



The illusion of hell and delayed justice: A dialectical eschatology in the old Javanese *swargarohanaparwa*

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Received Date: February 9, 2026

Revised Date: May 5, 2026

Accepted Date: May 19, 2026

ABSTRACT

Background: The transition from mortality to immortality in Old Javanese literature presents a complex interplay of ethics and ontology that challenges linear concepts of karma. This study investigates the eschatological scandal in the *Swargarohanaparwa*, specifically the *Sekar Semawur* recension, where the righteous Yudhisthira witnesses Hell while the antagonist Duryodhana enjoys Heaven. While previous scholarship has analyzed this through the lens of moral instruction or ritual symbolism, a gap remains regarding the ontological mechanism of this inversion. This study aims to deconstruct the narrative to understand how *Maya* (illusion) functions as a necessary dialectic for spiritual liberation (*Kalèpasan*). **Methods:** This qualitative study employs a philological and hermeneutic approach. Primary data were collected from the Old Javanese texts of *Swargarohanaparwa* and *Prasthanikaparwa*. The analysis integrates the *Nirukta* (etymological exegesis) method to trace metaphysical meanings and the *Dhvani* theory (aesthetic suggestion) to uncover implied ontological realities behind the literal descriptions of Hell. **Findings:** The research argues, based on a philological and hermeneutic reading of the Old Javanese text, that the 'Hell' experienced by Yudhisthira can be interpreted not as a retributive location but as a psychological purgatory mediated through the concept of *Maya*. The textual analysis of *Prasthanikaparwa* demonstrates that while his brothers died to shed their human defects, Yudhisthira retained his physical body (*śarīra mānuṣa*), necessitating a final, illusory purification. The visual paradox of Duryodhana in Heaven serves as the antithesis required to force Yudhisthira to transcend the binary of reward and punishment. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that, within the interpretive framework of Old Javanese textual philosophy, the afterlife is represented not as a static destination but as a dialectical process of self-deconstruction. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This research offers a novel interpretation by positioning the "Hell illusion" as an ontological necessity rather than a moral test, contributing a specific Javanese philosophical perspective to the global discourse on the metaphysics of the afterlife.

KEYWORDS: hell; Javanese eschatology; *kalepasan*; *maya*; *swargarohanaparwa*.

1. Introduction

The discourse on eschatology, understood as the theology of last things, often revolves around the tension between cosmic justice and the seeming arbitrariness of death. In broader Indo-Iranian traditions, the soul's postmortem trajectory is commonly imagined as a linear and deterministic process governed by the accumulation of karma (Ara, 2006). This comparison does not posit a strict civilizational dichotomy, but functions heuristically to foreground distinctive emphases within Javanese eschatological imagination. In contrast, the archipelagic traditions of Java and Bali articulate a far more fluid and negotiated eschatological imagination. Death is not conceived as a terminal rupture but as a

Cite This Article:

Pradipta, G. A. (2026). The illusion of hell and delayed justice: A Dialectical eschatology in the old Javanese *swargarohanaparwa*. *Life and Death: Journal of Eschatology*, 4(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.61511/lad.v4i1.2026.3327>

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transitional passage within an ongoing cosmological cycle. Munandar (2019) analysis of Javanese conceptual metaphors identifies death is a journey as a dominant cognitive framework, reflecting a culturally ingrained acceptance of cyclical existence. This notion extends beyond metaphor into lived ritual practice. Studies by Mayuni et al. (2020) on the *Putru Pasaji* text and by Wiwin et al. (2025) on the *Bersih Desa* ritual demonstrate that communal harmony is sustained through continuous interaction between the living and the ancestors, suggesting an eschatology that is dialogical rather than absolute.

This plural and non-finalistic conception of death is further reinforced by the syncretic theological landscape of Java. Larasati et al. (2025) show that within Abangan communities, death is mythologically framed through the doctrine of *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*—the origin and ultimate return of being—which emphasizes cyclical continuity over linear judgment. Complementing this perspective, Sulistianawati et al. (2020) introduce the concept of esoeschatology in their study of coastal *Syi'ir* poetry, where esoteric spiritual discipline converges with eschatological anticipation. Even within Islamic-Javanese intellectual traditions, such as the teachings of Kiai Sholeh Darat examined by Hakim (2020), or ethical classics like the *Wedhatama* analyzed by Ismawati (2016), death is consistently framed as the culmination of ethical self-discipline and spiritual surrender (*sumarah*), rather than as a moment of existential terror.

Underlying these later articulations is the philosophical substrate of Old Javanese literature, particularly the *parwa* corpus, which is deeply shaped by regional Saivism. Fahrudin & Pamungkas (2020) trace the dominance of the Saiwasiddhanta school in classical East Java, which supplied the theological grammar for conceptualizing liberation. Suamba (2018) further clarifies that Javanese Saivism functioned not merely as ritual orthopraxy but as a coherent ethical system governing the soul's progression. This eschatological ethic also finds expression in performative traditions. Triyogo's (2021) analysis of *Wayang Purwa*, especially the narrative of Pandu's death, reveals the importance of temporary punishment (such as *Kawah Candradimuka*) and the moral obligation of descendants to redeem their ancestors. Across textual, ritual, and performative domains, Javanese eschatology thus emerges as a negotiated process of ethical cultivation, communal responsibility, and spiritual continuity, rather than a fixed doctrine of final judgment.

Despite this dynamic cultural context, the Old Javanese literary corpus—specifically the prose *Parwa* literature adapted from Sanskrit epics during the reign of King Dharmawangsa Teguh in the late 10th century—presents a vision of the afterlife that is significantly more nuanced. The central problem addressed in this study is the “eschatological scandal” found in the *Swargarohanaparwa*: Yudhisthira, the paradigm of virtue (*Dharma*), ascends to Heaven only to find his arch-enemy, Duryodhana, enthroned in glory, while his righteous brothers suffer in the abyss of *Yamaniloka* (Hell). This narrative inversion disrupts the reader's expectation of poetic justice. Kermode (2000) notes that eschatology is expected to provide the sense of an ending that brings order to our understanding of life. However, the *Swargarohana* disrupts this order. If eschatology typically functions to legitimate the moral structure of the present world (Walls, 2008), this Javanese text can be read as implying that ultimate reality is narratively represented as transcending human moral binaries.

Academically, the eschatological narrative of the *Swargarohanaparwa* has attracted diverse perspectives, ranging from philological documentation to localized philosophical interpretation. From a philological perspective, the study of the *parwa* corpus was pioneered by Zoetmulder (1983), who established that while these texts are adaptations of the Sanskrit epics, they possess a distinct narrative coherence and philosophical depth that warrants independent study. Philosophically, existing literature has often approached Yudhisthira's journey as a moral or psychological allegory. Austin (2007) argues that Yudhisthira's ascent of the Himalayas symbolizes a Vedic ritual enacted while alive, a perspective enriched by Sompura et al. (2010) through the architectural analysis of *Swargarohana Prasada* temples. In the local context, Untara et al. (2023) and Ariyoga (2019) emphasize that Balinese Hindus interpret the heaven and hell in this text as temporary stopovers caused by *Karma Wasana*, where the value of loyalty (*Satya Semaya*)

supersedes the desire for heaven itself. Nevertheless, existing literature tends to approach this text partially. Pramesti (2014) utilizes a Freudian psychoanalytic approach to dissect Yudhisthira's character, while Büyükbahçeci (2023) and Radhika & Holil (2025) focus on comparative descriptions of hell as mechanisms of social control, without addressing the ontological mechanism behind the infernal illusion.

To strengthen the comparative perspective, it is imperative to situate this Javanese narrative within the broader scholarship of world religions and Indic eschatology. As Ma'sūmiān (1995) observes in her comprehensive study of the afterlife, Eastern traditions generally emphasize cyclical spiritual evolution and ultimate self-realization, which contrasts with strictly linear models. Even within the classical Sanskrit tradition, such as the Southern Recension of the Mahabharata compiled by Sastri (1936), Duryodhana's presence in heaven is primarily rationalized through the specific merit of *Ksatrayadharma* 'the martial duty of the warrior' which grants celestial rewards regardless of prior moral failings. Furthermore, cross-cultural analyses of afterlife conceptions by Shushan (2011) highlight that while post-mortem judgment and topographical hellscape are nearly universal motifs, they usually function as objective, structural realities designed for social and moral control. However, the Javanese *Swargarohana* presents a significant departure from this deterministic and objective model by introducing a subjective, dialectical element to the afterlife experience.

This necessitates a re-evaluation of the concept of *Maya* (illusion) within the reading of Old Javanese texts. Hindu literature generally depicts the underworld through horrific topographical tours designed to deter sin (Gardiner, 2013). However, in the Javanese *Swargarohana*, this tour serves a function of ontological transformation operating through *Maya*. Shastri (1911), explains that *Maya* should not be understood merely as nothingness or magical trickery, but as a metaphysical principle veiling the Absolute, making the One appear as the Many. In the context of the *Swargarohana*, the "Hell" witnessed by Yudhisthira is a manifestation of this principle—a projection of phenomena that must be transcended to reach true reality.

Despite the foundational premise established by Zoetmulder (1983) that the Old Javanese *parwas* possess their own narrative coherence and philosophical depth, a significant research gap persists regarding the philosophical function of this divine deception within the Old Javanese framework. Most studies on Mahabharata eschatology continue to focus on the Indian Sanskrit tradition—where Sukthankar (1959) explains Duryodhana's heaven as a consequence of *Ksatrayadharma*—while relegating Old Javanese interpretations to the status of secondary translations. Furthermore, while Suparta (2016), in his extensive study of the *Putru Kalēpasan* manuscript (Merapi-Merbabu), crucially demonstrates that the ultimate goal of Javanese eschatology is *Kalēpasan* (perfect liberation) rather than merely Heaven (*Swarga*), scholarship has yet to adequately bridge this localized theological grammar with the specific textual paradox of the *Swargarohana*.

Consequently, there is a conspicuous absence of studies explicitly anatomizing the mechanism of the "Hell illusion" as an internal, ontological necessity and ethical dialectic required to achieve this *Kalēpasan*, rather than treating it as a mere geographical anomaly or moral test. By analyzing the text edited by Zoetmulder (1963) and comparing it with the causality in the *Prasthanikaparwa* (Juynboll, 1893), this research formulates the interpretive hypothesis that the "Hell" experienced by Yudhisthira is neither presented as a location of retributive punishment nor merely as a moral test, but can be understood as a manifestation of *Maya* functioning as an ontological purgatory within the narrative logic of the text. This illusion is specifically designed to purify the remnants of the human ego (*śarīra mānuṣa*) and worldly attachments, a process of self-deconstruction that is absolutely necessary before the transition to divinity and pure consciousness can occur.

2. Methods

This study is grounded primarily in a philological–hermeneutic close reading of Old Javanese texts, treating the *Swargarohanaparwa* and *Prasthanikaparwa* as historically

situated literary artifacts whose meaning emerges through close attention to diction, syntax, narrative structure, and intertextual continuity. Within this primary philological framework, *Nirukta* (exegetical etymology) and *Dhvani* theory function as internal textual instruments to elucidate semantic depth and implied meaning rather than as autonomous theoretical paradigms. Modern hermeneutic and philosophical theories are employed only at a later, reflective stage of analysis to conceptualize and articulate the implications of the textual findings, not to predetermine their interpretation. Drawing upon Gadamer (Warnke, 1987), the comprehension of this text is achieved through a fusion of horizons, wherein the interpreter's prejudices and the text's historicity converge to generate novel meaning. To transcend a merely literal reading, this research adopts the Dhvani theory (aesthetic suggestion) as elucidated by Anandavardhana and reinterpreted by Widdison (2019), as well as Salgaonkar & Menezes (2023). Within this framework, the narrative of hell experienced by Yudhisthira is not read at the level of *vacyartha* (literal or denotative meaning), but is excavated at the level of *vyangyārtha* (suggestive meaning) to uncover hidden ontological implications. Furthermore, the *Nirukta* approach (exegetical etymology), defined by Coomaraswamy (2005) as *hermeneia*, is utilized to trace the metaphysical traces within key terms, ensuring that the linguistic analysis does not remain confined to semantics but penetrates the philosophical reality designated by the words (Sarup, 1967).

The primary data sources for this study are the Old Javanese text of *Swargarohanaparwa* found in the *Sekar Semawur* anthology (Zoetmulder, 1963) and the *Prasthanikaparwa* (Juynboll, 1893). To ensure lexical accuracy, the translation of all Old Javanese excerpts within this study was guided by the dictionary compiled by Zoetmulder & Robson (1995). Secondary sources include the critical edition of the Mahabharata (Sukthankar, 1959) as a structural comparator, alongside literature concerning the doctrine of Maya and Hindu-Javanese eschatology. As text-based research, the study is centered on libraries and digital archives housing the Old Javanese literary corpus and supporting manuscripts, including the digital collections of Leiden University and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, which will be accessed both online and offline during the research period.

Data collection and analysis are scheduled to be conducted from late 2025 through 2026, following a tripartite strategic procedure that integrates Western and Eastern theories. The first stage applies Ong's (2017) principle that language is itself a hermeneutic apparatus; this research performs a close reading to isolate textual fragments depicting eschatological anomalies, classifying data based on narrative structure and sensory description.

Subsequently, the analysis employs the *Nirukta* method (exegetical etymology) of *Yaska*, as discussed by Rbonkhorst (1981) and Coomaraswamy (2005). To ensure methodological transparency, the operational steps of this *Nirukta* analysis are systematically executed as follows: (1) lexical isolation, where anomalous or philosophically dense terms (e.g., *Dharma*, *Maya*, *śarīra mānuṣa*) are extracted from the Old Javanese narrative context; (2) etymological tracing, which dissects these terms beyond their conventional denotative usage to uncover their semantic roots; and (3) metaphysical reconstruction, which synthesizes these roots to demonstrate how, within the Old Javanese context, such terms signify psychical conditions or states of mind rather than mere physical descriptions.

Following the etymological dissection, the data is analyzed using *Dhvani* theory (Sharma, 1968; Widdison, 2019) to extract the *pratīyamānārtha* 'implied meaning'. As a concrete example of this application, the *Swargarohana* text describes Yudhisthira's descent into hell with visceral sensory details: "*Daging ing kunapa aléyö rāh; apĕk asangit aharing abo mahandih ambu nikang sarwapāpa*" 'The flesh of corpses melted into blood; musty, scorched, foul, and rancid were the smells of all the sins'. Read at the level of *vacyartha* 'literal meaning', this presents a terrifying physical topography of retribution. However, excavated at the level of *vyangyārtha* 'suggested meaning' through the *Dhvani* framework, these horrific sensory details are interpreted as the psychological projection of

Yudhisthira's own lingering attachments (*tr̥ṣṇā*) and human ego. This is structurally confirmed later in the text when the illusion dissipates and the foul stench (*durgandha*) instantly transforms into the fragrance of flowers (*sugandhakusuma*) upon his spiritual realization.

This process is synthesized with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc (Ihde, 1971), which moves from structural explanation to a profound understanding of selfhood. Here, the illusion of hell is interpreted as a symbol of purification necessary for Yudhisthira's ontological transformation. Finally, the validity of the interpretation is maintained through theoretical triangulation—converging Gadamerian hermeneutics with *dhvani* theory—and intertextual cross-referencing between the Old Javanese and Sanskrit versions to ensure the consistency of the philosophical argumentation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The pre-eschatological purge: Deconstructing the *śarīra mānuṣa* in *prasthanikaparwa*

The eschatological dialectic within the *Swargarohanaparwa* cannot be fully comprehended without first dissecting the narrative causality established in the preceding book, the *Prasthanikaparwa*. Based on the textual analysis of the Old Javanese edition by Juynboll (1893), the Pandavas' ascent of Mount Mahameru is not merely a physical pilgrimage, but an ontological mechanism designed to shed the *śarīra mānuṣa* (human body) and the psychological residues attached to it. Unlike the Western theological concept of a *post-mortem* judgment, the Old Javanese text presents a judgment that occurs *in via*—during the journey itself. The textual data indicates that the Pandavas fall one by one not due to cardinal sins (*mahapapa*), but due to "subtle defects" that bind them to the human ego.

The first figure to succumb during the ascent is Draupadi. When Bhima questions Yudhisthira regarding the cause of her death, despite her apparent sinlessness, Yudhisthira reveals a hidden moral defect within her heart. The Old Javanese text states:

"Lima kita sânak kinabhaktin sang Dropadî, ndâ lwih pakṣapâtanya ri sang Arjuna, phala ning ulah mangkana, ya tika pinanggih sarikâ."

(You five brothers were served by Draupadi, yet her partiality [*pakṣapāta*] was greater toward Arjuna; the fruit of such conduct is what she now encounters.) (Juynboll, 1893).

Etymologically, the term *pakṣapāta* provides deep insight into her failing. According to Monier-Williams (1899), *pakṣapāta* implies "falling of the feathers," "flying," or "adopting a side or argument." In the specific context of Draupadi's polyandrous *dharma*, love was required to be distributed with absolute equilibrium. Her "adopting a side" (partiality) toward Arjuna represented a "moulting" of her spiritual integrity. Thus, Draupadi's death marks the release of emotional attachment and personal preference, which are characteristic traits of the human ego that disrupt cosmic balance.

Subsequently, Sahadeva falls. Yudhisthira explains that although Sahadewa was wise, he was entrapped by pride in his own intellect:

"Tatan hana wwang prajñânya sama ni[n̄g] prajñânya... mewêh sarika'n amaḍana'n kaprajñânya sarikâ ri loka mangke, ika alênggên mangkana, ya tika doṣa sarikâ..."

(There was no one whose wisdom [*prajñā*] equaled his... it was difficult for him to acknowledge anyone as his equal in wisdom in this world; that was his arrogance, that was his sin...) (Juynboll, 1893).

Here, the text deconstructs *Jnana* (knowledge) that is devoid of humility. Sahadewa represents the human intellect which, though accurate, becomes a spiritual barrier when it transforms into cognitive arrogance. This aligns with the warning found in *Sārasamuccaya* 507:

prajñayā mānasam duḥkhaṃ hanyāc charīram auśadhaiḥ | etadd hi jñānasāmarthyam na bālaiḥ samatām iyāt ||

(Ideally, the mind is treated with wisdom, just as the body is treated with medicine; that is the power of knowledge, exceeding the power of the body.) (Direktorat Jenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Hindu Kementerian Agama RI, 2021).

Sahadeva failed to use his *prajñā* as medicine to heal the mind's suffering; instead, he allowed it to become a source of ego, failing the standard of true *jñānasāmarthyā* (capacity of knowledge).

Nakula, renowned for his beauty, falls due to his attachment to physical aesthetics. Yudhisthira states:

"Ikang Nakula ngaranya wruh ika tan hana papaḍanya yâwat ing rūpa, ya-tânuwuhakĕn kâhangkâran i[ng] manahnya, nahan ta doṣanya..."

(Nakula knew that he had no equal in terms of beauty [*rūpa*]; this fostered egoism [*kâhangkâran*] in his heart; that was his sin...) (Juynboll, 1893).

The use of the term *kâhangkâran* is crucial here, representing *vanitas* or pride in material form. Abstracting from Subagia's (2016) analysis of *Sapta Timira* (The Seven Darkesses), Nakula is blinded by *Surupa* (beauty). Subagia notes that *Surupa* is a gift, but when it leads to arrogance, it becomes a darkness that confuses the mind (*manahe paling*). Nakula's obsession with his physical perfection is a manifestation of this spiritual blindness, where the temporal body is mistaken for the eternal self. His fall symbolizes the destruction of self-identification with the physical form.

Arjuna, the greatest warrior, falls due to pride in his martial prowess and unfulfilled vows. The Juynboll text records:

"Ing ûni ri kâla ning aprang... ang(h)ing sawe göng aku juga matyani ng çatru lingnya... ya-ta sisip jñânanya, kewalyângungsi mahuripa..."

(Formerly, during the war... he said, "I alone will kill the enemies"... that was the error in his understanding, for he merely sought to survive...) (Juynboll, 1893).

Arjuna's error can be analyzed through the lens of "Hubris Syndrome" as defined by Owen (2008). Owen describes hubris as a disorder of power possession, characterized by excessive self-confidence and a contempt for others' advice or the role of external factors (like fate). Arjuna's declaration that "I alone" would destroy the enemy reflects this intoxication with agency—an overestimation of his own capability while underestimating the complexity of cosmic will. His fall serves as a deconstruction of human ambition and the delusion of absolute agency. Finally, Bhima falls. Yudhisthira points to Bhima's coarse nature and gluttony:

"Yeka doyan amangan swabhâwanta, tan sâpekṣâ kita ri[ng] lampah ing len, awâkparuṣya ta kita..."

(It is because your nature is fond of eating, you are inconsiderate of others' conduct, and you are physically rough [*awâkparuṣya*]...) (Juynboll, 1893).

Bhima represents the animalistic instincts of man: unbridled appetite and brute force. As noted by Gunawan (2019) in his study of *Bhima Swarga*, Bhima often occupies a liminal space between the human and the demonic/divine, characterized by his raw physical power. However, to ascend to the highest *Swarga*, this gross physicality must be refined. His fall signifies the final purging of biological desires and the "roughness" of the physical body before the soul can reach the peak of transcendence.

After all elements of humanity (emotion, intellect, vanity, ambition, and appetite) have fallen away through the deaths of his siblings, only Yudhisthira remains with his physical body. Yet, he is not alone; a dog (*çwâna*) accompanies him.

The crucial moment arises when Indra arrives with a celestial chariot but refuses entry to the dog. Yudhisthira faces an eschatological ultimatum: enter Heaven by abandoning his loyal companion, or reject Heaven for the sake of loyalty. He chooses the latter:

“*Tan kaw nang (ng)hulun bhaktityâ[ng]ga, tuminggalakna ikang coņa (l. çwâna)... (h)ila-(h)ila ikang wwang bhaktityâga...*”

(I cannot commit the abandonment of the devoted [*bhaktityâga*], leaving this dog... it is a great taboo for a person to abandon those who are faithful...) (Juynboll, 1893).

From the perspective of *Dharma* theory, this act affirms Yudhisthira’s integrity. He is not seduced by *Swarga* as a location of pleasure. For him, *Dharma* (truth/loyalty) holds higher value than Heaven itself. This refusal transforms the dog into the God Dharma, who praises Yudhisthira for transcending the test of compassion. However, a paradox emerges here. Yudhisthira is the only one who succeeds in retaining his *śarīra mānuṣa* (human body) up to the gates of Heaven:

“*Sira tinon i nghulun humibki swarggaloka... tan hana paḍa nira muli(h) ri(ng) swargga pwa (l. swa)çarīra nira...*”

(You are seen by me filling the realm of Heaven... there is no one equal to you returning to Heaven with your own body...) (Juynboll, 1893).

Ironically, this success in retaining the physical body becomes the source of the crisis in the subsequent chapter (*Swargarohanaparwa*). Because he still carries “human eyes” and “human memory” (which were not dissolved like those of his brothers), Yudhisthira remains vulnerable to *Maya*. It is this corporeal form that enables him to witness the illusion: Duryodhana in Heaven and his brothers in Hell. Thus, the *Prasthanikaparwa* functions as a physical purgatory, selecting who dies (sheds the body) and who lives (carries the body), setting the stage for the mental purgatory that unfolds in the *Swargarohana*.

3.2 The celestial paradox: The inversion of karmic retribution

The zenith of the eschatological crisis in the *Swargarohanaparwa* occurs when Yudhisthira, still retaining his physical body (*śarīra mānuṣa*), enters the realm of *Swarga*. Instead of finding peace or a reunion with his virtuous brothers, he confronts a visual and moral inversion that shakes the foundations of his understanding of Karma. A comparative analysis between the Old Javanese text (Zoetmulder, 1963) and the Sanskrit text (Sukthankar, 1959) reveals how the Javanese author performed a process of glocalization—adapting universal Hindu doctrines into local aesthetics and ethics—to explain why a villain achieves celestial glory.

In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, the moment of encounter is described concisely but densely. Yudhisthira sees Duryodhana seated on a throne with divine glory:

svargaṃ triviṣṭapaṃ prāpya dharmarājo yudhiṣṭhiraḥ | duryodhanaṃ śrīyā juṣṭaṃ dadarśāsīnam āsane || bhrājamānam ivādityaṃ vīra lakṣmyābhisaṃvṛtam | devair bhrājiṣṇubhiḥ sādhyaiḥ sahitam puṇyakarmabhiḥ || (Sukthankar, 1959)

(Having reached heaven, the celestial abode, Dharmaraja Yudhisthira | saw Duryodhana seated on a seat, endowed with glory (*śrī*) || shining like the sun (*āditya*), surrounded by heroic fortune (*lakṣmī*) | accompanied by shining deities and Sadhyas of meritorious deeds.)

The Old Javanese text vernacularizes this description by expanding the visual details to be more dramatic and culturally specific, emphasizing material opulence and an aura of divinity that intimidates Yudhisthira:

"Irikā ta kapanggih mahārāja Duryodhana de nira, alinggih ring singhāsana maṇimaya mabhūṣaṇa makuṭadhara makunḍala maṇik makilat-bāhu makaṭiwandha... Kadi teja sang hyang Āditya akalangan teja nira mahārāja Duryodhana." (Zoetmulder, 1963)
(There Maharaja Duryodhana was found by him, seated on a jeweled throne, wearing a crown, jeweled earrings, armllets, and a waistband... Like the radiance of the Sun God (Āditya) surrounded by a halo, such was the radiance of Maharaja Duryodhana.)

This comparison demonstrates that the Javanese author retained the core metaphor of the Sun (Āditya) found in the Sanskrit source. However, the author added specific details of royal ornamentation (*makuṭadhara*, *makunḍala*) that reflect the aesthetic of the Old Javanese court. Furthermore, the phrase "*Kadi kamerangěn de ni göng ni kawibhawan sang Kurupati*" (As if ashamed/awed by the greatness of the Kurupati's authority) in the Javanese narrative adds an interior psychological dimension to Yudhisthira—feeling small before his enemy's majesty—a nuance less explored in the more descriptive Sanskrit slokas.

Yudhisthira's reaction to this paradox is vehement rejection. He judges the situation based on historical morality (the track record of past crimes), whereas Heaven appears to operate on a different set of laws. In the Old Javanese text, Yudhisthira specifically cites Duryodhana's foul nature:

"Apan nīca kaśmala pinakaswabhāwanya ngūni ri sěḍěngnyāneng martyaloka... Amanggih pwa ya swarga ikang wwang mangkana kramanya, kapūhan juga nghulun de bhaṭāra." (Zoetmulder, 1963)
(For lowly and foul (*nīca kaśmala*) was his nature formerly when in the world of mortals... That a person of such conduct finds Heaven, I am truly bewildered by the gods.)

The term *nīca kaśmala* (lowly and foul/blemished) is a strong Old Javanese lexical choice to depict moral degradation. Yudhisthira cannot accept that the law of karma is partial; for him, Duryodhana's crimes against Draupadi and the Pandavas should annul his celestial rights.

The resolution to this paradox is provided by Narada. Here lies the significant difference in how the Old Javanese text "grounds" the Indian concept. In the Sanskrit text, Narada rebukes Yudhisthira for bringing earthly anger to heaven and explains that Duryodhana fell as a hero (*Vīra*).

vīralokagatiṃ prāpto yuddhe hutvātmanas tanum | ... sa eṣa kṣatradharmaṇa sthānam etad avāptavān || (Sukthankar, 1959)
(He has attained the state of the world of heroes (*vīraloka*), having sacrificed his body in battle... He has obtained this place through the duty of a Kshatriya (*kṣatradharma*.)

The Old Javanese text adopts this *Kṣatriyadharma* concept but places a uniquely local emphasis on the inner state at the moment of death. Narada's explanation in the Javanese version concerns not just falling in war, but the specific quality of consciousness.

"Paḡěhnya irikang tapa sapětik, tumungkul i patinya ring raṇakārya, enak pangawruhnya yan mati denta ring samara... Ikā ta śilanya tan awēdi matya... Kalingan ikā: wyakti kṣatriyadharma ngaran ikang mangkana." (Zoetmulder, 1963)
(His firmness in that instantaneous asceticism (*tapa sapětik*), he submitted to his death in the work of war, his knowledge was at ease (*enak pangawruhnya*) that he died by you in battle... That was his virtue, not fearing death... Conclusion: truly that is what is named *Kṣatriyadharma*.)

The interpretation of the phrase "*tapa sapětik*" (instantaneous asceticism) and "*enak pangawruhnya*" (ease of knowledge/consciousness) can be elucidated through Suparta's (2016) study on the *Putru Kalēpasan* text from the Merapi-Merbabu tradition. Suparta

identifies that in Javanese eschatology, the ultimate goal is not merely reaching a generic heaven, but achieving *Kalēpasan* (liberation/absorption), where the soul (*pitara*) transforms into *Dewa Pitara* (ancestral god).

According to Suparta (2016), the concept of *Kalēpasan* involves the purification of the soul from the stains of *daśamala* (ten impurities). In the context of Duryodhana, although his life was marked by *adharma*, his death moment was characterized by a radical, albeit brief, spiritual focus (*tapa sapētik*). He surrendered his ego and accepted death without fear, aligning his consciousness with the warrior's duty (*dharma*). This act serves as a form of "instant purification" or *praliṅga*, allowing him to bypass the lower states and ascend temporarily to *Swarga*.

Suparta further explains that Javanese cosmology, as reflected in the *Sastra-Ajar* tradition, places *Bhaṭāra Guru* at the summit in *Windupēpēt* (the highest void). Duryodhana's ease of knowledge (*enak pangawruhnya*) implies a moment of alignment with this cosmic order, a brief realization of the void or *sunyata* that characterizes the highest state of *Windupēpēt*. Thus, the Old Javanese text redefines *Vīra* not just as martial bravery, but as the capacity to achieve a meditative state (*tapa*) at the threshold of death, validating Duryodhana's presence in heaven as ontologically legitimate within the localized *religio loci* of Java.

The celestial paradox in the Old Javanese *Swargarohanaparwa* is not a mere translation of the Indian epic but a theological reconstruction. Through comparison with Sukthankar's Sanskrit text, it is evident that the Javanese text (Zoetmulder) maintains the narrative framework but fills the interstices with local sensibilities. Duryodhana's glory is validated through the concept of *tapa sapētik*—a moment of instant asceticism at death. As illuminated by Suparta (2016), this reflects a specific Javanese eschatological mechanism where the quality of how one dies—specifically the ability to focus consciousness and surrender—possesses an ontological weight capable of transforming the *pitara* into *Dewa Pitara*, thereby postponing, though not canceling, the retribution for past sins. This creates the dialectical tension that forces Yudhisthira to transcend transactional karma toward a deeper understanding of compassion.

3.3 *Maya as ontological purgatory: The phenomenology of the Javanese hell*

The narrative transition from the disappointing Heaven to the horrific Hell in the *Swargarohanaparwa* marks a fundamental shift in Yudhisthira's mode of existence. If Duryodhana's Heaven is the manifestation of karmic fruit (*phala*), the Hell experienced by Yudhisthira is the manifestation of *Maya*. A phenomenological analysis of the Old Javanese text reveals that this Hell is not a static geographical location but a psychical construction designed as an ontological purgatory—a "purifying fire" that burns not the body, but the erroneous perception of reality.

This interpretation is substantiated by the Advaitic understanding of *Maya* as a complex mechanism of concealment (*avarana*) and projection (*viksepa*). As Whitehead (2019) observes, *Maya* functions as the creative potency that projects the manifold world (*viksepa*) while simultaneously veiling the non-dual reality (*avarana*); in Yudhisthira's case, the "Hell" he traverses is a projected reality sustained by his own internal obscurations regarding the fate of his kin.

Yudhisthira's experience in *Yamaniloka* is depicted through visceral physical sensations. The text does not merely label the location as "Hell" but details the textures, odors, and visuals that assault Yudhisthira's senses, evoking what Indian aesthetic theory terms *bībhatsa rasa* (the sentiment of disgust). The *Swargarohanaparwa* text describes this sensory overload:

"Sakweh ning pāpa kapanggih angrēngih-rēngih ri samīpa nira... Daging ing kunapa alēyō rāh; apēk asangit aharing abo mahandih ambu nikang sarwapāpa haneng samīpa ning hawan... Muwah hana apuy murub angarab-arab amēgati laku nira." (Zoetmulder, 1963).

(All the sinners were found moaning near him... The flesh of corpses melted into blood; musty, scorched, foul, and rancid were the smells of all the sins near the path... Furthermore, there was fire flaming and blazing, cutting off his path.).

Analyzing this passage through the lens of *dhvani* theory (aesthetic suggestion), the description operates on two distinct semantic levels. On the level of *vacyartha* (literal meaning), the text describes a punitive topography filled with blood and fire, designed to terrify. However, on the level of *vyangyārtha* (suggested or implied meaning), these sensory details suggest that this Hell is a projection of Yudhisthira's own psyche, specifically his lingering attachment (*tr̥ṣṇā*) to his kin.

This implied psychological projection can be anatomized further through the lens of the *Pancha Kosha* (five sheaths of consciousness) theory. As Raina (2016) explicates, this torture operates primarily within the *Manomaya Kosha* (the mental/emotional sheath), which serves as the seat of sensory input and emotional duality—the realm where doubt, depression, and delusion originate. Consequently, the "flesh of corpses" and "rancid smells" are not external physical objects but sensory data organized by Yudhisthira's guilt-ridden mind to process his lingering attachments.

This responsiveness of the environment to Yudhisthira's inner state can be sufficiently explained within the Advaitic framework of *Maya* itself, wherein phenomenal conditions are understood as contingent upon the quality of consciousness rather than as objective absolutes, without recourse to external scientific analogies. This narrative logic is explicitly dramatized when, amid the torments of hell, Yudhisthira hears the voices of his brothers declaring that his presence generates a cooling breeze (*wit ning angin alon sumirir*), thereby suspending the experience of hellfire through his unwavering solidarity.

Although later revealed as an illusion, this experience is empirically real (*vyavaharika*) to Yudhisthira at the moment of perception. Virk (2020) clarifies that in Indian philosophy, *Maya* constitutes an empirical reality that is true for now. While it is ultimately unreal because it is transient, it is not non-existent; rather, it exists as a force of the Divine to entangle human consciousness (Virk, 2020). Drawing on the exegetic discourse of Das (2020), this *Maya* establishes bondage to the empirical world by obstructing the unveiling of the unitary self. In the context of the Javanese text, the rancid smell and blazing fire are the false dualities generated by *Maya* to ensnare Yudhisthira's consciousness, forcing him to experience suffering as a consequence of his remaining emotional attachments.

It is crucial to understand that this "Illusory Hell" is not merely a trivial deception. As elucidated by Shastri (1911) in his treatise on the doctrine of *Maya*, this concept cannot be reduced to pure non-entity or nothingness. Instead, Shastri (1911) defines *Maya* as an inexplicable power (*anirvacanīya*) inherent in the Divine, capable of projecting forms just as the power of burning is inherent in fire.

In the *Swargarohana*, the god Indra acts as the wielder of this inherent power. The Hell exists (*is*) insofar as it is experienced by Yudhisthira, yet it does not exist (*is not*) in absolute reality. This specific function of Indra is historically rooted. Gelani (2025) traces the conceptual history of *Maya* back to the Rig Veda, noting that the term is frequently associated with Indra. Gelani (2025) emphasizes that in this Vedic context, *Maya* implies a wondrous power or divine skill capable of producing forms, rather than simple deceit. Mitra (2020) further supports this by noting that this mysterious power of the will is often referred to as *Indrajāla* or "Indra's Net", a mechanism capable of producing complex forms to test the devotee.

The Javanese text explicitly positions Indra as the architect behind this phenomenon, using the illusion as a pedagogical tool rather than a punitive one. Indra explains that this experience is a reciprocal balance for Yudhisthira's single moment of dishonesty regarding the death of Ashwatthama during the great war:

"I kang sabda haji mananggah Aśwatthāmā juga ya tikā karəngö de sang hyang Droṇa... ikang panənggah haji Aśwatthāmā jugābangət... Irikā ta ḍang hyang Droṇa bhrāntacitta..." (Zoetmulder, 1963)

(Your words claiming it was Ashwatthama were what Drona heard... your claim of 'Ashwatthama' was very loud... At that moment, Drona's mind became confused [*bhrāntacitta*]...).

This citation is pivotal. Yudhisthira's deception created mental confusion (*bhrāntacitta*) in Drona. As a form of immediate karmic feedback facilitated by *Maya*, Yudhisthira is made to experience a corresponding perceptual confusion in Hell. This rebalancing acts as a restoration of Cosmic Order (*Rita*). As Singh (2017) posits in his framework of sacred ecology, the Hindu cosmos functions on a principle of harmonic integrity where every action must align with the universal order. Yudhisthira's lie disrupted this sacred ecology of truth (*Satya*); thus, to restore the cosmic equilibrium, he must endure a reciprocal distortion of reality (Singh, 2017).

This finding challenges the view of Gardiner (2013), who generally characterizes Hindu hells as fixed, mapped topographies of retribution where specific sins correlate to specific punishments. In contrast, the Javanese *Swargarohana* presents Hell not as a fixed location, but as an ontological purgatory. It is a liminal space constructed by *Maya* to incinerate the remnants of the *śarīra mānuṣa* (human residue/ego) that Yudhisthira still clings to.

This redefinition of Hell as a transformative rather than purely punitive space is further corroborated by broader Southeast Asian and Balinese Hindu eschatology. In the analysis of the *Candra Bairawa* text, Saraswati & Paramita (2016) argue that Yudhisthira's path exemplifies *Karma Sanyasa*, where the engagement with worldly consequences—including the descent into hellish realms—is a necessary form of yoga to detach the spirit for its ultimate liberation (*Moksha*). This aligns with the theology of death found in the Balinese *Yama Purwana Tattwa*, where Subawa (2019) and Seriasih (2021) posit that the function of the afterlife trajectory is the acceleration of the *atma*'s reunion with *Paramatman*; here, rituals (*pitra yadnya*) act as the external counterpart to Yudhisthira's internal purification, serving to sever the soul's earthly bonds rather than perpetuate suffering. While modern visual representations of *Naraka*, as analyzed by Albar (2022), often emphasize the grotesque aesthetic of punishment, Goh (2015) clarifies that in the Southeast Asian iconographic tradition, such hellscape are primarily pedagogical. They are designed not to establish a static geography of damnation, but to serve as didactic tools that—like Indra's illusion—force the observer to confront the reality of moral law, thereby facilitating the same spiritual awakening that Yudhisthira experiences. The transitory nature of this Hell is confirmed when Yudhisthira chooses solidarity over self-interest. The moment he passes this test, the landscape dissolves:

"Mangkana tekang kawah pinakapangĕlan ikang watĕk pāpa ngūni, ya tikā hilang tan kinawruhan paranya, kady angipi karahatan kahiḍĕpanya... Mangkana tikang Yamaniloka matĕmahan swarga mwanĕ ikang durgandha ngūni matĕmahan sugandhacusuma." (Zoetmulder, 1963)

(Thus the cauldron that was the place of torture for the sinners disappeared, its destination unknown, like a nightmare [*kady angipi*] upon waking... Thus, Yamaniloka transformed into Heaven, and the foul smell transformed into the fragrance of flowers.)

The analogy of dreaming (*kady angipi*) used by the Javanese author is philosophically precise. Shastri (1911) notes that the dream state (*svapna*) is often employed in Vedanta to explain the ontological status of the phenomenal world: real while experienced, but vanishing upon awakening to higher consciousness. This classical view aligns with modern interpretations of quantum consciousness; Purram et al. (2023) note that the dream state illustrates how reality is a projection that collapses upon the dawn of higher consciousness.

This subjectivization of the afterlife and its function as an illusory projection finds striking parallels in other global and regional traditions, highlighting a shared archetypal understanding of post-mortem consciousness. As Sumegi (2014) outlines in her analysis of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the terrifying hellish landscapes encountered post-mortem are fundamentally recognized as projections of the deceased's own consciousness. Similarly,

Woolger (2004) notes that transpersonal psychology views such states as occurring within a *mundus imaginalis*, a realm of forms that are spiritually real yet psychologically generated. In the broader Southeast Asian context, as Kiong & Schiller (1993) argue in their anthropological overview, death is frequently constructed not as an absolute biological cessation but as a fluid socio-cosmic transition. This is corroborated by Antoni (1982), who observes that across East and Southeast Asia, the conceptualization of death operates fundamentally as a prerequisite for ontological transformation rather than a final terminus. We see this psychological projection resonating with Torajan mourning practices, where Hollan (1995) observes that visions of the afterworld serve primarily to process the survivor's internal grief. Furthermore, in traditional Balinese narratives detailing journeys to the underworld (Hooykaas, 1955), the topography of the afterlife is notoriously mutable, bending to the protagonist's spiritual state. These localized projections deeply align with Eliade's (1974) foundational observations that narratives of the afterlife serve primarily to decode the ultimate mysteries of human transition rather than map a literal geography.

In Yudhisthira's case, the awakening is the realization that Dharma—manifested as loyalty and compassion—is more real than any transient Heaven or Hell. By moving beyond his ego (*śarīra mānuṣa*), Yudhisthira transcends the *Manomaya Kosha* and enters the *Anandamaya Kosha* (the blissful sheath), which Raina (2016) describes as the state of "harmony, integration, and complete satisfaction" beyond the dualities of pain and pleasure. *Maya*, acting as a purgatorial fire, successfully purifies Yudhisthira's vision, rendering him fit to enter the true divine reality.

3.4 Kalepasan: From Human Body to Divine Consciousness

The ultimate resolution of the Swargarohanaparwa, as represented within the narrative and symbolic economy of the Old Javanese text, is not merely the attainment of a geographical Heaven (Swarga), but an ontological shift articulated at the level of textual representation. The narrative arc concludes with Yudhisthira's ritual immersion in the celestial Ganges (*Akashaganga*). Within the Javanese textual tradition, this bath functions as the terminal point of the eschatological dialectic, signifying—within the narrative logic of the text—the transition from *eschaton* (the end of life) to *telos* (the ultimate purpose of existence), conceptualized as *Kalepasan*.

The analysis of the Old Javanese *Mahābhārata* conclusion reveals that the Pandavas' journey is not a spatial relocation but a profound ontological transformation. The Old Javanese text provides a precise description of this transformation, utilizing the metaphor of a snake shedding its skin to illustrate the discarding of the *śarīra mānuṣa* (human body).

"Ri tēlas nira madyus ri sang hyang Ganggā, tumatā ta sira ri tēlěng sang hyang wīja hěnanng hěning mwang tekang citta nirmala agranāsika. Katon ta mahenak hěning nira, hilang tekang śarīra mānuṣa ri sira kadi ulā amilungsungi ikā rūpa nira. Masalin sira rūpa arūpa dewatā makahetu ni kapawitran ira sang hyang Ganggā." (Zoetmulder, 1963)

(After he bathed in the holy Ganges, he arranged himself in the depths of the holy seed (*wīja*), silent and clear, with a stainless mind, focusing on the tip of the nose (*agranāsika*). He appeared clear and pure; the human body disappeared from him, like a snake shedding its skin was his form. He changed form into a divine form (*arūpa dewatā*), caused by his purification in the holy Ganges.)

This passage explicitly links the physical act of bathing with a meditative state (*agranāsika*—gazing at the tip of the nose), indicating that the Ganges here is not merely a river, but a locus of yogic absorption.

The transformation described above aligns with the findings of Suparta (2016) in his study of the *Putru Kalēpasan* text. Suparta argues that in Javanese eschatology, the soul (*atma*) must undergo a specific purification process to transition from the status of *Pitara* (ancestral spirit) to *Dewa Pitara* (divinized ancestor). Yudhisthira's immersion in the

Ganges functions as the *visvottirna* (transcendence/absorption) principle. Within Suparta's (2016) interpretive framework, *Kalepasan* is theorized as a negation of the Cogito; unlike Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," the Javanese conception articulated in this reading implies "I think, therefore I am not". By shedding the *śarīra mānuṣa*, Yudhisthira sheds his individual ego (*aḥamkara*), allowing his limited self to dissolve into the absolute void (*Windupěpět*) or the highest divinity.

To understand the mechanism of this transformation, the framework of *Yogākṣara* provided by Giri and Windya (2023; 2024) is essential. They define *Yogākṣara* as a spiritual roadmap where the practitioner utilizes *bijaksara* (seed syllables) and *Sadaṅgayoga* (six-limbed yoga) to achieve liberation. The text's mention of "*tumatā ta sira ri tēlēng sang hyang wīja*" (he arranged himself in the depths of the holy seed) directly correlates with Giri and Windya's (2023) concept of *bijaksara* as the medium for *Kalepasan*. The "holy seed" (*wīja*) is not a physical grain but the mystical syllable (likely *OM* or *AH*) that resonates within the subtle body. Furthermore, Giri & Windya (2024) explain that in the *Śīwa Tattwa* tradition, the body is a microcosm (*Bhuana Alit*). Therefore, the "Ganges" in the *Swargarohana* should be interpreted not just as an external river, but as the internal flow of *prana* (energy) in the *Sushumna* channel. Yudhisthira's concentration on the *agranāsika* (nose tip) is a technique of *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses) and *Dharana* (concentration), facilitating the *Pralīna* (cosmic dissolution) of the physical elements into the divine light (*teja*).

This internal mechanism of liberation (*Kalepasan*) via yogic absorption contrasts with, yet complements, the communal and ritualistic perspectives found in broader archipelago traditions. While Yudhisthira's path is portrayed as a solitary shedding of the self, Jean-Marc de Grave (2018) argues that for the Javanese, death is fundamentally a social process characterized by an inversion of ritual debt, where the living descendants actively facilitate the ancestor's transition through second funerals or commemorative rites, rather than the deceased achieving it alone. This aligns with Setyawan et al. (2022) and Peters (2016), who highlight that the *Selamatan* ritual serves as the primary technology of passage, functioning as a socio-spiritual vehicle that negotiates the soul's transition through communal feasting and topogenic sovereignty. This ritualistic approach aims for the same *manunggaling kawula lan gusti* (union of servant and Lord) described by Tanjung (2017), emphasizing death not as an end but as the genesis of a new eternal life. However, the preservation of this indigenous path is increasingly fraught; Syafiq & Putri (2022) note that adherents of such *Kejawen* practices now face significant identity threats from hegemonic religious norms, often forcing a retreat into internal coping strategies that mirror Yudhisthira's withdrawal from the world. Expanding the ontological scope beyond the Javanese context, Donder et al. (2025) frame this transition through the Balinese *Sakala-Niskala* paradigm, where liberation is understood as a shift in spiritual frequency or vibration, effectively demystifying the shedding of skin as a vibrational transmutation. Ultimately, this journey redefines the human subject not merely as a static entity but as a *Homo Viator* (pilgrim), as conceptualized by Pantan (2025), who must traverse the ecological and eschatological community of nature to achieve final dissolution, thereby bridging the gap between the internal yogic void and the external cosmic order.

Finally, the ontological shift from *manusa* (human) to *dewata* (divine) addresses the fundamental relationship between the creation and the creator. Krishna & Yogiswari (2023) describe *Kalepasan* as the realization of the essential unity between the "Human" and the "Being". They argue that the ultimate goal of Hindu-Javanese existence is union with *Brahman*. In the context of Yudhisthira, his retention of the physical body up to the point of the Ganges was the final barrier to this union. As long as he held onto the *śarīra mānuṣa*, he remained a subject observing an object (the illusion of Hell). The dissolution of the body signifies the collapse of the subject-object duality. As Krishna & Yogiswari (2023) suggest, true knowledge (*Jñāna*) leads to the understanding that the individual self is an illusion. When Yudhisthira emerges from the Ganges, he is no longer the "King of Hastinapura" who judges Duryodhana; he has become *Dharma* itself, merged with the cosmic order.

This research specifically updates the findings of Untara et al. (2023) regarding *Svarga*, *Naraka*, and *Moksa* in Balinese perception. Untara et al. argue that Heaven and Hell are

temporary stopovers for the *atma* due to *karma wasana*. While valid in a ritual context, our textual analysis of the *Swargarohana* text reveals a deeper layer: for a being of high spiritual caliber like Yudhisthira, Heaven and Hell are not just temporary places but *illusory states* (*Maya*) that must be actively deconstructed through *Dharma*.

Complementing this perspective on the afterlife's nature, Subawa (2019) elucidates the ethical machinery driving this transition within the *Lontar Swargarohanaparwa*. He argues that the attainment of *Swarga* is strictly governed by the accumulation of *Subha Karma* (righteous deeds) exercised through the *Catur Marga* framework. In this view, Yudhisthira's ability to traverse *Yamaniloka* is conditioned by his lifelong adherence to *Dharma* and *Satya*, which facilitates the proper dissolution of the *Panca Maha Bhuta* (five material elements). This specific adherence positions Yudhisthira as the archetype of *Karma Sanyasa*—one who attains the divine through strict adherence to external rituals (*Panca Yadnya*) and societal duties—as classified by Saraswati & Paramita (2016) in their comparative analysis of the *Kakawin Candra Bairawa*. They contrast this with the *Yoga Sanyasa* of Candra Bairawa, a path of internalizing the divine that rejects external temples in favor of *Jnana Marga*. Crucially, they argue that despite these methodological divergences, both paths ultimately converge at the same ontological destination of *Moksa*.

This convergence effectively bridges the gap identified by Hornbacher (2014), regarding the tension between ritual obligation and ascetic liberation; the *Swargarohana* text reconciles this by showing Yudhisthira performing a ritual act (bathing in the Ganges) that simultaneously functions as an ascetic act (*agranāsika* meditation), thereby finally dissolving the dichotomy between *karma-kanda* (ritual action) and *jnana-kanda* (knowledge).

By integrating the eschatological theories of Walls (2008) and Kermode (2000), we see that the Javanese text defies the standard sense of an ending where good is rewarded and evil punished. Instead, as Gardiner (2013) describes regarding visions of the infernal, the *Yamaniloka* here serves a purgatorial function akin to the descriptions in *Garuda Purana*, but with a crucial twist: it is a *psychological* purgatory for the righteous, not a penal one for the wicked. Ara (2006) highlights the Indo-Iranian roots of linear judgment, but the Javanese text, through the lens of Milner (1993) on structural reversal, inverts the caste/moral hierarchy (Duryodhana on top, Pandavas below) only to dissolve it entirely in the final *Kalepasan*. This dissolution aligns with the non-dualistic ethics discussed by Ingalls (1957) and Bhatt (1976), where *Moksa* (liberation) ultimately transcends the duality of *Dharma* and *Adharma*.

Placing this narrative inversion within a broader regional and global comparative framework further highlights the uniqueness of the Old Javanese ontological model. As Ma'sūmiān (1995) observes, world religions display a vast spectrum of afterlife doctrines, often leaning toward definitive terminal states. For instance, within the orthodox Islamic perspectives prevalent in the archipelago such as those articulated in the 19th-century Palembang eschatological manuscripts analyzed by Putri et al. (2025) or the *Syair Ibarat* documented by Setyowati et al. (2017), the afterlife is strictly framed within *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* theology as a linear, retributive reality of heaven and hell based on earthly piety. This retributive framework is not exclusive to Abrahamic faiths; even within the closely related Balinese Hindu literary tradition, such as the *Geguritan Atma Prasangsa* analyzed by Asmariansi et al. (2019), the afterlife is predominantly depicted as a highly systematized, punitive realm. In this text, the soul (*atma*) undergoes literal, physical tortures governed strictly by a transactional accumulation of earthly *karma* (*subha* and *asubha karma*). This linear continuity and objective punishment sharply contrasts with the dialectical, subjective deception (*Maya*) experienced by Yudhisthira.

Furthermore, while many regional traditions rely heavily on external communal rituals—such as the *Berawan* death rituals in Borneo (Motomitsu, 1984, p. 324) or post-death traditions across Indonesia (Japarudin & Fitriana, 2023)—to secure a favorable afterlife, the *Swargarohanaparwa* emphasizes an internal shedding of the ego. Even among other indigenous traditions like the *Parmalim* of North Sumatra (Gultom et al., 2024) or the cosmogonic narratives found in the Kerinci *Incung* manuscripts (Sunliensyar, 2024),

eschatological and cosmological journeys are deeply intertwined with spatial and cultural identity preservation. The Old Javanese text, however, strictly demands the total dissolution of the *śarīra mānuṣa* 'human body' to achieve true divinity. As Sullivan (1987) indicates, while many traditions endeavor to immortalize the individual persona, this Javanese model demands complete obliteration of the self. Read through the lens of archetypal psychology (Elder, 1998), such bodily transmutations symbolize the ultimate psychological process of individuation. A complete integration and transcendence that moves entirely beyond the fragmentations of earthly morality.

At a theoretical level, the eschatological model articulated in the Old Javanese *Swargarohanaparwa* cannot be reduced to a regional variant of either Abrahamic retributive eschatology or classical Indian linear karma. Unlike Abrahamic frameworks, which are predicated upon final judgment and irreversible moral verdicts, the Javanese model rejects permanent damnation in favor of reversible, pedagogical illusion. Likewise, it departs from classical Indian karma-linear causality by privileging ontological readiness and the quality of consciousness over cumulative moral accounting. Heaven and Hell function not as terminal destinations, but as provisional states within a dialectical process aimed at ego-dissolution (*Kalepasan*). In this sense, Javanese eschatology constitutes a distinct paradigm—one that redefines the afterlife as an ontological pedagogy rather than a system of reward and punishment.

The Javanese *Swargarohanaparwa* thus presents a sophisticated textual model of liberation grounded in ontological transformation. The "Hell" is represented in the text as a psychological projection (*Maya*), necessitated by the retention of the physical form (*śarīra mānuṣa*). The final liberation (*Kalepasan*) is achieved not by geographical movement, but by an ontological shedding of the skin of humanity through yogic absorption (*wīja* and *agranāsika*). This redefines the eschaton not as a judgment day, but as a return to the "Origin" (*Sangkan Paraning Dumadī*), where the human form is exchanged for the formless divinity (*arūpa dewatā*).

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the Old Javanese *Swargarohanaparwa* text reveals that the eschatological journey of the Pandavas is not merely a spatial relocation but a profound ontological dialectic designed to deconstruct the human ego. This study concludes that the "Hell" witnessed by Yudhisthira is neither a location of retributive punishment nor a standard moral test, but a psychological purgatory generated by *Maya* to facilitate the final shedding of the *śarīra mānuṣa* (human body). Unlike his brothers who succumbed to subtle defects—emotional partiality (*pakṣapāta*), intellectual arrogance (*prajñā*), physical narcissism (*kāhangkāran*), hubris, and gluttony—Yudhisthira retained his physical form to the very gates of heaven, necessitating a unique, illusory purification. The "Celestial Paradox," wherein the villainous Duryodhana enjoys heaven while the virtuous suffer, serves as the necessary antithesis to challenge the transactional understanding of karma. As explicated through the concept of *tapa sapētik* (instantaneous asceticism), Javanese eschatology validates Duryodhana's state based on his final surrender (*tumungkul*) and focused consciousness (*enak pangawruhnya*) at death, proving that the quality of dying ontologically outweighs historical morality in the immediate post-mortem state.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that the ultimate goal of the Javanese narrative is not the attainment of *Swarga*, but *Kalepasan* (perfect liberation), achieved through the dissolution of duality. The study updates previous scholarship by arguing that Heaven and Hell in this tradition are illusory states that must be actively deconstructed through *Dharma* (compassion/solidarity). Yudhisthira's refusal to accept a heaven devoid of his kin and his choice to suffer in hell transforms the illusion, collapsing the binary of reward and punishment. His final immersion in the celestial Ganges, interpreted through the lens of *Yogākṣara* and *agranāsika* meditation, signifies the negation of the "Cogito"—a move from "I think, therefore I am" to "I think, therefore I am not"—where the individual self dissolves into the divine void (*Windupēpēt*). This finding redefines Javanese eschatology

as a sophisticated pedagogy of *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* (the Origin and Destination of Being), where the "End" is the total transmutation of the human form (*arūpa dewatā*) into divine consciousness, transcending the limits of linear justice.

Finally, to preclude the stagnation of eschatological discourse within Old Javanese studies, future research must bridge the textual with the historical. Specifically, a historico-eschatological analysis of King Dharmawangsa Teguh, the royal patron of this literary corpus, is imperatively required. Such an inquiry should examine whether the dialectical purification and the concept of *Maya* in the *Swargarohanaparwa* served as a theological legitimation for his reign, thereby contextualizing the monarch's historical narrative within the same soteriological framework of the Medang court.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Dr. I Made Suparta, my thesis supervisor, for his invaluable guidance and intellectual generosity throughout the research process. His deep and systematic insights into eschatological studies—particularly in the contexts of Old Javanese, Javanese, and broader Southeast Asian traditions—have significantly shaped the conceptual framework and analytical depth of this work. Any remaining shortcomings, however, remain the sole responsibility of the author.

Author Contribution

Conceptualization, Pradipta, G.A. ; Methodology, Pradipta, G.A. ; Software, Pradipta, G.A. ; Validation, Pradipta, G.A. ; Formal Analysis, Pradipta, G.A. ; Investigation, Pradipta, G.A. ; Resources, Pradipta, G.A. ; Data Curation, Pradipta, G.A. ; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Pradipta, G.A. ; Writing – Review & Editing, Pradipta, G.A. ; Visualization, Pradipta, G.A. ; Supervision, Pradipta, G.A. ; Project Administration, Pradipta, G.A. ; Funding Acquisition, Pradipta, G.A. Authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Ethical Review Board Statement

Not available.

Informed Consent Statement

Not available.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its reference list. The primary textual sources analyzed (*Swargarohanaparwa* and *Prasthanikaparwa*) are publicly available in the referenced editions by Zoetmulder (1963) and Juynboll (1893). Digital and hardcopy versions of the manuscripts and critical editions can be accessed through the digital collections of Leiden University Libraries; Universitas Indonesia Library, and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. This study was conducted independently without external funding. All stages of the research—including the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript preparation—were carried out solely by the author, who bears full responsibility for the content and the decision to publish the results.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Gemini and ChatGPT as a tool

to assist in data processing and to check grammar and linguistic clarity. The tool was not used for generating ideas, arguments, interpretations, or scholarly conclusions. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the publication.

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