



Exploring Social and Cultural Meanings in the Novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini: Its Relevance to Literature Learning in Senior High School

Ni Luh Candra Dewi*, I Ketut Yarsama, I Made Sujaya

Universitas PGRI Mahadewa, Indonesia.

*Corresponding Author. Email: candraadewii93@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the representation of social and cultural meanings in the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini and to examine its relevance as literature learning material for senior high school students. The study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive-interpretative method. The primary data consisted of textual elements in the novel, including words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narrative passages, characters' actions, and significant events. Supporting data were obtained from the Merdeka Curriculum documents, particularly the Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes for Phase F, as well as qualitative responses from Indonesian language teachers and Grade XI/XII students collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and open-ended questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive-interpretative content analysis. The findings indicate that the novel represents a range of social meanings, including social stratification, gender inequality, power relations, and tensions between individual agency and collective social norms. Its cultural meanings are reflected through religious beliefs, Balinese customs and traditions, the symbolic meaning of the **tempurung** (coconut shell), family honor, social obligations, and the value of harmony. The findings further suggest that **Tempurung** is highly relevant as literature learning material for senior high school because it promotes critical reading, literary appreciation, social empathy, cultural awareness, and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile.

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Introduction

Indonesian national education is currently undergoing a significant transformation through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. According to the Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment in 2022, this curriculum emphasizes the development of students' competencies, character, and independent learning through student-centered instruction. This orientation is directed not only toward the mastery of academic knowledge but also toward character formation as reflected in the Pancasila Student Profile, such as critical reasoning, global diversity, cooperation, independence, creativity, and faith and devotion to God Almighty (Aminuddin, 2023). In this context, Indonesian language and literature learning has a strategic role because it can develop students' literacy, critical thinking, social sensitivity, and empathy toward various life phenomena (Tarigan, 2015 ; Astuti & Arifin, 2021).

Literature is not only understood as an aesthetic work that emphasizes the beauty of language but also as a medium for representing the social and cultural realities of society (Andalas et al., 2022). Through literary works, students can access various complex human experiences, such as social conflict, structural inequality, power relations, and cultural



dynamics reflected through characters, plot, setting, and point of view. Therefore, literature learning should ideally not focus only on the structural aspects of texts, but also on a deeper interpretation of the social and cultural values contained in them (Astuti & Arifin, 2021 ; Faruk. 2012).

In literary studies, the concept of representation is important for understanding how social and cultural realities are re-presented in literary texts (Putra et al., 2023). Representation does not merely reflect reality as it is, but also reconstructs and gives new meaning to the social phenomena raised by the author. Thus, literary works function as symbolic spaces that enable readers to understand the values, norms, and ideologies that live within society (Yanthi et al., 2021).

Social meaning in literary works is related to human relations, social structure, stratification, and conflicts that arise in community life (Uswansyaf et al., 2022). Meanwhile, cultural meaning is related to systems of values, traditions, customs, beliefs, and the collective identity of a community (Faruk. 2012). These two aspects are closely related because culture often becomes the basis for the formation of social structures, while social structures influence cultural practices in everyday life (Budianta, 2020).

However, the reality of literature learning in schools shows that students' appreciation of literary works remains relatively low. Literature learning is often textual, theoretical, and insufficiently connected to students' real-life contexts (Antari, 2025). In addition, the development of digital technology and instant culture has influenced students' reading interest in literary works that tend to be long and reflective (Budianta, 2020). This condition indicates the need for innovation in selecting literary teaching materials that are not only engaging but also relevant to students' social and cultural lives (Astuti & Arifin, 2022).

One contemporary Indonesian literary work that has strong potential to be examined from social and cultural perspectives is the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini. This novel explicitly represents Balinese society with its various social and cultural complexities, especially those related to women's position, the caste system, family relations, and the tension between tradition and modernity (Arifat, 2019). Through the characters and events presented, this novel shows how social structures and cultural values shape and at the same time limit individual life (Dermawan et al., 2025).

Socially, *Tempurung* represents various forms of social relations, such as domination, marginalization, social pressure, and conflicts caused by differences in status and values in society (Rusmini, 2010). Culturally, the novel depicts the strong influence of Balinese customs, traditions, and belief systems that continue to shape the thoughts and behavior of its characters. This representation shows that literature is not only a reflection of social life, but also a space for criticizing existing cultural systems (Mahsa, 2021; Nugroho, 2021).

The selection of *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini as the object of this study is based on both theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, the novel presents literature as a social document that reflects, questions, and reconstructs social and cultural realities. Through the lives of female characters, *Tempurung* represents the complexity of Balinese society, including caste hierarchy, patriarchal relations, family pressure, religious values, customary norms, and the tension between tradition and modernity. These issues make the novel relevant to be analyzed through the sociology of literature because the text does not merely present fictional events, but also reveals how cultural values and social structures shape identity and life choices.

Practically, *Tempurung* can be used as an alternative literary teaching material to address the low appreciation of literature among senior high school students. The novel offers



social and cultural issues that are close to students' real-life experiences, especially those living in Balinese communities. Through reading and discussing the novel, students are not only invited to understand literary elements, but also to interpret social issues, evaluate cultural values, develop empathy, and reflect on their surrounding environment. Therefore, the use of *Tempurung* in literature learning is relevant to the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, especially critical reasoning, global diversity, independence, creativity, and faith and devotion to God Almighty through an understanding that respects cultural and religious values.

Previous studies on *Tempurung* have mostly focused on feminism, patriarchal criticism, and women's identity in Balinese culture. However, studies that specifically integrate the analysis of social and cultural meanings comprehensively and relate them to their relevance as literature learning material at the senior high school level remain relatively limited (Nazilaturrizkiyah et al., 2026 ; Tara et al., 2025). This shows a research gap that needs to be addressed through a more integrative study.

The selection of SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara as the research site is based on the social context of Badung Regency, which lies at the intersection of local tradition and globalization. Students in this area live in an environment rich in Balinese cultural values while at the same time being exposed to modernity and global culture. This condition makes contextual literature learning important in helping students understand, criticize, and reflect on the socio-cultural values around them (Anwar et al., 2023).

In line with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment (2022) in the 2025/2026 academic year, literature learning is expected to encourage students to think critically, reflectively, and contextually. The analysis of social and cultural meanings in literary works not only helps students understand texts, but also connects them with the realities of everyday life. Thus, literature functions as a bridge between the world of texts and the real world (Ardi et al., 2026 ; Putra et al., 2023).

Based on the above explanation, *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini has significant potential to be examined from the perspective of social and cultural meanings and is relevant as literature learning material in senior high school. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of social and cultural meanings in the novel *Tempurung* and to examine its relevance as literature learning material at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara.

This study contributes to literature education in three aspects. First, it enriches sociological literary studies on *Tempurung* by integrating social and cultural meanings in a comprehensive analysis. Second, it provides a pedagogical contribution by connecting the results of literary analysis with the needs of literature learning in senior high school under the Merdeka Curriculum. Third, it offers practical considerations for Indonesian language teachers in selecting contextual literary teaching materials to strengthen students' literary appreciation, cultural awareness, and reflective thinking skills.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative method. The main focus of the study was textual analysis of the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini. The textual units analyzed included words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narratives, character actions, and events that represent social and cultural meanings in the novel. These units were examined through close reading and content analysis to reveal the social and cultural issues embedded in the text.



The primary data source of this study was the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini, published by PT Grasindo in 2010. The secondary data sources included Merdeka Curriculum documents, particularly the Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes for Phase F, relevant theories of the sociology of literature and literature learning, previous studies on *Tempurung* and Balinese cultural representation, and supporting documents from SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara. The study was conducted in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara, Badung Regency, Bali. The research participants consisted of Indonesian language teachers and Grade XI/XII students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara. The selection of Grade XI and XII students was based on their relevance to Phase F in the Merdeka Curriculum. The teachers and students did not serve as the main sources of literary analysis, but rather as participants who provided qualitative responses regarding the feasibility and relevance of the analysis results as literature learning material. These responses were obtained through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), semi-structured interviews, and qualitative questionnaires.

The main instrument of this study was the researcher as the human instrument. Supporting instruments included a textual data classification table, guidelines for analyzing social and cultural meanings, interview guidelines, FGD guidelines, and qualitative questionnaires for assessing the relevance of the novel as teaching material. Data were collected through documentation, close reading, note-taking, FGD, interviews, and qualitative questionnaires. Textual data were collected by identifying and classifying quotations from the novel based on the categories of social meaning, cultural meaning, and learning relevance.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-interpretative content analysis. The stages of analysis referred to the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The textual data were first condensed by selecting relevant quotations from the novel. The data were then displayed in thematic categories, including social meaning, cultural meaning, and relevance to literature learning. The final stage involved interpreting the relationship between textual findings, sociological literary theory, feminist perspectives, previous studies, and the learning outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum (Miles et al., 2014). To examine the relevance of *Tempurung* as teaching material, a comparative-evaluative analysis was used by comparing the textual findings with the criteria of literary teaching materials, the Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes for Phase F, and qualitative responses from teachers and students. Data validity was maintained through theoretical triangulation, source triangulation, persistent observation, and peer discussion.

Results and Discussion

Representation of Social Meanings in the Novel *Tempurung*

The novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini represents social meanings through the experiences of female characters who live under the pressure of social norms, patriarchal structures, and unequal power relations. Social reality in the novel is not only presented through major events, but also through simple dialogues that reveal how society monitors and judges women's lives. One form of such social pressure appears in the questions, "When will you get married?" and "Do you already have someone?" These dialogues show that women's identities in society are often measured by marital status. Questions that appear ordinary actually contain social pressure because women are positioned as if they are incomplete when they are not yet married.



The phrase “when will you get married” does not merely refer to a question of time, but also indicates the existence of social standards that require women to follow certain life stages. In this context, women are not fully regarded as subjects who are free to determine their life choices, but as individuals who must adjust themselves to the expectations of family and society. Such questions become a form of social control that operates subtly through everyday language. This kind of control shows that social relations in the novel are constructed by collective norms that place women in a vulnerable position before social judgment.

This social pressure becomes stronger because women’s lives in the novel are also influenced by patriarchal structures. Women not only face the demand to get married, but are also burdened with expectations to maintain family honor, obey family decisions, and accept predetermined social roles. In this regard, *Tempurung* shows that gender injustice does not always appear in the form of physical violence, but also in the form of psychological pressure, social expectations, and restrictions on life choices. This condition is in line with the perspective of the sociology of literature, which views literary works as reflections as well as critiques of social reality.

On the other hand, the novel also presents the awareness of female characters to move beyond such pressure. This is reflected in the quotation, “In the end, I believe that I myself must be responsible for my life.” This quotation shows the character’s personal awareness in taking control of herself. The phrase “I myself” emphasizes the character’s position as a subject who begins to realize her right to determine the direction of her life. Meanwhile, the phrase “be responsible for my life” indicates that women no longer fully surrender their lives to family, custom, or social judgment.

These findings show that the social meanings in *Tempurung* are not only related to social pressure on women, but also to women’s struggle to gain self-autonomy. The novel presents a critique of social structures that turn women into objects of judgment while also showing the emergence of women’s awareness in negotiating their position in society. This is in line with feminist studies, which argue that women often live within social systems that limit their freedom, yet still have space to build awareness and resistance. Thus, *Tempurung* represents the complex social reality of Balinese society, especially in relation to gender, family, custom, and power.

These findings strengthen previous studies that position *Tempurung* as a work that critically examines women’s position within patriarchal social structures. Purwanti et al., (2020) show that this novel contains gender awareness and women’s experiences in facing social pressure, while Sari et al. (2024) emphasize the image of women and gender injustice that emerge through unequal social relations. In line with this, Dermawan et al. (2025) highlight forms of gender injustice and the resistance of Balinese women in *Tempurung*. However, this study expands previous findings by situating social pressure on women not only as a gender issue, but also as part of more complex relations among family, custom, social status, and the collective norms of Balinese society.

Representation of Cultural Meanings in the Novel *Tempurung*

Cultural meanings in *Tempurung* are represented through customary values, religiosity, family honor, and cultural symbols that shape the lives of the characters. Balinese culture in the novel does not appear merely as a setting, but also as a value system that regulates the ways characters think, behave, and make decisions. Women’s lives in the novel are shaped by customary obligations, demands to maintain family dignity, and social rules inherited from generation to generation. Therefore, culture in *Tempurung* cannot be



understood merely as tradition, but also as a social force that influences individual identity and freedom.

The main symbol that stands out in this novel is “*Tempurung*.” Symbolically, *Tempurung* represents a narrow, closed space that limits one’s view. In the context of the female characters’ lives, *Tempurung* can be interpreted as a metaphor for confinement within a patriarchal cultural structure. Women live in social spaces shaped by custom, family norms, and cultural obligations. They are expected to obey, maintain family honor, and adapt themselves to values considered correct by society. Thus, the symbol of “*Tempurung*” is not only the title of the novel, but also a cultural representation that restricts women’s movement, choices, and freedom.

This cultural meaning also appears in the quotation, “In the end, I believe that I myself must be responsible for my life.” This quotation indicates a tension between cultural demands and personal desire. The female character realizes that her life cannot be entirely determined by value systems outside herself. The phrase “be responsible for my life” shows that the character begins to negotiate with culture. She does not completely reject culture, but attempts to position herself as a subject with awareness, choice, and personal responsibility.

From a cultural perspective, this condition shows that culture is not static. Culture is always negotiated by the individuals who live within it. This is in line with Geertz’s view that culture is a system of symbols used by humans to give meaning to their lives. In *Tempurung*, custom, religion, family, and cultural symbols become systems of meaning that shape the characters’ actions. However, these systems can also become sources of pressure when cultural values limit individual freedom, especially for women.

These findings show that *Tempurung* represents Balinese culture ambivalently. On the one hand, culture becomes a source of identity, values, and social harmony. On the other hand, culture can also become a mechanism of control that pressures individuals when practiced rigidly and patriarchally. Thus, this novel does not merely portray Balinese culture as a traditional heritage, but also criticizes how cultural values may influence women’s position in the family and society. This representation reinforces the view that literary works can become spaces of reflection for understanding culture more critically and humanely.

The findings of this study are also in line with previous studies which affirm that Oka Rusmini’s works frequently represent the complexity of Balinese culture. Mahsa (2021) shows that Balinese society in Oka Rusmini’s works is depicted through the relationship among custom, tradition, and social structure, while Widiastuti (2020) emphasizes that the caste system in Oka Rusmini’s works affects the social lives of the characters. Putra et al. (2023) also state that cultural identity can be read through symbols and cultural practices that appear in literary works. Unlike previous studies, this study emphasizes that culture in *Tempurung* functions not only as collective identity, but also as a space of negotiation when customary values, religiosity, family honor, and personal freedom confront one another.

Relevance of the Novel *Tempurung* as Literature Learning Material

Tempurung has strong relevance as literature learning material at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara because it contains social and cultural issues that are close to students’ lives, especially in the context of Balinese society. This novel can be used not only to introduce the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of literary works, but also to develop students’ ability to read texts critically, interpret symbols, understand social conflicts, and reflect on cultural values. This relevance is consistent with Indonesian language learning in Phase F of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes the ability to understand, analyze, evaluate, and reflect on literary texts contextually.



The dialogues “When will you get married?” and “Do you already have someone?” can be used as classroom discussion materials to invite students to understand that literary works often record social pressures that occur in everyday life. Through these dialogues, students can be guided to see that language is not always neutral. Simple questions may contain certain values, norms, and social expectations. In learning activities, teachers can guide students to analyze how these questions represent women’s position in society, how social norms operate through everyday conversations, and how female characters respond to such pressure.

In addition, the quotation “In the end, I believe that I myself must be responsible for my life” can be used to develop students’ reflection on independence, responsibility, and courage in making life choices. This quotation is relevant to the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly the dimensions of critical reasoning, independence, and global diversity. Students are not only invited to understand the content of the text, but also to evaluate the social and cultural values that appear in the story. Thus, literature learning through *Tempurung* can help students understand that literature is not only an aesthetic reading, but also a medium for reading social reality.

From a pedagogical perspective, this novel can increase literary appreciation because it presents contextual issues that are challenging to discuss. Students can be encouraged to conduct close reading, group discussions, reflective writing, or presentations on issues of gender, custom, family, and cultural identity in the novel. These activities can make literature learning more meaningful because students do not merely memorize literary theory, but also connect texts with their social and cultural experiences. This is important for addressing low literary appreciation, which is often caused by learning that is too theoretical and insufficiently connected to students’ real lives.

Nevertheless, the use of *Tempurung* as teaching material still requires teacher guidance. Several parts of the novel contain sensitive issues such as patriarchal pressure, violence, family conflict, and gender inequality. Therefore, teachers need to select quotations carefully, provide adequate cultural context, and build a safe and critical discussion space. With appropriate learning strategies, *Tempurung* can become relevant, contextual, and meaningful literary teaching material for students at SMA Negeri 1 Kuta Utara. The novel not only strengthens literary appreciation, but also helps students develop social empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking toward social realities.

The findings regarding the relevance of *Tempurung* as literature learning material support Dewi et al. (2018), who state that the novel *Tempurung* is related to literature learning in SMA/SMK. In addition, Astuti dan Arifin (2021) show that novels containing social values can be used as literary teaching materials because they help students understand the relationship between texts and life realities. Nugroho (2021) also emphasizes the importance of selecting literary works that are relevant to learning needs in senior high school. This study strengthens and expands these studies by showing that *Tempurung* is not only relevant as material for literary appreciation, but can also be used to develop critical reading skills, social empathy, cultural awareness, and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile through contextual literature learning.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini represents social and cultural meanings that critically portray the complexity of Balinese society. The social meanings in the novel are reflected in caste-based social stratification, gender inequality,



unequal power relations, and conflicts between individual desire and collective norms. These findings show that *Tempurung* functions not only as a literary work, but also as a medium of social critique that reveals how social structures can limit women's autonomy and life choices.

The cultural meanings in *Tempurung* are represented through religious beliefs, Balinese customs, cultural symbols, and values such as family honor, social obligations, and harmony. The symbol of "*Tempurung*" emphasizes the limited space experienced by women within patriarchal and customary structures. Thus, this novel presents Balinese culture as a source of identity as well as a space of negotiation between tradition and individual freedom. The findings also show that *Tempurung* is relevant as literature learning material at the senior high school level, particularly in Phase F of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The social and cultural issues raised in the novel can support the development of students' critical reading, literary appreciation, empathy, and cultural awareness. The implication of this study is that contextual literary works such as *Tempurung* can be used to strengthen literature learning that is not only text-oriented, but also reflective, culturally responsive, and aligned with the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile.

Recommendation

Curriculum developers are recommended to provide broader space for the use of contemporary Indonesian literary works that contain local social and cultural issues as contextual teaching materials. Indonesian language teachers can use the novel *Tempurung* selectively through appropriate quotation selection, critical discussion, and guidance on sensitive issues such as patriarchy, custom, violence, and gender inequality. Meanwhile, future researchers are encouraged to develop this study into teaching modules, learning media, or reader-response research to examine the effectiveness of using *Tempurung* in improving students' literary appreciation, critical thinking, and cultural awareness.

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