

# BELEGIG SUKAMANTRI: ASTRAL SUNDA HERITAGE IN INDONESIA

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*Keywords:* *Bebegig Sukamantri*, astral, Sundanese, mask, heritage

## 1. Introduction

This study seeks to reveal the meaning and function of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask. *Bebegig Sukamantri* is a carnival art that uses a large wooden mask with creepy facial characteristics. The research was conducted to determine the type of mask characters and their meanings in Sundanese culture because no researcher has ever made an analysis based on an interpretation of the mask design. The research was conducted using qualitative methods in the form of triangulation techniques which refer to the use of various methods or data sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural heritage and socio-cultural phenomena that have developed in Sundanese society in Indonesia.

In Ciamis Regency, West Java, Indonesia, there are six fast-growing carnival arts, namely *Bebegig Sukamantri*, *Pontrangan*, *Mabokuy*, *Buta Kararas Tilas*, *Wayang Landung* and *Mengmleng* Art. Carnival art is a colossal art performance in the form of a parade accompanied by music, songs and theatre. *Bebegig Sukamantri* carnival art won the ORI (Original Record Indonesia) award in 2016 as the record-breaker for having the highest number of dancers. In 2018 the Government of the Republic of Indonesia established *Bebegig Sukamantri* as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage and it has subsequently become a famous cultural icon of the province of West Java.

*Bebegig* means scarecrow. Its function is to scare people who cross certain limits in restricted areas. *Bebegig Sukamantri*, however, is different from the scarecrow in general because it has a distinctive shape and character. The visual character of *Bebegig* is unique because it only exists in West Java, Indonesia. The function of the *Bebegig*, according to Dais Darmawan [1], is to act as a representation of the guardian of the surrounding natural environment based on the word *bebegig* and refers to the scarecrow used by villagers to ward off and scare pests. The history of the *Bebegig* is not found in ancient Sundanese texts, except in the form of fairy tales or legends that are narrated and passed on from generation to generation.

*Bebegig Sukamantri* is a mysterious, mystical and mythological form of performing art. Each *Bebegig* dancer adopts a very frightening attribute by wearing a large mask representing the characteristics of the face of the fierce *Batarakala* and they are dressed in palm fiber costumes with a headdress made from forest leaves and usually carry a replica of an ancient weapon. The dancing is very agile and manly, and their behaviour tends to be arrogant. The form and appearance of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* are related to the ancient Sundanese culture which is linked to the era of Hinduism.

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The process of interpreting the symbolic meaning of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask was carried out through an ethnographic approach. Researchers conducted interviews and visually observed the *Bebegig* dancers and mask-making artists. This was done due to the limited literature and inadequate data that were already available.

In examining and interpreting the meaning of the mask, the researchers carried out a differential semantic analysis of the distinguishing elements of the design in the mask products. Researchers grouped the different types and interpretations of the masks based on similarity in the design elements. The design elements observed included the mask's character, color and ornamental attributes. The characteristics of the mask include the details of the facial features, the expression and the shape of the molars and fangs. The visual analysis of the attributes of the mask decoration was also carried out to find similarities between the visual features that would indicate the existence of character groups based on Sundanese cultural values. This character grouping found three different types of characters, the three characters having the potential to be icons of the astral culture of the Sundanese people.

Color interpretation analysis was performed on the dominant mask colors and color combinations and was defined according to the character of the mask.

Researchers also collected *Bebegig* mask photography documentation data from various social media in Indonesia, published in 2019. The result of this process found about 54 different known mask designs.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. History of the *Bebegig* mask

Scientific studies about the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask are still scarce, but quite a lot of people write articles about *Bebegig Sukamantri* on various social media in Indonesia. It is a form of empathy and admiration for the preservation of this ancient culture. The history of the presence of *Bebegig Sukamantri*, moreover, is not found in ancient Sundanese texts except in the form of folklore.

Research on the *Panji* mask that developed in the Kingdom of Kediri (1042-1222) states that the growth of mask art reached its heyday during the *Majapahit* Empire (1313-1364). The *Majapahit* mask is thought to have something to do with the shape of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask mentioned in the historical story of the *Bubat* tragedy when *Prabu Maharaja Linggabuana* and his daughter, *Dyah Pitaloka Citraesmi*, from the *Kingdom of Sunda* (932-1579) were attacked by *Bhayangkara Majapahit* and led by *Bhre Wengker* who was wearing a *Bebegig* mask [2].

The story of the *Bubat* tragedy was later written in a poetic book entitled *Kidung Sunda* or *Kidung Sundayana*. *Kidung Sunda* is an ancient 15th century literary work in the form of old Javanese verse. It was re-adapted by C.C Berg in 1927 into Dutch and entitled: "*Kidung Sunda.inleiding.tekst.vertalingen aantekeningen.BKI83 1-169*". In his opinion, the *Kidung Sunda* should be considered a literary work and not an accurate chronicle of history, although it is likely based on factual events.

To commemorate the *Bubat* tragedy, *Mangkubumi Hyang Bunisora Suradipati*, as the next Sundanese king, made a replica of the *Bebegig* mask as a totem which was installed in several strategic areas. This *Bebegig* mask therefore functioned as a way to guard territories and repel enemies, since in protecting the territory of the kingdom, the troops patrolling the Sunda Kingdom wore *Bebegig* masks. This particular form of cultural heritage then developed over time into today's colossal carnival art.

## 2.2. Development in the meaning of the mask

Research on the meaning and function of masks in Indonesia refers to the development of *wayang wong* (classical Javanese dance) mask dance, *wayang golek* (wooden puppet art from West Java) and various other arts that use masks as the main attribute. Various mask arts in Indonesia are experiencing significant dynamics of change and while most of them have been preserved as traditional cultural heritage and their authenticity has been maintained, some of them have been developed as souvenir products for tourism.

The results of research on the development of the *wayang kulit Malang* art (leather shadow puppetry from East Java), show that there has been a process of change in which the value of art has been influenced by three factors, namely masked dance performances, tourism and mask production for commercial purposes. Commodification in Indonesia has transformed art into a commodity, so that art objects have become part of the local tourist industry [3]. If in Indonesia traditional masks have developed into a means of fostering tourism, in Africa, for example, it has developed more as a means of introducing cultural heritage into an educational process. Research on the development of the meaning of masks in Africa shows the function of traditional masks as a means of educating, to understand the heritage and local wisdom of this African form of culture. Some cultural education experts learn about African culture through the experience of making African masks using authentic African symbolism [4].

In advanced western societies, the traditional use of historical masks is now beyond practical purposes, but undoubtedly serves as a link between past and present. Nevertheless, they are consistently used in drama education and are usually contextualized through specialized knowledge of drama and theater practices. Based on a cultural understanding of the past and present, anthropology offers a context of masks and drama which shows that the purpose of masks in society supports the benefits of a broader education outside the academic field, such as for child development in formal education. The application of mask education and reframing the potential for schools to engage with anthropological concepts in a full curriculum, would provide considerable advantages [5]. In drama, teaching and learning about masks is carried out and presented as a methodology for acquiring a basic knowledge of the art and there are many workshops and journal articles available for teachers who offer knowledge or implementation of mask work [6].

The numerous articles about masks can be studied in many contexts, as mask cultures are found all over the world. Almost every nation has an exclusive mask type with varying interpretations. In Indian mask culture, there are complex interpretations of the meaning of masks because they have been closely intertwined with other cultures across the world. Changes in the meaning of masks occur based on different geographical locations, various races, languages, religious beliefs and rituals. The various interpretations of Indian masks influence social structures in creating a unique panorama of the art of mask making. The mask is also used as a tool to criticize the norms of an intolerant society and stereotypical culture. Masks were also successfully displayed outside religious structures and often resulted in increased acts of humanism. [7].

The *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask is different from other masks in the world. This mask is very large and heavy and has a creepy facial appearance. The mask has undergone a change in meaning and function over time and from being a reinforcement for repelling disasters, it has developed into a carnival character. The various character variations in the masks show the dynamics of the Sundanese artist community who are active in creating new, unique and diverse aspects (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Several profiles of Bebegig Sukamantri.

### 2.3. Development of a carnival performance

The most common topics from the perspective of cultural studies on folk festivals are the festivalgoers, festivals as spaces where cultural identity negotiations take place, festivals as part of subcultural networks and festivals as spectacles [8].

It is commonly understood that in carnivals, the mask can also be compared to a kind of fashion show, which is always associated with glamour, luxury, star hotels, city centers, elite societies, lights and glittery costumes. It is often not realized that fashion shows have created firm boundaries between the center and the periphery, the elite and the public, the upper and the lower classes, the glamorous and the old-fashioned [9].



Figure 2. Bebegig Sukamantri Parade (source: koropak.co.id).

The development of carnival in Indonesia is similar to that developed in Rio de Janeiro (Rio Festival) or flower festivals in several cities across the world. But the *Bebegig Sukamantri* carnival (Figure 2) is very different, as this carnival avoids luxury and emphasizes simplicity by using natural ingredients that are widely available in village

forests. This approach is strongly sustained because it is relevant to the forest conservation efforts developed by the Government of Indonesia. As a result, *Bebegig Sukamantri* is highly appreciated and fosters a lot of empathy from the wider community.

### 3. Methodology

As mentioned earlier the research on *Bebegig Sukamantri* uses an ethnographic approach, namely through visual observation and structured interviews. To understand the meaning of the characteristics and attributes of a mask, visual design analysis was used based on a perception of the concept of similarities and differences in mask design, which provided the final results and important data. The qualitative descriptive study was then examined and a search made to find possible hidden meanings in the mask designs involving icons or signs and any other distinguishing marks [10].

The purpose of this research is to find aspects about *Bebegig Sukamantri* that have been preserved but are not clearly identified in people's general perception. Through the process of product design analysis, regarding the colors, characters and attributes of the *Bebegig* mask, it is hoped that an objective benchmark for comparison can be found [11].

The study employs triangulation techniques as a strategy to test validity data, through the convergence of information from multiple sources [12]. Literature about *Bebegig Sukamantri* is very scarce, so to find additional data, interviews were carried out with mask craftsmen and *Bebegig* dancers; this contributed to further understanding the scientific, technological and cultural values of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask.

For data collection, interviews were conducted traditionally, to accurately understand "what people say they do". In understanding cultural values, ethnographic observation activities were carried out, namely by "observing what people do" and documenting their actions. Additionally, to find out what techniques are employed in mask making, a participatory design process was carried out by involving members of the research team in the crafting of the masks [13].

A visual data analysis was made of the appearance and character design of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask using a pattern of connectedness between science, technology and culture. This interaction forms the original character of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask as a cultural product. To focus on understanding mask products, it is necessary to look at them from the point of view of science, technology and culture combined. Understanding the concepts and values and their cultural meaning requires involvement in various community activities so that a complete picture of the behavior, habits and understanding of the *Bebegig* people is obtained, both in terms of historical meaning and the possibility of change and development. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

In collecting visual data about the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask, images, photos and videos of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* Mask Carnival were also collected from various social media in Indonesia. News about the carnival is well-publicized, but there is absolutely no discussion regarding the character of the masks used. In the process of visual analysis, 54 pictures of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask were selected which differed from one another. The most significant differences were found in the facial features, mask color and other attributes. To focus on the visual analysis of the masks, other attributes, such as clothing, headdresses and weapons are not discussed directly.



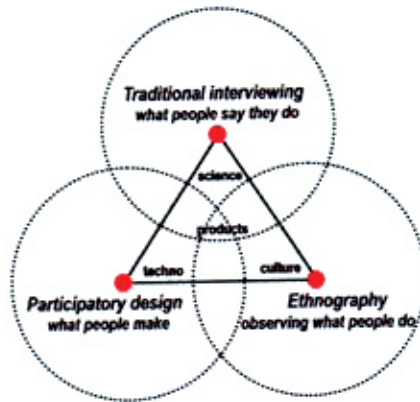


Figure 3. Schematic representation of research method.

#### 4. Result and discussion

The analysis of the 54 selected *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask designs found several similarities and differences. The components observed in each of the *Bebegig* masks, consisted of the (a) shape and color of the eyes; (b) nose shape; (c) ear shape; (d) tooth shape and length; (e) gum shape; (f) tongue shape; (g) eyebrow shape; (h) the position and shape of the horn.



Figure 4. Classification of *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

Other distinctive features that were noted in the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask was the use of a headdress and necklace. The headdresses found were “*tilak cakra*” (a mark on the forehead), “*topong*” (a cloth tie), “*makuta*” (a royal crown), and horn. There are

two types of necklaces, namely “*japamala*” (made of prayer beads) and *Butakala* (fangs). This grouping of *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask features raises the matter of the existence of three types of *Bebegig* mask characters. In accordance with their form and character, these three types of characters are depictions of astral beings, identified as *Detya*, *Denawa* and *Rakshasa*. The three names of these astral beings are revealed in section XXII (15th century) of the lontar text “*Sanghyang Siksa Kanda ing Karesian*”, where there are three types of guardian deities who protect the three social groups of the Sundanese people. *Detya* is the protector of the *rama* (peasants), *Danawa* is the protector of the *reishi* (clergy) and *Rakshasa* is the protector of the *ratu* (aristocrats and warriors) [14]. This is represented in Figure 4.

Similarity factors identified as group markers include:

1. The face color, consisting of red, black, green, white and yellow hues. Each color represents a different meaning for the *Bebegig* characters.
2. The concept of different accessories for *Detya*, *Denawa* and *Rakshasa* is an effort to adjust to their rights and obligations. A farmer or commoner, accustomed to a simple lifestyle, only uses a headband made of a sarong or a piece of *batik* cloth. The aristocrats wore more valuable sparkly head decorations, and the warriors wore simple helmets or helmets with horns. The *reshi* only used turbans and headbands without any decoration.
3. *Dénawa*'s distinctive attributes are the large *japamala* necklace (made of prayer beads) around the neck, the belt collar, bone necklace and the rattan strands.
4. The existence of *tilak chakra*, a sacred marker in the form of dots or other shapes, located on the forehead or between the eyes. *Tilak chakra* does not have the function of a third eye but rather, is a sign of purity, as a protective spirit or as a marker of astral beings who have a particular task. *Tilak chakra* is generally a single mark, similar to a dot, but there is also a compound called a *mandala*. *Mandala* patterns are found in many *Réshi* or *Dénawa* *Bebegig* masks (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Attributes of *Bebegig Sukamantri* groups.

Based on the attributes of the three types of *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask, a fairly clear picture is seen, where each type of mask is associated with the three icons of the astral beings. Some of the same details can be developed as immutable provisions, while very different details are new and contemporary creations.

#### 4.1. Meaning and character of the red *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask

The classification based on the dominant color of the *Bebegig* mask shows the different functions and roles of the *Bebegig* in the carnival scene.

The group of red *Bebegig* masks is a visualization of angry, arrogant, dangerous characters. Figure 6 shows 15 designs of *Bebegig* masks dominated by red consisting of *Dénawa* (numbers 01, 02, 05, 09, and 11), which are adorned with a *Japamala* necklace. *Rakshasa* (numbers 02 and 05) also has a crown. In particular, numbers 02 and 05 are a combination of *Dénawa* and *Rakshasa*.



Figure 6. Red *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

In the arena, red *Bebegig* masks show a dignified but dangerous character and generally have many very large fangs, indicating the level of danger or threat to other *Bebegig*; red *Bebegig* mask dancers must be tall heavy adults.

#### 4.2. Meaning and character of the black *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask

The black *Bebegig* mask represents the character who dominates the arena and is the bitter enemy of the red *Bebegig* mask. Black represents mystery, so the movements of the black masked dancer tend to be unpredictable. The dance movements and the rhythm of the accompanying music are generally very lively and noisy. Figure 7 shows 15 designs of *Bebegig* masks that are predominantly black consisting of *Dénawa* (numbers 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26, 28, and 29) with a *Japamala* necklace and a fang necklace. A black *Bebegig* mask never dances alone, but always collectively, to form a long flowing procession.

The black mask designs (numbers 20, 24 and 29) belong to the *Rakshasa* group because they use a crown or head jewelry. Some of the masks have horned helmets, which is a visualization of knights. This horn is not interpreted as a visualization of animals or monsters, because it does not show a complete manifestation of animal characters. This is different when compared to Greek mythological figures such as the Minotaur or Centaur.



According to the elders of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* dance group, the black mask is the color of the oldest mask. This mask shows determination in upholding the principles of ancestral life and the law of behavior that upholds togetherness.



Figure 7. Black *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

As the oldest *Bebegig* mask, the black mask triggers the birth and appearance of new and very different mask creations and are produced by mask craftsmen every year. The oldest mask attribute can be identified by the use of coconut fibers and a headdress made of dry, blackish leaves. Figure 8 shows a group of black masks – *Dénawa* and *Rakshasa* – and being the oldest *Bebegig* masks it is these that have spurred the development of *Bebegig* art to date.



Figure 8. A group of black *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

### 4.3. Meaning and character of the green *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask

The *Bebegig Sukamantri* green mask is less scary than the red and black mask, although its ferocity and courage are still visible. In order to maintain a more terrifying visualization, many craftsmen add huge fangs, blood and sharp teeth. Green masks are intermediaries and peacekeepers. They are generally made with the effect of having rough, scaly skin. *Détya* (numbers 34, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, and 45) has special marks and generally represents a group of farmers tasked with protecting forest areas.

*Rakshasa* masks are green in color, and generally have a kind of royal crown with ornate carvings of cut gold and gemstones sprinkled in several points. The crown has gradually become larger showing *Rakshasa*'s position as a noble of high rank and immense power.

The dominant green color in the green *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask becomes even more substantial with the addition of green leaves on the head so that it leads to the concept of a fusion between ancestral spirits and the natural environment as a form of animist and dynamic behavior.

The existence of the ancestral spirits is visualized in the form of a green *Bebegig*. It is a manifestation of natural energy that exists as a mutualistic relationship between village communities and the surrounding forest area which is dominated by green. Figure 9 shows some green *Bebegig* masks:

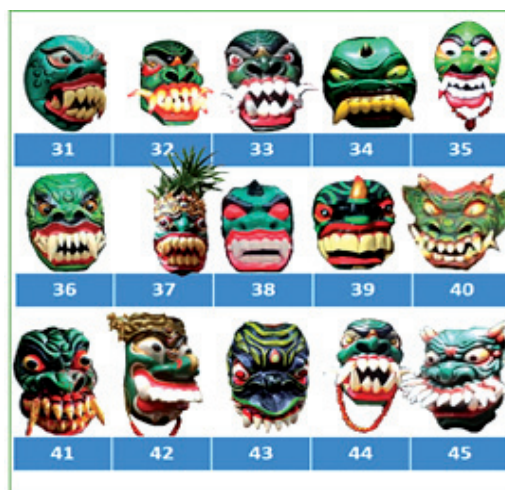


Figure 9. Green *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

### 4.4. Meaning and character of the white, yellow and blue *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks

The presence of *Bebegig* masks in white, yellow, blue, or other colors, indicates the freedom to create. The creation of colored masks other than black, red and green is an anomaly and several mask makers have cited the difficulty of presenting a fierce and dangerous figure. The mask-makers saw non-*Batarakala* characters as an opportunity to present a variety of different "monsters", but most failed.

The white, yellow and blue *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks and animal shapes (numbers 52, 53, and 54) are new creations featuring different characters. The mask makers claim that the non-*Batarakala* character is not *Bebegig Sukamantri*, because the original *Bebegig* characteristic is the face of *Batarakala*. Masks with other characteristics are referred to as monsters, or other evil creatures popular in Sundanese folklore.

The younger generation of *Bebegig* mask makers have tried to make new creations based on popular Western characters such as elves, orcs, werewolves and vampires, but they were very short-lived. These new mask designs quickly disappear because the public dislikes them and are consequently not accepted, whereas the *Bebegig* mask featuring Sundanese astral creatures is a long-established part of their culture and is irreplaceable. Figure 10 shows a selection of these new creations.

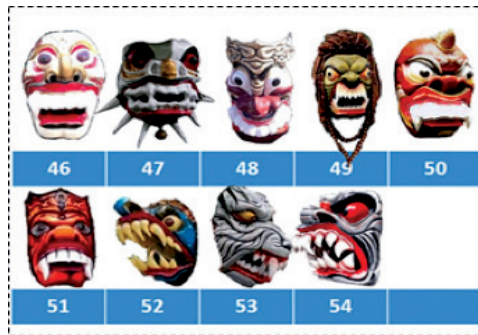


Figure 10. Selection of new *Bebegig Sukamantri* masks.

#### 4.5. Sundanese astral culture in the *Bebegig Sukamantri* carnival

In the *Bebegig Sukamantri* carnival there are ritual events performed for the safety of the carnival and dances which are called *tawasulan*. These rituals take the form of people praying together in forest and mountain areas. In ancient times, the people of Sukamantri Village performed this ritual in the ancestral burial area which was considered sacred. *Bebegig Sukamantri* is basically an art related to mysticism, where supernatural powers play an important role as a channel for energy for *Bebegig* dancers who wear and control an 80 kg mask for more than 5 hours. The existence of this astral energy makes this art even more interesting, as well as captivating and entertaining for the public. The ability of the Sukamantri community to present astral energy is part of the local wisdom that shows a certain genius in connecting astral energy with physical human strength and muscles.

However, for the young generation of *Bebegig Sukamantri* dancers and mask makers there have been very significant changes, most of which reject this mysticism. For example, eliminating the *tawasulan* ritual in sacred tombs is a major change that the community is grateful for and is seen as something positive, not something that is unacceptable.

The *Bebegig Sukamantri* Mask Carnival is only held on major holidays in Indonesia and is especially important in welcoming Independence Day. Everyone, young and old alike, joins the carnival with great enthusiasm because on this particular day all members of the community wear their respective masks of pride. This is an occasion when mask makers generally try to present new and different creations.

The carnival program features dance dramas that originate from the stories of the heroism of the people's ancestors. Wearing large scary masks, the people dance to traditional music. Some of the small masks, also worn by children, move around and dance freely, often producing some very amusing entertainment. In the field, all adult *Bebegig Sukamantri* fight to defend the territory captured by other adults. The fight is quite fierce, but generally ends with mutual forgiveness and walking together in harmony. The moral of this program is that self-defense is obligatory and that war against evil is a patriotic duty. In all arenas, evil always loses and the righteous win.

#### 4.6. Development and problems facing the *Bebegig Sukamantri*

The problem faced by the organizer of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask carnival is how to preserve this art from the threat of changes in the lifestyle of rural communities and urbanization. Currently, many of the natural resources used in the manufacture of *Bebegig* masks and accessories are scarce, the main causes being drought, forest fires and deforestation.

The worry of the *Bebegig* mask crafters at the moment is the decreasing stock of large old trees as the primary raw material for making masks; the structure of the mask is made of a wood of African origin (*Maesopsis eminii* Engl.), Albasiah wood (*Albizia Chinensis*) and several other types of wood available in the forest area outside the village [15].

The *waregu* tree (*Rhapis Flabelliformis l'Herit*) is a type of Palma tree and is a unique plant with fairly soft stems and fan-like leaves widely used as a hedgerow. *Waregu* wood cannot be replaced with other types of wood, because it is a special requirement for making *Bebegig* masks. The people who make the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask need the wood of the *waregu* tree because it is believed to be a sacred wood that can repel venomous snakes and reptiles and is considered to have supernatural properties. The *waregu* tree grows in the interior of the cold foggy forest, so to obtain its wood to make the masks requires a great deal of physical, as well as mental, effort and energy.

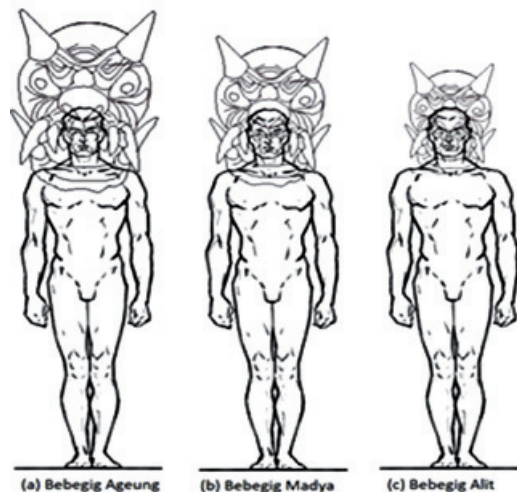


Figure 11. *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask.

Several craftsmen, today, cultivate *waregu* trees in the land around the village, as a preparatory step in overcoming the scarcity of raw materials. Some mask craftsmen also try to use other materials such as wood pulp, pinewood and other types of light wood that grow around the forest. Another problem faced by the community is the enormous size of the masks weighing more than 20 kg for a small mask, 30-40 kg for a medium-sized mask, and 50-60 kg for a large mask (Figure 11). With the average carnival lasting 5 hours, at the end of the event the mask dancers are physically exhausted and even risk injuring themselves. This is because the use of coconut palm fibers, which are sharp, can damage the skin. A solution therefore needs to be found to this particular problem. The authenticity of the use of forest materials is indeed good, but the use of the original *Bebegig Sukamantri* gear should be rethought and alternatives found. In part, this could be in the form of using softer natural materials or sustainable synthetic fur, which would be more comfortable to use and prevent the mask wearers from harming themselves. But other solutions need to be found.

Another essential issue that interferes with the performance of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* players is the supporting structure of the mask which is a wooden construction placed on the shoulders of the dancers. Bearing the weight of the mask, this structure often results in pain and fatigue due to the excessive pressure put on the upper part of the body when moving the mask in different directions. In addition, *Bebegig Sukamantri* players have minimal visibility because their eyes are blocked by the masks' rows of teeth and fangs. The view through the mouth opening in the hood is limited to the opening between the teeth or when the mouth is wide open (Figure 12). *Bebegig Sukamantri* players can only follow dance movements based on the sound of traditional Sundanese music around them. The motion and direction of the *Bebegig* players are regulated through the music.

The limited vision coupled with the absence of communication media between the players can at times lead to misunderstandings between the performers.

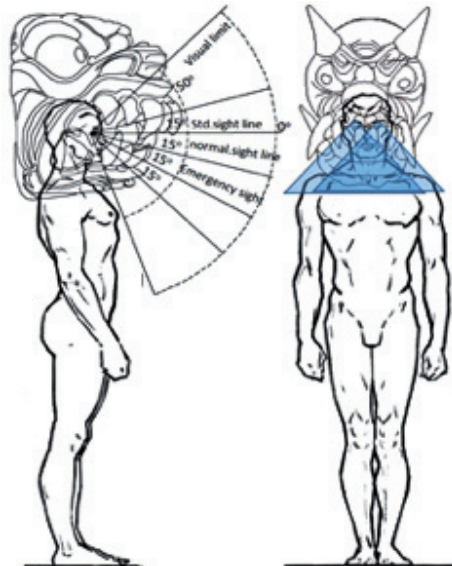


Figure 12. Ergonomic problems in *Bebegig* masks.



## 5. Conclusion

*Topeng Bebegig Sukamantri* is a traditional carnival of the Sundanese people in Indonesia which is quite unique. The natural materials used to make the masks come from the surrounding forest environment. This mask is very large, and the face is associated with the scary character of Batarakala who evokes feelings of fear and unease. At first, the masks were made as a symbol of remembrance which then developed into totem art in forest areas. Since one of the reasons the mask is worn in dances is to repel disease and enemies, it is also often used as an attribute of patrols to scare off unauthorized people who wish to cross the borders. Today, it has developed into a colossal carnival art.

The *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask is made of special wood which is carved manually without any prior design so that each mask has its own distinct character. The colours used for the masks are predominantly black, red, and green, each colour representing a different kind of behavior and character. Based on the physical attributes adorning the masks, it is known that there are three groups which relate to the concept of the Sundanese astral creatures respected by the ancient Sundanese people, namely *Rakshasa*, *Detya*, and *Denawa*.

However, problems exist, as seen in the *Bebegig Sukamantri* carnival today, where the dancer's behavior and the color of the mask's character are often mismatched. To try to overcome this problem, each *Bebegig* dance studio conducts an exercise to emphasize the need for a match between dance behavior and the color of the mask. Another problem is the limited vision and heavy weight of the *Bebegig* mask, which reaches up to 60-80 kg and has to be carried on the dancer's shoulders for 5 hours. This is evidently a very painful experience for the dancer to bear. Efforts are therefore needed to redesign the mask frame and use lighter materials, so that it provides better visibility and will be easier and more comfortable for the dancers to move and manipulate them. And lastly, a communication system between players would be useful in regulating and coordinating the mask-wearers' movements according to the color of the mask with standard procedures being adopted so the carnival runs smoothly and there is no risk to the dancers.

## Acknowledgments

The study was funded by the Institut Teknologi Nasional - Bandung in 2019, through a project: Strategic Excellence Research Grant (PUSI). The Authors express their appreciation to the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask crafters and dancers, and especially the speakers from *Bebegig Baladewa* Art Studio.

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### Summary

This article provides a glimpse into the story and meaning of the *Bebegig Sukamantri* Mask which is used in the art of a sustainable and fast-growing folk carnival in West Java, Indonesia. The masks used in the carnival are unique and are an expression of the cultural heritage left by the ancestors of the ancient Sundanese people in West Java.

Each mask creation, in various colors and shapes, derives from the face of *Batarakala*, who is a very well-known figure in Hindu culture and represents the god of anger. Based on the various shapes and colors of the masks, there are three groups, which are believed to relate to the mythology of the existence of astral creatures that protected ancient Sundanese people, namely *Rakshasa* for the nobility, *Detya* for the common people and *Denawa* for the clergy. The existence of these astral beings is found in the 15th-century ancient manuscript entitled *Sanghyang Siksa Kanda ing Karesian* (a clue to Reshi).

Preserving the *Bebegig Sukamantri* mask as part of ancient Sundanese cultural heritage is a worthwhile goal because of its uniqueness and its significance for future generations. It is, moreover, greatly appreciated as a cultural carnival event at both national and international level.

### Riassunto

Questo articolo riguarda la storia e il significato della maschera *Bebegig Sukamantri* che viene utilizzata nel carnevale popolare sostenibile e in rapida crescita a Giava occidentale, in Indonesia. Le maschere utilizzate nel carnevale sono uniche e sono un'espressione del patrimonio culturale lasciato dagli antenati dell'antico popolo sundanese a Giava occidentale.

Ogni maschera, in vari colori e forme, deriva dal volto di *Batarakala*, che è una figura molto nota nella cultura indù e rappresenta il dio della rabbia. In base alle varie forme e colori delle maschere, ci sono tre gruppi, che si ritiene si riferiscano alla mitologia dell'esistenza di creature astrali che proteggevano l'antico popolo Sundanese, vale a dire *Rakshasa* per la nobiltà, *Detya* per la gente comune e *Denawa* per il clero. L'esistenza di questi esseri astrali si trova nell'antico manoscritto del XV secolo intitolato *Sanghyang Siksa Kanda ing Karesian* (un indizio per Reshi).

Tutelare la maschera di *Bebegig Sukamantri* come parte dell'antico patrimonio culturale sundanese è un obiettivo utile a causa della sua unicità e del suo significato per le generazioni future. È, inoltre, molto apprezzato come manifestazione carnevalesca culturale sia a livello nazionale che internazionale.