



# Stories and Meanings on Candi Borobudur Reliefs as Cultural Insight in BIPA Learning

Paramita Ida Safitri<sup>1</sup>, Liliana Muliastuti<sup>2</sup>, Ilza Mayuni<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia  
paramita\_9906922017@mhs.unj.ac.id

**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to describe the story and meaning of Borobudur temple reliefs as cultural insights in BIPA learning. Stories and meanings on Borobudur temple reliefs are used in BIPA learning because they can be utilized to introduce cultural insights to BIPA learners. This study examines the stories and meanings in the reliefs of Borobudur temple and relates their relevance in BIPA learning. The cultural values contained in the stories on the reliefs of Borobudur temple are used in BIPA learning activities to introduce Indonesian culture while improving language skills. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research method. The data sources in this research are stories and meanings on the reliefs of Borobudur temple. The stories and meanings on the reliefs of Borobudur temple studied in this study include: 1) story and meaning on *Karmawibhangga* relief; 2) story and meaning on *Jataka-Avanada* relief; 3) story and meaning on *Lalitavistara* relief; 4) story and meaning on *Gandavyuha* relief; 5) story and meaning on *Bhadracari* relief. The results of this study indicate the relevance of cultural values contained in the story of Borobudur temple reliefs to cultural material contained in BIPA teaching materials. The use of stories and meanings in Borobudur temple reliefs can provide cultural insights and language skills for BIPA learners. Stories and meanings in the reliefs of Borobudur temple help BIPA learners in the process of learning culture and language optimally and fun.

**Keywords:** BIPA, Borobudur temple, culture, stories, reliefs

## 1 Introduction

Borobudur temple is the largest Buddhist temple in Indonesia located in Borobudur, Magelang, Central Java. Apart from being a place of Buddhist worship. Borobudur temple consists of six square terraces on which there are three circular courtyards and the walls are decorated with 1460 reliefs. The reliefs on Borobudur temple not only depict the teachings of Buddhism, but also tell the story of the life of the ancient Mataram era. To read the story on the reliefs of candi Borobudur visitors must walk clockwise, or commonly referred to as *Mapradaksina*, which comes from the sanskrit *Daksina* which means east (the story starts from the east side and ends on the east side), therefore the story on the reliefs of Borobudur temple begins and ends at the east side gate at each level.

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The reliefs on the walls of Borobudur temple were carved in detail by the *silpins* (carving artists) both ornamental reliefs and narrative reliefs (Munandar, 2018: 15) [1]. The reliefs function to convey religious teachings through visual language and beautify the building, besides that the reliefs also function as a medium that facilitates the delivery of religious teachings and makes these religious stories eternal because they are carved in stone (Munandar, 2018: 39) [2].

In the context of learning, Borobudur temple can develop cross-cultural skills in conservation. Borobudur temple can help learners to understand more about Indonesian culture and history (Bakhri, 2021) [3]. In addition, Borobudur temple can also be an interesting and fun learning media for BIPA learners because of its architectural beauty and philosophical stories contained therein. By studying Borobudur temple, BIPA learners can gain a better understanding of Indonesian history and culture and enrich their insights into Indonesia's rich and diverse culture.

The stories and meanings contained in the reliefs of Borobudur temple have a close connection to cultural insights for BIPA learners. In addition, Borobudur temple is a destination that is much in demand and visited by BIPA learners, besides that the reliefs at Borobudur temple have many stories that are rich in cultural insights. The existence of Borobudur temple is a magnet for BIPA learners to learn Indonesian language and culture.

The BIPA program is an Indonesian language learning program for foreign speakers, they are not native speakers of Indonesian. Indonesian for BIPA learners can be a second language, third language, and so on. The implementation of the BIPA program is basically always related to two objectives, namely; introducing Indonesian language and culture to foreign nationals. This is in line with the opinion of (Kusmiatun, 2016) [4] which states that in addition to having a vision of introducing Indonesian as a national identity, BIPA learning also supports the teaching of Indonesian culture globally. In teaching BIPA, culture cannot be separated. Language and culture both become a close part and support each other as a teaching program. BIPA teaching activities are an effort to support the government to improve the function of Indonesian to become an international language. Increasing the function of the Indonesian language certainly has an impact on increasing Indonesia's position in the world arena.

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BIPA teaching activities are an effort to support the government to improve the function of Indonesian to become an international language. Increasing the function of the Indonesian language will certainly have an impact on improving Indonesia's position in the international arena, namely strengthening the nation's identity and increasing the nation's competitiveness. The achievement of Indonesian as an

international language so that Indonesian can be used as an official language at meetings between countries and used as a connecting language in various political, social, cultural and economic interests between countries.

The BIPA program plays an important role in introducing Indonesia to the international community and as a tool of Indonesian diplomacy. The BIPA program is one of the diplomatic tools that can be used by the Indonesian government in an effort to strengthen Indonesia's position in the world arena (Wiratsih, 2019) [6]. Through BIPA, other countries can get to know Indonesian language and Indonesian culture. One of the goals of BIPA is to introduce Indonesian language and culture to the international community in order to enhance the positive image of the Indonesian nation abroad and improve the quality of BIPA teaching (Yolanda, 2018) [7].

Language and culture are two interconnected entities. Language is an expression of culture. Thus, BIPA learning cannot be separated from Indonesian cultural materials. BIPA teaching is not only related to teaching Indonesian language but also related to teaching culture. The Indonesian language represents the culture of Indonesian society. What is meant by culturally charged Indonesian language learning is: (1) Indonesian language learning with the cultural values of Indonesian society, (2) Indonesian language learning with Indonesian cultural teaching materials, both cultural values, cultural tastes, and ways of thinking of Indonesian society (Widianto, 2016) [8]. This is in line with the view (Tomalin and Stempleski, 2017) [9] that the success of BIPA teaching will not be optimal if the teaching does not involve socio-cultural aspects that prevail in the language community.

BIPA teaching requires cultural expedition as a breakthrough that must be made. In line with this, many BIPA teachers have incorporated cultural elements in their teaching. BIPA books published by PPSDK and individuals consciously integrate cultural recognition in language skills materials (Muliastuti, 2018). Foreign language teaching in multilingual communities must be adapted to the concepts of plurilingualism and multilingualism. Plurilingualism is an individual's language experience in a cultural context that continues to develop throughout one's life (Muliastuti, Mayuni, et al. 2023) [10].

The introduction of cultural insights and Indonesian language in BIPA learning can use the media of stories and meanings on the Borobudur temple reliefs. The use of stories on Borobudur temple reliefs can provide cultural insights and language skills for BIPA learners. Stories on Borobudur temple reliefs help BIPA learners in the process of learning culture and language optimally and fun.

## **2 Research Method**

The research approach used in this research is through a qualitative approach. The qualitative research approach is descriptive analytic, so that the results of data analysis in the form of exposure related to the situation under study are presented in the form of narrative descriptions (Salim, 2019) [11]. Qualitative methods help the availability of diverse descriptions involving phenomena. This method encourages understanding of

the substance of an event. Qualitative research is not only to fulfill the researcher's efforts to get a picture and explanation, but also helps the researcher get more detailed information. The purpose of descriptive research is to make the discussion more systematic, factual, and accurate. Data from several written sources and from the story of the story on the relief of Borobudur temple. After the data is collected, data analysis is carried out in accordance with qualitative research procedures. The analysis in this study is limited to the story and meaning contained in the reliefs of Borobudur temple. The data sources for this research include primary data obtained directly from the stories on the reliefs of Borobudur Temple and secondary data collected from books and articles related to the research topic.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### Stories and Meanings on Borobudur Temple Reliefs

Agus Aris Munandar, through the book *Antara Arkeologi Hindu-Buddha* (2018: 39) [12] explains, the reliefs at Borobudur Temple are sculpted with a high artistic taste to convey religious teachings through visual language so that the stories of Buddha contained are easily understood by ordinary people. The reliefs contained in the Borobudur temple have a beauty value that is full of meaning.

Other primary sources come from Hindu-Buddhist historiography originating from India, namely the books that narrate the narrative reliefs carved on the walls of candi Borobudur. The books are in order from the lowest level to the top of the relief wall are *Karmawibhanga*, *Jataka-Avadana*, *Lalitavistara*, *Gandavyuha*, and *Bhadracari*. The reliefs in candi Borobudur depict the life teachings of Gautama Buddha. The reliefs depict a beautiful natural atmosphere, boats with outriggers, traditional buildings of the archipelago, and so on. Borobudur is believed to have the most complete and largest Buddhist reliefs in the world. The relief carvings of Borobudur temple are included in pure art, which means they are created to be enjoyed for their beauty and uniqueness. In detail, the reliefs carved in Borobudur temple are divided into 5 stories, namely: 1) stories and meanings on *Karmawibhanga* reliefs; 2) stories and meanings on *Jataka-Avanada* reliefs; 3) stories and meanings on *Lalitavistara* reliefs; 4) stories and meanings on *Gandavyuha* reliefs; 5) stories and meanings on *Bhadracari* reliefs. Of the five categories of reliefs, each has its own story and meaning, as follows:

#### 3.1 Stories and Meanings on *Karmawibhanga* Reliefs

*Karmawibhanga* relief is a relief carved on the foot wall of Borobudur Temple. This relief totals 160 panels and only 4 relief panels are open on the southeast side. The relief depicts human life along with its environment and behavior. Both, human behavior towards the environment and towards fellow humans. The message contained in the *karmawibhanga* relief is universal and cross-generational. The message highlighted in the *karmawibhanga* relief is the law of karma or the law of cause and effect, such as evil will be rewarded with punishment and good will be rewarded with happiness.

*Karmavibhanga* (*Karmawibhangga*) or commonly referred to as *Mahakarmavibhangha* (*Mahakarmawibhangga*) is a relief derived from the Buddha's book entitled *Karmavibhanga Sutra* or *Mahakammavibhanga Sutta* which means Sermon on the great explanation of actions. In this book, Buddha explains the law of action that is done to give results to the perpetrator, as the perpetrator of evil will get a bad reward and the perpetrator of virtue will get a good reward.

The *Karmawibhangga* reliefs depict a story and meaning that has a causal relationship. The reliefs depict not only human misdeeds and the punishment they will receive, but also human good deeds and rewards. Overall it is a depiction of human life in a never-ending cycle of birth-life-death, and by Buddhism it is the chain that will be ended to reach perfection.

### 3.2 Stories and Meanings on *Jataka-Avanada* Reliefs

*Jataka* and *Avadana* reliefs are one of the story reliefs that contain a lot of ethical education carved in candi Borobudur. *Jataka* and *Avadana* reliefs represent the previous life of Buddha in the past before being born as a human named Siddharta Ghautama. *Jataka* is a story about the Bodhisattva who experienced repeated births in various forms to help humans achieve the Buddhist path. In these stories the Bodhisattva as both a human and an animal always exemplifies the truth and teachings of the *Dharma*. *Avadana*, on the other hand, is a heroic story. *Avadana* is similar to *Jataka* stories, but the main character is not the Buddha, but another character or an ordinary animal that is not an incarnation of the Bodhisattva.

The *Jataka* stories are a collection of stories of the Buddha's past births in fulfilling the completion of the ten perfections (*dasaparamita*) in order to achieve enlightenment. The *Jataka* reliefs in Borobudur come from the *Jatakamala* manuscript compiled by Aryasura in mixed sanskrit prose and verse. *Jataka* tells how the journey of a Bodhisattva (future Buddha) in repeated lives through cycles of death and birth as humans with various roles and various types of animals in order to perfect the nature of perfection, such as; morals, truth, compassion, mercy, and sacrifice.

The story of the *Avadana* (*Awadana*) or Tradition of the Bodhisattva contains stories about the past lives of a Bodhisattva before attaining enlightenment. The difference with *Jataka* is that *Avadana* is not only centered on the past lives of Sakyamuni Buddha but *Avadana* can feature other Buddhas. *Avadana* can be said to be a tradition because it will happen to anyone who becomes a Bodhisattva (future Buddha). *Avadana* also includes the *divyavadana* or Heavenly Tradition, where the Bodhisattva is born as a heavenly being. *Avadana* is used to help clarify how karma and rebirth work.

In summary, the stories and meanings on the *Jataka-Avadana* reliefs tell the stories of the Buddha's rebirth in various animal and human forms before achieving enlightenment. *Jataka* is a story of the Buddha's past life that illustrates various virtues such as generosity, patience, and self-sacrifice. *Avadana*, meanwhile, are similar stories but emphasize more on the virtuous deeds of ordinary people. These panels teach profound moral and ethical values.

### 3.3 Stories and Meanings on *Lalitavistara* Reliefs

The *lalitavistara* story is a depiction of the Buddha's incomplete history in a series of reliefs. It begins with the Buddha's descent from Tushita heaven, and ends with the first discourse in the Deer Park near the city of Banaras. The *lalitavistara* reliefs run from the staircase on the south side, after passing through a row of 27 reliefs starting from the east side staircase. The 27 frames depict the bustle, both in heaven and on earth, in preparation for the arrival of the Bodhisattva's final incarnation as the future Buddha. The relief depicts the birth of the Buddha in this *arcapada* as Prince Siddhartha, son of King Suddhodana and Empress Maya of Kapilawastu Country. The *lalitavistara* reliefs total 120 frames, ending with the first discourse, which is symbolically expressed as the turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha's teaching is called *dharm*a which also means "law", *dharm*a is symbolized as a wheel.

*Lalitavistara* relief is one of the story reliefs in candi Borobudur that tells the story of the Buddha's life journey in all early times including from when he was invited to his last life in Tusita heaven to the first teaching in the Deer Park. *Lalitavistara* (*lalitawistara*) or the life story of Gautama Buddha is the main book of the mahayana tradition which tells of the bodhisattva's life as a god in Tusita Heaven then descending to the human realm, achieving enlightenment in his last life as a human being, to teaching the first *dharm*a discourse. The *Lalitawistara* story found on Borobudur reliefs is divided into five parts, namely:

- a) Conception and Pregnancy
- b) Birth and Youth
- c) Foreshadowing and Renunciation
- d) Encounter and Struggle
- e) Brightness and Teaching

### 3.4 Story and Meaning of *Gandavyuha* Reliefs

*Gandavyuha* (*Gandawyuha*) or The Search for Enlightenment is one of the main scriptures of the Mahayana tradition under the name *gandavyuhasutra*. It is the final or culminating part of the *avatamsakasutra*, a collection of 39 sutras describing the stages of the Bodhisattva path. The *Gandavyuha* is a long and difficult text, telling the story of the Buddha in his *Dharma* body as *Vairocana* entering a meditative state and revealing the essence of the true penetration of the universe (*dharmadhatu*) and is understood by disciples who have enough ability to see and understand it.

The *Gandavyuha* relief briefly recounts Sudhana's journey in search of ultimate wisdom. On his journey, Sudhana meets 53 different teachers who give him various spiritual teachings. It teaches the importance of perseverance in seeking knowledge and wisdom and illustrates the concept of the oneness of all beings. *Gandavyuha* is part of the Mahayana texts that are highly revered in the Buddhist tradition.

### 3.5 Stories and Meanings on *Bhadracari* Reliefs

The story on the *bhadracari* relief is the ideal of the life of virtuous practice determination, the final part of *gandavyuha* which is the last series and the relief

at the topmost level on the square terrace of candi Borobudur. Some of the commitments in *bhadracari* include; rejoicing in the virtues of others and channeling virtue to all beings. *bhadracari* can also be referred to as buddhacarita (Buddhist practice) which is performed as *anuttarapuja* (highest puja) in achieving enlightenment.

*Bhadracari* reliefs are carved on the main wall on the inside of each balustrade containing story reliefs. The top of the balustrade contains a statue niche containing a statue of Dhyani Buddha. The top of balustrade I is *keben* shaped and the top of balustrade II V is stupa-shaped. On the top of the balustrade, there is also an *antefic* decoration, which is in the form of a triangular base pattern and decorated with stylized plant carvings (disguised), which has a function to reduce the rigid impression caused by the horizontal lines in the temple (Borobudur Conservation Center, 2016: 29-31).

*Bhadracari* reliefs can be seen on the main walls of level III and IV hallways and balustrades at candi Borobudur. *Bhadracari* carvings tell of Sudhana's efforts to achieve Buddhism by studying with Boddhisatva Maitreya and Boddhisatva Samanthabhadra. *Bhadracari* reliefs tell the spiritual journey of a Bodhisattva who performs various acts of virtue as part of his practice towards enlightenment. *Bhadracari* depicts moral and ethical teachings and shows how one can lead a virtuous life. This relief emphasizes the importance of compassion, generosity and self-sacrifice for the welfare of all beings.

#### **4 Borobudur Temple as Cultural Insight in BIPA Learning**

Borobudur Temple as a spiritual building has moral messages for human life. The moral message contained can be seen from the structure, ornaments, and reliefs of Borobudur temple. The masterpiece of Borobudur temple in the era of globalization is used as a vehicle for education, where the symbols attached contain noble meanings for human life. In the era of globalization, many experts are trying to study the Borobudur temple, both in terms of religion, history, anthropology, social, art, culture, mathematics and others. This shows that candi Borobudur has a high educational value that can be explored and analyzed from various clumps of science.

The sacred values of the Borobudur temple are believed to be a representation of the sacred palace of Buddha, based on the Buddhist philosophy of mandala can help change a person's inner flow towards perfection, so that a person is more encouraged to do virtue in achieving inner perfection. Borobudur Temple is the teaching of *dasabhumi*, which is the ten levels of Boddhisatva development that must be passed in achieving Buddhism. This shows that the Borobudur temple architecture is a medium for disseminating information on values that are realized in the physical form of buildings, the Borobudur temple represents the peak of ancient Javanese culture in the 8th-10th centuries.

Borobudur temple ornaments and reliefs are depicted on every wall and hallway. The relief of Borobudur temple besides adding beauty is also a medium for religious education, which implicitly forms a narrative containing morality teachings. Borobudur Temple in the era of globalization is used as a place for *dhamma* discussions, *dhamma* discussions carried out by Buddhists from various groups and traditions.

Borobudur temple as a medium in BIPA learning activities can provide insight into the diversity of Indonesian culture. Borobudur Temple, which was built in the 9th century by King Samaratungga, is the result of collaboration between Indonesian, Indian and Chinese cultures. This is reflected in the architecture, ornaments, and reliefs in Borobudur temple which depict the culture and religion of the three countries. Borobudur temple as one of the famous historical sites and has many educational values can be an effective and interesting learning.

The strong educational values contained in the story of Borobudur temple have a close relevance in introducing cultural and linguistic insights in BIPA Learning, this is because Borobudur temple is very attractive to BIPA learners as a destination chosen to visit. The stories contained in the reliefs of Borobudur temple can be used as cultural insights for BIPA learners.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the results of the study of *Stories and Meanings on Borobudur Temple Reliefs as Cultural Insights in BIPA Learning*, the following conclusions were found: 1) stories and meanings on *karmawibhangga* reliefs describe human life and its environment and behavior. Both, human behavior towards the environment and towards fellow humans. The message highlighted in the relief of *karmawibhangga* is the law of *karma* or the law of cause and effect. 2) Stories and meanings on *Jataka-Avanada* reliefs tell stories of Buddha's rebirth in various animal and human forms before reaching enlightenment. *Jataka* is a story of Buddha's past life that illustrates various virtues such as generosity, patience, and self-sacrifice. Meanwhile, *Avadana* is a similar story but emphasizes more on the virtuous deeds of ordinary people. These panels teach deep moral and ethical values. 3) The stories and meanings on the *Lalitavistara* reliefs chronicle the Buddha's life journey in all the early ages from when he was invited to his last life in Tusita heaven to the first teaching in the Deer Park. 4) The story and meaning of the *gandavyuha* relief teaches the importance of perseverance in seeking knowledge and wisdom and illustrates the concept of the unity of all beings. 5) The story and meaning of the *bhadracari* relief depicts moral and ethical teachings, and shows how one can live a virtuous life. It emphasizes the importance of compassion, generosity and self-sacrifice for the welfare of all beings.

Stories and meanings on the reliefs of Borobudur temple have relevance to cultural materials contained in BIPA teaching materials. The use of stories in Borobudur temple reliefs can provide cultural insights and language skills for BIPA learners. Stories and meanings on the Borobudur temple reliefs help BIPA learners in the process of learning language and culture optimally because the stories told on the Borobudur temple reliefs are told by native Indonesian speakers, so that BIPA learners understand the right pronunciation, intonation, and expression concretely. Through this activity, BIPA learners are facilitated in the process of learning Indonesian language and culture.



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