

Literary Tourism: The Story of Ni Diah Tantri in the Ceiling of Kerta Gosa, Klungkung, Bali

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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The purpose of this study was to examine the narrative structures of the Ni Diah Tantri story, as well as the Hindu ideals it contains, and to determine whether it may be used to generate literary tourism in Klungkung Regency, Bali. The Ni Diah Tantri narrative, displayed on the ceiling of Kerta Gosa in the form of Kamasan puppet paintings, is a one-of-a-kind visual literary masterpiece of great cultural significance. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with procedures including literature review, visual observation, interviews with expert informants, and documentation. The findings revealed that the story of Ni Diah Tantri incorporates spiritual virtues like self-control, compassion, and loyalty, all of which are consistent with Hindu beliefs. This story can be used as a means of storytelling to enhance the appeal of cultural tourism in Klungkung when combined with a tourist literary strategy. In order to promote the transformation of literary works into a sustainable tourist destination branding force, this study recommends cross-sector collaboration between academics, tourism actors, and cultural conservationists.

INTRODUCTION

The need to explore meaning and cultural richness is a significant aspect of motivation to travel in modern tourism. Visitors are no longer content with visiting places, but desire to know the stories that lie behind every destination (Watson, 2006). Literary tourism offers one way of meeting this demand by relating literary works in textual, oral, and visual mediums of representation to narrative and reflective forms of tourism (Simanihuruk et al., 2022). Such a strategy puts local voices at the forefront of the attraction and provides the visiting culture with a level of (Xiang et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, in Indonesia, particularly, Bali, with such a rich classical literature heritage, the use of literature as a tourism tool is still found to be less than ideal (Juliana et al., 2023). Earlier researchers focused on the meaning of the text substance, the analysis of religious values, or the historical background of a literary work (Semadi, 2019; Sukmawirani, 2016). However, research that uses literary work as a strategic approach to creating narrative-type tourist destinations remains scarce. It reveals the existence of a conceptual and practical gap that must be closed through interdisciplinarity between literature, culture, and tourism studies (Putra & Pidada, 2023).

The value of such research is that this study attempts to elevate the narrative of *Ni Diah Tantri* not merely as a cultural object or repository of moral principles, but as a strategic amenity to build the identities and appeal of a tourist destination. This local tale is not only contained in the text of *kidung* or oral tradition, but it is also imagined in the image of *Kamasan-style wayang* paintings at the ceiling of *Kerta Gosa, Klungkung*. A special feature of this visualization is that it may be developed as a space-based tourism narrative that offers tourists an imaginative and educational experience through traditional visual arts.

Therefore, the study introduces a different perspective on the perception of local stories as the narrative infrastructure of a destination.

The main difference between this and other studies is that this study explores the synthesis of these three elements in a literary context, a visual context, and tourism strategy. Although other literatures typically divide the study into the literary content of a study and the use of tourism (Dionisio & Nisi, 2021; O'Connor & Kim, 2014; Qeidari et al., 2024), the present study attempts to combine the two by examining how visualized stories can serve as a story content to enhance visual literacy-based cultural tourism. In this study, the researcher also positions tourists as agents who can consume cultural values when they interact with local stories.

In light of this urgency, the current study seeks to investigate the narrative pattern of *Ni Diah Tantri*'s story and the *Hindu* teachings embedded in the story, as well as to determine how the story might be best used as material for the development of literary tourism in Klungkung Regency, Bali.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology with an interpretative-cultural framework. The primary purpose was to investigate the narrative pattern and religious ethos in *Ni Diah Tantri*'s classical narrative, as well as to assess its potential usage as a literary tourist resource in Bali's Klungkung Regency. This qualitative technique was chosen because it allowed for the interpretation of the story's meaning, its cultural function in society, and how it was shown in public space. The method was ideal for the examination of traditional narratives about social, cultural, and spatial environments.

The research was conducted at *Kerta Gosa*, a cultural heritage site in Klungkung Regency, Bali, where the ceiling is painted with *Kamasan*-style paintings portraying the story of *Ni Diah Tantri* graphically. The main objects were:

1. The story is presented through paintings on the ceiling.
2. *Kidung* and *Kekawin* manuscripts as original literary sources.
3. Locals' social or cultural interpretations of the story.

The following data in this study were acquired using three basic methods of triangulation: observation, document analysis, and in-depth interviews. The field observation was conducted at the site of the *Kerta Gosa* ceiling painting to see the flow of the narrative, style, and visual imagery employed, in addition to the cultural symbols, and was accompanied by photo documentation of the entire scene and comments. Document analysis entailed an assessment of *Kidung Tantri* manuscripts to determine the tale structure and values contained within them. Meanwhile, site managers were interviewed in a semi-structured format, transcribed, and thematically coded.

The primary tool of the study was the researcher, who was integrally involved in the stages of data collection, interpretation, and synthesis. To ensure validity, a triangulation of sources, including texts and paintings, interviews, and triangulated data, as well as the researcher's reflexivity to dynamics in the field, was utilized.

The process of data interpretation followed three steps: data reduction, which involved sieving related specifics in the observations, texts, and the interviews, only to retrieve the relevant information; data presentation, which was in terms of themes and illustrations; and testing the conclusion between the sources to verify the validity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Structure and Value in Ni Diah Tantri's Story

The *Ni Diah Tantri* story is one of the most important stories in Balinese literature. It comes from the *Tantri* stories, which are a localized version of the Indian *Pancatantra* story collection. The narrative is presented distinctively through a frame story where the central character, *Ni Diah Tantri*, narrates various tales, often featuring animal characters, to convey moral and ethical lessons. This technique not only makes the story more interesting, but it also works well as a rhetorical tool to sway other characters, especially King *Eswaryadala*.

1. Scene of Tantri Telling the Story to the King

Tantri is shown sitting cross-legged beside the king and narrating a story in one of the early panels. The king seems to be listening solemnly while reclining on a splendid bed. The frame story technique, in which the main narrative frames several fables *Tantri* tells to postpone her death, is reinforced in this scene. *Tantri's* proactive and vocal stance reflects the role of narrative as a vehicle for social change as well as the strength of women as moral and intellectual agents.



Figure 1. Scene of *Tantri* Telling the Story to the King

2. Fable Story: Buffalo as a Symbol of Devotion

The panels below show the buffalo character in different situations: being forced to carry a load, being burned alive, and finally being betrayed. *Tantri* uses this as part of an allegorical story to criticise the cruel ruler without saying so directly. The buffalo stands for the hard-working and loyal common people who are often let down by greedy elites. This picture shows structural injustice and makes people think about the importance of loyalty, devotion, and karma.



Figure 2. Fable Story: Buffalo as a Symbol of Devotion

3. Negotiation between Animals: A Critique of Power

In the other panel, a group of dogs is depicted speaking under a tree as they confront a creature with a wolf head. This scene presents a symbolic encounter between the weak who unite to engage the force of the powerful oppressors. The image conveys the message of togetherness, against lying, and how the voices of minorities are important when they are under oppression. The tale reveals that animals may also be wise, and thus *Tantri* animal tales are by no means meant to be simply entertaining to read; they are also tools to educate and reprove society.



Figure 3. Negotiation between Animals: A Critique of Power

4. Social Symbolism and Spirituality

The colors and each character in the painting are designed with symbolic significance: characters of higher status are depicted in graceful attire and positioned above, appearing less expressive, while animals or ordinary individuals are represented lower and more expressively. The depiction of fire, trees, and spiritual beings reflects the emotional pathway and spiritual consequences of human actions. For instance, fire symbolizes suffering or karma, while trees often serve as a source of contemplation or reflection. This highlights that Kamasan paintings functioned as visual narratives of ethics, effectively replacing written texts during the traditional era.



Figure 4. Social Symbolism and Spirituality

The ethical and moral dimensions of the *Ni Diah Tantri* narrative play a crucial role in understanding the important message conveyed through the story and its characters. This tale serves not only as entertainment but also as a means of reflection and character development. By presenting legendary figures and allegorical situations, readers are invited to reflect related to the essential values such as loyalty, justice, wisdom, and self-discipline. These values are illustrated through character transformations and the symbolic relationships between the characters. Several key values depicted in the *Ni Diah Tantri* story have been highlighted, along with descriptions and images that are mirrored in the plot.

Table 1. Values Contained in the Story of *Ni Diah Tantri*

Value	Description	Illustration in Story
Self-Control	Self-control in this context refers to the ability of a person, especially a leader, to restrain personal passions, anger, and desires for the sake of greater moral interests. This value is very important in the practice of leadership and social ethics.	King <i>Eswaryadlala</i> , who is initially portrayed as a despotic and impulsive ruler, undergoes a character transformation to become wiser after listening to the stories full of moral messages delivered by <i>Tantri</i> . This process of change shows how narrative and reflection can be a tool to shape ethical awareness.
Compassion and Devotion	This value reflects the sincere love and devotion of a child towards his parents, as well as the willingness to make sacrifices to maintain the honor of the family. In traditional Balinese society, this value is highly upheld as part of a child's moral obligation.	<i>Ni Diah Tantri</i> voluntarily agreed to marry King <i>Eswaryadala</i> to save her father, who was in a threatened position. This decision was not based on self-interest, but on a sense of responsibility and love for the family, which shows the integrity of <i>Tantri's</i> character.

Loyalty	Loyalty in this story is displayed in the form of obedience to superior orders and job responsibilities, even if it conflicts with personal interests or emotional values. This value reflects the moral dilemma often faced by individuals in hierarchical social systems.	Ki Patih Badeswaya, the father of <i>Ni Diah Tantri</i> , continued to carry out his duty to find an offering girl for the king, even though he finally had to give up his daughter. This attitude shows loyalty to his country and duty, even though it conflicts with his personal feelings as a father. This moral dilemma strengthens the complexity of the characters in the story.
Narrative Power and Female Intelligence	This value illustrates the ingenuity of <i>Tantri</i> , who uses her storytelling skills as a survival strategy. With narratives full of moral messages, she was able to influence and change the attitude of the ruler.	<i>Tantri</i> is depicted sitting cross-legged at the king's side, telling allegorical stories that made King <i>Eswaryadala</i> postpone his execution and eventually turn wise. Stories became a tool of salvation as well as social transformation.

These four central values reveal *Ni Diah Tantri* as not merely a work of entertainment, but one that contains ethical and moral messages and lessons, applicable both in the framework of traditional culture and regarding character education, embedded into the current discourse. The traditional usage of women as agents of change is also depicted in the story, where traditional Balinese literature places women ahead of gender stereotypes and able to contribute to the moral order of society.

Kamasan Painting as a Medium of Literary Visualization

Wayang Kamasan paintings that adorn the ceiling of *Bale Kerta Gosa* in Klungkung, Bali, have a significant role as a medium for narrative visualization in the context of literature and cultural education. The *Kamasan* style of painting is a classical Balinese art heritage originating from the village of Kamasan, Klungkung, which adapts the aesthetic form of shadow puppets with bold lines, natural coloring, and linear composition of narrative panels.

These paintings do not simply function as decorative elements, but rather as visual devices that represent and bring to life classical literary narratives, such as the story of *Tantri Kamandaka*. The style of presentation is serial and linear – similar to a storyboard or modern comic strip – which allows for a visual reading of the storyline. Each panel or plane on the ceiling depicts an important scene or episode, which together form a whole story sequence. For example, in the story of *Ni Diah Tantri*, scenes can be found such as when the character *Tantri* contemplates before telling the story, the moment she tells the fable story to the king, until the change in the king's character begins to appear.

The use of symbols and visual conventions is one of the strengths of *Kamasan* paintings since it is shown consistently. High social status figures are shown in a sitting cross-legged position on thrones or pedestals, and lower figures or animals are shown smaller with characteristic facial mannerisms. The symbolic use of color also occurs as the red

background is a frequent depiction of emotional or conflict actions, whereas the use of blue or green helps establish a calm or introspective mood.

This painting played an important role as a tool of cultural literacy transmitting moral and spiritual values and communicating them in visual language to the society which was still predominantly unable to access written documents. People could therefore learn literary and ethical teachings visually, which was universal and open to many groups of people.

Moreover, the presence of this painting in the context of the *Kerta Gosa* building, which was part of the royal court complex, also reinforces its educational and philosophical function. The courtroom is not only a place to punish lawbreakers, but also a space for ethical contemplation, where narratives such as *Tantri Kamandaka* convey the importance of self-control, justice, and wisdom. In other words, the paintings are part of an education strategy based on traditional visual arts.

By considering their visual, textual, and socio-ritual contexts, *Kamasan*-style paintings in *Kerta Gosa* can be positioned as an integrative form of literature, fine arts, and moral education. It becomes a medium for connecting oral literary values and aesthetic experiences that can be felt directly, as well as a means of instilling cultural values that are cross-generational.

Potential Development of Tourism Literature through *Ni Diah Tantri's* Stories

There is high potential for *Ni Diah Tantri's* story to be developed as a literary tourism product in Bali, in particular to support the idea of narrative-based tourism and local culture. Not only does this story have moral and educational values, but it is also directly linked with the aesthetics that are pertinent to *Kerta Gosa*. Thus, this story may be guided as the primary material in an interpretive tour based on visual, historical, and storytelling experiences.

Such an interpretive tour may be produced in various media channels: by training tour guides to perform the stories narratively, using location-based multimedia applications, which are presented in an interactive audio-visual form, and by delivering digital installations to historical sites, like *Kerta Gosa*. By doing this, tourists not only look at paintings as a source of beauty but also as a source of knowing Balinese cultural values in context.

Interview samples with the site managers in *Klungkung* revealed:

"The story on the Kerta Gosa ceiling is always questioned by many foreign tourists. They are stunned by details, but unfortunately, the coherent explanation is not available. They simply receive snippets of information as provided by their guides, and most of the time, it is just general information, without giving details about the complete story of Tantri." (SM1)

"They take an interest in what I say about Tantri, as soon as I tell a little more. One of the German tourists even stated that it sounded like their folktale. However, we are restricted. There is nothing official and visual to assist us in explaining things more clearly and sequentially." (SM2)

The above statement depicts the keen interest of tourists in cultural narratives, and this is evident in the absence of proper delivery systems. The story of *Ni Diah Tantri* was more like a decorative background that was not the primary focus of the tourist experience. Hence, repackaging of the storyline towards systematic, creative, and technology-based delivery is necessary. Some propositions regarding the *Kerta Gosa* regarding the development of literary tourism products based on the story of *Ni Diah Tantri* are:

- a. Digital Interpretation: Develop a QR code close to the painting panel so that when scanned, it will display (a) a synopsis of the story, (b) an explanation of the moral values, or (c) a short animation of the fable on the smartphones of the tourists.
- b. Thematic Tours: Create a special tour package of *Jelajah Fabel Kerta Gosa* led by a trained storyteller.
- c. Print Media: Design a small and colorful pocketbook or leaflet on the story of *Ni Diah Tantri* within *Kerta Gosa* as a matter of approach.
- d. Merchandise: Create educational gifts like illustrated children's storybooks, postcards, or t-shirts with fable characters from the *Kamasan* paintings

This needs the synergy of tourism, education and cultural preservations industries. The preservation of the heritage and commercialization in a sustainable way can be exploited through programs like cultural literacy tours, narrative training of tour guides, or teaching materials, e.g. based on *Tantri* stories in schools, as strategic options to preserve the heritage in a sustainable way.

Therefore, *Ni Diah Tantri* has the biggest potential to be declared as a narrative icon in the Balinese cultural tourism, particularly at the *Kerta Gosa* location, *Klungkung*. The narrative aspect of the *Wayang Kamasan* pictures does not merely add aesthetic value to the building aesthetics but also turns into a channel of spreading moral and spiritual messages that can be found within the classical Balinese literature. This strengthens the belief that no form of traditional visualization can ever be divorced from local literary values.

These results are consistent with the study of *Anoegrajekti et al. (2018)*, which demonstrates that cultural festivals like the “Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival” contribute to narrowing the gap between local heritage and the global tourist industry. This goes to highlight the role of the visual media and story in reinforcing the cultural values. Besides, *Khater et al. (2025)* pointed to how tour guide storytelling, involving the application of structural narratives, could enhance the experiences and satisfaction of tourists in the tourist villages of Bali, resulting in a more holistic tourism identity. This is a positive contribution towards the proposal of integrative and narrative guide training as revealed by the field interviews.

In the study by *Sari et al. (2024)* about *Jatiluwih*, it concluded that storytelling behavior and revisit intention can be activated by a memorable tourism experience. This is also applicable as *Ni Diah Tantri* creates an emotional, as well as aesthetic, story that can also leave a deep impression on visitors. Primarily, assisting individual digital storytelling is also effective technically. *Kasemsarn & Nickpour (2025)* have demonstrated the effectiveness of story-based digital experiences in generating higher purchase intention and engagement of tourists to the promoted experience in cultural tourism. This solidifies the concept of adding multimedia to *Kerta Gosa*, e.g., location-based audio tours or interactive apps, to precisely present the story of *Tantri*.

Zandi (2023) who studied on the rebirth of the Silk Road through AR/VR in cultural tourism illustrates that the use of immersive technology increases the level of immersion by embedding contextualized narratives. Even though the scenario is unusual, the interactive digital solution can be viewed as a unique and innovative method to enrich *Kerta Gosa* tourism.

This technique combines oral narrative offered by skilled guides, interactive digital media, and a visual background provided by *Kamasan paintings*, resulting in a cultural storytelling-based tourism that has gained international recognition. This is based on the concept that local culture may be made and represented sustainably if it is handled in an effective, participatory presentation style with accompanying technology. This concept not only improves the visitor experience, but it also allows local communities and other cultural agents to stay current and alive in the global tourist market.

Future research may focus on developing technology-assisted interpretative media, such as augmented reality smartphone applications or audio-visual tour guides, to improve the presentation of *Ni Diah Tantri's* story in real time at the *Kerta Gosa* location. A participatory ethnographic technique can also be used to grasp the implications of this story, as there are local cultural actors, such as *Kamasan* painters and tour guides, whose perspectives can be relevant. In addition, a quantitative and qualitative investigation of how tourists reacted to the *Tantri* narrative will provide insight into the effectiveness of delivering moral values through cultural tourism. The study's scope can also be expanded by doing comparative site studies on other sites in Southeast Asia that have used visual narrative in traditional ways. The variability of findings with previous research, such as tourists' unfamiliarity with moral implications in *Kamasan* paintings, can be explained by the absence of a vocal narrative associated with the representations. This highlights the need for a new strategy that incorporates digital media and localized leadership of local tour guides, as cultural discourse actors and elements.

CONCLUSION

The story of *Ni Diah Tantri*, as shown in the *Kamasan* paintings on the ceiling of *Bale Kerta Gosa*, is more than just an artistic remnant; it is also a narrative heritage that has great potential for the development of local culture-based literary tourism. This study concludes that the moral qualities included in the story can be replicated by repackaging it using interpretive, visual, and digital strategies, thereby enriching the visitor experience. The relevance of such a reconstruction of the story demonstrates that classical literature is more than just a historical object, but it can also be used as a pedagogical and reflective tool, as well as a tourist attraction in modern society.

With the combination of fine arts, the strength that fables and narrative technology serve, and the feature of a touristic attraction, *Kerta Gosa* has the potential to be a parade of cultural destination development that is not only intellectually stimulating but also emotionally stirring. The recognition that local community participation is critical, because it strengthens the position that cultural preservation must be inclusive and sustainable. As a result, *Ni Diah Tantri* is more than just an old story; it stands at the crossroads of a wise past and a promising tourism future.

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