Communicative Value of Hindu Leadership Philosophy in Kakawin Nitisastra

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores *Kakawin Nitisastra*, a classical Old Javanese text, through the lens of the Aristotelian Model of Communication. Originating from ancient Indian philosophy and further developed in Balinese cultural contexts, *Nitisastra* integrates moral, political, and rhetorical principles to guide ethical leadership and communication practices. The study analyzes key teachings such as *Catur Pariksa, Asta Brata,* and *Panca Upaya Sandhi*, which emphasize the ethical use of speech, justice, wisdom, and strategic decision-making. These doctrines are examined in relation to Aristotle's rhetorical triad—*ethos, pathos,* and *logos*—as well as his five communicative elements: speaker, speech, occasion, audience, and effect. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research draws from textual interpretation and literature review to identify the communicative values embedded in the *kakawin*. The analysis reveals that the speaker in *Nitisastra* is portrayed as a morally upright and spiritually attuned figure, whose messages are framed in culturally significant occasions and intended for a broad audience including rulers and common citizens. The effect of communication in the text, aligned with *pathos*, is demonstrated through its transformative influence on leadership behavior and societal ethics. The kakawin does not merely offer normative guidance but presents practical models of rhetorical and ethical engagement relevant across generations. Ultimately, this study highlights how traditional Southeast Asian literary works can embody and enrich classical communication theories, positioning *Kakawin Nitisastra* as both a historical artifact and a living guide for ethical leadership and public discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Kakawin Nitisastra is one of the classical literary heritages written in Old Javanese, rich in ethical values, leadership principles, and communication practices from a Hindu philosophical perspective. Rooted in ancient Indian philosophical thought, this text was later adopted and developed within the cultural context of Bali, making it a vital source of knowledge in shaping the character of Hindu communities, both individually and collectively. The term "Niti" refers to guidance, policy, or leadership. At the same time, "Sastra" denotes teachings or advice, thereby suggesting that Nitisastra serves as a moral and ethical compass, particularly in the governance of society and statecraft.[1]

Historically, Nitisastra emerged around 350 BCE during the Magadha Kingdom in India and significantly influenced classical Hindu political thought, including during the golden age of the Majapahit Empire in the Indonesian archipelago. The text does not merely address governance in a formal or institutional sense but also explores everyday life, education, morality, devotion (bhakti), economic systems, and social relations. The values embedded in Nitisastra are universal and practical, rendering the work relevant across generations and applicable to various academic disciplines.[2,3,4]

One of the most prominent aspects of Kakawin Nitisastra is its integration of leadership doctrines with principles of communication. Teachings such as Catur Pariksa, Asta Brata, and Panca Upaya Sandhi all underscore the importance of wisdom, courage, justice, and communicative competence in a leader. In certain sections of the Kakawin, particularly in Sargah V and Sargah XV, it is explicitly explained how speech and verbal expression, especially by leaders, carry significant consequences for social cohesion and public trust. These phenomena reflect an early understanding of classical communication theory, such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model, as well as the Aristotelian model, long before such concepts were formalized in modern communication studies. Moreover, Nitisastra does not merely offer normative prescriptions but presents concrete illustrations of how individuals may influence their environment and society through verbal ethics, silence, diction, and conduct. This highlights the text's strong affinity with principles of ethical and strategic communication, which remain highly relevant in contemporary leadership practices.[5]

METHOD

This paper aims to explore how the communicative values embedded in *Kakawin Nitisastra* can be analyzed through the lens of classical communication theory, particularly the Aristotelian Model of Communication.[6,7] Given the text's rich content concerning rhetoric and ethical speech, Aristotle's triadic framework—

ethos (credibility), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *logos* (logical reasoning)—offers a relevant and robust analytical tool. The presence of persuasive elements and moral exhortations within *Kakawin Nitisastra* aligns closely with Aristotelian rhetorical theory, making it suitable for examining how leadership, ethics, and social harmony are communicated through poetic and philosophical language.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive methodology, with data collected primarily through a literature review. The research process involves several steps: data collection, data categorization, textual analysis and interpretation, and finally, presentation of the findings in descriptive narrative form. Through this method, the study seeks to identify and interpret patterns of rhetorical and communicative strategies within the *Kakawin* that align with Aristotelian principles. Furthermore, the analysis is not limited to formal linguistic structures but extends to symbolic meanings, contextual applications, and the ethical dimensions of speech acts conveyed in the text. In doing so, the paper not only highlights the enduring relevance of *Kakawin Nitisastra* in the study of communication but also demonstrates how classical rhetorical models can be applied to traditional Southeast Asian literary works.

DISCUSSION

This paper analyzes the Kakawin Nitisastra through the framework of the Aristotelian Model of Communication, which comprises five key elements: Speaker, Speech, Occasion, Audience, and Effect. Within the context of Kakawin Nitisastra, the primary communicator is a wise figure who imparts teachings to readers or listeners. This figure is portrayed as possessing profound knowledge as well as moral and spiritual sensitivity. The speaker conveys messages through a narrative style rich in didactic counsel. More than an educator, the speaker serves as a moral exemplar, guiding the community. In Aristotelian rhetoric, the success of communication is deeply influenced by the credibility of the speaker. The speaker's ethos—moral authority and trustworthiness—is strongly emphasized throughout the text. Prominent figures

Figure 1.[9]   Illustration of leadership in Hinduism.

such as Gajah Mada also function as communicators within the leadership teachings of the Kakawin. The speaker in Kakawin Nitisastra thus represents not merely an individual persona, but a symbolic embodiment of Hindu ethical ideals.[8] Through profound language structures, symbolic expression, and metaphor, this communicator invites the audience to contemplate and apply these teachings to sociopolitical life.

The message conveyed in Kakawin Nitisastra is both dense and multilayered, encompassing doctrines of leadership, communication ethics, and moral behavior. Core teachings such as Catur Pariksa, Panca Upaya Sandhi, and Asta Brata serve as the principal content of the communication. Catur Pariksa, also known as Catur Naya Sandhi, is one of the foundational doctrines found in Kakawin Ramayana and further elaborated in Kakawin Nitisastra. This framework consists of four fundamental strategies—Sama (conciliation), Beda (differentiation), Dana (generosity), and Danda (punishment)—which together offer a holistic model of leadership, governance, and political communication. Deeply rooted in Hindu political philosophy, Catur Pariksa not only addresses the ethical responsibilities of a leader but also functions as a strategic communication tool adaptable to both domestic and foreign affairs. Its integration of justice, social order, and rhetorical prudence reflects a mature understanding of how power and communication intersect in the

management of society.[10,11]

Beyond its application in domestic governance, Catur Pariksa also serves as a model for statecraft in international relations. As outlined in the Manava Dharmasastra, these principles can be extended to diplomatic practice. In this context, Sama represents the preservation of friendly relations and equal status among nations, often formalized through diplomatic representation. Dana translates to the strategic use of gifts or aid to secure alliances and foster goodwill. Beda is applied as a divisive strategy—commonly employed in colonial and imperial politics—wherein rival powers are weakened by internal fragmentation and psychological tactics. Danda, in the realm of international diplomacy, may manifest as military intervention or nonviolent sanctions such as economic embargoes.

In sum, Catur Pariksa reflects a sophisticated integration of ethical governance and strategic communication. It provides a classical model for understanding power relations, both interpersonal and geopolitical, that is surprisingly resonant with contemporary leadership and political discourse. Far from being an archaic or purely religious doctrine, Catur Pariksa stands as a dynamic and adaptable theory of leadership, offering timeless insights into how communication, ethics, and governance can be aligned in the pursuit of societal harmony and justice.

Each doctrine aims to cultivate morally upright and intellectually wise leaders and

Figure 2.[13] the occasion of communication in *Kakawin Nitisastra* is intricately linked to the broader aim of strengthening Hindu socio-political structures.

citizens. These messages are articulated through symbolic and nuanced language, as seen in Sargah V, which highlights the importance of prudence in speech. Within the Aristotelian model, the logos, or the logical substance of the message, is of great importance. The messages in the Kakawin are not only informative but also persuasive and pedagogical. Even silence or nonverbal restraint is elevated as a meaningful form of communication. The structure of these messages facilitates deep reflection on action and consequence in social interaction. Each verse allows for both contemplation and practical application in the domains of governance and everyday communal life.

Kakawin Nitisastra is delivered within the socio-cultural context of Hindu communities in both ancient India and Bali. The text serves multiple purposes, including as a pedagogical tool, a guide for leadership development, and a medium for social cultivation. The occasions for its communication range from formal educational settings and royal ceremonies to critical moments in the moral formation of leaders. In Aristotelian theory, the effectiveness of communication is closely influenced by its context, or occasion. Within this framework, *Kakawin Nitisastra* functions as a culturally and spiritually resonant mode of communication. As a literary work, it also acts as a medium of intergenerational transmission of values. Deeply embedded in Hindu cultural traditions, the text reinforces religious principles through its communicative structure. The political environment of the Majapahit Kingdom and the influence of Vedic teachings further enrich the textual content. Therefore, the occasion of communication in *Kakawin Nitisastra* is intricately linked to the broader aim of strengthening Hindu socio-political structures. This context renders the text's communication strategic, philosophical, and reflective.[12]

The primary audience of *Kakawin Nitisastra* includes leaders, royal officials, and the wider public who seek to comprehend and embody life's ethical values. According to the Aristotelian model, an understanding of the audience is critical for delivering effective messages. The *Kakawin* addresses all strata of society, both the educated elite and the ordinary people. Its teachings are not limited to ruling classes but serve as universal moral guidance. The audience is expected not only to grasp the content intellectually but also to internalize it spiritually. The communication seeks to shape individuals who are reflective, wise, and socially responsible. Readers are encouraged to engage in self-reflection through the figures and teachings presented in the text. To this day, Hindu communities in Bali continue to refer to the *Kakawin* as a cultural and ethical touchstone. Thus, the text's communication strategy is highly responsive to the needs of its audience. The audience, in turn, becomes the inheritor and custodian of the values embedded within the *Kakawin*.[14,15]

The communicative effect of *Kakawin Nitisastra* is aimed at shaping the character and behavior of an ideal society. In Aristotelian rhetoric, the effect—*pathos* is achieved when messages resonate emotionally and logically with the audience. The *Kakawin* succeeds in prompting readers to reflect on the consequences of speech and the virtue of silence. Its influence is also evident in the historical application of teachings such as *Asta Brata* and *Panca Upaya Sandhi* in traditional leadership systems. The communication embedded in the *Kakawin* not only imparts knowledge but also inspires social and political action. Over the long term, it fosters a culture of ethical and moral communication. This impact is particularly notable in the formation of visionary, just, and wise leaders. The continued relevance of its messages in modern contexts attests to its communicative power. In essence, *Kakawin Nitisastra* exemplifies philosophical communication with a transformative effect on both individuals and society. The ultimate goal of its communication is the realization of social harmony and leadership grounded in *Dharma*.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Kakawin Nitisastra stands as a profound literary and philosophical artifact that bridges classical Hindu values with enduring theories of communication. Its rich content on leadership, ethics, and interpersonal conduct highlights a deep alignment with the Aristotelian model, particularly in its treatment of speaker credibility (ethos), emotional impact (pathos), and logical structure (logos). The text demonstrates that communication is not merely a transactional act but a moral and cultural practice that shapes individual behavior and collective identity. Through teachings such as Catur Pariksa, Asta Brata, and Panca Upaya Sandhi, the Kakawin outlines a framework of strategic

and ethical communication relevant across time and sociopolitical contexts. These teachings reveal how leaders must cultivate discernment, integrity, and rhetorical awareness in guiding both the self and society. Furthermore, the Kakawin's poetic form enables layered meaning, allowing each verse to function as both literary expression and ethical directive. Its messages are not confined to historical context but offer universal principles applicable in contemporary leadership, governance, and civic life. Ultimately, Kakawin Nitisastra illustrates how traditional texts can inform modern conceptions of communicative responsibility and public virtue.

The relevance of the Aristotelian model becomes evident through the way Kakawin Nitisastra configures communication as a dialogic process situated within specific contexts and oriented toward particular audiences. The speaker, often portrayed as a wise and morally upright figure, exemplifies the role of the communicator whose authority is derived from knowledge, spiritual depth, and social awareness. The text's messages are delivered in culturally significant settings—such as royal courts, religious ceremonies, and educational forums—demonstrating how the occasion of communication shapes both tone and meaning. By situating the text within its historical and religious context, the Kakawin functions as both a transmission of sacred knowledge and a strategy for social organization. The audience of the text, ranging from rulers to laypeople, is expected not only to receive the message intellectually but to engage with it affectively and ethically. Communication in this sense is transformative, designed to guide both personal conduct and institutional leadership. The Kakawin

thus responds to the unique demands of its audience, reinforcing its role as a living cultural document. As such, it bridges the personal, the political, and the spiritual through a coherent and integrated communicative framework.

The impact or effect of Kakawin Nitisastra, understood in Aristotelian terms as pathos, is central to its enduring power. The text invites readers to reflect deeply on the consequences of speech, the ethics of silence, and the power of language in shaping public trust. Its application in both ancient and modern contexts—particularly in cultivating visionary leadership—underscores its capacity to influence societal values and behavioral norms. Through the embodiment of its teachings, leaders are encouraged to act not only with authority but with compassion, wisdom, and discernment. The Kakawin's emphasis on ethical communication establishes a moral blueprint for navigating conflict, exercising justice, and sustaining social cohesion. Over generations, its principles have informed educational curricula, religious instruction, and civic engagement within Hindu communities. Its ability to speak across historical divides and cultural shifts attests to the universality of its vision. Therefore, Kakawin Nitisastra should not be viewed solely as a literary relic but as a dynamic resource for contemporary ethical leadership and communicative excellence.

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