

The Message of Death: Critical Discourse Analysis of *Sebujur Bangkai* Song by Rhoma Irama

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Abstract: This study analyzes the song *Sebujur Bangkai*, which literally means ‘a lifeless corpse’ by Rhoma Irama through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover its deeper messages about death and morality. As one of the most influential figures in Indonesian *dangdut* music, Rhoma Irama often conveys religious and social themes in his lyrics. This research examines how linguistic features, discursive strategies, and sociocultural contexts shape the song’s meaning. Utilizing Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework, the study explores the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of *Sebujur Bangkai*. The findings suggest that the song serves as a moral reminder, emphasizing human mortality, the futility of material wealth, and the importance of spiritual devotion. The discourse constructed in the lyrics reflects broader religious and cultural values in Indonesian society. This study contributes to the understanding of how music functions as a medium for ideological expression and social critique.

Keywords: after life, CDA, death, morality, mortality, religion

Introduction

Music has long served as a powerful medium for conveying messages, emotions, and ideologies across different cultures. In Indonesia, *dangdut*—often regarded as the music of the common people—has played a significant role in shaping public discourse, particularly through the works of its legendary figure, Rhoma Irama. Known as the "King of *Dangdut*," Rhoma Irama has utilized his music not only for entertainment but also as a tool for moral and religious teachings. One of his most profound songs, *Sebujur Bangkai*, presents a deeply reflective message about death, human mortality, and the transient nature of worldly possessions. The song serves as a poignant reminder of the inevitability of death and the importance of spiritual preparation, making it a rich subject for critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a valuable approach for examining the deeper meanings embedded within texts, particularly in the context of music, where lyrics function as a form of social commentary. CDA allows researchers to uncover hidden ideologies, power relations, and socio-cultural influences that shape discourse. Given the strong moral and religious undertones of *Sebujur Bangkai*, applying CDA to its lyrics provides an opportunity to explore how language constructs meaning and reinforces cultural values. This study utilizes Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, which examines textual analysis (linguistic features of the lyrics), discursive practices (how meaning is produced and interpreted), and social practices (the broader socio-cultural implications of the song).

In the Indonesian context, religious and moral teachings are often intertwined with cultural expressions, including music. *Sebujur Bangkai* embodies Islamic teachings about life, death, and the afterlife, resonating with the predominantly Muslim population of Indonesia. The song’s lyrics emphasize the futility of material wealth and status after death, reinforcing the notion that only faith and good deeds hold value in the hereafter. Such messages align with broader religious discourses in Indonesian society, where mortality and moral responsibility are central themes in public discussions.

This study aims to answer several key questions: (1) How does Rhoma Irama construct the discourse of death in *Sebujur Bangkai*? (2) What linguistic strategies are employed to deliver the song’s message? (3) How does the song reflect socio-cultural and religious values in Indonesia? By addressing these questions, this research contributes to the growing field of discourse studies in music, demonstrating how lyrics serve as a vehicle for ideological expression and social critique.

Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language in relation to power, ideology, and social structures. Unlike traditional linguistic analysis, which focuses primarily on grammar and syntax, CDA examines how discourse shapes and is shaped by social and political contexts. It investigates how language constructs meaning, influences perception, and reinforces or challenges dominant ideologies. CDA is particularly useful in analyzing texts that carry implicit messages about social issues, making

it a valuable tool for examining song lyrics, political speeches, media discourse, and other forms of communication.

One of the most influential models of CDA is Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which provides a structured approach to discourse analysis. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse operates at three interconnected levels: (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice, and (3) social practice.

1. Textual Analysis

This level focuses on the linguistic features of a text, including vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and rhetorical devices. It examines how specific word choices and stylistic elements contribute to meaning-making. In the context of song lyrics, textual analysis helps uncover how language is used to evoke emotions, convey themes, and shape listeners' interpretations.

2. Discursive Practice

This dimension explores how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. It considers the intentions of the author, the role of the audience, and the broader communicative context. In the case of *Sebujur Bangkai*, analyzing discursive practice involves understanding Rhoma Irama's position as a musician and religious figure, as well as how his audience interprets and engages with the song.

3. Social Practice

This level examines the broader societal, cultural, and ideological contexts in which discourse operates. It seeks to understand how texts reflect and influence power dynamics, social norms, and dominant belief systems. In Indonesia, where religious teachings are deeply embedded in everyday life, *Sebujur Bangkai* can be seen as part of a larger discourse that reinforces Islamic values and moral consciousness.

Beyond Fairclough's model, other key figures in CDA include Teun A. van Dijk (2008), who emphasizes the cognitive and psychological aspects of discourse, and Ruth Wodak (2009), whose Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) links discourse to historical and political developments. These perspectives further highlight how language is not neutral but is deeply connected to ideology and social change.

By applying CDA to *Sebujur Bangkai*, this study uncovers how Rhoma Irama's lyrics construct a discourse of death that reflects broader religious and cultural values in Indonesia, reinforcing moral lessons through music.

The Role of *Dangdut* Songs in Indonesian Society

Dangdut is more than just a music genre in Indonesia—it is a cultural phenomenon that reflects the values, struggles, and aspirations of the people. Emerging in the 1970s as a fusion of Malay, Indian, Arabic, and Western influences, *dangdut* has evolved into one of the most popular and influential musical styles in the country. Its infectious rhythms, relatable lyrics, and deep connection to everyday life make it a significant part of Indonesian identity. *Dangdut* music has several characteristics.

1. A Voice for the Marginalized

Dangdut has historically been associated with the lower and middle classes, providing a musical expression for their joys, sorrows, and challenges. Many *dangdut* songs address themes such as poverty, hard work, love, and heartbreak—experiences that resonate with the majority of Indonesians. By voicing the struggles of ordinary people, *dangdut* serves as a cultural representation of grassroots society.

2. A Medium for Social and Political Commentary

Beyond entertainment, *dangdut* has been used as a tool for social and political criticism. Artists like Rhoma Irama have infused their songs with messages about corruption, social justice, and moral values. Songs such as *Judi* (which condemns gambling) and *Indonesia* (which critiques leadership and governance) highlight the genre's role in shaping public discourse. Even today, *dangdut* remains a platform for expressing concerns about contemporary issues.

3. Religious and Moral Education

Many *dangdut* songs, particularly those by Rhoma Irama and other Islamic-influenced artists, emphasize religious values and moral teachings. Songs like *Sebujur Bangkai* and *Azza* remind listeners of spiritual responsibilities, reinforcing Islamic principles within the popular culture. This religious influence has helped *dangdut* maintain its relevance among a predominantly Muslim audience.

4. A Symbol of National Identity and Unity

Dangdut's widespread popularity across different regions and social classes makes it one of the few musical genres that unites Indonesians. Whether in rural villages or urban centers, this popular music is enjoyed by people from all backgrounds. It is frequently played at celebrations, such as weddings and national events, highlighting its role as a unifying cultural force.

5. A Form of Entertainment and Celebration

Dangdut is synonymous with joy and festivity. Its upbeat rhythm, often accompanied by energetic dancing, makes it a staple at public gatherings, concerts, and community events. The interactive nature of *dangdut* performances, where audiences engage with singers and dancers, further strengthens its role as an accessible and participatory form of entertainment.

Dangdut is more than just music—it is a reflection of Indonesian society, capturing its struggles, beliefs, and aspirations. From being a voice for the marginalized to serving as a medium for social critique and moral education, *dangdut* continues to shape and be shaped by the people who embrace it.

Song lyric of *SebujurBangkai* (a lifeless corpse) by Rhoma Irama

Badan pun takberhargasesaatditinggalnyawa (The body is worthless when dead arrives)

Anak isteritercintataksudilagibersama (Beloved wife and children no longer to be with)

Secepatnyajasaddipendam (As soon as the body is buried)

Secepatnyajasaddipendam (As soon as the body is buried)

Karena taklagidibutuhkan (Because it is no longer needed)

Diri yang semuladipuja (The self that was originally adored)

Kinibangkaitakberguna (Now it turns to useless carcass)

Dari kamar yang indahkasurempuktilamputih (From a beautiful room soft and white mattress)

Kiniharusberpindahterkuburdalamperutbumi (Now have to move buried in the bowels of the earth)

Kalauselamainidiriberhiaskan (If all this time you have decorated yourself)

Emasintanpermatabermandicahaya (With gold diamond lighted with bathed gem)

Tetapi kali ini di dalamkuburan (But this time in the grave)

Gelapekatmencekamtanpaseorangteman (Intense dark gripping without a friend)

Terputuslahpergaulan (Cut off from friendship)

Terbujurlahsendirian (Laid alone)

Diriterbungkuskainkafan (Self-wrapped in shroud)

Wajah dan tubuhindah yang duludipuja-puja (Beautiful face and body that was formerly adored)

Kinitiadalagi orang sudimenyentuhnya (Now no one touches it anymore)

Jadi santapancacingtanah (Becomes the earthworms' meals)

Jadi santapancacingtanah (Becomes the earthworms' meals)

Sampai yang tersisakerangka (Until the skeleton remains)

Begitulahsuratan badan (That is how the body is determined)

Kebumidikembalikan (Returned to earth)

Kebanyakanmanusiaterlenasehinggalupa (Most people are negligent and forget)

Bahwamautkandatangmenjelang (That dead surely will come)

The Message of Death Conveyed by the Song *Sebujur Bangkai*

Rhoma Irama's song *Sebujur Bangkai* delivers a profound reflection on death, emphasizing the inevitability of human mortality and the insignificance of worldly possessions in the afterlife. The lyrics serve as a moral and religious reminder that life is temporary, and only faith and good deeds will have lasting value. Through its poetic language and melancholic melody, the song urges listeners to contemplate their purpose in life and prepare for the hereafter. The song sends the following messages.

1. The Inevitability of Death

The title *Sebujur Bangkai*, which translates to "a lifeless corpse," immediately sets the theme of the song. The lyrics highlight that no matter how powerful, wealthy, or respected a person is in life, death will come for everyone without exception. This message aligns with the Islamic belief in *ajal* (predestined time of death), reinforcing the idea that human life is fleeting and beyond one's control.

2. The Futility of Wealth and Status

A central message of the song is the insignificance of material wealth after death. Rhoma Irama warns that possessions, power, and social status hold no meaning in the grave. This theme echoes religious teachings that encourage detachment from worldly desires and emphasize spiritual fulfillment over material success. By reminding listeners that nothing from this world can be taken to the afterlife, the song promotes humility and a focus on good deeds.

3. The Importance of Faith and Morality

The lyrics of *Sebujur Bangkai* stress that the only things that remain valuable after death are one's faith (*iman*) and righteous actions (*amal*). This message aligns with the Islamic teaching that, upon death, a person's deeds are the only things that will accompany them to the grave. Rhoma Irama uses the song to encourage self-reflection and a commitment to moral living, urging people to prioritize their spiritual responsibilities.

4. A Call for Self-Reflection

Beyond being a song, *SebujurBangkai* serves as a wake-up call for listeners. It urges people to question their actions, reconsider their priorities, and live a life that prepares them for the inevitable journey to the afterlife. The solemn tone and lyrics function as a moral reminder, making the song more than just entertainment—it becomes a lesson in spirituality and ethics.

Through *Sebujur Bangkai*, Rhoma Irama delivers a timeless and powerful message about death's certainty, the impermanence of worldly success, and the importance of faith and good deeds. The song remains relevant as a form of musical preaching, urging listeners to embrace a life of righteousness before it is too late.

Forgetting Death: The Human Tendency to Chase Worldly Life

One of the greatest paradoxes of human existence is that while death is certain, many people live as if it will never come. The inevitability of death is an undeniable truth, yet it is often ignored or pushed aside in favor of worldly pursuits. People become preoccupied with accumulating wealth, chasing status, and indulging in pleasures, believing—consciously or unconsciously—that life will continue indefinitely. Rhoma Irama's song *Sebujur Bangkai* serves as a powerful reminder of this reality, urging listeners to reflect on the fleeting nature of life and the importance of preparing for the afterlife. The song reminds us on the following aspects.

1. The Illusion of Permanence

Human beings often live under the illusion that they have endless time. They plan for the future, set long-term goals, and work tirelessly to improve their financial and social status. While ambition and success are not inherently negative, the danger lies in forgetting that life is temporary. Many become so absorbed in their careers, businesses, or personal achievements that they neglect their spiritual well-being. This illusion of permanence makes people prioritize the material world over their moral and religious obligations.

2. The Endless Pursuit of Wealth and Status

In modern society, success is often measured by material wealth, power, and social recognition. People dedicate their lives to acquiring luxurious possessions, climbing the social ladder, and securing financial stability. However, this pursuit often blinds individuals to the reality that none of these things will accompany them after death. Rhoma Irama's *Sebujur Bangkai* reminds listeners that once a person dies, their riches, influence, and reputation become meaningless. The only thing that remains is their faith and the good or bad deeds they have committed during their lifetime.

3. Death as an Unwelcome Thought

Many people avoid thinking about death because it is uncomfortable and frightening. The uncertainty of what happens after death, coupled with the fear of losing loved ones and possessions, makes people push the topic aside. As a result, death is often treated as a distant event, something that happens to others but not to oneself. This avoidance leads to a life focused solely on temporary pleasures, with little thought given to spiritual or moral responsibilities.

4. The Need for Self-Reflection

Rhoma Irama's song serves as a wake-up call, urging people to break free from their attachment to the material world and remember their ultimate destination. Death is not an end but a transition, and the choices made in this life determine one's fate in the afterlife. True wisdom lies in balancing worldly success with spiritual awareness, ensuring that one's life is meaningful beyond material achievements.

Forgetting death and focusing solely on worldly life is a common human tendency, but it is a dangerous illusion. *Sebujur Bangkai* reminds listeners that no matter how much wealth or status they accumulate death will eventually come. By embracing this reality, people can live with greater purpose, prioritizing faith, kindness, and moral responsibility over temporary gains.

Moral and Ethical Lessons from the Song *Sebujur Bangkai*

Rhoma Irama's *Sebujur Bangkai* is more than just a song—it is a profound reflection on life, death, and human priorities. Through its lyrics, the song conveys deep moral and ethical lessons, urging listeners to reconsider their attachment to material wealth and to live with greater awareness of their spiritual and moral responsibilities. The song serves as a reminder that worldly success is temporary and that only faith and good deeds will hold value in the afterlife. The song serves several moral teachings.

1. The Impermanence of Worldly Possessions

One of the central lessons of *Sebujur Bangkai* is the futility of material wealth and status. The song emphasizes that no matter how much a person accumulates in their lifetime—money, power, or fame—it all becomes meaningless after death. This teaches an important ethical principle: material possessions should not define one's life. Instead, individuals should focus on values such as kindness, honesty, and compassion, which have lasting significance beyond the material world.

2. The Importance of Faith and Good Deeds

The song underscores the idea that the only things that accompany a person after death are their faith (*iman*) and actions (*amal*). This aligns with the moral teaching that life should not be wasted on meaningless pursuits but should be dedicated to doing good. Ethical behavior, such as helping others, being honest, and maintaining integrity, is what truly defines a person's legacy. The song serves as a reminder that individuals should strive to live a life that contributes positively to society.

3. Humility and Avoiding Arrogance

Another key lesson from *Sebujur Bangkai* is the need for humility. Many people become consumed by their social status, wealth, or power, believing that they are superior to others. However, death is the great equalizer—everyone, regardless of their status, will face the same fate. This realization encourages humility and discourages arrogance. Ethical living involves treating all people with respect, recognizing that no one is above mortality.

4. Self-Reflection and Preparing for the Afterlife

The song encourages self-reflection, asking listeners to evaluate their lives and consider whether they are truly prepared for death. Ethical living is not just about following religious teachings but also about being accountable for one's actions. The song urges people to live with purpose, ensuring that their actions align with moral values and contribute to the well-being of others.

Sebujur Bangkai teaches invaluable moral and ethical lessons about the transient nature of life, the importance of good deeds, and the need for humility. It serves as a wake-up call, urging individuals to prioritize ethical values over material wealth and to live with a sense of responsibility towards themselves and society.

Conclusion

Rhoma Irama's *Sebujur Bangkai* is more than just a *dangdut* song; it is a powerful reflection on the inevitability of death and the transient nature of worldly life. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study has revealed how the song conveys deep moral and ethical messages, urging listeners to reconsider their priorities and embrace a more meaningful existence. The lyrics emphasize that material wealth, power, and social status ultimately hold no value in the face of death. Instead, faith and good deeds are the only aspects of life that remain significant in the afterlife.

The song serves as a wake-up call, reminding individuals of the importance of humility, self-reflection, and ethical living. It critiques the human tendency to pursue material success while neglecting spiritual and moral responsibilities. By addressing these themes through *dangdut* music, Rhoma Irama successfully reaches a broad audience, reinforcing religious and cultural values in a way that is both engaging and thought-provoking.

Furthermore, *Sebujur Bangkai* exemplifies the role of *dangdut* as a medium for social and religious discourse in Indonesia. The song's popularity demonstrates how music can be an effective tool for moral education, encouraging listeners to reflect on their lives and make ethical choices. The study confirms that *dangdut* is not merely a form of entertainment but also a vehicle for shaping societal values.

In conclusion, *Sebujur Bangkai* delivers a timeless and universal message about life, death, and morality. It serves as a reminder that true success is not measured by wealth or status, but by the legacy of one's character and deeds. Through the lens of CDA, this analysis highlights how Rhoma Irama uses music to convey profound philosophical and religious insights, making his work a lasting legacy and influence in Indonesian society.

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