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REPRESENTATION OF BALINESE WOMEN IN CASTE AND PATRIARCHAL RELATIONS IN THE FILM *NOESA PENIDA* (1988)

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of Balinese women in the film *Noesa Penida* (1988), particularly within caste and patriarchal relations as socio-cultural constructions that shape women's identities, bodies, and choices. The primary data source consists of selected scenes from *Noesa Penida* (1988) relating to the character of Gusti Ayu Pandansari, a *Ksatria* noblewoman raised in a *Sudra* family. This study aims to analyze how Balinese women are represented through visual signs, narrative, inter-character relations, and social symbols associated with caste hierarchy and patriarchal authority. Data were analyzed qualitatively through film text analysis, employing Stuart Hall's constructivist approach to representation combined with Roland Barthes' semiotics of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings show that women in *Noesa Penida* (1988) are not only presented as narrative subjects, but also as objects of caste, sites of patriarchal contestation, and markers of social honor. Women's bodies and mobility are constructed through lineage, social status, and the decisions of male figures who hold domestic and aristocratic authority. Although the film reproduces caste and patriarchal structures, the representation of Pandansari also opens space for critical readings of Balinese women's agency in confronting the social boundaries that constrain her.

Keywords: representation; Balinese women; caste; patriarchy; *Noesa Penida* (1988).

Introduction

Film as a cultural product cannot be understood as an entirely neutral medium. Film is a space of representation where meanings about identity, social groups, and power relations are produced, negotiated, and displayed through narrative, aesthetic, and ideological choices that often appear natural. Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but an active practice in the construction of meaning about the social world, including meanings about who is positioned as dominant, who is positioned as subordinate, and how relations between them are imagined. In the context of

cinema, dialogue, costume, space, bodily gesture, inter-character relations, and camera composition can all be read as representational elements showing how film reproduces, negotiates, or challenges prevailing social constructions.

Studies of women's representation in Indonesian film show that cinema frequently reproduces ideological constructions concerning gender roles and women's position in society (Andriani, 2024). In the context of the New Order (1966–1998), a number of Indonesian films operated within a state ideological climate that shaped the ideal image of women—as mothers, loyal wives, and guardians of family morality (Kurnia & Hidayatullah, 2024; Sen, 1994). Such representations not only reflected societal views on women, but also helped shape and legitimize women's position within the prevailing social order. In this context, the film *Noesa Penida* (1988) becomes significant for analysis because, although produced during the New Order period, it presents a historical Balinese setting of the early twentieth century that reveals how women's identities and bodies were constructed through caste and patriarchal relations.

Noesa Penida (1988) was directed by Galeb Husein with a screenplay by Asrul Sani. The film presents a cross-caste drama about Sari, later revealed to be Gusti Ayu Pandansari, a Ksatria noblewoman raised in a Sudra family by her adoptive father, Made Murda. When her caste identity is revealed, Pandansari becomes the center of a tug-of-war between two worlds: the *puri* (palace) that claims her through bloodline and aristocratic status, and the Sudra world that has shaped her lived experience, affections, and social identity. This conflict makes Pandansari's body and choices a contested field of meaning between lineage, male authority, and emotional ties to the family that raised her. Institutionally, *Noesa Penida* (1988) also received recognition at the 1989 Indonesian Film Festival through three Citra Awards and several important nominations (Film Indonesia, n.d.). This recognition positions the film as a prominent work in Indonesian cinema of its time, making it relevant to re-read through a cultural studies perspective.

The relevance of this reading is reinforced by the fact that the conflict in *Noesa Penida* (1988) cannot be separated from the relations between *wangsa*, patriarchy, and the female body. Sadnyini (2016:113) explains that the social stratification of Balinese Hindu society in the form of *catur wangsa* operates vertically and is based on descent. At the same time, Rahmawati (2021:7) demonstrates that Balinese society adheres to a patrilineal kinship system through the concept of *purusa-pradana*, in which *purusa* is positioned higher as the family heir, while *pradana* generally refers to women with a lower standing. In a broader context, Dewi and Tobing (2025:61–62) show that patriarchy in Balinese culture can give rise to discrimination against women, including

marginalization, subordination, negative stereotyping, double burdens, and violence. Accordingly, Pandansari's conflict in *Noesa Penida* (1988) can be read as a representation of how Balinese women's identities and choices are constructed at the intersection of *wangsa* hierarchy and patriarchal power.

Although studies of women's representation in Indonesian film have grown over the past two decades, academic attention to historical films with Balinese cultural settings remains relatively limited. Much of the scholarship on gender and caste representation in Bali focuses on literary works, particularly novels addressing women, custom, and social hierarchy, such as Oka Rusmini's *Tarian Bumi* (Nurzahra et al., 2024). The medium of film, by contrast, has rarely served as the primary object for reading how Balinese women's bodies, identities, and choices are constructed within caste/*wangsa* and patriarchal relations. Moreover, studies of Indonesian film employing Barthes' semiotics and Hall's theory of representation tend to focus on contemporary films (Soleha & Wirawanda, 2026; Utami, 2024; Nahda et al., 2024), and have yet to extensively explore historical films that record cultural constructions from a different social period. The gap between Balinese literary studies and Indonesian film studies, and between readings of contemporary and historical films, constitutes the academic space this research seeks to fill.

Based on this background, this study poses one central question: how does *Noesa Penida* (1988) represent Balinese women within caste and patriarchal relations through its visual-cinematic signs and narrative structure? To answer this question, this study aims to identify patterns of women's representation constructed in the film, to reveal the ideological myths naturalized through narrative, symbols, and inter-character relations, and to analyze how caste and patriarchy operate simultaneously—not separately—as mutually reinforcing systems of representation in shaping the position of Balinese women in Indonesian historical cinematic texts. In doing so, this study contributes not only to Indonesian film studies, but also to a broader understanding of how popular cultural texts function as arenas for both the reproduction and negotiation of gender and caste ideology in Balinese socio-cultural representation.

Literature Review

Stuart Hall (1997), in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, explains that representation is the process of producing meaning through language, signs, and signifying practices. This study employs the constructionist approach as its conceptual foundation, which holds that meaning does not naturally inhere in objects, events, or social identities, but is formed through systems of signs, language, discourse, and particular cultural practices.

Representation is thus understood not as a neutral mirror of reality, but as an active practice in constructing, negotiating, and sustaining meaning. In the context of this research, *Noesa Penida* (1988) is read as a cultural text that produces meaning about Balinese women, caste/*wangsa*, patriarchy, and custom through narrative, character, dialogue, body, costume, space, and inter-character relations.

Two concepts from Hall (1997) are central to this study. *Stereotyping* operates through processes of reduction, essentialization, and naturalization: reduction simplifies the complexity of individuals or groups into fixed characteristics; essentialization treats those characteristics as innate and permanent; naturalization makes social hierarchies appear inevitable. In the context of gender and caste, stereotyping positions women—particularly those of certain social standings—in images that appear natural, such as obedient, passive, emotional, or bound to family honor and custom. *Transcoding*, by contrast, refers to the re-use of dominant sign systems to produce different or opposing meanings. Hall (1997) emphasizes that dominant representations are never fully closed; gaps, ambiguities, and contradictions always enable the emergence of alternative meanings, including moments where women's representation opens possibilities for negotiation or resistance against constraining social systems.

Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957/1972), distinguishes denotation—the literal or descriptive meaning of a sign—from connotation, the cultural, associative, and ideological meanings attached to a sign in a particular social and historical context. When connotative meanings operate dominantly and are accepted as natural, they form myth: a signifying system that conceals its own historical and ideological construction, making socially produced relations appear natural, timeless, and universal. Applied to cinema, this framework helps explain how gender and caste inequalities are naturalized through visual and narrative signs. Previous studies confirm the productivity of this approach: Nahda et al. (2024) apply Barthes' semiotics to *Gadis Kretek*; Soleha and Wirawanda (2026) to *A Normal Woman*; and Utami (2024) to *A Perfect Fit*. None, however, specifically situate a historical Balinese film as an arena for reading women at the intersection of caste/*wangsa*, patriarchy, and custom.

The production context of *Noesa Penida* (1988) is also significant. The film emerged during the New Order, when national cultural and film policies were heavily influenced by agendas of stability, development, family morality, and national identity formation. Kurnia and Hidayatullah (2024) show that New Order cinema reproduced the ideology of *ibuisme* (motherism)—the construction of women as domestic subjects serving family and state. Sen (1994) argues that

Indonesian cinema of this period functioned as an ideological arena in which gender, class, and cultural identity were shaped through socio-political interests. Thus *Noesa Penida* (1988) cannot be read merely as popular entertainment or cultural documentation, but as a cultural text whose narrative and visual choices carry the traces of that ideological landscape.

Beyond the national production context, reading *Noesa Penida* (1988) requires situating it within the socio-cultural context of Bali—specifically the relations between *wangsa*, patriarchy, and the female body. Sadnyini (2016:113) explains that *catur wangsa* stratification operates vertically with social position determined by descent; caste membership is strictly birth-based. Rahmawati (2021:7) demonstrates that Balinese society adheres to a patrilineal *purusa* system positioning men as family heirs. Women's vulnerability is amplified in *nyerod* marriage: Sujana et al. (2023:2046) explain that a *triwangsa* woman who marries a Sudra man relinquishes her noble status. Sadnyini (2016:115) further notes that in the context of the *patiwangi* sanction, women's bodies become sites where *wangsa* rank and honor are affixed and potentially forfeited. Several studies on Balinese women confirm that gender relations cannot be separated from structures of custom, patrilineality, and social hierarchy: Wahyuni et al. (2025) show that caste-based discrimination against women persists in customary life; Dewi and Tobing (2025:61, 68–69) find that patriarchal culture keeps women in subordinate positions bound by adat rules about remaining in their "place"; and Narawati, Suarka, and Wiasti (2021:24–25) demonstrate that patriarchal hegemony rooted in Balinese culture continues to operate even within formally egalitarian institutions. Taken together, *wangsa*/caste and patriarchy in the Balinese social context cannot be understood as two entirely separate systems, but as mutually intertwined structures shaping women's bodies, choices, and social positions, a dynamic this study traces in the representational system of the film.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative-interpretive approach with film textual analysis as its method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study does not aim to measure the frequency of visual or narrative elements, but rather to understand how meanings about Balinese women, caste/*wangsa*, patriarchy, and custom are produced through systems of signs in film text. Textual analysis, as explained by Stokes (2013), treats the text as the primary object that can be systematically read to reveal layers of meaning not always explicitly apparent. In the context of this study, *Noesa Penida* (1988) is treated as a cultural text

containing visual, narrative, and ideological signs that need to be analyzed reflectively.

The object of this study is the film *Noesa Penida* (1988), directed by Galeb Husein, written by Asrul Sani, and running for 113 minutes. Because this is a film textual analysis, the research was not conducted at a particular field location. The site of analysis is the text of *Noesa Penida* (1988), while Balinese socio-cultural context and New Order cinema serve as contextual frameworks for reading the film's signs. The selection of this film was based on three considerations. First, it is an Indonesian film with a Balinese cultural setting that places women as an important part of the narrative and social conflict relating to caste or *wangsa*, patriarchy, and custom. Second, as a New Order cinematic product recognized at the Indonesian Film Festival, it represents cultural constructions important for analysis. Third, academic studies specifically addressing *Noesa Penida* (1988) from the perspective of cultural studies, women's representation, and gender-caste relations remain relatively limited. The primary data source is the film *Noesa Penida* (1988), with the unit of analysis being six purposively selected scene segments. Data collection was conducted through repeated viewings of the film, scene notation, dialogue identification, gesture, costume, space, inter-character relations, and mapping of visual and narrative signs relating to Balinese women, caste or *wangsa*, patriarchy, and custom. Relevant scenes were then noted by timecode to ensure accuracy of analytical reference.

Segment selection was based on four criteria. First, scenes displaying the position and identity of female characters within the caste/*wangsa* hierarchy. Second, scenes presenting dialogue or actions reflecting power relations between gender, caste/*wangsa*, and custom. Third, scenes showing the simultaneous intersection of gender and caste/*wangsa* signs. Fourth, scenes containing tension, negotiation, or reversal of meaning that open possibilities for alternative readings. Based on these criteria, the six segments analyzed are: (1) 00:05:06–00:07:05, the scene of Murda restricting Sari's freedom of movement; (2) 00:37:16–00:38:25, the scene of the keris revelation and caste identity; (3) 00:56:53–00:58:38, the confrontation scene between Murda and Jaya over Pandansari; (4) 01:02:50–01:13:16, the sequence of scenes in which Sari presents herself before the King at the *Puri*; (5) 01:13:17–01:13:32, the scene of Pandansari removing her jewelry; and (6) 01:37:39–01:40:15, the scene of Jaya's return and the confrontation between Jaya, Pageh, and Sari.

The analytical procedure was carried out in three interconnected and iterative stages. The first stage is a semiotic reading using Roland Barthes' framework (1972, 1977). Each segment was analyzed at three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, analysis

was directed at describing literally what is seen and heard in each scene, including dialogue, expression, bodily gesture, costume, space, inter-character positioning, and action. At the connotative level, these signs were read in relation to the cultural and ideological meanings at work within the context of Balinese culture, caste/*wangsa* relations, patriarchy, custom, and New Order cinema. At the mythic level, analysis was directed at identifying the ideological constructions naturalized through the film's signs—namely, how particular social and historical relations are presented as though natural, inevitable, and unquestionable.

The second stage read the semiotic findings through Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation (1997), especially stereotyping and transcoding, to examine how dominant images of Balinese women are formed and how they may be negotiated or challenged. The third stage synthesized the six analyzed scene segments by comparing denotation, connotation, myth, stereotyping, and transcoding to show that caste/wangsa and patriarchy operate as interconnected structures shaping women's positions in the film. This study places the researcher as the main interpretive instrument, while acknowledging potential bias managed through systematic analysis, transparency, and consistent theoretical use. Its limitation lies in its focus on film textual analysis without audience reception or in-depth production-context study, making the findings interpretive and open to alternative readings.

Results and Discussion

Bodies and Spaces Under Restriction

From its opening scenes, *Noesa Penida* (1988) presents women's bodies as spaces supervised by the orders of caste and patriarchy. At timecode 5:06–7:05, Sari (Gusti Ayu Pandansari) is prevented by her adoptive father, Made Murda, when she tries to carry fish from the catch and from sitting too close to Kak Jaya. This scene shows that control over women does not always manifest through direct violence, but through reprimands, advice, and rules of everyday propriety. Sari's body is positioned from the outset not as an individual body, but as a social body that must be guarded for the sake of family honor, social status, and caste hierarchy.

At the denotative level, this scene presents Sari as a young woman trying to help her adoptive father carry fish from the catch, an action that is refused by Made Murda. Afterward, when Sari approaches Jaya to sit with him, Murda again forbids her. Literally, this scene presents a family interaction in the domestic space of a fishing community: a daughter wishing to participate in

everyday activities, while a father figure restricts her actions on grounds of propriety. Murda's refusal is reinforced through dialogue:

> *"Sari is not fit to carry fish... Sari, sit down in your place... In this house, everyone already has their own place."*

At the denotative stage, this dialogue indicates a division of roles and positions within the family, before being readable at further stages of analysis as signs of regulation over women's bodies, freedom of movement, and social position.

At the connotative level, Murda's prohibition cannot be read merely as a matter of etiquette or household division of labor. The phrase *"not fit"* carries multi-layered cultural weight, as propriety in this scene is framed through relations of caste, gender, and family honor. Sari is forbidden not only from carrying fish for practical reasons, but because her body is positioned as a body that must be guarded from activities deemed inconsistent with her social status. Similarly, the phrase *"in this house, everyone already has their own place"* refers not only to a physical location inside the house, but also to a social position determined by hierarchical order. *"Place"* in this dialogue can be read as a metaphor for the social structure that regulates who may perform certain tasks, who may be in proximity to whom, and how far a person may transgress the roles attributed to them.

At the mythic level, this scene can be read as the reproduction of a naturalized idea in a caste-based social order as represented in the film. *Triwangsa* women are positioned as symbols of honor whose integrity must be preserved. They are not primarily presented as subjects with freedom of choice, but as social signs reflecting family dignity, lineage, and caste hierarchy boundaries. Within Hall's framework (1997), this representation can be understood as a form of stereotyping operating through essentialism. Women's "place" in this scene is presented as though natural, fixed, and beyond question. Yet this position is a cultural construction produced, repeated, and maintained through power relations. In this way, the film not only displays restrictions on women's bodies, but also shows how social boundaries based on caste and patriarchy are naturalized through the language of propriety, honor, and ordinariness.

If the opening scene shows how Sari's body is restricted in domestic space, the scene of identity revelation through the *keris* shifts the reading to a deeper level—regulation of genealogical identity. Sari's body is not only supervised in everyday actions, but is also returned to the *wangsa* structure when her aristocratic origins are revealed. This construction becomes most explicit at timecode 37:16–38:25, when Sari's caste identity is revealed through a *keris*. This

scene presents Made Murda producing a *keris* entrusted by the late King as proof that Sari is in fact Gusti Ayu Pandansari, a woman of Ksatria blood.

At the denotative level, this scene is a dramatic moment of identity revelation. The *keris* functions as material evidence connecting Sari with her aristocratic origins. At the connotative level, however, this scene reveals a more fundamental issue: how women's identity is operationalized within the caste order as represented in the film. Pandansari's identity is not discovered or declared by herself, but is given to her by a man—Murda—through a sacred heirloom previously entrusted by another authority, the King.



Figure 1. Sari's identity is revealed through the keris.
Source: Film *Noesa Penida* (1988)

This scene thus shows that women's identity and dignity do not fully originate from self-consciousness, but depend on recognition, verification, and validation by authority external to herself. The *keris* in this scene functions not only as a narrative prop, but also as a symbolic sign that legitimizes Sari's social status. Sari's body can only be read as an aristocratic body after a sacred heirloom and male testimony affirm her origins. Here the film shows that women are positioned not as primary subjects determining their own identity, but as objects of recognition within a social structure controlled by male authority and caste hierarchy.

At the mythic level, the revelation of Sari's identity through the *keris* reproduces the idea that women are custodians of lineage heritage. Women's bodies are positioned as media through which *wangsa* origins, honor, and dignity are affixed. In this logic, Sari is not merely present as an individual with a personal history, but as a social body that must be "returned" to her place of origin when her noble identity is revealed. This reading aligns with Sadnyini (2016:113), who explains that the social stratification of Balinese Hindu society in the form of *catur wangsa* is vertical, with criteria for social position based on descent. Accordingly, the *keris* in this scene functions not only as a sacred

heirloom, but also as a genealogical sign connecting Sari's body with the Ksatria bloodline.

In the historical-juridical context, Sadnyini (2016:113) also shows that status boundaries in the Balinese Hindu environment are bound by strict structures, as caste membership is measured by birth. This reinforces the reading that Sari's identity does not fully emerge from self-consciousness, but must be validated through proof of origin, male testimony, and social recognition. Thus the *keris* becomes an instrument of symbolic legitimation returning Sari into the meaning of *wangsa*.

The regulation of Sari's identity is also intertwined with patriarchal structures in Balinese society. Rahmawati (2021:7) explains that Balinese kinship traces descent through the paternal or *purusa* line, so that in inheritance only sons and daughters of *purusa* status are entitled to become heirs. In the context of the *keris* scene, recognition of Sari not only confirms *wangsa* origins but also shows that women's identity is validated through lineage, male authority, and family legitimacy. Sari's body is thus positioned as a symbolic medium connecting family honor, social status, and the continuity of the bloodline.

Further, Sadnyini (2016:115) explains that in the context of the *patiwangi* sanction, women's bodies can become sites where *wangsa* rank, fragrance, and honor are affixed. *Triwangsa* women who marry Sudra men may experience a loss of status, a change of name, and may no longer be recognized by their families. Although the context of *Noesa Penida* (1988) does not directly present the *patiwangi* sanction, its symbolic logic remains relevant: women's bodies are represented as media through which family honor, lineage, and caste hierarchy boundaries are affixed, guarded, and at stake.

Women in Patriarchal Relations

This section examines how patriarchy positions women within networks of male power. Operationally, caste and patriarchy function through different but mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Caste determines the social meanings attached to women's bodies, while patriarchy regulates who holds the authority to oversee, control, and determine their fate.

Patriarchal relations in this film operate through three primary male figures who sequentially claim authority over Pandansari: Made Murda as the adoptive father who feels he holds a moral mandate to protect and determine the boundaries of her life; Jaya as the lover who feels entitled to her love and loyalty; and Pageh as the husband who obtains social and customary legal legitimacy over her body and marital status. These three figures display different forms of power, but operate within the same logic—Pandansari is positioned as a woman

whose life can be guarded, contested, owned, and decided by men. These claims are not presented as problematic, but appear natural within the film's narrative arc. This is where patriarchy operates not only through direct coercion, but through the naturalization of male power as a social order taken for granted.

This reading aligns with Narawati et al. (2021:25), who note that patriarchal culture can form cultural hegemony when male dominance is attached to values, morals, and social interpretations accepted as natural. Furthermore, Narawati et al. (2021:29) show that the production of patriarchal values can become the sole reference point positioning men as generators of social truth, while women are directed to submit to that truth.

At timecode 56:53–58:38, after Pandansari has been returned to the *puri*, the film presents a confrontation between Murda and Jaya. Jaya tries to follow Pandansari, but Murda restrains him, saying: *"Your place is fated to be in this hut. Not everyone can simply enter the puri."*



Figure 2. Murda forbids Jaya from meeting Sari.
Source: Film *Noesa Penida* (1988)

At the denotative level, this scene presents a quarrel between two men about a woman who is not visually present in the scene. Murda acts as the adoptive father who feels he has fulfilled the king's trust, while Jaya appears as a man who feels he has lost the woman he loves. Tension escalates when Murda draws his *keris* and Jaya picks up a sickle, before Pageh intervenes to end the dispute. Literally, this scene depicts a family conflict and a love conflict. Connotatively, however, Pandansari's absence becomes a particularly important sign. She is the center of the conversation, yet given no space to speak.

This connotative meaning becomes clearer through the final exchange between Jaya and Murda. When Jaya declares his love for Pandansari, Murda does not respond to that love as a matter of feeling, but as a violation of the social boundaries that have been established.

"I know, Jaya. But each of us already has a place. Today I am glad to have kept my child from making a mistake. From touching a woman who is not for him."

Murda's statement, *"each of us already has a place,"* reveals that the social order in the film is understood as something fixed and incontestable. The word *"place"* refers not only to physical location but also to social position. Jaya is placed in the *"hut,"* while Pandansari is returned to the *"puri."* The film thus builds a symbolic opposition between low/high, outside/inside, commoner/noble, and unworthy/worthy. Within this structure, Pandansari's body becomes a marker of social boundary: she is understood not merely as a loved woman, but as a figure whose existence must be returned to the social space deemed appropriate to her origins.

Murda's statement *"today I am glad to have kept my child from making a mistake. From touching a woman who is not for him"* reinforces this patriarchal construction. The phrase *"a woman who is not for him"* positions Pandansari within a logic of possession and social entitlement. She is not named as a subject who can choose, but as a woman who is *"not for"* Jaya. In other words, what determines the relationship is not Pandansari's will, but the social structure policed by men. The word *"touching"* is also significant, shifting the issue of love into a matter of access to women's bodies. Pandansari's body is understood as something that must be guarded from the touch of men deemed unworthy.

This scene also shows that patriarchy operates through the figures of father, lover, and brother. Murda feels entitled to protect Pandansari in the name of the king's trust. Jaya feels entitled to fight for Pandansari in the name of love. Pageh feels entitled to mediate the conflict in the name of brotherhood and protection of his father. This is the form of patriarchy that does not always operate through direct violence against women, but through conversation, prohibition, family legitimacy, and division of social space.

This reading aligns with Narawati et al. (2021:24), who explain that patriarchal culture places men in a position higher than women, so that men occupy the dominating side while women experience subordination. In the context of this scene, this domination is evident through Murda's right to set the limits of Jaya and Pandansari's meeting, and through the way Pandansari's body is positioned as a territory to be guarded from men deemed socially inappropriate. Narawati et al. (2021:29) also show that patriarchal values can be produced as the sole reference and social truth that women must follow. This is apparent in Murda's statement, which offers no space for negotiation but affirms that each person already has their "place."

At the mythic level, this scene builds the idea that social order can only be maintained if women are returned to the place deemed correct according to caste,

family, and male authority. Jaya's love for Pandansari is not read as a legitimate emotional right, but as a threat to the order. Conversely, Murda's action of separating them is framed as a form of moral responsibility. This is where patriarchy operates ideologically.

The patriarchal dimension becomes yet more apparent at timecode 01:37:39–01:40:15, when Jaya returns after serving ten years of punishment and finds that Pandansari has married Pageh. In this scene, Jaya says: *"How shallow the heart of a woman... It seems you waited for me with a child from my own brother."*



Figure 3. Jaya accuses Sari of disloyalty.
Source: Film *Noesa Penida* (1988).

Denotatively, this scene presents an emotional confrontation between two characters who were once bound in a love relationship, but separated by punishment, time, and changed circumstances. Connotatively, however, Jaya's statement reveals a patriarchal worldview that reduces the complexity of women's experience to a matter of individual morality. Jaya does not first question the structural conditions that separated him from Pandansari, including his punishment, the news of his supposed death, and the social pressures enabling Pandansari to marry Pageh. Instead, Jaya immediately directs the accusation at Pandansari through the phrase *"the shallow heart of a woman."* This statement not only accuses Pandansari personally, but also generalizes women as beings who are weak, easily swayed, and unfaithful. Thus, suffering genuinely shaped by social structure, custom, and male decisions is displaced onto women's moral failure.

At the mythic level, this dialogue reproduces patriarchal stereotypes of women as emotional and unreliable in their faithfulness. Pandansari is not read as a subject who also experienced compulsion, loss, and limited choices, but as a woman deemed to have failed to maintain loyalty. In other words, Jaya does not see Pandansari as a victim of larger circumstances, but as the cause of his own emotional wound. At timecode 01:41:48–01:42:36, the construction of ownership

over Pandansari's body and status is further affirmed through Pageh's response: *"Even so, she is still my wife now. As long as I am here, she will not go with anyone."*

This statement shows that marital status becomes the basis for male legitimacy to claim a woman. The phrase *"she is still my wife now"* positions Pandansari in a position determined by her legal and social relationship with a man, while the statement *"she will not go with anyone"* shows that Pandansari's own will is not the central consideration. This scene presents two forms of patriarchy confronting each other, yet neither truly liberates Pandansari. This reading aligns with Narawati et al.(2021:29), who show that patriarchal values can be produced as social truth placing women under male definitions and decisions. In this scene, the truth about Pandansari is built not from her own voice, but from Jaya's judgment and Pageh's claim.

The discussion in this section demonstrates that patriarchy in *Noesa Penida* (1988) does not operate only through physical violence or explicit prohibition, but through a network of power involving family, love, marriage, and social honor. Murda, Jaya, and Pageh occupy different male positions, yet all are involved in a logic that positions Pandansari as a woman to be guarded and contested. Pandansari does appear as the center of conflict and has a voice in several scenes, but that voice does not become the primary basis for decisions about her own fate. Within Barthes' semiotic framework, this condition shows how the patriarchal myth operates by naturalizing women's subordination as part of love, family, and social order. The contest over Pandansari appears as a personal tragedy, yet behind it lie power relations that place women's bodies and choices under male authority. The representation of Pandansari thus reveals that women in this film are not entirely erased, but weakened in their position: present emotionally, yet without social sovereignty.

Caste and Patriarchy as a Layered System of Representation

In *Noesa Penida* (1988), caste and patriarchy operate in an intertwined manner. They are not two pressures running in parallel over Pandansari's body, but two dimensions of a single representational system that mutually reinforce each other. Caste provides social legitimacy for the regulation of Pandansari's body and position, while patriarchy determines who is entitled to oversee, evaluate, and decide her fate.

The intersection of caste and patriarchy is most clearly visible in the sequence of scenes at the *Puri*. In these scenes, Pandansari presents herself before the King and pleads for Jaya, who faces punishment. Yet Pandansari's plea is not treated as the voice of a woman fighting for the safety of someone she loves. Instead, the King frames her plea within the logic of social status and caste honor.

At timecode 01:02:50–01:13:32, the King says: *"The truth is you are of Ksatria blood and that man is not. If you involve yourself with him, you will share in his disgrace."*

At the denotative level, this dialogue presents a prohibition from the highest authority figure in the narrative against the relationship between Pandansari and Jaya. The King affirms that Pandansari is a woman of *Ksatria blood*, while Jaya is positioned as a man outside the social status deemed appropriate for her. Literally, this scene presents a rejection of a relationship that crosses social status lines. Connotatively, however, the prohibition does not only speak to caste difference, but to control over women's bodies, choices, and relations.

The King's statement reveals that Pandansari's status as a *Ksatria woman* does not grant her the freedom to make her own choices. On the contrary, that status becomes the basis for restricting her relationship with Jaya. The phrase *"you will share in his disgrace"* shows that Pandansari's body and choices are positioned as markers of caste honor. If she enters into a relationship with a man deemed unequal, what is at stake is not only her feelings but also the dignity of the *puri* and the purity of her social status. Thus Pandansari's love is not treated as a personal experience, but as a matter of collective honor to be controlled by social authority.

At the mythic level, this scene constructs the idea that noblewomen must preserve the purity of their social status by subjugating personal will to caste honor. The relationship between Pandansari and Jaya is rejected not because they do not love each other, but because the relationship is seen as disturbing naturalized social boundaries. This is where myth operates, caste hierarchy and patriarchal control over women's bodies do not appear as social constructions open to question, but as moral necessities that must be obeyed.

This condition shows that Pandansari's representation operates through a layered system of representation. She is not only restricted because of her position as a woman, but also because her body is associated with *triwangsa* status, family honor, and lineage. Her noble status does indeed give Pandansari a high social position, but that position does not automatically grant her autonomy. On the contrary, that symbolic value becomes the very basis for control over her body, love, and choices. This reading aligns with the Balinese social context: Sadnyini (2016) demonstrates that the *wangsa* system operates as a hierarchical structure regulating social position based on descent, while Narawati et al. (2021:24–25) show that patriarchal culture positions men in dominant positions and can operate as a cultural hegemony accepted as social natural order. Ayu et al. (2023:89–90) also show that custom, religion, social norms, and *awig-awig* can function as mechanisms of social control in Balinese

society. This framework is important for reading *Noesa Penida* (1988), because Pandansari's body is represented as a space where *wangsa* hierarchy and patriarchal power operate simultaneously.

Dewi & Tobing (2025:61) show that patriarchal culture in Bali continues to operate through various forms of discrimination against women, including marginalization, subordination, negative stereotyping, double burdens, and violence. In their discussion, Balinese women are frequently placed in subordinate positions, under male control, and bound by customary rules about how women should act and remain in their "place" (Dewi & Tobing, 2025:68–69). In *Noesa Penida* (1988), Pandansari appears to be in a similar situation. She does not openly reject the caste system as a social order, but resists the particular position assigned to her by that system. This distinction is important, as it shows that Pandansari's resistance is not a total rejection of the system, but a limited negotiation from within a structure that still binds her.

Within the layered representational system constructed by the film, one important scene reverses this logic. At timecode 01:13:17–01:13:32, Pandansari removes her jewelry in the presence of the King and the *puri* inhabitants, saying: *"This jewelry is not fit to adorn my body. Please allow me to return to my own family, the Sudra people."*



Figure 4. Sari removes her jewelry and asks to return to the Sudra family.
Source: Film *Noesa Penida* (1988).

At the denotative level, this scene presents Pandansari's physical act of removing her jewelry and her verbal declaration to return to the Sudra family that raised her. Literally, she removes the attributes of nobility from her body. Connotatively, however, this action is far more complex than a mere removal of objects. The jewelry in this scene is not only body ornamentation but a sign of status, bloodline, honor, and *triwangsa* identity. By removing the jewelry,

Pandansari does not only reject the object attached to her body, but also rejects the signification system that makes her body a symbol of *puri* honor.

The semiotic power of this scene lies in the change of the sign's function. Previously, the jewelry operated as a marker of caste legitimacy: it affirmed that Pandansari was a woman of *Ksatria blood* who must be returned to her social place. The jewelry was part of a representational system binding Pandansari's body to the *puri*, noble blood, and family honor. But when Pandansari herself removes the jewelry, the sign that previously functioned as a legitimation of status becomes a sign of rejection. The body that was previously marked by the system now uses the same signs to challenge that system.

Within Hall's framework (1997), this action can also be read as a form of *transcoding*, the re-use of the same sign system to produce a different, even opposing, meaning. Pandansari does not reject jewelry, caste, dignity, and propriety as meaningless signs. On the contrary, she uses these very signs to reverse the meanings previously attached to her. If previously the jewelry marked *triwangsa* honor and *puri* legitimacy over her body, then in this scene the removal of the jewelry becomes a sign of rejection of the imposed identity. Thus, the sign that previously functioned as an instrument of status affirmation becomes a medium of resistance.

This reversal of meaning becomes significant because throughout the film's narrative, Pandansari's body has been defined from outside by the caste and patriarchal system. She has been called a woman of Ksatria blood, a body that must be returned to the *puri*, and a symbol of honor that must not "fall" into a relationship deemed disgraceful. Yet when Pandansari herself declares that the jewelry is "not fit" to adorn her body, she appropriates the language of propriety previously used to control her. She does not merely remain an object of signification, but attempts to become the subject who reorganizes the meaning of her own body and identity.

Nevertheless, Pandansari's resistance remains ambivalent. On one hand, she demonstrates agency by rejecting the *triwangsa* identity imposed upon her—she no longer allows her body to be fully read through the interests of the *puri* and caste honor. On the other hand, her refusal does not dismantle the caste system as a whole. She instead declares her wish to return to the "Sudra people," thereby still using the language and categories provided by the caste system itself. Pandansari's action is thus not a total liberation from social structure, but a form of negotiation from within the language of that structure.

This reading aligns with Nurzahra, Falah, and Widyawati (2024), who show that Balinese women's resistance to caste hegemony in *Tarian Bumi* does not always appear as a total rejection of the system, but as an effort to fight for space

for choice within a social structure that still binds. In the context of *Noesa Penida* (1988), Pandansari demonstrates a similar pattern: she does not dismantle the caste system as a whole, but uses the signs provided by that system—jewelry, propriety, blood, and status—to reject the position imposed upon her. Pandansari's action can thus be read as symbolic resistance operating from within the system, not as total liberation from the caste and patriarchal system.

Thus, *Noesa Penida* can be read as an ideologically ambiguous text. On one hand, the film reproduces a representational system that constrains women through the intersection of caste and patriarchy. Pandansari's subordination is naturalized as part of love, family honor, caste dignity, and social order. On the other hand, the film also inserts possibilities for resistance through Pandansari's action of refusing the dominant meaning over her body and identity. Within Hall's framework (1997), this action can be read as a form of *transcoding*—the re-use of dominant signs to produce different meaning. At this point, the film not only displays the strength of dominant representation, but also shows the possibility for women to unsettle meanings attached to them from within the system itself.

Conclusion

This study addresses the question of how *Noesa Penida* (1988) represents Balinese women within caste and patriarchal relations. Through a reading of Roland Barthes' semiotics and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this study demonstrates that Pandansari is not only present as a female character in a love tragedy, but as a symbolic body through which *wangsa* hierarchy, family honor, male authority, and social norms operate simultaneously. Pandansari's status as a woman of Ksatria blood does not grant her autonomy; rather, it becomes the basis for restricting her body, love, and choices. Patriarchy then operates through male figures Made Murda, Jaya, Pageh, and the King who claim authority over Pandansari through family, love, marriage, and social power. Accordingly, Pandansari is at the center of conflict, but does not fully occupy the center of decisions about her own life.

The main finding of this study shows that caste and patriarchy in *Noesa Penida* do not operate as two separate representational systems, but as a layered system that mutually reinforces each other. Caste provides symbolic legitimacy for restricting women's bodies, while patriarchy supplies the social mechanism for executing that restriction. However, the film also inserts the possibility of resistance through the scene of Pandansari removing her jewelry, which within Hall's framework can be read as a form of *transcoding*—the re-use of dominant signs to produce different meaning. The film *Noesa Penida* (1988) can therefore be

read as an ideologically ambiguous text. On one hand, it reproduces women's subordination within caste and patriarchal relations. On the other hand, it opens space for women's agency. This study recommends that studies of Indonesian films with Balinese cultural settings should not only read women through patriarchy, but also consider caste, custom, and social honor as important elements in the construction of women's position.

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