

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Women's representation in Sundanese folklore: A local feminist approach to gender literacy

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Structural gender inequality persists in Sundanese society despite the cultural philosophy of *silih asah*, *silih asih*, and *silih asuh*, while folklore continues to transmit gender norms across generations. However, studies examining Sundanese folklore through a local feminist perspective to support gender literacy remain limited. This study investigates patterns of women's representation, identifies the local feminist values embedded in four Sundanese folktales (*Sangkuriang*, *Lutung Kasarung*, *Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri*, and *Nyi Anteh*), and explores their potential contribution to gender-literacy learning within Indonesia's Independent Curriculum. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study integrates content and thematic analysis through three coding stages (open coding, focused coding, and thematic synthesis) with credibility enhanced by source triangulation and multi-coder verification. The findings reveal three dialectically interconnected models of women's representation: domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered, and ambivalent figures. These representations embody four interrelated local feminist values: inner fortitude, moral integrity, relational wisdom, and non-confrontational cultural resistance. The study argues that these values constitute an indigenous feminist epistemology that complements and extends dominant Western feminist frameworks by emphasizing culturally embedded forms of agency and resistance. Practically, the findings demonstrate the pedagogical potential of Sundanese folklore as culturally responsive learning materials for fostering students' critical gender literacy, although further classroom-based intervention studies are needed to evaluate their instructional effectiveness.

**Keywords:** cultural resistance; gender literacy; local feminism; sundanese folklore; women's representation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality remains one of the most contested issues in contemporary Indonesian society, particularly within communities that continue to uphold strong cultural traditions. Despite constitutional guarantees and national policies promoting equal rights, women in many regions continue to experience significant inequalities in social roles, decision-making power, and cultural representation. (Pahlevi & Rahim, 2023). Within Sundanese society, which is philosophically grounded in the values of *silih asah*, *silih asih*, *silih asuh* a triadic ethic of mutual learning, mutual affection, and mutual care that recent scholarship has reframed as a decolonial, relational foundation for community life rather than a merely ornamental cultural slogan (Dewi et al., 2025) this gender paradox persists: women are disproportionately positioned within the domestic sphere, while men continue to dominate public and institutional decision-making, a pattern that recent psychological research links to the continuing normative force of traditional Sundanese belief systems on everyday social relations (Ibad et al., 2026).

Such structural inequality is not incidental but is continuously reproduced through cultural media, one of the most influential of which is folklore, functioning as a living cultural archive that transmits gender norms across generations, consistent with corpus-based evidence that Indonesian folk narratives encode recurring, patterned constructions of gender across regional traditions (Darmadali, 2022). This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that Sundanese local literature functions as a cultural space where women's identities are continuously negotiated while simultaneously providing opportunities to challenge dominant gender norms (Koburtay et al., 2023). Sundanese folktales such as Sangkuriang, Lutung Kasarung, Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, and Nyi Anteh have long functioned as vehicles for conveying ideals of femininity, morality, and social propriety, a function increasingly recognized in comparative folklore-pedagogy scholarship across Southeast Asia (Rahmawati & Pamungkas, 2026).

The female figures within these narratives embody a wide spectrum of representation, ranging from domestic submission to moral and spiritual authority, and these representations actively shape how Sundanese communities perceive women's roles, echoing findings elsewhere in the archipelago that folkloric queens and heroines function as culturally coded vehicles of feminist meaning (Wiyatmi, 2023). Nevertheless, gender literacy understood as the capacity to critically identify, interpret, and interrogate gender roles, stereotypes, and inequalities within social and cultural contexts (Schaper, 2024) remains underdeveloped at both the institutional and individual levels. It has been argued that

strengthening literacy is a strategic pathway toward cultivating critical gender awareness from the earliest stages of education (Liriwati et al., 2024), while other scholarship has found that the gender perspective embedded in Indonesia's Independent Curriculum still requires deeper epistemological refinement, lest it remain a normative discourse without critical classroom application (Maela, 2024).

Local feminism emerges as a meaningful theoretical alternative to the prevailing influence of Western feminist paradigms, which have long been challenged for their tendency to universalize cultural experiences (Parashar & Choi, 2024). In this study, local feminism is conceptualized not as a broad or generalized label, but as a context-specific analytical framework that prioritizes culturally grounded knowledge systems over universal normative perspectives (Tanusy et al., 2024). Epistemologically, this framework must be clearly distinguished from four related feminist paradigms. Unlike postcolonial feminism, which centers on dismantling colonial legacies and residual structures of power, local feminism does not treat colonial history as its primary analytical axis but instead pursues the affirmative recovery of indigenous moral and relational values (Irshad & Yasmin, 2022). It also differs from intersectional feminism, which emphasizes the overlapping nature of oppression based on race, class, and gender, as this study focuses on a single culturally specific context rather than attempting to generalize across multiple social categories (Cleton & Scuzzarello, 2023).

It is also not synonymous with indigenous feminism, which tends toward an essentialist claim to indigenous authenticity, whereas local feminism here is non-essentialist and remains open to the dynamics of cultural negotiation (Alexeyeff, 2020). Finally, it diverges from cultural feminism, which risks romanticizing gender difference as an inherent given; local feminism instead critically reflects on how cultural values can simultaneously constrain and empower women, a tension also foregrounded in recent feminist-pedagogy scholarship on how masculinities and femininities are jointly reproduced through cultural training rather than through femininity alone (Rahmawati & Pamungkas, 2026; Sakti, 2024; Schaper, 2024). Accordingly, this study positions local feminism not as an entirely novel theory but as an adaptation and extension of existing feminist frameworks, operationalizing the lived values of Sundanese women inner fortitude, relational ethics, and non-confrontational resistance as legitimate and generative analytical categories. This positioning aligns with the argument that feminist knowledge production from the peripheries of the Global South is frequently absent from mainstream epistemic maps (Vlase, 2025), and that Southeast Asian women's movements possess their own genealogy of

articulating agency without overt confrontation, a genealogy further evidenced by recent historical work recovering unlabeled, grassroots feminist agency in pre-Reformasi Indonesia (Hendrastiti & Kusujiarti, 2023).

Existing scholarship on Sundanese folklore has largely remained confined to narrative structure and semiotic analysis, while questions of gender representation and women's agency have received comparatively little systematic attention (Awaliah et al., 2024). Three research gaps can be identified: the scarcity of local feminist frameworks applied to folklore analysis, the absence of a pedagogically oriented model of women's representation, and the weak integration between folklore scholarship and gender-literacy education practice a gap that resonates with broader findings that gender-equity programming in the Global South tends to adapt to, rather than dismantle, patriarchal structures (Udenigwe, 2026). Tesar and Pangastuti (2024) argue that this condition is compounded by the limitations of gender-education discourse in Indonesia, which has yet to fully move beyond universalized Global-North approaches. They emphasize a distinct scarcity of educational epistemologies that consciously position local cosmologies as an equal, rather than supplementary, foundation of knowledge alongside mainstream gender theory. This exact scarcity is likewise noted in efforts to embed local-wisdom curricula into early childhood education (Arwan et al., 2026).

Building on these gaps, this study is guided by three research questions: (1) how are women represented in four selected Sundanese folktales; (2) what values of local feminism are embedded within these representations; and (3) how can these representations and values be integrated into gender-literacy practice within the Independent Curriculum, an integration that comparative studies of regional folklore-based teaching materials suggest is both feasible and pedagogically valuable when handled with cultural specificity. The originality of this study lies in constructing a distinctly Sundanese model of women's representation that is simultaneously connected to contemporary gender-literacy discourse a combination that has not been addressed in prior research on Sundanese folklore and that extends beyond documented character-education applications of local wisdom to a specifically gender-critical reading (Sakti, 2024). Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a culturally grounded feminist epistemology; practically, it offers a critically reflective, folklore-based pedagogical model for educators and curriculum developers.

## METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, in which content analysis provided the structural framework for organizing textual units, while thematic analysis served as the interpretive procedure for generating meaning from narrative patterns, following the six-phase model of familiarization, initial coding, subtheme clustering, theme generation, cross-version review, and interpretive synthesis. Four Sundanese folktales Sangkuriang, Lutung Kasarung, Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, and Nyi Anteh were purposively selected based on their cultural prominence, the narrative centrality of their female protagonists, and their demonstrated relevance to gender scholarship. For each folktale, between three and five textual versions were analyzed. These versions were obtained from nationally published literary collections, including editions issued by regional cultural heritage archives maintained by the West Java Language Office, and peer-reviewed philological publications. Each text was chosen based on its documented provenance, publication history, and scholarly recognition of its authenticity within Sundanese literary studies. Complete bibliographic information for all selected sources was retained in the study's source inventory to ensure transparency and facilitate independent verification (Jannah et al., 2022).

To strengthen analytical transparency, coding was not conducted by a single interpreter alone. Following initial open and focused coding, a random subset of coded excerpts was independently reviewed by a second coder familiar with Sundanese cultural studies; discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, approximating standard intercoder agreement procedures (Udenigwe, 2026). The researcher additionally maintained a reflexive journal throughout data analysis to document her positionality as a culturally proximate yet critically distanced analyst, acknowledging that prior familiarity with Sundanese oral tradition could shape interpretive emphasis; this reflexive practice, combined with peer debriefing, was employed to safeguard against confirmation bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Validity was further reinforced through source triangulation across narrative versions and theoretical triangulation integrating folklore studies with feminist cultural theory, while an audit trail documented each coding and interpretive decision to support dependability and confirmability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Representation of Women's Image in Sundanese Folklore

The representation of women in Sundanese folklore is neither uniform nor static; it constitutes a contested cultural terrain in which patriarchal ideologies are simultaneously inscribed and destabilized through narrative construction. Rather than offering a singular model of femininity, the four folktales examined encode multiple, at times contradictory, subject positions, reflecting the broader tension between cultural normativity and individual agency that characterizes gender relations in Sundanese society.

This complexity requires an interpretive lens capable of moving beyond descriptive labeling toward the ideological structures underlying women's representation, which is precisely the analytical function that *local feminism* performs in this study. To improve analytical clarity, the thematic findings previously compressed into a single dense table have been disaggregated into three focused tables that separate coding evidence, thematic classification, and interpretive synthesis, thereby reducing redundancy and improving readability.

| No. | Folklore                 | Initial Code                                               | Emergent Theme         |
|-----|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1   | Sangkuriang              | Symbolic strategy; normative conformance; indirect refusal | Gender ambivalence     |
| 2   | Lutung Kasarung          | Inner fortitude; active patience; self-dignity             | Cultural resistance    |
| 3   | Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri | Spiritual sacrifice; symbolic holiness; cultural authority | Spiritual authority    |
| 4   | Nyi Anteh                | Obedience; loyalty; domestication                          | Domestic subordination |

**Table 1.** Initial Coding and Thematic Classification

Building on the thematic categories established above, Table 2 translates each theme into a corresponding model of female representation and identifies the specific local feminist values embedded within it. This mapping is essential for demonstrating that the models of domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered, and ambivalent femininity are not arbitrary classifications but are systematically derived from culturally grounded value systems namely moral integrity, inner fortitude, spiritual authority, and social harmony that collectively constitute the epistemological core of local Sundanese feminism.

| Folklore                 | Female Image Model  | Local Feminism Values                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Sangkuriang              | Ambivalent          | Moral integrity; non-confrontational resistance |
| Lutung Kasarung          | Resistant-Empowered | Inner fortitude; relational wisdom              |
| Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri | Resistant-Empowered | Moral purity; spiritual authority               |
| Nyi Anteh                | Domestic-Submissive | Patience; loyalty; social harmony               |

**Table 2.** Female Image Models and Associated Local Feminism Values

The correspondence illustrated in Table 2 underscores that local feminist values are not uniformly distributed across the four folktales but are instead unevenly emphasized depending on each narrative's ideological function whether reinforcing domestic norms,

valorizing spiritual sacrifice, or dramatizing moral ambivalence. However, identifying these values alone risks producing a merely descriptive taxonomy; a deeper, critically interpretive reading of each folklore is therefore required to expose the underlying power relations, cosmological assumptions, and structural tensions that these values conceal or negotiate, as presented in Table 3.

| Folklore                 | Critical-Analytical Interpretation                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sangkuriang              | Dayang Sumbi's rejection of Sangkuriang operationalizes symbolic agency within a cosmology that simultaneously polices female sexuality and rewards moral intelligence, situating her neither as purely compliant nor purely resistant. |
| Lutung Kasarung          | Purbasari's endurance under exile reframes patience as an active, transformative strategy rather than mere submission, destabilizing power asymmetries through inner-directed resistance.                                               |
| Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri | Nyi Pohaci's bodily sacrifice constitutes the cosmological foundation of communal subsistence, positioning the female body simultaneously as a site of sacrificial subordination and of moral-ecological authority.                     |
| Nyi Anteh                | Nyi Anteh's domestic confinement functions as a cultural mirror that both normalizes and exposes the patriarchal mechanisms constraining women's agency, inviting critical rather than affirmative reading.                             |

**Table 3.** Analytical Interpretation

Taken together, the critical interpretations summarized in Table 3 reveal that the empowerment attributed to figures such as Purbasari and Nyi Pohaci cannot be read uncritically as unambiguous feminist triumph; rather, each narrative simultaneously affirms and constrains women's agency through culturally specific mechanisms of discipline, sacrifice, and symbolic negotiation. This critical layer of analysis substantiates the argument that Sundanese folklore functions not as a monolithic vehicle of patriarchal reproduction, but as a dialectical cultural text in which resistance and subordination are continuously renegotiated an insight that directly informs the subsequent discussion of local feminist values and their pedagogical implications.

Female image models are categorized by degree of agency, resistance, and cultural positioning. *Ambivalent* denotes simultaneous conformity and subtle resistance; *Resistant-Empowered* denotes active inner agency expressed through cultural and spiritual means; *Domestic-Submissive* denotes femininity constructed within patriarchal normative frameworks. Local feminism values are grounded in indigenous Sundanese epistemological traditions emphasizing relational ethics, spiritual authority, and non-confrontational resistance.

In several folktales, such as Sangkuriang and Nyi Anteh, women are initially depicted as submissive figures confined to the domestic realm. However, Dayang Sumbi's characterization cannot be reduced to passive compliance with Sundanese moral norms. Her narrative instead enacts what may be theorized as *strategic femininity*, in which outward

conformity to cultural expectations functions as a protective mechanism through which women preserve dignity and exercise moral authority without direct confrontation (Hermawan, 2024). This reading aligns with local feminist theory's contention that women's agency in non-Western cultural contexts is frequently expressed through subtle, relational, and symbolically mediated strategies rather than overt resistance (Alexeyeff, 2020), and corresponds to the traditional construction of women as guardians of family harmony and community morality embedded in Sundanese codes of politeness and patience (Cleton & Scuzzarello, 2023).

Yet a genuinely critical reading of Dayang Sumbi's ambivalence must move beyond the recurrent labeling of her as merely "ambivalent" and interrogate the deeper ideological mechanisms her narrative encodes. First, her rejection of Sangkuriang operates as a negotiation of the *incest taboo* a patriarchally constructed regulatory mechanism that governs female sexuality and bodily autonomy within the Sundanese cosmological order rather than a neutral plot device. The imposition of impossible conditions upon her son-suitor is not simply an assertion of personal agency but a culturally sanctioned technology for disciplining desire, one in which the burden of upholding sexual boundaries is displaced onto the female body. Second, Dayang Sumbi's perpetual youth, often romanticized as a mark of feminine privilege, functions instead as a site of *cosmological objectification*, whereby women's corporeality is rendered subordinate to masculine mythological time and narrative causality; her body becomes the vessel through which cosmic order is both threatened and restored, stripping her of full narrative authorship over her own condition.

Third, the *politics of motherhood* encoded in her portrayal reveals how maternal identity operates simultaneously as a source of moral authority and as a normative constraint that disciplines women's agency: Dayang Sumbi is empowered precisely insofar as she performs motherhood correctly, and her legitimacy as a moral agent is contingent upon this performance rather than autonomously derived. When examined through the perspective of symbolic power relations, her capacity to make decisions is constrained by social structures that define the limits of her agency. As a result, her acts of resistance cannot be viewed simply as expressions of emancipation, since they remain shaped by the power structures within which they occur (Utomo & Kusuma, 2025)

Sundanese folklore, however, does not present women solely as passive figures. The thematic coding process applied across Sangkuriang, Lutung Kasarung, Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, and Nyi Anteh yielded four principal themes: domestic subordination, cultural resistance, moral-spiritual authority, and gender ambivalence. In *Lutung Kasarung*,



Purbasari exemplifies feminine power operating through inner integrity and emotional intelligence rather than confrontation. Her sustained moral integrity throughout exile constitutes what local feminist scholarship terms *inner-directed resistance*, wherein empowerment is grounded not in external confrontation but in the cultivation of psychological resilience, ethical consistency, and relational intelligence as sources of transformative cultural power (Andini et al., 2023).

This model of empowerment challenges Western feminist assumptions privileging visible, assertive, or structurally disruptive forms of resistance, foregrounding instead the epistemic value of culturally embedded strategies of dignity preservation (Holil, 2020). Yet this reading also warrants critical scrutiny: Purbasari's eventual triumph over her antagonist, Purbararang, when examined through the lens of symbolic power relations, raises the question of whether such narratives genuinely affirm female empowerment or merely relocate patriarchal hierarchy onto competing feminine subjects, replacing one hierarchical structure with another rather than dismantling hierarchy as such.

The narrative of Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri presents women as figures of spiritual and symbolic authority. Nyi Pohaci is depicted as the source of life and cosmic balance through the sacrifice of her body, which gives rise to rice and to the sustenance of human life (Hermawan, 2024). This representation positions women at the center of moral legitimacy and social sustainability. From a local feminist perspective, Nyi Pohaci's narrative does not merely romanticize female sacrifice; it elevates women's embodied experience as the epistemological foundation of communal ethics and ecological sustainability, a reading that resonates with postcolonial feminist critiques of the gendered body as a site of both oppression and cultural authority.

Nevertheless, a critical interpretation must also acknowledge the ambivalence embedded in this valorization: the narrative's celebration of self-sacrifice risks normalizing the expectation that women's ultimate social value is realized through bodily self-erasure for collective benefit, a tension that situates Nyi Pohaci's story within broader debates on the relationship between femininity, spirituality, and moral legitimacy in Southeast Asian cultural traditions (Li et al., 2025). In contrast, Nyi Anteh represents a domestic-submissive image emphasizing loyalty, obedience, and acceptance of destiny, reflecting the idealized construction of womanhood within Sundanese patriarchal culture. Nyi Anteh's story reproduces traditional values while simultaneously opening space for critical reading of gender relations within local culture.

Critically, however, her narrative should not be interpreted as an uncritical endorsement of domestic subordination. Rather, it functions as a *cultural mirror* that simultaneously reproduces and exposes the ideological mechanisms through which patriarchal structures normalize women's confinement to the private sphere. A critical examination of this representation encourages educators and readers to distinguish between values that are culturally upheld and limitations imposed by social structures. Such a distinction is essential for the meaningful integration of gender literacy within educational contexts (Hadiati et al., 2026). A deeper cosmological reading of Nyi Anteh's narrative further complicates any straightforward classification of her as merely domestic-submissive. Her transformation into a lunar figure who eternally weaves alongside her cat, banished to the moon, situates her confinement not within the household alone but within a mythological architecture that renders feminine seclusion cosmic rather than incidental.

This lunar exile can be read as a symbolic mechanism through which patriarchal cosmology naturalizes women's removal from terrestrial, communal life by relocating their labor and presence to a celestial periphery, visible yet permanently unreachable, productive yet perpetually solitary. Such a reading resonates with broader philological findings that Sundanese folk narratives frequently encode gendered spatial hierarchies through cosmological metaphor, wherein women's mobility is constrained not through explicit prohibition but through mythic relocation to liminal, othered spaces (Hadiati et al., 2026). Nyi Anteh's endless weaving, moreover, functions as a repetitive, non-terminating labor motif that mirrors the unpaid, cyclical, and often invisible domestic labor historically assigned to women, reinforcing rather than merely reflecting the ideological expectation that feminine value is measured through perpetual productivity without narrative resolution or reward. Read this way, her story does not simply depict submission; it actively naturalizes indefinite female labor as a cosmic given, foreclosing narrative possibilities for her eventual return, recognition, or reintegration into communal life.

This interpretive layer illustrates how translation and transmission choices across successive retellings can subtly reinforce or destabilize such gendered cosmological framing, depending on how pragmatic and narrative strategies handle culturally loaded imagery when rendered across languages and audiences (Mahmud et al., 2024). Consequently, Nyi Anteh's myth should be approached pedagogically not as a static parable of feminine virtue but as a layered cultural text whose cosmological framing of exile, labor, and visibility invites students to critically examine how mythology itself can function as an instrument of gendered spatial discipline, extending the analytical work of gender literacy beyond textual

content alone into the symbolic architecture of the narrative itself. Beyond these individually distinct figures, Sundanese folklore more broadly reveals an ambivalence reflecting the dialectic between conformity and resistance.

Female characters inhabit the tension between normative demands and the drive to preserve agency, positioning the female image as a meeting point between patriarchal structure and local values that permit cultural resistance. Dayang Sumbi, though bound by moral rules, nonetheless exercises consequential decision-making authority within the narrative; Purbasari, though characterized as gentle, possesses a strength that ultimately subordinates Purbararang. This persistent ambivalence corroborates the conceptualization of folklore as a text of ongoing cultural negotiation rather than a fixed ideological artifact. Taken together, these findings resist any reduction of women's imagery in Sundanese folklore to a simple affirmation of patriarchal values, revealing instead the seeds of subtle, culturally embedded resistance (Mahmud et al., 2024).

This diversified pattern demonstrates that Sundanese women are positioned simultaneously as subjects submissive to social norms and as possessors of moral, spiritual, and symbolic power capable of implicitly challenging patriarchal structures (Mori, 2023). Sundanese folklore thus provides rich narrative terrain for understanding local gender dynamics and constitutes an important resource for interpreting feminist values that are non-confrontational yet rooted in wisdom and cultural harmony. Collectively, the three models identified domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered, and ambivalent do not operate in isolation but function as a dialectical system of meaning-making through which Sundanese culture negotiates the tension between tradition and transformation, offering a theoretically grounded and culturally specific contribution to the growing literature on non-Western feminisms.

### **Local Feminism Values in Sundanese Folklore**

Reading Sundanese folklore through a critical lens reveals local feminist values that diverge markedly from Western feminist paradigms, which tend toward confrontation and structural critique. Local Sundanese feminism instead emphasizes women's inner strength, wisdom, spirituality, and capacity to maintain harmony values that reflect a model of non-frontal resistance while still affirming women's standing as moral and cultural subjects. These values emerge through analysis of the actions, roles, and symbolization of female characters, who are portrayed neither as wholly passive nor as unilaterally dominant, but as

figures negotiating authority within the specific idiom of Sundanese culture (Maretty & Narawati, 2019).

The first principal value is *inner fortitude*, evident in the characters of Purbasari and Nyi Pohaci. In *Lutung Kasarung*, Purbasari confronts a series of injustices yet maintains moral integrity without retaliating through violence. This fortitude is rooted in Sundanese cultural values upholding patience, subtlety of mind, and the capacity to sustain harmonious relations. Such steadfastness should not be mistaken for surrender; it constitutes a strategy of cultural resistance that rejects domination without abandoning locally upheld values. This interpretation aligns with the broader argument that non-Western feminisms must be understood through the specific context of community values and lived experience rather than through liberal or radical feminist benchmarks (Nuraini et al., 2025).

The second value, *moral purity*, appears in the characters of Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri and Dayang Sumbi. Purity within Sundanese culture is linked to both the physical and moral dimensions of womanhood, positioning women as guardians of cosmic and social balance. This is reflected in Nyi Pohaci's narrative as a symbol of fertility, the sustainability of life, and a wellspring of goodness, granting women ethical legitimacy to determine the moral equilibrium of the community. Within local feminist thought, purity thus becomes a source of moral authority that commands communal respect, a conception consistent with archipelagic anthropological studies of women's spiritual authority (Narawati & Hapidzin, 2024). At the same time, this value warrants a cautionary reading, since the moral capital women accrue through purity remains contingent upon conformity to culturally prescribed standards of bodily and behavioral propriety, thereby reproducing surveillance over women's conduct even as it confers symbolic status.

The third value concerns women's *relational wisdom* in restoring social harmony (Weintraub, 2025). Female figures in Sundanese folklore frequently function as agents of conflict resolution through subtle strategies, emotional diplomacy, or symbolic action, exemplified by Purbasari's capacity to transform violent circumstances into spaces of reconciliation. Within local feminist perspective, this capacity to maintain and restore harmony constitutes a form of social power that positions women as arbiters of relational direction, consistent with the broader framing of local women as guardians of cultural memory and stabilizers of social dynamics within traditional communities.

The fourth value is *non-confrontational cultural resistance*, expressed through subtle, symbolic, and moral action rather than overt confrontation (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). This resistance is evident when female figures confront male domination or unjust social

structures: Dayang Sumbi's rejection of union with Sangkuriang is enacted not through violence but through strategic decision-making that forestalls the threat altogether. Such resistance reflects the characteristic strategy of local Sundanese feminism—upholding women's dignity through wisdom, self-restraint, and the preservation of harmony rather than direct confrontation with patriarchal structures. Collectively, these four values demonstrate that Sundanese folklore does not depict women as inherently weak; rather, female characters emerge as bearers of distinctive moral and spiritual power, offering an alternative model of empowerment rooted in tradition and constituting an important epistemic resource for formulating a contextually grounded model of gender literacy in Indonesia.

### **The Model of the Image of Sundanese Women in the Perspective of Local Feminism**

Synthesizing the findings on women's representation and local feminist values, this study identifies three dialectically interrelated models of Sundanese womanhood: domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered, and ambivalent. These models constitute a complex network of meaning regarding women's role within Sundanese culture rather than discrete, mutually exclusive categories. The first model positions women as submissive, domestic figures who safeguard the home, morality, and family harmony, exemplified by Dayang Sumbi and Nyi Anteh as gentle, patient, loyal, and compliant with Sundanese moral demands. While this image reflects cultural values of mutual compassion and nurturing, it simultaneously renders women vulnerable to restrictions on their spatial and social mobility (Alexeyeff, 2020).

The second model portrays women as resistant and empowered figures, as reflected in Purbasari and Nyi Pohaci Sanghyang Sri, whose moral and spiritual strength enables them to confront injustice without forfeiting dignity. Their agency manifests not through frontal resistance but through inner fortitude, moral integrity, emotional intelligence, and the capacity to restore social harmony a subtle yet substantial form of cultural resistance capable of challenging patriarchal domination while validating empowerment consistent with local wisdom and spirituality.

The third model, ambivalence, situates women in a position that is neither wholly passive nor wholly dominant. This ambivalence arises because women navigate complex social demands while retaining space to exercise agency; Dayang Sumbi exemplifies this duality by complying with certain moral norms while simultaneously making decisions that determine the narrative's trajectory (Weldon et al., 2023). This ambivalence reflects the

broader dynamic of Sundanese culture, which privileges harmony while still permitting women room to negotiate their position.

Read through the lens of local feminism, these three models demonstrate that the representation of women in Sundanese folklore simultaneously reproduces patriarchal values and harbors transformative potential. Rather than orienting itself toward direct conflict with cultural structures, Sundanese feminism reinterprets existing values to construct a more contextual, ethical, and communicative space of resistance (Narawati & Hapidzin, 2024). Women's power, within this model, is expressed not through outright rejection of culture but through the reinterpretation of traditional values to expand the available space for agency. Sundanese folklore thereby functions as a cultural text that captures social reality while offering an alternative imagination of women's roles applicable to contemporary life. Theoretically, this tripartite synthesis contributes to the development of local feminist scholarship in Indonesia by framing gender representation in local culture as a negotiation arena rather than a fixed hierarchy, positioning Sundanese folklore as an epistemic foundation for feminism grounded in local wisdom and providing a conceptual basis for pedagogical strategies that treat folklore as a reflective and transformative source of gender literacy.

### **Pedagogical Implications for Strengthening Gender Literacy**

The local feminist values embedded in Sundanese women's representation carry implications for strengthening gender literacy within Indonesian education. As a cultural text embedded in everyday community life, Sundanese folklore holds potential as a learning resource for developing students' capacity to read, interpret, and critique gender representation, where gender literacy refers to the ability to identify inequality, stereotypes, and cultural biases shaping students' perceptions of gender relations (Holil, 2020). Integrating Sundanese folklore into instruction may constitute a pedagogically relevant strategy for cultivating students' critical awareness of social relations within their own cultural context.

It is essential to state explicitly, however, that the pedagogical implications advanced here remain conceptual and propositional rather than empirically demonstrated. This study did not incorporate classroom-based implementation, empirical student data, or curriculum experimentation, and the proposed applications should therefore be read as a theoretically grounded framework awaiting empirical validation rather than as evidence of instructional efficacy. The three analytically derived models domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered,

and ambivalent constitute interpretive scaffolding through which students could, in principle, be guided to interrogate patriarchal constructions, recognize culturally embedded forms of female agency, and cultivate reflexive gender consciousness rooted in their own heritage; whether such scaffolding produces measurable learning outcomes, however, remains an open empirical question that this study cannot answer. Future research employing quasi-experimental designs or ethnographic classroom research is therefore necessary to test, rather than assume, the pedagogical efficacy of this proposed framework within actual Indonesian educational settings.

Folklore's pedagogical value lies partly in its proximity to students' lived cultural experience. Within the framework of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes contextual, locally grounded learning and character strengthening through critical literacy, Sundanese folklore could in principle serve as a medium for introducing concepts of gender equality and justice; analysis of figures such as Dayang Sumbi, Purbasari, and Nyi Pohaci might help students distinguish passive representations from those embodying moral integrity and social agency, thereby supporting higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and reflection associated with twenty-first-century learning demands (Li et al., 2025). Such claims, however, remain hypothetical absent classroom testing.

The local feminist values identified inner fortitude, moral integrity, relational wisdom, and non-confrontational resistance could theoretically inform culturally sensitive, gender-responsive learning models conveyed through class discussion, text analysis, and creative projects such as retelling folklore from female characters' perspectives, an approach consistent with critical literacy theory's treatment of texts as media for dialogue and reflection on social structure (Andini et al., 2023). Educators might further develop inquiry-based or project-based learning strategies through which students investigate women's roles across multiple folklore versions and connect these patterns to contemporary social realities; prior scholarship suggests that inquiry-scaffolded integration of folklore into education is associated with measurable gains in cultural literacy and critical thinking (Nuraini et al., 2025), and that literary and cultural texts can serve as sites for surfacing patriarchal biases otherwise naturalized within mainstream educational discourse (Andini et al., 2023). Nonetheless, given the absence of direct empirical testing within the present study, these connections should be regarded as plausible extrapolations from existing literature rather than findings generated by this research itself.

Finally, this study's findings may serve as a conceptual reference for developing gender-sensitive curricula and teaching modules that present local feminist perspectives,

supporting the Independent Curriculum's broader goal of cultivating character, critical thinking, and appreciation of diversity, and reinforcing education's commitment to gender equality as affirmed in national policy and international human rights instruments. The pedagogical implications discussed here thus affirm Sundanese folklore's status as a cultural heritage worth preserving and as a potentially strategic, though as yet empirically untested, resource for building critical, contextual gender literacy, which remains vital pending future classroom-based validation.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how women are represented in four Sundanese folktales, to identify the local feminist values embedded within these narratives, and to explore their potential relevance for gender-literacy education. The resulting findings reveal that women's representation operates through three interrelated models: domestic-submissive, resistant-empowered, and ambivalent. These models are underpinned by four culturally specific values: inner fortitude, moral purity, relational wisdom, and non-confrontational resistance. On a broader level, these insights demonstrate that Sundanese folklore neither uniformly reproduces patriarchal subordination nor straightforwardly celebrates female empowerment, but instead constitutes a dialectical cultural space where compliance and agency are continuously negotiated. The primary value of this work lies in theorizing these patterns through a culturally grounded feminist epistemology that extends beyond Western analytical paradigms. Consequently, the contribution is primarily theoretical, offering a conceptual framework rather than an empirically tested pedagogical model.

Several limitations, however, must be acknowledged, particularly the reliance on written textual corpora as the primary source of analysis and the absence of empirical validation within actual classroom settings. Because of this specific scope, the findings remain interpretive and theoretical, without direct evidence of how the proposed framework may function in educational practice or influence students' understanding of gender literacy. Furthermore, confining the analysis to written versions may not fully capture the richness and diversity of Sundanese oral storytelling traditions, where cultural values and gender representations are often negotiated through performance, narration, and community interaction. To address these gaps, future research should expand the scope of analysis by incorporating oral traditions, ethnographic approaches, and field-based investigations involving storytellers, educators, and local communities. In addition, empirical classroom trials are warranted to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of



integrating Sundanese folktales into gender literacy education and to examine their impact on students' critical engagement with cultural narratives, gender representation, and local knowledge. Implementing these approaches would provide stronger empirical support for the educational applicability and broader relevance of the present findings.

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## **DECLARATIONS**

### ***Ethical considerations***

Not applicable. This study analyzed publicly available written and archival folkloric texts and did not involve human participants, personal data collection, or interventions requiring institutional ethical review or informed consent procedures.

### ***Use of artificial intelligence (AI)***

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence tool ChatGPT was used exclusively for language editing and grammatical improvement. It did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, or conclusions.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. No personal, financial, or institutional relationships exist that could be perceived as improperly influencing the interpretation, analysis, or presentation of this research.

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