



Storytelling as a Medium of Patriarchy Critique: A Narrative Analysis of Women's Subordination, Silencing, and Objectification in Nyai Gowok

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Abstract

This study examines the storytelling elements in the novel *Nyai Gowok* through narrative analysis, focusing on how the narrative portrays women as victims of patriarchy. The novel is significant because it depicts women's lives in a traditional Javanese setting where gender roles are shaped by unequal power relations. Although previous studies have explored the novel's cultural and historical aspects, few have analyzed how storytelling techniques convey women's oppression. This study addresses that gap by examining how narrative elements function as a medium of patriarchy critique. The research analyzes plot, characterization, setting, point of view, and symbolic motifs to understand how gender roles and power relations are constructed and maintained. Using storytelling theory and patriarchy as the main analytical framework, the study explores how conflict development, characterization patterns, and symbolism shape the reader's perception of the female protagonist. The findings show that the protagonist is portrayed as an object of desire, a silenced voice, and a subordinate figure whose identity is largely defined by male authority and social expectations. *Nyai Gowok*'s experiences reflect the normalization of unequal power relations and the internalization of patriarchy values. However, the narrative also presents subtle forms of resistance that challenge dominant gender norms. Data were collected through close reading of the text. This study contributes to gender and literary studies by showing how narrative structure and symbolism reveal persistence of patriarchy and possibility of resistance in culturally rooted literary texts.

Keywords: Narrative analysis; Novel *Nyai Gowok*; Patriarchy; Storytelling

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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been an essential medium for conveying cultural values, social norms, and collective memory across generations. Storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life- lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights (Serrat, 2008). Storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping how characters are represented and how meaning is constructed within a narrative. According to Bruner (1991), storytelling functions as a cultural tool through which individuals and societies make sense of human experience, shaping identity and moral understanding. Chatman (1978) emphasizes that narrative structure determines how readers perceive characters, as the sequence of events and perspective guide emotional and ethical responses. Similarly, Bal (1997) argues that storytelling not only conveys actions but also reveals the ideological framework that defines characters' roles within social hierarchies.

From a linguistic standpoint, Toolan (2001) suggests that storytelling mediates between narrator and audience, creating interpretive spaces where readers engage with the

complexity of character motivations and voice. Furthermore, Riessman (2008) highlights that narratives are performative acts that construct reality, and through storytelling, authors and narrators both reflect and critique cultural norms—especially those related to gender and power. In literary studies, therefore, storytelling is not merely a technique of narration but a means of representing identity, ideology, and resistance through the depiction of characters and their lived experiences. In literature, stories not only entertain but also reflect societal structures and ideologies. Traditional narratives, such as the novel *Nyai Gowok* written by Sardjono (2014), offer rich material to analyze the intersection between culture, gender, and power. In this story, women are often positioned within a framework that limits their agency, reflecting the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms.

The Gowok tradition is an ancient Javanese practice in which a woman was responsible for teaching young men about the female body, love, and desire prior to marriage. This tradition is believed to have originated from Chinese culture. A novel is an extended narrative about human life that may be either fictional or non-fictional (Agustina, 2020). In the novel *Nyai Gowok*, the story revolves around Bagus Sasongko, a young man placed under the care of Nyai Lindri, a gowok, who is tasked with guiding him into adulthood. Patriarchy, defined as a system of social organization in which men hold dominant power over women, is commonly reflected in literature through the depiction of women as passive, dependent, or subordinate figures (Walby, 1990). Analyzing narratives through this lens enables researchers to uncover how cultural stories reinforce or challenge gender hierarchies. The novel *Nyai Gowok* exemplifies these dynamics by portraying female characters who experience subordination and silencing within social and cultural contexts.

This study employs narrative analysis to examine the story's structure, characterizations, and symbolic motifs, aiming to reveal how storytelling reflects patriarchy ideology. By focusing on the narrative elements, the research seeks to explore both the reproduction of gendered power relations and the potential for critical reflection embedded in the story. This approach aligns with the view that narratives construct social meaning while simultaneously offering insights into cultural critique (Bruner, 1991). The significance of this study lies in its ability to connect literary analysis with gender studies, providing a framework for understanding how traditional stories like *Nyai Gowok* can inform contemporary discussions on women's representation, social inequality, and cultural transformation. By examining storytelling through narrative analysis, the study highlights the dual function of literature as both a mirror of social reality and a medium for cultural reflection and critique.

Some previous studies have examined the novel *Nyai Gowok* from different perspectives. Herawati et al. (2025) analyzed women's attitudes toward exploitation, while Tuminih (2025) explored the ambivalence between submission and empowerment, showing the complex position of women within the prevailing social structure. Nurhidayatulloh (2024) investigated the formation of masculine gender identity in the main character, emphasizing performative gender, social practice, representation, and power structures. Yono (2020) focused on personification and its stylistic function in the novel. In addition, other studies have discussed the stereotyped and subordinate position of women in Javanese society (Megawati et al., 2025; Darni et al., 2023; Agustina, 2021, 2024a, 2024b), as well as the broader concept of patriarchy and its role in producing gender inequality and violence (Agustina, 2023; Sari & Hayati, 2023; Priyatna, 2018). Although these studies provide valuable insights into exploitation, gender identity, women's social positions, and figurative language, they do not specifically examine how storytelling elements—such as plot structure, characterization, point of view, and symbolic motifs—construct and communicate patriarchal oppression. This study addresses that gap by analyzing storytelling as a narrative strategy that not only represents women's

subordination, silencing, and objectification but also functions as a medium of patriarchal critique.

Among the previous studies, the novelty of this research lies in its focus on how storytelling elements in the novel *Nyai Gowok* not only represent but also construct and critique patriarchy ideology. Rather than merely identifying the presence of patriarchy, this study examines how plot structure, characterization, point of view, and symbolic motifs shape the reader's understanding of gender roles and unequal power relations. Through these narrative strategies, the novel portrays women as figures with limited agency whose voices are silenced, whose bodies are objectified, and whose identities are subordinated within a male-dominated social order. At the same time, storytelling functions as a critical medium that exposes and questions the normalization of patriarchal values in Javanese society.

Based on this focus, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do narrative structures in *Nyai Gowok* construct and reflect patriarchy ideology? (2) How does storytelling represent women's limited agency through subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression? and (3) How do narrative techniques function as a medium for cultural reflection and critical examination of gender inequality?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs narrative analysis to explore how storytelling in *Nyai Gowok* reflects women as victims of patriarchy. Narrative analysis focuses on understanding the structure, content, and meaning of stories, emphasizing how narratives construct social realities and cultural values. This method allows an in-depth examination of how storytelling shapes the representation of gender roles and power relations. The research is qualitative and interpretive (Creswell & Poth, 2018), aiming to analyze the narrative elements of *Nyai Gowok* in the context of patriarchy ideology. The study combines storytelling theory to examine narrative techniques with the concept of patriarchy to interpret the representation of women within the story. The data sources consist of the primary that is the novel *Nyai Gowok*, including plot, characters, dialogues, and symbolic motifs; and the secondary data are the scholarly books, journal articles, and previous research related to storytelling, narrative theory, patriarchy, and gender representation in literature.

This study employs a narrative analysis approach to explore how storytelling serves as a medium to reveal the subordination of women within a patriarchy framework. The analysis was conducted in three interrelated stages following Riessman's (2008) model of narrative inquiry. The first stage, Structural Analysis, examines the narrative components of the novel—such as plot progression, sequence of events, character roles, and story arcs—to uncover how the storyline constructs gender relations. Through this stage, the writer identifies how the narrative structure situates women's experiences in relation to male dominance and authority. The second stage, Thematic Analysis, focuses on recurring themes such as women's subordination, silencing, and objectification. These themes reveal the underlying patterns of gender inequality and expose the social and cultural mechanisms that sustain patriarchy control within Javanese society as depicted in *Nyai Gowok*. Finally, the Interpretive Analysis applies the concept of patriarchy to interpret how these narrative elements and themes reinforce or challenge gender hierarchies. This stage enables a deeper understanding of how the novel's storytelling both mirrors and critiques the patriarchy norms that position women as victims of systemic oppression. By integrating structural, thematic, and interpretive perspectives, this study not only highlights the literary strategies used to represent women's marginalization but also demonstrates how storytelling functions as a form of cultural resistance and reflection on gendered realities in Indonesian society.

The data collection procedure was carried out through several systematic steps to ensure that the analysis was comprehensive and reliable. First, the novel *Nyai Gowok* was read repeatedly and thoroughly to gain a deep understanding of its storyline, characters, and socio-cultural context. During these close readings, the researchers identified and recorded textual evidence related to storytelling elements and patriarchy representation. The selected data included words, dialogues, narrative descriptions, scenes, symbolic motifs, and significant events that reflected women's subordination, silencing, objectification, and limited agency. Each relevant excerpt was then categorized according to narrative aspects such as plot, characterization, point of view, setting, and symbolism. In addition to the primary text, supporting data were collected through library research. Relevant books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies on storytelling, narrative theory, gender studies, and patriarchy were gathered to establish the theoretical framework and provide analytical support. All collected materials were organized and reviewed systematically to ensure that the interpretation was grounded in both textual evidence and scholarly references. This step-by-step procedure enhances the transparency and credibility of the literary analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study investigate the narrative the women's subordination, silencing, and objectification in *Nyai Gowok* through the storytelling as a Medium of Patriarchy Critique. The first stage done by the researchers is discussing the narrative structures in *Nyai Gowok* construct and reflect patriarchy ideology. The second stage is analyzing the storytelling which represent women's limited agency through subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression. The last stage is analyzing the narrative techniques function as a medium for cultural reflection and critical examination of gender inequality.

Narrative Structure in Nyai Gowok

The narrative of *Nyai Gowok* follows a traditional Javanese storytelling structure that combines myth, moral lessons, and social commentary. Through narrative analysis, it is evident that the story centers on the experiences of the female protagonist, whose actions and decisions are largely constrained by male authority and societal norms. The plot's progression—from introduction, conflict, to resolution—illustrates how patriarchal systems shape women's lives, reinforcing gender hierarchies and social expectations.

The narrative structure of *Nyai Gowok* can be examined through the lens of narrative analysis, focusing on plot progression, character functions, and cultural symbolism. Using a structuralist approach inspired by Propp's narrative functions (1968) and Todorov's narrative model (1977), the story reveals a sequence that both reflects and reinforces patriarchal ideology.

Orientation (Exposition)

The story begins by introducing *Nyai Gowok*, a woman named *Nyai Lindri* who serves as a teacher of sexuality for young aristocratic men, *Bagus Sasongko*. This orientation sets the tone for the narrative: the woman is positioned not as an autonomous subject but as a facilitator of male desire and fulfillment. From the outset, the social context already frames *Nyai Gowok*'s role as existing within the boundaries of patriarchy, where her value is tied to men's needs.

Rising Action (Conflict Development)

As the narrative unfolds, *Nyai Gowok* becomes involved in relationships that highlight her vulnerability. The conflicts often arise from her entanglement with men of power, illustrating the tension between personal agency and societal expectations. Here,

narrative analysis identifies the use of binary oppositions—male dominance versus female subordination, desire versus morality—which shape the cultural message of the story.

Climax (Turning Point)

The climax often centers on Nyai Lindri struggles when her role as a woman collides with moral, social, or political forces. At this point, the story portrays her as both powerful (due to her knowledge and influence) and powerless (due to social constraints). This paradox reflects the ambivalence of women's position in patriarchal narratives: they may hold symbolic authority but remain structurally subordinate.

Falling Action (Consequences)

Following the climax, the narrative typically demonstrates how Nyai Lindri decisions are constrained by external forces. The consequences reinforce the notion that women who step outside traditional roles risk punishment, marginalization, or loss of dignity. The story naturalizes patriarchal values by embedding them into the cause-and-effect structure of the plot.

Resolution (Closure)

The resolution often reestablishes patriarchal order, positioning Nyai Lindri within the expected cultural framework: a woman defined by her relation to men and society's moral codes. Even when she exhibits strength or wisdom, the closure underscores the dominance of patriarchal ideology, emphasizing that women's agency remains limited.

Storytelling portrays women as victims of subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression

Set in Javanese society in 1955, Nyai Gowok offers a vivid representation of women working as Gowok, revealing how female figures are marginalized and perceived as subordinate to men. The novel highlights the structural inequalities that confine women to inferior positions within various social spheres, such as roles, functions, and status. These inequalities stem from entrenched cultural and social stereotypes that associate domestic responsibilities with women and public authority with men. In line with the findings of Agustina (2024a, 2024b), this study further underscores how women are often compelled to conform to societal constraints, leaving them with limited agency to resist the oppressive systems surrounding them.

Characterization of Women

Analysis reveals that women in Nyai Gowok are primarily represented in relation to men, such as objects of desire, caregivers, or moral exemplars. The protagonist's limited autonomy and dependency highlight systemic subordination, consistent with the concept of patriarchy. This representation demonstrates how narrative techniques construct women's roles and perpetuate societal norms that confine female agency.

Themes of Subordination, Silencing, Objectification, and Symbolic Oppression

Thematic analysis identifies recurring motifs of subordination and silencing, showing that storytelling portrays women as victims of subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression. Key events reveal the protagonist's limited decision-making power and her marginal position within the social environment. These patterns demonstrate how storytelling embeds patriarchy ideology into plot and character development, normalizing women's subordinate status and reinforcing unequal power relations.

In the text, Nyai Lindri is depicted as a Javanese woman who passively accepts and fulfills her designated role as a Gowok. A Gowok is portrayed as a woman who serves as a sexual and social companion for young Javanese men, particularly those from noble or aristocratic backgrounds. Her primary responsibility is to educate and prepare young

men for marriage, not only by introducing them to sexual experience but also by teaching manners, etiquette, and emotional maturity expected in traditional Javanese society. Thus, the role of the Gowok extends beyond physical intimacy to include cultural transmission, socialization, and moral guidance within a patriarchal system.

Despite this seemingly respected social function, the position of the Gowok reflects the exploitation and objectification of women. Nyai Lindri's body becomes a symbolic site where patriarchy values are enacted and sustained, as her worth is defined by her ability to satisfy male desires and fulfill expectations imposed by a male-dominated culture. Her limited agency and constrained voice illustrate symbolic oppression, in which women are culturally valued only insofar as they serve men's interests. Through this portrayal, the novel critiques the patriarchy system that commodifies women's bodies while disguising such exploitation as a legitimate cultural and educational practice. Overall, the portrayal of Nyai Lindri demonstrates how storytelling constructs women as victims of subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression within a patriarchy cultural system.

Symbolism and Cultural Meaning

Symbolic motifs within the narrative, such as specific objects, settings, and dialogues, carry implicit messages about women's roles and societal expectations. These symbols reinforce the patriarchal order by portraying women's struggles as naturalized experiences. Narrative analysis highlights that these cultural symbols function both as mirrors of social reality and as mechanisms to transmit ideological values across generations.

In Nyai Gowok, the narrative use of objects and settings vividly reflects the patriarchy culture embedded within Javanese society. The story unfolds in traditional Javanese spaces such as aristocratic homes, where the physical layout subtly encodes gender hierarchy. The pendopo (front pavilion) represents the male domain of authority and social interaction, while the dalem (inner quarters) confines women to domesticity and obedience. Likewise, cultural objects like the kebaya and selendang signify the ideals of modesty and refinement imposed upon women. Through these symbols, the novel reveals how material culture reinforces the expectation that Javanese women remain graceful, submissive, and devoted to male power.

The broader setting of the novel also mirrors the social and ideological structures of mid-twentieth-century Java, where patriarchy is intertwined with class and tradition. The pesanggrahan, a secluded place where young men are educated by a Gowok, becomes a metaphor for institutionalized gender inequality disguised as moral and cultural instruction. Within these spaces, male dominance is normalized and female roles are reduced to instruments of cultural continuity. By embedding patriarchy values into the environment and material objects, the narrative exposes how tradition legitimizes women's subordination. Ultimately, the spatial and symbolic design of Nyai Gowok serves as a critique of Javanese patriarchy, revealing how everyday settings perpetuate unequal gender relations under the veneer of cultural harmony.

Storytelling as Cultural Reflection and Critique in Nyai Gowok

Despite reinforcing patriarchy, the story also offers space for reflection. By presenting the protagonist's struggles and constraints, the narrative implicitly invites readers to question the fairness of gendered social structures. Storytelling thus operates on dual levels: it reproduces existing norms while also providing a platform for critical reflection and potential cultural critique.

Through narrative analysis, it is clear that Nyai Gowok serves both as a cultural artifact reflecting patriarchal structures and as a medium for examining gender inequality. Structural elements, thematic patterns, and symbolic motifs reveal how storytelling

constructs meaning and social norms. At the same time, the story allows audiences to engage critically with these norms, highlighting the dual function of traditional narratives as both mirrors and tools for cultural reflection and potential transformation.

In Nyai Gowok, storytelling functions not only as a medium for narrative entertainment but also as a lens for reflecting social realities and critiquing patriarchy structures that shape women's lives. Through the narrative, the experiences of women—particularly those marginalized or victimized—are brought to the forefront, allowing readers and audiences to engage critically with social norms and gendered power relations.

Storytelling as Reflection

Storytelling in Nyai Gowok serves as a mirror to women lived experiences within a patriarchy society. Several dimensions of reflection can be identified:

Personal Reflection of Female Character

The protagonist, Nyai Lindri, embodies the struggles and resilience of women constrained by social norms, familial expectations, and male dominance. Through her experiences, the narrative explores the psychological, emotional, and social challenges faced by women. This reflective element allows the audience to understand the internal world of female characters and empathize with their plight.

Cultural and Social Reflection

The story highlights cultural practices, societal expectations, and historical conditions that perpetuate gender inequality. Through storytelling, traditional customs, gender roles, and social hierarchies are examined critically, showing how they shape women's opportunities, choices, and freedoms.

Invitation to Ponder and Relate

By presenting the struggles of women in vivid narrative form, the story encourages the audience to reflect on the continuity of patriarchal norms in contemporary society. It bridges historical or fictional experiences with real-world gender issues, creating a space for contemplation and awareness.

Storytelling as Critique

Beyond reflecting reality, Nyai Gowok employs storytelling to challenge patriarchal norms and question societal structures:

Critique of Gender Inequality

The narrative exposes the systemic oppression and marginalization of women. By illustrating how female characters are limited by male authority or societal expectations, the story critiques the injustice inherent in patriarchal societies. It is in line with Butler (1991), gender is not an innate or fixed identity but a performative act — a social construct produced and reproduced through repeated behaviors, discourses, and cultural norms.

Building on Butler's (1991) concept of gender performativity, the narrative in Nyai Gowok reveals how women's identities are shaped through continuous reinforcement of cultural expectations rather than personal autonomy. Female characters such as Nyai Lindri embody the gendered roles imposed by Javanese patriarchal culture, where obedience, modesty, and servitude are considered moral virtues. These behaviors are not expressions of innate femininity but performances dictated by social norms that sustain male dominance. Through repetition of these acts, the novel illustrates how patriarchy constructs womanhood as a submissive identity, while simultaneously legitimizing men's authority as natural and unquestionable. The narrative thus becomes a space for unveiling the performative mechanisms through which inequality is normalized within the cultural fabric of society.

Moreover, the text employs storytelling as a form of cultural critique, exposing the contradictions within patriarchal values that claim to “protect” women while actually restricting their agency. The story underscores how women internalize and reproduce their subjugation through compliance with traditional expectations. Yet, through subtle narrative strategies—such as irony, symbolic objects, and contrasting character perspectives—the novel also gestures toward moments of resistance and awareness. These narrative choices invite readers to question the authenticity of gender roles and to recognize the cultural artifice behind women’s marginalization. In doing so, *Nyai Gowok* not only mirrors the gendered power imbalance of Javanese society but also challenges it by revealing that the patriarchal order is a social performance that can be disrupted, reinterpreted, and transformed.

Empowering Alternative Perspectives

Storytelling provides a platform for women’s voices to be heard. Through *Nyai Lindri* as a *Gowok* perspective, audiences gain insight into experiences often silenced or overlooked, which serves as a subtle yet powerful critique of social hierarchies and gender bias. By centering *Nyai Lindri*’s perspective, *Nyai Gowok* reclaims narrative space traditionally dominated by male voices and authority. Her storytelling becomes a means of redefining agency within the constraints of patriarchal culture. Although her position as a *Gowok* appears subordinate, the narrative reframes her experiences as a form of lived knowledge and moral reflection. Through her voice, readers are exposed to the complexities of desire, duty, and self-awareness that challenge the simplistic portrayal of women as passive subjects. As Cixous (1976) asserts, writing from a woman’s perspective is itself an act of resistance—a reclaiming of language and meaning from patriarchal discourse. In this sense, *Nyai Lindri*’s narrative presence embodies an alternative epistemology, one that values emotional depth and lived experience as sources of truth.

Furthermore, storytelling in *Nyai Gowok* functions as a transformative discourse, allowing women’s stories to transcend silence and invisibility. The act of narration itself destabilizes hierarchical power relations, turning the traditionally objectified woman into a subject capable of reflection and interpretation. This narrative shift aligns with Spivak’s (1988) notion of “speaking-subjects,” where marginalized women articulate their realities despite systemic silencing. Through this lens, *Nyai Lindri*’s account is not only personal but also political—it confronts the dominant ideology that defines women’s value through their service to men. By offering a space for empathy and introspection, storytelling becomes both a mode of survival and a subtle form of rebellion.

Subversion through Narrative Structure

The plot, conflicts, and resolution of the story reflect resistance to patriarchal authority. The story may use irony, tragedy, or symbolic events to reveal contradictions in social norms, inviting readers to question and critically evaluate traditional practices. The subversion of patriarchal ideology in *Nyai Gowok* is also embedded within the narrative’s structural design. The interplay of plot, conflict, and resolution reflects a deliberate resistance to the closure typical of moralistic or patriarchal storytelling. The text employs irony and symbolic events to reveal contradictions within Javanese social norms, inviting readers to reevaluate the legitimacy of gendered hierarchies. As Genette (1980) observes, narrative structure can serve as critique, and *Nyai Gowok* uses shifts in time, tone, and perspective to expose the tension between cultural ideals and lived realities. What seems to be a conventional moral story gradually unfolds as a commentary on domination, revealing how cultural refinement and virtue can be complicit in maintaining oppression.

Moreover, the novel’s ending resists narrative resolution, a strategy that disrupts the notion of harmony central to patriarchal ideology. Rather than restoring social order, the text leaves the reader in a state of reflection and unease, symbolizing the unresolved

condition of women's struggle for autonomy. This open-endedness aligns with Hutcheon's (1989) idea of metafictional resistance, where narratives question their own ideological foundations. Through this technique, Nyai Gowok dismantles the illusion of cultural stability and exposes the constructed nature of patriarchal discourse. The story thus uses its very form as a means of critique—transforming narrative structure into an act of subversion that challenges both literary convention and social hierarchy.

Mechanisms of Reflection and Critique in Nyai Gowok

Characterization

Female characters are crafted to reveal both vulnerability and agency, reflecting real societal pressures while highlighting possibilities for resistance or resilience.

Conflict and Struggle

Conflicts—between Nyai Lindri and male authority figures or societal expectations, Bagus Sasongko—serve as narrative devices that expose systemic oppression.

Symbolism and Cultural References

Traditional Javanese elements, cultural rituals, and local settings symbolize the broader patriarchal context, allowing the story to critique societal structures implicitly.

Narrative Voice

The use of a narrator or focalization through the female perspective strengthens the reflective and critical dimensions of the story, giving audiences direct access to the emotional and cognitive world of women under patriarchy.

Significance in Literary and Social Contexts

By combining reflection and critique, Nyai Gowok accomplishes multiple objectives: First, the novel educates audiences about the historical and cultural dimensions of women's oppression. Secondly, it fosters empathy and understanding toward women's struggles. The next, it challenges readers to reconsider entrenched gender norms and think critically about ongoing patriarchal structures in society. In summary, storytelling in Nyai Gowok operates as both a mirror of women lived realities and a tool for social critique, allowing literature to function as a site of reflection, awareness, and empowerment. The story not only portrays women as victims of patriarchy but also encourages critical dialogue about gender injustice and societal transformation.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that storytelling in the novel Nyai Gowok functions not only as a narrative device but also as a cultural mechanism that constructs, normalizes, and critiques patriarchal ideology. Through plot structure, characterization, setting, point of view, and symbolic motifs, the novel portrays women as subjects whose identities are shaped by unequal gender relations. These findings confirm that literary narratives are not neutral representations of reality; rather, they actively organize social meanings and shape readers' understanding of gender and power.

The narrative structure reveals a recurring pattern in which the female protagonist, Nyai Lindri, is introduced within a social order that defines her value in relation to male needs. The orientation establishes her role as a Gowok, a woman entrusted with educating young men in sexuality and social conduct. Although this role appears culturally respected, the subsequent conflicts show that her authority remains conditional and subordinate. This pattern supports Todorov's (1977) theory that narrative progression often restores social order. In Nyai Gowok, however, the restored order reinforces patriarchal control and limits women's autonomy.

The characterization of Nyai Lindri further demonstrates how women are represented as both knowledgeable and constrained. She possesses experience and

emotional intelligence, yet her identity is defined by her usefulness to men. This paradox reflects Butler's (1991) concept of gender performativity, which explains that femininity is produced through repeated social acts rather than biological destiny. The findings indicate that the novel constructs women's subordination as a socially reproduced condition. In addition, the themes of silencing and limited agency are also central to the narrative. Important decisions affecting Nyai Lindri are shaped by male authority, social expectations, and moral judgments. Her voice is present, but her capacity to alter her circumstances remains restricted. This finding resonates with Spivak's (1988) argument that marginalized women may speak, yet their voices remain constrained within dominant ideological structures.

The symbolic analysis strengthens this interpretation. Traditional spaces such as the pendopo, dalem, and pesanggrahan, as well as objects such as the kebaya and selendang, encode gender hierarchy and normalize expectations of female obedience and domesticity. These findings support Genette's (1980) view that narrative form and symbolic arrangements contribute significantly to ideological meaning. At the same time, the study reveals that storytelling in Nyai Gowok contains a critical dimension. By foregrounding Nyai Lindri's emotional struggles and exposing contradictions within cultural traditions, the narrative encourages readers to question patriarchal values. This supports Cixous's (1976) argument that women's narratives can reclaim discursive space and challenge dominant representations.

The present findings both support and extend previous studies on Nyai Gowok. Herawati et al. (2025) and Tuminih (2025) demonstrate that women experience exploitation and occupy an ambivalent position between submission and empowerment. The current study supports these conclusions by showing that such conditions are systematically constructed through narrative structure and characterization. Nurhidayatulloh (2024) emphasizes the formation of masculine identity through social performance and power relations. This study extends that perspective by revealing how storytelling simultaneously shapes feminine identity as subordinate and constrained. Yono (2020) focuses on personification as a stylistic feature, while the present research broadens the analysis by examining symbolism as an ideological mechanism that naturalizes gender inequality.

The findings also reinforce broader studies on women's stereotypes and subordination in Javanese society (Megawati et al., 2025; Darni et al., 2023; Agustina, 2021, 2024a, 2024b). However, unlike these studies, which primarily address social and cultural conditions, the present study demonstrates how literary techniques transform those conditions into a coherent narrative critique. Similarly, while Agustina (2023), Sari and Hayati (2023), and Priyatna (2018) conceptualize patriarchy as a system of male dominance, this study shows how such dominance is embedded in narrative design and communicated through storytelling.

Thus, the present study does not challenge earlier findings; rather, it integrates and extends them by highlighting storytelling as the mechanism through which patriarchal ideology is represented, maintained, and questioned. Plot, characterization, and symbolism are shown to be not merely aesthetic devices but narrative strategies that expose women's subordination, silencing, objectification, and symbolic oppression. In broader terms, this study confirms that literature serves as both a mirror of social realities and a tool for ideological reflection. The representation of women in Nyai Gowok reflects historical and cultural conditions in Javanese society, while the narrative's critical perspective invites readers to reconsider those conditions. Storytelling therefore emerges as a powerful medium for exposing gender injustice and imagining alternative understandings of women's roles and agency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that storytelling in the novel *Nyai Gowok* functions as both a representation of patriarchy social realities and a medium for critiquing gender inequality. Through narrative analysis, the study demonstrates that plot structure, characterization, and symbolic motifs systematically construct women as objects of desire, silenced voices, and subordinate figures with limited agency. At the same time, these storytelling elements expose the contradictions within patriarchal culture and invite readers to question the normalization of women's marginalization. The main contribution of this study lies in showing that storytelling does not merely depict patriarchy; it actively organizes and communicates patriarchal ideology while also creating space for cultural resistance and critical reflection.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to the analysis of a single literary work and is interpreted through the specific theoretical frameworks of narrative analysis and patriarchy. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian literary texts or all representations of women in traditional narratives. Future research may compare *Nyai Gowok* with other novels, oral traditions, or cultural texts to examine how storytelling functions across different contexts and genres. This study implies that storytelling is an important analytical lens for literary and gender studies because it reveals how narrative techniques can both reproduce women's subordination and provide subtle forms of resistance to dominant cultural ideologies.

RECOMMENDATION

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a more comprehensive exploration of *Nyai Gowok* and other literary works that portray women's experiences within patriarchy societies. They may compare *Nyai Gowok* with other novels, oral traditions, or cultural texts to examine how storytelling functions across different contexts and genres. This study implies that storytelling is an important analytical lens for literary and gender studies because it reveals how narrative techniques can both reproduce women's subordination and provide subtle forms of resistance to dominant cultural ideologies. Moreover, it would be valuable to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives—such as feminist literary criticism, cultural studies, or sociological analysis—to deepen the understanding of how patriarchy ideology shapes women's identities and voices in literature. Future researchers might also analyze the role of language, symbolism, and narrative structure in reinforcing or challenging gender hierarchies. By expanding the scope of analysis and incorporating diverse methodologies, subsequent research can contribute to a more nuanced and critical discourse on gender representation, narrative power, and the socio-cultural implications of patriarchy in Indonesian literature.

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