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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 the context of caste hierarchies and patriarchal relations as sociocultural constructions that shape women's identities, bodies, and choices. The primary data consisted of selected scenes from Noesa Penida (1988) featuring Gusti Ayu Pandansari, a woman of Ksatria noble descent raised in a Sudra family. This study aimed to analyze how Balinese women are represented through visual signs, narrative structures, character interactions, and social symbols associated with caste hierarchies and patriarchal authority. The data were analyzed qualitatively through textual film analysis, applying Stuart Hall's constructionist approach to representation and Roland Barthes's semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings revealed that women in Noesa Penida (1988) were portrayed not only as narrative subjects but also as subjects of caste-based regulation, sites of patriarchal contestation, and symbols of social honor. Women's bodies, identities, and mobility were constructed and regulated through lineage, social status, and decisions made by male figures exercising domestic and aristocratic authority. Although the film reproduced existing caste hierarchies and patriarchal structures, Pandansari's representation also provided opportunities for critically examining Balinese women's agency in negotiating and challenging the sociocultural boundaries that constrained their autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Film, as a cultural product, cannot be understood as an entirely neutral medium (Sujana et al., 2023; Khadilkar & KhudaBukhsh, Mitchell, T. M., 2022). Rather, it functions as a site of representation in which meanings concerning identity, social groups, and power relations are produced, negotiated, and communicated through narrative, aesthetic, and ideological choices that often appear natural or self-evident. (Hall, 1997) emphasized that representation is not merely a reflection of reality but an active process through which meanings about the social world are constructed, including how individuals and groups are positioned within dominant and subordinate social structures and how relationships between them are conceptualized. In cinema, dialogue, costumes, spatial arrangements, bodily gestures, character interactions, and camera composition can be interpreted as representational elements that reveal how films reproduce, negotiate, or challenge prevailing social constructions (Wahyuni et al., 2025; Heliyon: 2022; Barthes, 1977).

Studies examining the representation of women in Indonesian cinema have demonstrated that films frequently reproduce ideological constructions concerning gender roles and women's positions within society (Andriani, 2024). During Indonesia's New Order period (1966–1998), numerous films were produced within a state-dominated ideological environment that promoted idealized representations of women as mothers, devoted wives, and guardians of family morality (Kurnia & Hidayatullah, 2024; Sen, 1994). Such representations not only reflected prevailing societal attitudes toward women but also contributed to constructing and legitimizing their positions within established social hierarchies. Against this historical backdrop, Noesa Penida (1988) provides a significant subject for analysis because, although produced during the New Order era, the film portrays Balinese society in the early twentieth century, illustrating how women's identities, bodies, and social positions were constructed through caste hierarchies and patriarchal relations.

Noesa Penida (1988), directed by Galeb Husein and written by Asrul Sani, presents a narrative centered on cross-caste conflict involving Sari, who is subsequently revealed to be Gusti Ayu Pandansari, a woman of Ksatria noble descent raised in a Sudra family by her adoptive father, Made Murda. Following the revelation of her aristocratic lineage, Pandansari becomes caught between two contrasting social worlds: the puri (palace), which claims her identity through ancestry and aristocratic status, and the Sudra community, which has shaped her lived experiences, emotional attachments, and social identity. This conflict positions Pandansari's body, identity, and personal choices as contested sites of meaning, shaped by competing claims of lineage, patriarchal authority, and familial affection. The film also received institutional recognition at the 1989 Indonesian Film Festival, winning three Citra Awards and receiving several additional nominations (Film Indonesia, n.d.). This recognition highlights its significance within Indonesian cinema of the period and supports its relevance as a subject for critical examination from a cultural studies perspective.

The significance of this interpretation is further reinforced by the relationship among wangsa (hereditary social status), patriarchy, and the representation of women's bodies in Noesa Penida (1988). (Sadnyini, 2016) explained that social stratification within Balinese Hindu society, particularly through the catur wangsa system, operates hierarchically and is closely associated with hereditary descent. Similarly, (Rahmawati, 2021) demonstrated that Balinese society traditionally follows a patrilineal kinship system associated with the concepts of purusa and pradana, in which purusa represents the lineage-bearing position associated with inheritance and familial continuity, whereas pradana is generally associated with a different position within the kinship structure. Within patriarchal interpretations of this system, women may occupy subordinate positions in matters of inheritance, familial authority, and social decision-making. Furthermore, (Dewi & Tobing, 2025) demonstrated that patriarchal structures within Balinese culture may contribute to various forms of gender discrimination, including marginalization, subordination, negative stereotyping, unequal domestic responsibilities, and violence against women. Accordingly, Pandansari's conflict in Noesa Penida (1988) can be interpreted as a representation of how Balinese women's identities, bodies, and choices are constructed and negotiated at the intersection of wangsa hierarchies and patriarchal power relations.

Although scholarship examining women's representation in Indonesian cinema has expanded over the past two decades, academic attention to historical films depicting Balinese sociocultural contexts remains relatively limited. Existing studies addressing gender and caste representation in Bali have frequently concentrated on literary works, particularly novels exploring women's experiences, customary traditions, and social hierarchies, such as Oka Rusmini's Tarian Bumi (Nurzahra et al., 2024). In contrast, film has received comparatively less attention as a medium for examining how Balinese women's bodies, identities, and choices are represented through the intersection of wangsa hierarchies and patriarchal

structures. Furthermore, studies of Indonesian cinema employing Roland Barthes's semiotic framework and Stuart Hall's theory of representation have predominantly examined contemporary films (Soleha & Wirawanda, 2026; Utami, 2024; Nahda et al., 2024), with relatively limited exploration of historical films depicting sociocultural constructions from earlier periods. These limitations reveal a research gap between literary and cinematic examinations of Balinese women's representation, as well as between analyses of contemporary and historical Indonesian films. The novelty of the present study lies in integrating Barthes's semiotic framework with Hall's constructionist approach to representation to examine how caste hierarchies and patriarchal relations intersect in the portrayal of Balinese women in a historical Indonesian film. This integrated perspective offers an opportunity to investigate how visual signs, narrative structures, and ideological meanings collectively construct and reinforce gendered social hierarchies within a specific cultural and historical context.

Based on this background, the present study addresses the following central research question: How does Noesa Penida (1988) represent Balinese women within caste hierarchies and patriarchal relations through its cinematic signs and narrative structures? To address this question, the study aims to identify patterns of female representation constructed through the film's visual and narrative elements, examine the ideological myths naturalized through cinematic symbols and character interactions, and investigate how caste hierarchies and patriarchal authority function as interconnected systems of representation that shape Balinese women's social positions and identities. By examining these intersecting structures, the study seeks to contribute to Indonesian film studies and broader discussions of gender, cultural representation, and social hierarchy. Specifically, it provides a critical framework for interpreting historical films as cultural texts that reproduce, negotiate, and potentially challenge dominant ideologies concerning gender and caste. Furthermore, the findings are expected to enrich scholarly understanding of Balinese women's representation in Indonesian cinema and demonstrate the relevance of combining semiotic analysis with representation theory to examine the ideological dimensions of historical cinematic narratives.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach using textual film analysis to examine the representation of Balinese women within caste (wangsa) hierarchies, patriarchal relations, and customary practices in Noesa Penida (1988). The analysis focused on how visual, narrative, and ideological signs constructed meanings concerning gender, social status, and power relations. Following (Stokes, 2013), textual analysis was applied to systematically examine the film's representational elements and identify underlying sociocultural meanings.

The primary data source was Noesa Penida (1988), a 113-minute Indonesian film directed by Galeb Husein and written by Asrul Sani. The film was purposively selected because of its Balinese cultural setting, its portrayal of gender and caste-based conflicts, and its historical significance within New Order Indonesian cinema. The analysis focused on six purposively selected scene segments representing interactions among gender, caste (wangsa), patriarchal authority, and customary traditions. Data were collected through repeated viewings, systematic scene documentation, and identification of relevant dialogue, gestures, costumes, spatial arrangements, character interactions, and visual symbols. Each selected segment was documented using timestamps to ensure accurate identification and facilitate systematic analysis.

Scene selection was guided by four criteria: representations of female identity and social position within caste hierarchies; interactions reflecting gendered and caste-based power relations; visual or narrative elements illustrating the intersection of caste and patriarchy; and moments of conflict, negotiation, or resistance to established social

expectations. Based on these criteria, six segments were selected: (1) 00:05:06–00:07:05, depicting Murda's restriction of Sari's freedom of movement; (2) 00:37:16–00:38:25, revealing Sari's caste identity through a keris; (3) 00:56:53–00:58:38, portraying the confrontation between Murda and Jaya concerning Pandansari; (4) 01:02:50–01:13:16, depicting Sari's appearance before the King at the puri (palace); (5) 01:13:17–01:13:32, showing Pandansari removing her jewelry; and (6) 01:37:39–01:40:15, portraying Jaya's return and the confrontation involving Jaya, Pageh, and Sari.

The analytical process consisted of three interconnected stages. First, Roland Barthes's semiotic framework (1972, 1977) was applied to examine denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings within each selected segment. Denotative analysis documented observable cinematic elements, including dialogue, facial expressions, bodily gestures, costumes, spatial arrangements, character positioning, and actions. Connotative analysis examined the sociocultural and ideological meanings associated with these elements, particularly in relation to Balinese caste hierarchies, patriarchal authority, customary practices, and the historical context of New Order cinema. Analysis at the level of myth identified ideological constructions through which historically contingent social hierarchies and gender relations were represented as natural or legitimate.

Second, the semiotic findings were interpreted through Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation (1997), with particular attention to stereotyping and transcoding. This stage examined how dominant representations of Balinese women were constructed, reinforced, negotiated, or challenged through cinematic signs and narrative developments. Third, findings from the six segments were synthesized through comparative interpretation of denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings alongside processes of stereotyping and transcoding. This synthesis identified how caste (wangsa) hierarchies and patriarchal relations intersected in constructing women's identities, social positions, and agency within the film.

Analytical rigor was supported through repeated viewing, systematic documentation of scene-specific evidence, consistent application of the theoretical frameworks, and reflexive consideration of alternative interpretations. The researcher served as the primary interpretive instrument, with potential interpretive bias addressed through transparent analytical procedures and the use of identifiable cinematic evidence. The study was limited to textual film analysis and did not incorporate audience reception data or an extensive examination of production contexts. Consequently, the findings were interpretive rather than generalizable and remained 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. CC 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 (2016:113) 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 et al., 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 examined how Noesa Penida (1988) represents Balinese women within caste hierarchies and patriarchal relations. Drawing on Roland Barthes's semiotic framework and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the findings demonstrate that Pandansari is portrayed not merely as a female character in a tragic love story but as a symbolic figure through whom wangsa hierarchies, family honor, male authority, and social norms intersect. Despite her Ksatria lineage, Pandansari's aristocratic status does not guarantee personal autonomy; instead, it becomes a justification for regulating her body, romantic relationships, and individual choices. Patriarchal authority is exercised through male characters, including Made Murda, Jaya, Pageh, and the King, who assert control over her life through familial obligations, romantic relationships, marriage, and social status. Consequently, although Pandansari occupies a central position in the narrative conflict, she remains marginalized in decisions concerning her own life. The findings further reveal that caste hierarchies and patriarchy function not as independent systems of representation but as interconnected structures that reinforce women's subordination. Caste-based distinctions provide symbolic legitimacy for restricting women's autonomy, while patriarchal authority operates as a mechanism through which these restrictions are maintained and enforced.

Nevertheless, the film also presents possibilities for resistance, particularly through the scene in which Pandansari removes her jewelry. Within Hall's theoretical framework, this act can be interpreted as transcoding, whereby dominant cultural symbols are reappropriated to construct alternative meanings. Accordingly, Noesa Penida (1988) can be understood as an ideologically ambivalent cultural text that simultaneously reproduces and challenges established gender and caste hierarchies. While the narrative reinforces women's subordination within aristocratic and patriarchal structures, it also creates interpretive space for recognizing female agency and resistance to restrictive social expectations. Future research should examine representations of Balinese women in other historical and contemporary Indonesian films, incorporating audience reception studies and comparative analyses to explore how caste, customary traditions, family honor, and patriarchal authority shape cinematic representations of gender. Such investigations could deepen scholarly understanding of the relationship between cultural identity, social hierarchy, and women's agency in Indonesian cinema.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the preparation of this article. I Gusti Agung Gede Artanegara, was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and manuscript preparation. The other authors contributed to the review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the preparation of this article.

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