

From Vedic Rite to Javanese Power: The Rājasūya as Political Allegory in the Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu Manuscript Tradition

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Abstract

This study examines how the *Rājasūyarambha* section of the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* (SP MM) manuscript reconfigures the Indian *Rājasūya* consecration rite into a political allegory for Javanese royal legitimation. Although previous scholarship has addressed the Vedic origins of the *Rājasūya* or its later cultural reception, the specific textual mechanisms through which the Old Javanese parwa tradition transforms this ritual into a model of political authority remain insufficiently explored. This research fills that gap by analyzing how the SP MM adapts ritual structure, narrative sequencing, and symbolic motifs to articulate a distinctly Javanese conception of kingship. The study employed qualitative descriptive analysis based on primary manuscript data from three SP MM witnesses (lontar and paper codices). Data were examined through comparative textual analysis, juxtaposing Javanese narrative elements with Vedic ritual sources and Javanese inscriptional terminology. The findings reveal three key mechanisms of allegorization: (1) the transformation of ritual violence into a metaphor for military conquest and territorial unification; (2) the elevation of spiritual recognition as a source of charismatic authority; and (3) the consolidation of social hierarchy through the *cakravartin* ideal. These mechanisms demonstrate how the SP MM functions as an ideological blueprint that shaped Javanese political thought. The study concludes that the SP MM not only legitimized rulers in its original context

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but also evolved into a repository of political memory, influencing later Javanese courts and sustaining long-term models of authority.

Keywords: *Sabhāparwa*, Royal Legitimacy, Political Allegory, Religious Ritual, *Rājasūya*, Javanese Heritage.

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti bagaimana bagian Rājasūyarambha dalam naskah Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu (SP MM) merekonfigurasi ritus konsekrasi India Rājasūya menjadi sebuah alegori politik bagi legitimasi kerajaan Jawa. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas asal-usul Veda dari Rājasūya atau penerimaannya pada periode-periode selanjutnya, mekanisme tekstual spesifik yang digunakan tradisi parwa Jawa Kuno untuk mentransformasikan ritus ini menjadi model otoritas politik masih kurang dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan menganalisis bagaimana SP MM mengadaptasi struktur ritual, urutan naratif, dan motif simbolik untuk membentuk konsep kejawaan tentang kedaulatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis deskriptif kualitatif berdasarkan data primer dari tiga manuskrip SP MM (lontar dan kodeks kertas). Ketiganya dianalisis melalui pendekatan komparatif, dengan membandingkan unsur naratif Jawa dengan sumber ritual Veda serta terminologi prasasti Jawa. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga mekanisme utama alegorisasi: (1) transformasi kekerasan ritual menjadi metafora penaklukan militer dan penyatuan wilayah; (2) peneguhan pengakuan spiritual sebagai sumber otoritas karismatik; dan (3) konsolidasi hierarki sosial melalui ideal cakravartin. Mekanisme ini menunjukkan bahwa SP MM berfungsi sebagai cetak biru ideologis yang membentuk pemikiran politik Jawa. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa SP MM tidak hanya melegitimasi penguasa pada konteks awalnya, tetapi juga berkembang menjadi wadah memori politik yang memengaruhi istana-istana Jawa berikutnya dan mempertahankan model otoritas jangka panjang.

Kata Kunci: *Sabhāparwa*, Legitimasi Kerajaan, Alegori Politik, Ritual Keagamaan, *Rājasūya*, Warisan Kebudayaan Jawa.

Introduction

The adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* across Asia has long served as a vehicle for transmitting religious concepts, political ideology, and cultural memory. Within this broader landscape, the Javanese tradition stands out for its extensive reworking of the epic into the

aṣṭādaśaparwa, a monumental project of cultural translation that reshaped Indian narrative materials into a distinctly Javanese intellectual framework (Effendi & Adiwimarta, 2001; Zoetmulder, 1983; Creese, 2001). Among these adaptations, the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* (SP MM)¹ occupies a unique position as a late manuscript witness (16th–18th centuries) produced within the Merapi–Merbabu scriptorial tradition and written in Buda script (Suparta, 2016). As a product of a mountain scriptorium that preserved pre-Islamic knowledge, the SP MM functions not only as a literary artifact but also as a repository of religious and political memory during a period of significant cultural transition in Java.

Within the Javanese political worldview, royal legitimacy was historically grounded in the king's role as protector and guarantor of cosmic order (Moedjanto, 1987; Supomo, 1981). Literary works frequently encoded this legitimacy through allegory, using narrative structures to link rulers with divine authority and hierarchical order (Fletcher, 1964; Quema, 2015; Robson, 1983). The *Rājasūyarambha* section of the SP MM, which narrates the *abhiṣeka* or coronation rite, exemplifies this process. Although derived from the Indian *Rājasūya*, a complex Vedic ritual for consecrating a *cakravartin* (Heesterman, 1957; Gonda, 1966), the Javanese version transforms the rite into a symbolic script for articulating political authority (Schrieke, 1957). This ideological continuity persisted into

¹ The abbreviation SP MM refers to the Sabhāparwa manuscripts originating from the Merapi–Merbabu tradition, where the space between the title and the "MM" designation is intentionally maintained to emphasize the scriptorium's independent standing and to prevent the degradation of its specific cultural meaning. In this study, the primary manuscript witness for this tradition is 31 L 92, a *lontar* written in Buda script which serves as the principal source for the textual reconstruction (Wiryamartana, 2001; Molen, 2011; Suparta, 2016).

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the Islamic Mataram courts, which appropriated pre-Islamic concepts of power to legitimize their rule (Ricklefs, 2001; Pigeaud & de Graaf, 1976; Sudibyo, 2004).

Despite this significance, the precise textual mechanisms through which the SP MM reconfigures the Indian ritual into a Javanese political allegory remain underexplored. Existing studies tend to focus either on the Vedic origins of the *Rājasūya* (Heesterman, 1957; Gonda, 1966; Smith, 1989), its modern performance in *wayang* (Cohen, 2016; Kurniawan et al., 2023), or broader discussions of Javanese kingship (Salindri, 2019; Wahyudi, 2021; Birsyada, 2016; Widodo et al., 2022). Even research that directly addresses the *Sabhāparwa* often examines thematic issues such as Hindu values or gender roles (Ardaswari, 2023; Ekawati, 2017; Ningsih et al., 2024), while studies linking the *Rājasūya* to power (Pertiwi et al., 2019; Sutika, 2023) do not analyze the ritual's structural transformation within the parwa tradition. Thus, a clear gap remains concerning how the SP MM textually adapts the ritual sequence, narrative architecture, and symbolic motifs to construct a model of Javanese royal legitimacy.

This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a comparative textual analysis of the *Rājasūyarambha* in the SP MM, examining how its narrative structure and ritual elements are reinterpreted to function as a political allegory for Javanese kingship. Specifically, the research investigates how the concepts of *cakravartin*, ritual purity, conquest and hierarchical consolidation are transformed through Javanese literary strategies and contextualized within local political realities.

The study contributes to scholarship in three significant ways. First, it demonstrates that the SP MM is not merely a literary adaptation but a sophisticated ideological instrument that redefines the *Rājasūya* as a model of political authority. Second, it identifies the concrete allegorical mechanisms: military, spiritual, and social, through which the text constructs the Javanese *cakrawartin* ideal. Third, it shows that the SP MM served as a dynamic blueprint for political legitimation whose influence extended beyond its Hindu-Buddhist origins into the Islamic Mataram period, thereby illuminating the long *durée* of Javanese political thought.

Literature Review

Scholarship on the *Rājasūya* and Javanese royal legitimacy reveals two major intellectual traditions that intersect yet have rarely been synthesized: the Indian ritual paradigm and the Javanese political-cosmological framework. Studies on the Indian *Rājasūya* are dominated by prescriptive interpretations that emphasize liturgical precision and theological coherence. Heesterman (1957, 1992) conceptualizes the *Rājasūya* as a rigid Brahmanic rite whose authority derives from its capacity to ritually transform a king into a *cakravartin*. His analysis foregrounds the ritual's internal logic, e.g., its sacrificial sequence, its emphasis on purity, and its role in establishing cosmic order. Gonda (1966) reinforces this orthopractic reading by treating the ritual as a stable, internally consistent system embedded in Vedic cosmology. Both scholars thus present the *Rājasūya* as a closed ritual universe, one whose meaning is anchored in textual fidelity and theological continuity.

Yet this prescriptive orientation is challenged by scholars who foreground the historical and political malleability of ritual. Schrieke (1957), for instance, argues that when Indic rituals travel beyond India, they undergo significant reinterpretation, functioning less as liturgical prescriptions and more as symbolic resources adaptable to local political needs. This perspective stands in sharp contrast to the ritual orthodoxy emphasized by Heesterman and Gonda, who assume a relatively fixed ritual grammar. Schrieke's approach foregrounds historical contingency and political pragmatism, suggesting that the ritual's meaning is not inherent but negotiated. The tension between these positions reveals a critical limitation in Vedic-centric scholarship: while Heesterman and Gonda provide detailed accounts of ritual structure, they do not address how the Rājasūya is transformed when embedded in new literary and political ecologies. Schrieke opens the possibility of reinterpretation but does not examine how such transformations occur at the textual level, especially within narrative traditions like the Old Javanese *parwa*.

This gap becomes more apparent when juxtaposed with scholarship on Javanese kingship, which reveals a complex interplay between cosmological order, narrative construction and political strategy. Moedjanto (1987) and Supomo (1981) articulate a cosmological model in which the king is envisioned as the protector of the realm, responsible for maintaining universal order and shielding society from disorder. Their work emphasizes the sacral dimension of kingship, portraying the ruler as a stabilizing force whose legitimacy derives from his alignment with cosmic principles. This perspective highlights continuity with Indic models of divine kingship but tends

to treat legitimacy as an inherent quality rather than a negotiated construct.

Robson (1983) and Quema (2015), by contrast, foreground the role of allegory in shaping political authority. Robson's analysis of kakawin literature demonstrates how Javanese texts strategically link historical rulers with mythological figures, thereby constructing legitimacy through symbolic association. Quema, drawing on Fletcher's (1964) theory of allegory as a "symbolic mode," argues that allegorical narratives function as social and artistic formations that actively shape political reality. These scholars shift attention from cosmological order to narrative mediation, emphasizing that legitimacy is produced through textual strategies rather than merely inherited from tradition.

A third strand of scholarship, represented by Ricklefs (2001) and Pigeaud and de Graaf (1976), highlights the dynamic and adaptive nature of Javanese political ideology. Their studies show that Islamic Mataram rulers deliberately appropriated pre-Islamic symbols of power to reinforce their authority, demonstrating that legitimacy in Java is historically contingent and strategically constructed. This perspective challenges the assumption of continuity emphasized by Moedjanto and Supomo, revealing instead a pattern of ideological reinvention.

Despite these rich insights, scholarship on the Sabhāparwa itself remains fragmented. Ardaswari (2023), Ekawati (2017), and Ningsih et al. (2024) focus on ethical or gendered dimensions, offering valuable cultural readings but leaving political and ritual structures unexamined. Pertiwi et al. (2019) and Sutika (2023) link

the Rājasūya to concepts of power but do not analyze how the ritual is structurally transformed within the Javanese narrative. Meanwhile, philological studies by Acri and Griffiths (2014), Griffiths (2021), and Griffiths et al. (2024) emphasize textual precision and manuscript criticism but have not applied these methods to the Rājasūyarambha of the SP MM.

Taken together, these two bodies of scholarship, i.e., Indian ritual studies and Javanese political thought, reveal a shared gap: neither examines how the Rājasūya is narratively reconfigured within the Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu to construct a distinctly Javanese model of royal legitimacy. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how the SP MM transforms a sacred Indian rite into a political allegory embedded within the Merapi–Merbabu tradition.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design grounded in multi-layered comparative textual analysis. This design was deemed to be the most appropriate for addressing the research questions, which require examining how the *Rājasūyarambha* in the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* (SP MM) adapts the Indian *abhiṣeka* ritual into a political allegory of Javanese royal legitimacy. Because the study investigated textual transformation, narrative structure and ideological reframing rather than lived practices or statistical patterns, a qualitative textual approach enabled close reading, contextual interpretation, and structural comparison across different cultural and historical layers. The comparative dimension is essential, as the SP MM cannot be understood in isolation; its political meaning emerges only when juxtaposed with the Indian

ritual paradigm and the Javanese political vocabulary preserved in inscriptions.

The primary witness for this study, identified as Manuscript 31 L 92 (hereafter referred to as Manuscript A), serves as the foundational *codex optimus* or *naskah babon* for the Old Javanese prose *Sabhaparwa*. Held at the National Library of Indonesia (khastara.perpusnas.go.id), this *lontar* manuscript is a *unicum*, the only known original source for the Merapi–Merbabu scriptorial tradition of this text. From a codicological perspective, the manuscript consists of 60 palm-leaf folios (*lempir*) measuring 47.5 × 3.5 cm, secured between bamboo slats. The text is incised into the surface with a sharp stylus, a hallmark of the *lontar* tradition, with each page typically accommodating four lines of text. The script employed is Buda (also known as *Gunung* script), characterized by its rigid, non-cursive, and distinctively bold letterforms, which convey the *Sabhaparwa* in a linguistic blend of Old Javanese prose (*gancaran*) and Sanskrit.

The analytical significance of Manuscript 31 L 92 is underscored by its complex history of preservation and its role as the direct archetype for all subsequent paper copies, including BR 600 (Manuscript B) and KBG 350 (Manuscript C). While it lacks a formal colophon to pinpoint its exact production date, its origin within the Merapi–Merbabu scriptorium suggests a chronological window between the 16th and 18th centuries, with experts such as P.J. Zoetmulder (1983) estimating a 16th-century provenance. The manuscript bears evidence of external colonial-era intervention; in addition to the original Buda numerals on the left margins, Latin pagination was later added to the center of the folios, likely during

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its transition into the collection of the *Bataviaasch Genootschap* (BG). Philologically, the text presents a unique challenge; Zoetmulder famously described it as severely corrupt, an observation that this study reinterprets not as a late composition, but as the result of a protracted transmission process marked by specific paleographic and phonetic shifts inherent to this isolated scriptorial tradition.

The current physical and digital state of Manuscript 31 L 92 is critically fragile, which necessitates the use of later witnesses to resolve textual lacunae. Direct observations conducted in October 2024 confirm that the manuscript has suffered extensive decay, with blackened leaf surfaces, brittle edges, and significant perforations. The structural integrity is further compromised because the digital and physical folios are no longer in their original sequence. The most severe damage occurs at the beginning of the manuscript; page 1 is fragmented into two pieces and continues to erode. This specific physical degradation at the onset explains why the later copy, KBG 350, suffers from a narrative jump, as the copyist evidently found the first several pages (1r–2r) of 31 L 92 already illegible or missing. Even the modern Bali copy (Manuscript D/2389/IVa), though transliterated into Balinese script as late as 1977, remains a *codex descriptus* that fundamentally relies on the reading of this specific Merapi–Merbabu *babon*. Thus, while 31 L 92 remains the only witness with independent textual authority, its material vulnerability makes the comparative analysis of its paper descendants essential for restoring narrative continuity and correcting scribal errors.

Secondary data were drawn from two domains directly relevant to the comparative framework. The first comprises Vedic ritual sources

that define the Indian *Rājasūya* model, particularly the *Pañcaviṃśa-brāhmaṇa* and *Śrauta Sūtras*, which provide the prescriptive structure against which the Javanese adaptation is measured. The second includes Old Javanese inscriptions and historical texts documenting political terminology such as *cakravartin*, *digwijaya*, and royal consecration, allowing the study to trace conceptual continuity between literary allegory and historical political practice.

The analytical procedure proceeded through four sequential steps. First, the manuscripts were verified through transliteration of Manuscript A and cross-comparison with Manuscripts B and C to establish a reliable base text and resolve graphemic ambiguities. Second, textual excerpts were selected according to Wiryamartana's five-stage narrative structure to ensure that the analysis captures the full arc of the coronation narrative. Third, the selected passages were compared with the ritual procedures described in the Vedic sources to identify structural deviations, simplifications and narrative reconfigurations that signal a shift from ritual orthopraxy to political allegory. Finally, key motifs and lexical items in the SP MM were correlated with Javanese inscriptional vocabulary to demonstrate how the manuscript's narrative reflects historically attested modes of royal legitimation. This stepwise method ensures that the study's conclusions are grounded in rigorous philological verification, structural comparison, and contextual interpretation.

Result and Discussion

The description of the manuscripts under study
Below is the portrait of Manuscript A (31 L 92), a palm-leaf *lontar* written in Buda script, serves as the principal source because it is the most direct material representation of the tradition as presented in Figure 1; Manuscript B (BR 600), a paper codex considered a faithful copy as presented on Figure 2, and Manuscript C (KBG 350), another paper codex as presented on Figure 3.



Figure 1. The Manuscript Witnesses (Manuscript A)

Source: <https://khastara.perpusnas.go.id/koleksi-digital/detail/?catId=606006>.

(Top) The physical covers and (bottom) the initial folios of the primary and comparative manuscripts used in this study. All manuscripts are held in the collection of the Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia (National Library of Indonesia).

Figure 1 above illustrates the Sabhaparwa Merapi-Merbabu (Coll. 31 L 92), a palm-leaf ‘*lontar*’ manuscript that serves as the primary data source for this analysis. It is a late copy from the Merapi-Merbabu scriptorial tradition (c. 16th-18th c.) written in the Buda script and is noted as the only known *Sabhaparwa* manuscript of its kind, distinct from later adaptations.



Figure 2. The Manuscript Witnesses (Manuscript B)

Source: <https://khastara.perpusnas.go.id/koleksi-digital/detail/?catId=73665>

Figure 2 demonstrates (Coll. BR 600) A paper codex used as a comparator. It is valuable for this study as it is considered to be a faithful copy and presents the narrative content completely.

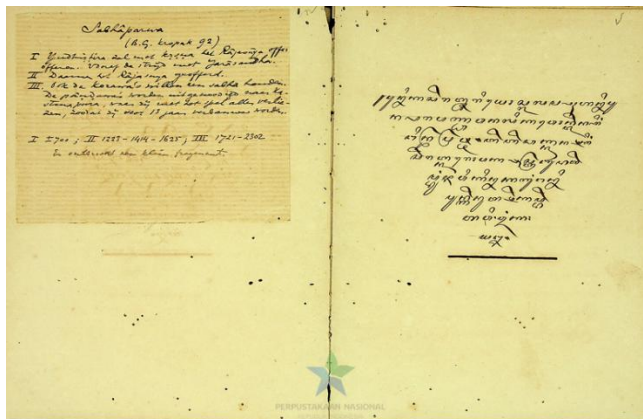


Figure 3. The Manuscript Witnesses (Manuscript C)

Source: <https://khastara.perpusnas.go.id/koleksi-digital/detail/?catId=81517>.

Figure 3 above (Coll. KBG 350) is a second paper codex used as a comparator, also noted for its faithful copying.

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Allegorical Reconfiguration of the Rājasūya: From Ritual Orthodoxy to Political Narrative

The first major finding shows that the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* (SP MM) does not reproduce the *Rājasūya* as a prescriptive Vedic ritual but transforms it into a narrative framework for political legitimation. To understand the political weight of the SP MM, one must move beyond a linear reading of the plot and analyze it as a "symbolic action". As defined by Fletcher (1964), allegory acts as a specialized form of symbolic mode that structures social and artistic formations to shape reality. In this context, the SP MM is not merely a translation of the Indian *Mahabharata*, but a sophisticated allegorical structure designed to impose a cosmic hierarchy upon the chaotic reality of Javanese politics. The narrative progression of the *Rājasūyarambha* does not follow a random sequence; it adheres to a rigid teleological structure. When analyzed through Wiryamartana’s (1990) five-stage Old Javanese poetics (*Mukha* to *Nirvahana*), the narrative reveals itself as a coherent script for the accumulation of legitimate authority.

Table 1.
Narrative Structure and Allegorical Function of *Rājasūyarambha*

Narrative Stage (Wiryamartana, 1990)	Plot Summary in SP MM	Data Evidence	Allegorical Function (Javanese Royal Legitimation)
<i>Mukha</i> (Initiation)	Yudhisthira states his intent to perform the Rājasūya, emulating King Haricandra, and seeks counsel from Krishna and Narada.	“ <i>antya antya mayke jin nto nta manira mahārāja Haricandra/...niha n liḡ bagawan Nārada/ ika mahārāja Haricandra/ saḡ amrad maḡapurusa</i> ”	Establishes the king's sacred intention, supported by divine sanction (Krishna) and ancestral/traditional validation (Haricandra).

Narrative Stage (Wiryamartana, 1990)	Plot Summary in SP MM	Data Evidence	Allegorical Function (Javanese Royal Legitimation)
		<i>tka sira... mway tlas manindakēn Rājasūya</i> " (SP MM. 6v)	
Pratimukha (Obstacle)	Krishna identifies Jarasandha as the primary obstacle who must be killed before the ceremony can be nirwikāra (flawless).	" <i>dhuh apa yan minangka de paramesyara/ kadi tan pengeta ta ya tan hyā si pandhawa/ tumingākēna ri rāntēn ing aji/ ika n pējahā Jarasandhi/... nirwikāra tika karyya Rājasūya</i> " (SP MM. 12v)	An allegory for the king's necessity to subdue rival powers (chaos/disunity) to create a stable mandala.
Garbha (Climax)	Bhima, with divine aid from Bayu, defeats and kills Jarasandha in a brutal duel.	" <i>...enak ta kacidra Saṅ Jarāsandi/ cēt sidhēpnira ta patakuraṅanta Saṅ Jarāsandi/ jinunjun ginripitakēn riṅ awaṅ-awaṅ/... p(ē)jah tā saṅ Jarāsandi...</i> " (SP MM. 16v)	Metaphor for military conquest. A demonstration of <i>kṣatriya dharma</i> 'warrior duty' and divinely sanctioned physical might.
Avamarsa (Consolidation)	Jarasandha's son is installed as a vassal, and the liberated kings request Yudhisthira to become cakravartin. The Pandavas then perform the digwijaya .	" <i>...tinonakēn nira tekang Sahadewābhiṣekaṅ a/ gumantya ri siṅhāsana/... mangkin ta pariminta kacakrawritti mahārāja Yudhisthira</i> " (SP MM. 17v) " <i>mahyun magawayaya dig(wi)jaya</i>	Represents the mandala political strategy: integrating defeated foes as vassals and consolidating power through hierarchical recognition and symbolic conquest.

Narrative Stage (Wiryamartana, 1990)	Plot Summary in SP MM	Data Evidence	Allegorical Function (Javanese Royal Legitimation)
<i>Nirvahana</i> (Resolution)	Yudhisthira successfully performs the Rājasūya, is formally consecrated (<i>abhiṣeka</i>)	<i>hambĕk patik aji</i> " (SP MM. 18r) "ri t(ĕ)las mahārāja Yudhistira diksabiseka/ amuja ta si ri batharā" (SP MM. 23r)	The final consolidation of the social and political hierarchy. The public and cosmic affirmation of the king as the guardian of world order (dharmarāja).

Based on the table above, the narrative arc of the *Rājasūyarambha* in the SP MM masterfully follows the Old Javanese structure outlined by Wiryamartana (1990). Each stage coherently builds the case for Yudhisthira as a figure worthy of undergoing the *abhiṣeka* and assuming supreme power. The journey is a narratological framework for Javanese legitimation, encompassing tests of strength, strategic conquest, political consolidation, and finally, sacred and profane recognition.

This finding challenges the ritual orthodoxy emphasized by Heesterman (1957, 1992) and Gonda (1966), who describe the *Rājasūya* as a rigid Brahmanic rite grounded in purity, cosmic order, and liturgical precision. In contrast, the SP MM simplifies, dramatizes, and rearranges ritual elements, demonstrating that the Javanese adaptation prioritizes political symbolism over ritual fidelity. This supports Schrieke’s (1957) argument that Indic rituals become politically elastic when transmitted to Southeast Asia, yet the SP MM provides concrete textual evidence of how this elasticity operates at the narrative level, a dimension Schrieke did not

examine. Thus, the finding both complements and extends existing scholarship by showing that ritual transformation is not merely contextual but structurally embedded in the narrative architecture of the Javanese *parwa* tradition.

The Rājasūya as Political Biography: Dharmawangsa and Airlangga

The allegorical machinery of the SP MM is best understood when contextualized within the reign of its patron, King Dharmawangsa Teguh. The Javanization of the *parwa* literature, initiated in the late 10th century (Juynboll, 1906; Juynboll, 1912), operates as a historical allegory where the protagonist serves as a proxy for the contemporary ruler.

The most compelling evidence for this is philological. The king's chosen *abhiṣeka* name, Dharmawangsa, is a direct equivalent to Yudhistira's primary epithet, *Dharmaraja* (McGrath, 2017). A 19th-century lexicon explicitly lists "Darmawāngsa" as a synonym (*dasanama*) for Prabu Yudhistira (Padmasusastra, 1903). Epigraphic evidence supports this identification; the Pucangan inscription refers to him as *Śrī Dharmmawamśa* (Kern, 1917, p. 88), and the Sirah Keting inscription records his full title as *Śrī Isāna Dharmmawangśā Tguh Anantawikramotunggadewa* (Djafar & Trigangga, 2005: 229-232).

Etymologically, *Dharmawangsa* implies the "Lineage of Dharma" or "Dynasty of Yudhistira" (cf. Monnier-Williams, 1899; Zoetmulder, 1995). By commissioning the SP MM, Dharmawangsa was performing a profound act of identification, casting his own military campaigns to unify the Medang kingdom as a reenactment

of Yudhisthira’s *Rājasūya*. The narrative’s insistence that Jarasandha must be killed to achieve a flawless (*nirwikāra*) ceremony serves as a potent metaphor for Dharmawangsa’s own need to subdue rival powers in the transition from Central to East Javanese hegemony, a transition documented in the Sangguran charter of 928 CE (Griffiths et al., 2024).

This allegorical utility persisted after the fall of Dharmawangsa’s kingdom (the *pralaya*). His successor, Airlangga, appropriated this literary capital to legitimize his own reconstruction of the realm (Eyerman, 2019). Airlangga’s decision to commission the *Kakawin Arjunawiwaha* (Poerbatjaraka, 1926; Wiryamartana, 1990; Robson, 2008) signalled a strategic continuation of the epic narrative. More explicitly, Airlangga’s inscriptions display a direct lexical dependency on the *parwa* literature, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Textual Parallels between SP MM and Historical Inscriptions

Legitimation Concept	Textual Evidence from <i>Sabhaparwa</i> (SP MM)	Historical Evidence (Airlangga's Inscriptions)	Analysis/Connection
Conquest of Directions (<i>digwijaya</i>)	“...mahyuni magawaya dig(wi)jaya...” (SP MM. 18r)	Airlangga's Pucangan Inscription (1041 AD) describes him as "...pūrvvādi digvijayinam hatasarvvaśatrum"	Airlangga consciously adopts the epic vocabulary and model of digwijaya as a roadmap for consolidating his own shattered kingdom.
Universal Sovereign (<i>Cakravartin</i>)	“...kacakrawaritti mahārāja Yudhisthira” (SP MM. 18r)	The Kamalagyan Inscription (1037 AD) states the people rejoice at Airlangga's nature as a “...ratu cakrawartta” (cakravartin king)	The Cakravartin ideal from the SP MM was adopted as the central ideological goal and official title used by Airlangga to proclaim his status.

Legitimation Concept	Textual Evidence from <i>Sabhāparwa</i> (SP MM)	Historical Evidence (Airlangga's Inscriptions)	Analysis/Connection
Capital as Heaven (<i>Indrasaba</i>)	“... <i>kunaṅ upamānya tansah saisa kalawan Indrasaba</i> ” (SP MM. 4v)	The Pucangan Inscription (1041 AD) glorifies Airlangga's capital with the exact same imagery: “... <i>tatpuram puruhūtarāṣṭram iva mudyutam</i> ” (his city, like the capital of Indra, was prosperous).	Airlangga used the exact same poetic and ideological simile from the parwa text to glorify his own center of power

These parallels confirm that Airlangga did not discard the literary legacy of his predecessor. Instead, he actively drew upon the allegorical model established in Dharmawangsa's *Sabhāparwa*, using its language and concepts to articulate and legitimize his own arduous project of royal reconstruction. The SP, therefore, functioned first as a direct political allegory for Dharmawangsa, and subsequently as a source of cultural memory and a legitimating model for Airlangga. This demonstrates the dynamic and enduring function of the text as a tool for Javanese royal legitimation, continually adapted to serve the political needs of successive rulers (Fletcher, 1964; Quema, 2015).

Mechanisms of Allegory and Their Legacy in Javanese Politics

The *Rājasūyārambha* narrative in the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* (SP MM) operates as a sophisticated allegorical framework that articulates the ideological foundations of Javanese kingship. Its title alone, *Rājasūya-rambha*, “the foundational support for royal consecration”, signals that the text positions itself

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not merely as literature but as a political instrument. Through Fletcher's (1964) concept of allegory as "symbolic action" and Weber's typology of legitimate domination, the narrative reveals a multilayered model of authority that blends traditional, charismatic, and proto-legal rational elements. This model, centered on the transformation of a ruler into a *cakravartin*, demonstrates continuity from Hindu-Buddhist courts to the Islamic sultanates of Mataram (Supomo, 1981; Moedjanto, 1987).

1. Military Conquest as the Coercive Foundation of Kingship

The first mechanism of legitimation is the allegorization of violence as a necessary precondition for sovereignty. Bhima's defeat of Jarasandha symbolizes the elimination of rival power centers, aligning with Weber's notion of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence. This narrative emphasis resonates with Heesterman's (1957) observation that the *Rājasūya* presupposes the prior subjugation of political rivals, distinguishing it from other rites such as the *Aśvamedha*. In the SP MM, conquest is framed not as aggression but as the fulfillment of *kṣatriyadharma*, the warrior's sacred duty.

Historical parallels reinforce this allegory. The Yupa inscriptions of Mulawarman describe the king as having conquered rival rulers and receiving tribute, explicitly comparing him to Yudhiṣṭhira. This demonstrates that the epic served as a political template as early as the 4th century. Similar patterns appear in Java, such as the Hantang Inscription (1135 AD), which celebrates Jayabhaya's victory over Janggala and functions as a public declaration of mandala consolidation (Djafar & Trigangga, 2005; Ras, 2014). These

examples confirm that the SP MM mirrors real political strategies, embedding historical statecraft within narrative form.

The role of the *taṇḍa* further illustrates the bureaucratization of violence. Jákl (2019) shows that these elite warrior-officials were central to military expansion and court hierarchy. Their presence aligns with Weber's administrative staff, demonstrating how charismatic and traditional authority required institutional support. The SP MM's emphasis on fraternal alliances in subduing Jarasandha allegorizes this reliance on a loyal military elite.

2. *Spiritual Recognition and the Evolution of Charismatic Authority*

The second mechanism is spiritual legitimation. Military power alone is insufficient; the king must also possess charisma grounded in divine sanction. In the SP MM, Krishna's endorsement of Yudhiṣṭhira elevates the coronation from political ambition to cosmic mandate. This reflects Gonda's (1966) and Heesterman's (1992) analyses of the *abhiṣeka* as an ontological transformation in which the king becomes aligned with deities such as Indra and Varuṇa.

The concept of the *devarāja* provides a broader Southeast Asian context. While earlier scholarship interpreted it as literal god-kingship, Kulke (1978) and Mabbett (1969) argue that it referred to Śiva as "king of the gods" and functioned as a political ritual rather than a metaphysical claim. In Java, this system evolved into a syncretic blend of Śaivism and Buddhism, exemplified by the Śailendra dynasty. Griffiths' (2021) re-examination of the Śaṅkara inscription demonstrates that religious identity in this period was not defined by conversion but by parallel patronage.

This spiritual framework intensified in East Java. Kings such as Kameśwara and Ken Angrok claimed divine descent, and Majapahit rulers like Raden Wijaya and Hayam Wuruk were portrayed as incarnations of Śiva, Viṣṇu, or the Jina (Ras, 2014; Pigeaud, 1960). The *Nāgarakṛtāgama*'s depiction of Hayam Wuruk's royal tour exemplifies the sacralization of kingship as a cosmic pilgrimage.

Over time, divine kingship was ethicized into the *Astabrata*, a doctrine requiring rulers to emulate the virtues of the Lokapāla. This shift transformed charisma from a personal attribute into a routinized ethical framework, aligning with Weber's notion of "routinized charisma." The endurance of the *Astabrata* into modern leadership culture, such as *bapak*-ism (Selvarajah et al., 2016; Koentjaraningrat, 1985), demonstrates the long-term influence of this spiritual model. In the Javanese organizational context, *bapak*-ism refers to a leadership style characterized by a reverence for the leader as a father figure, fostering a familial orientation of interdependency between management and employees. This cultural orientation emphasizes a paternalistic authority that is nurturing and trust-based rather than authoritative, where the leader is expected to maintain high moral standing as a teacher and parent (Selvarajah et al., 2016, pp. 2, 5, 14, 16).

3. Ritual Consolidation and the Jumenengan Tradition

The third mechanism is ritual consolidation. In the SP MM, the *Rājasūya* is a grand assembly where vassal kings affirm their subordination, transforming conquest into stable hierarchy. This mirrors Schrieke's (1957) and van Buitenen's (1981) descriptions of the mandala as a concentric political structure.

In Islamic Mataram, this mechanism evolved into the *jumenengan* enthronement ceremony. The *Babad Tanah Jawi* rewrote history to legitimize dynastic irregularities, linking rulers to Adam, Majapahit kings, and the mythic union with Ratu Kidul (Ras, 1987). Rituals such as the *Bedhaya Ketawang* dance reenacted this sacred bond, while the king's role as *Panatagama* preserved the ancient expectation that rulers regulate both political and religious order (Moedjanto, 1987). The use of *pusaka* heirlooms as mystical proof of legitimacy further reflects the SP MM's emphasis on material recognition. Even financial duties were sacralized, as shown in Ricklefs' (2019) discussion of *reyal muklis* as the king's pure wealth for religious merit.

This legacy culminates in the modern era with Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, who embodied both traditional charisma and democratic leadership (Soemardjan, 1989; Monfries, 2007). His philosophy of *Tahta untuk Rakyat* ("Throne for the People") demonstrates how ancient models of cosmic kingship continue to shape Indonesian political psychology.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the *Rājasūyarambha* of the *Sabhāparwa Merapi–Merbabu* reconfigures the Indian *Rājasūya* from a prescriptive Vedic ritual into a political allegory that articulates Javanese royal legitimacy. Through comparative textual analysis, the research shows that the narrative constructs the ideal *cakravartin* through three interconnected mechanisms, namely: military conquest, spiritual recognition, and hierarchical consolidation; each functioning as a symbolic script for kingship.

These findings directly answer the research questions by revealing how the SP MM transforms ritual structure into political meaning and how Indian concepts of sovereignty are selectively adapted to fit Javanese ideological frameworks.

Methodologically, the study is limited by its reliance on three manuscript witnesses from the Merapi–Merbabu tradition, which, although philologically robust, represent only a fraction of the broader *parwa* corpus. The analysis also focuses on textual comparison rather than performance or reception history, leaving unexplored how these allegories were interpreted by different audiences across time. Future research could expand the manuscript base, incorporate paleographic or codicological analysis, or examine how the *Rājasūya* allegory circulated in later Javanese courts, including its transformation in Islamic-era chronicles and ritual practices such as *jumenengan*.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the field by demonstrating that the SP MM is not merely a literary adaptation but a durable ideological blueprint that shaped Javanese political imagination for centuries. By revealing how ritual, narrative, and political vocabulary converge in the *Rājasūyarambha*, the research underscores the central role of manuscript traditions in preserving and transmitting models of power. The findings affirm that Javanese kingship, both ancient and modern cannot be understood without recognizing the deep textual roots that continue to inform its symbolic and political logic.

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