org/10.31851/sitakara.v10i1.15150)
- Setyowati. (2021). Karakter Wayang Perempuan Dewi Drupadi, Dewi Wara Sembadra, dan Dewi Srihandi Sebagai Inspirasi Berkarya Batik Fashion. *Journal of Contemporary Indonesian Art*, 7(2), 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.24821/jocia.v8i1.7054>
- Soekarba, S. R., Widodo, & Kusharjanto, B. (2021). Pemaknaan Motif Truntum Batik Surakarta: Kajian Semiotik Charles W. Morris. *Sutasoma : Jurnal Sastra Jawa*, 9(2), 197–210. <https://doi.org/10.15294/sutasoma.v9i2.51542>
- Subiyantoro, S., Kristiani, K., & Wijaya, Y. S. (2020). Javanese Cultural Paradoxism : A Visual Semiotics Study on Wayang Purwa Characters of Satria and Raseksa Figures. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 20(1), 19–28. [10.15294/harmonia.v20i1.23838](https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v20i1.23838)