

# The Hegemony of Catur Warna in Balinese Marriage Practices: The Subordination of Caste-Based Women within Balinese Social Structure

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## Abstract

Catur Warna is often regarded as the cosmological foundation of Balinese society, emphasizing harmony and social order. However, in practice, this system acts as a hegemonic mechanism that shapes women's life choices, especially for caste-based Balinese women in terms of marriage and family relations. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, this study examines how Catur Warna is reproduced through social consent and constructed through customary norms, family socialization, and the community's symbolic legitimation. This research employs a literature-based approach, analyzing scholarly books, journal articles, previous studies, customary texts, and academic publications related to Catur Warna, the Balinese social structure, and gender relations. The findings indicate that hegemony functions through the regulation of marriage, post-marital identity transformation, and stricter moral standards imposed on caste-based women, particularly in inter-caste marriages. These mechanisms are not sustained through coercion but through the internalization of obedience and the normalization of women's downward social mobility following Nyerod marriage practices. Such patterns constrain women's autonomy and reinforce gender inequality in Balinese societies. The novelty of this study lies in its use of Gramscian hegemony to interpret Catur Warna as cultural power reproduced through social consent rather than merely as a tradition. This study contributes to gender studies in Bali by demonstrating that female inequality is perpetuated by both customary law and social consciousness.

Keywords: *Catur Warna, caste, Balinese women, hegemony.*

## 1. Introduction

Marriage in Balinese society is generally understood not merely as a personal bond between two individuals but as a social institution that has historically reproduced broader structures of social stratification. This condition is reinforced by the Catur Warna system, which provides a normative framework for defining appropriate marriage partners and positioning kinship relations after marriage. Catur Warna is conceptually defined as a division of social duties and obligations based on *guna* and *karma* rather than on caste or lineage (*wangsa*) (PHDI, 2022). However, Catur Warna has evolved into a caste-like system that influences access to symbolic capital, social legitimacy, and one's position within customary and ritual structures.

Misinterpretations of Catur Warna have shaped customary marriage regulations, particularly regarding endogamous and exogamous marriage practices, which remain contested amid modernization and social change (Subawa, 2022). Within this framework, marriage often reflects not only a union between two individuals but also the subtle reproduction of inherited power relations within the family. In everyday practice, Catur Warna plays a decisive role in partner selection and strategies for maintaining lineage continuity. Thus, Catur Warna functions not only as a cosmological framework but also as a mechanism of social regulation of bodies and family relations. However, this regulation operates unequally.

In contemporary Balinese society, women categorized according to warna are commonly referred to as "caste-based women." This term no longer merely denotes a religious function but signifies a marker of social hierarchy attached to women's identities. Caste-based Balinese women occupy a vulnerable position due to the misapplication of Catur Warna in social life. Marriage in Bali is not regarded solely as a personal decision but as a representation of family honor and the continuity of the *wangsa*. Within this context, women from higher castes bear a heavier responsibility for preserving the perceived purity of their family status. Thus, women's bodies and life choices become the primary sites of customary and extended family

surveillance. Such regulation is exercised not through direct coercion but through norms that are socially accepted as natural and legitimate. Consequently, gender relations in marital practices reveal the operation of cultural power through hegemony.

Caste-based Balinese women experience hegemonic pressure when the obligation to maintain caste status is translated into restrictions on partner choice and stigma toward inter-wangsa marriages, or *nyerod*. Customary and familial narratives frame women's compliance as a moral responsibility to safeguard the wangsa's honor. In many cases, violations of these norms result in various social sanctions imposed on women, including ritualized status degradation through a ceremony known as *pati wangi* (Sukerti & Ariani, 2018). Notably, these surveillance mechanisms are not applied symmetrically to men. Men tend to possess greater room for negotiation in choosing partners across the wangsa. This asymmetry indicates that Catur Warna's hegemony operates along gendered lines, positioning women as the primary subjects in the reproduction of the social hierarchy.

This study analyzes how Catur Warna hegemony shapes inter-Wangsa marriage in Bali. It shows how customary norms, family ties, and concepts of wangsa honor systematically subordinate women of the lower castes. Marriage is seen not only as a familial institution but also as a site for reproducing power and social legitimacy. Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this study explores how social consent and the internalization of obedience uphold these norms.

## 2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined marriage practices in Balinese society from social, cultural, and customary law perspectives. These studies indicate that marriage is not merely a personal bond but also a mechanism for reproducing the social structure. These structures are closely associated with the caste system, lineage, and customary norms that regulate gender relations. Within this context, women's experiences are strongly shaped by the social positions ascribed to them through marriage. Women frequently function as mediums of social-status transmission and as symbolic bearers of family honor. Consequently, marriage is a crucial arena for analyzing the dynamics of gender inequality embedded in Bali's social structure.

Patriarchal culture and customary norms in Bali further contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality in Balinese society. Ayu et al. demonstrated that such inequality is particularly evident within the domestic sphere, especially in the division of roles and decision-making processes. The patrilineal system in Bali positions men as the primary inheritors of family rights, obligations, and traditions, rendering their presence socially indispensable (Ayu et al., 2022). In contrast, women are often perceived as temporary members of their natal families who will eventually leave the family upon marriage. Contemporary Balinese society is thus characterized by two coexisting paradigms: the persistence of strictly patriarchal cultural orientations, particularly in rural areas, and a gradual shift in urban contexts, such as Denpasar. Balinese norms and customs, continuously monitored and regulated through *awig-awig* (customary village laws), have sought to preserve these gender inequalities. Despite social change, Balinese society continues to strongly adhere to customary traditions, within which gender inequality persists.

According to Sadnyini's research, marriages between Brahmana women and men from different wangsa (Ksatria, Wesia, and Sudra) were historically referred to as *asupunding* marriages (Sadnyini, 2016). Sanctions imposed on such marriages included *labuh geni* (ritual death by fire), being drowned at sea with stones tied to the feet, banishment (*selong*), ritualized caste degradation through the *pati wangi* ceremony, prohibition from returning to the natal family home, and the obligation to use refined (*alus*) speech when interacting with one's biological relatives. Eventually, the formal practice of such punishment was abolished in 1951.

In line with Sadnyini's findings, a linguistic study by Astari et al. on Balinese women who entered inter-caste marriages (nyerod) also revealed significant changes in family communication patterns. (Astari et al, 2023). These changes are reflected in the language choice, forms of address, and patterns of interaction between women and both their natal and marital families. Thus, language becomes a key indicator of women's shifting social status following marriage. In many cases, women experience a decline in their symbolic position, as evidenced by the use of more subordinate linguistic forms. These shifts in linguistic practice are not neutral but reflect women's adjustment to the hierarchical norms associated with their new status within family social structures. Through language, women not only express social relations but also learn and internalize the boundaries of their legitimacy within kinship relations. This demonstrates that power relations operate not only through customary regulations but also through everyday communication practices. Therefore, language functions as a medium for reproducing the social hierarchy within the institution of marriage.

Building on this discussion of language and power within marriage, Wagiswari et al. offer an alternative perspective by identifying divergent views on marriage in contemporary Balinese society, distinguishing between traditional and modern orientations (Wagiswari, IGA Suryaning; Valentina, 2025). Wagiswari et al. further reveal that nyerod (downward-caste) marriage is perceived differently within traditional and modern segments of Balinese society. Traditional Balinese communities continue to associate nyerod with negative consequences for women, including its construction as a source of shame, post-marital identity transformation, psychological burdens resulting from the loss of caste status, and changes in linguistic practices when communicating with family members. In earlier periods, these consequences could even take the form of severe punishments, including execution.

In contrast, from a modern social perspective, nyerod is increasingly interpreted as a form of resistance to traditional values that constrain Balinese women's autonomy. Contemporary Balinese women are also becoming more pragmatic, considering multiple factors in marriage rather than prioritizing caste alone. Nevertheless, despite these shifting attitudes, sanctions against nyerod marriages remain prevalent in many communities in Kenya.

Subawa likewise emphasizes that Balinese society generally continues to enforce endogamous marriage—marriage within one's caste—through strict social regulation and explicit sanctions for those who violate this norm (Subawa 2022). However, in recent years, an increasing number of marriages have taken place between the Triwangsa and Wangsa Jaba groups. Despite these social changes in Balinese marital practices, pressures toward both endogamy and exogamy remain strong in Bali. Such pressures reflect the persistence of traditional structures in the regulation of partner selection. Individuals who engage in inter-caste or cross-social group marriages frequently encounter resistance from their families and customary communities. This demonstrates that social transformation does not automatically dissolve traditional norms.

This resistance is expressed not only through explicit prohibitions but also through more subtle mechanisms, such as familial advice, moral pressure, and concerns over family reputation. Through these means, traditional marital norms continue to be reproduced through social consent, appearing as forms of care rather than restrictions. Women occupy a more vulnerable position because their marital choices are often evaluated as a representation of family honor. Consequently, social control over women continues to operate through marriage.

A similar argument is presented in Limarandani et al. 's study, which found that within Balinese society, marriage is commonly regarded as obligatory between individuals of the same wangsa (Limarandani et al., 2024). Women who engage in nyerod marriage are often regarded as having violated their cultural identity because they relinquish their triwangsa noble titles. Over time, nyerod marriage has become less taboo, and an increasing number of triwangsa women have openly chosen this form of marriage for themselves. Nevertheless, in practice, the Nyerod marriage remains a type of union that is widely avoided.

Thus, although previous studies have comprehensively addressed social structure and transformations in Balinese customary marriage, the role of patriarchy in producing gender inequality, and the relationship between customary law and gender, there remains an explicit gap in the application of a hegemonic framework to explain how the Catur Warna structure systematically operates and positions women in vulnerable and subordinate roles within marriage practices.

### **3. Method**

This study employs a literature-based research method with a qualitative–interpretative approach, involving the examination, comparison, and interpretation of various written sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, and relevant academic documents, to construct a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon under study. The research design is based on a critical review of the literature, aimed at analyzing how the hegemony of Catur Warna operates within Balinese marriage practices, particularly in shaping gender relations and reproducing the subordination of caste-based Balinese women.

Through an analysis of academic and textual sources, this study investigates how customary norms, symbolic values, and moral constructions of *wangsa* honor function as mechanisms of cultural power legitimized through social consent. According to Webster and Watson, an effective and well-executed literature review as a research method provides a strong foundation for knowledge development and facilitates theory-building (J. Webster, 2002). The research data were derived from scholarly journal articles and academic books. The literature was selected based on the following criteria: publication within the last five to ten years (2016–2026), relevance to the themes of Balinese customary marriage, the Catur Warna system, and gender relations, and the inclusion of either empirical or theoretical analyses of women’s experiences. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns regarding Catur Warna’s role in regulating marriage and shaping women’s positions within this structure. The analysis was conducted using Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, in conjunction with a gender perspective, to examine how Catur Warna norms are reproduced through social consent and how they generate unequal power relations that affect the lives of caste-based Balinese women.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents the results of the analysis of the concept of Catur Warna and the social practices associated with it in the context of Balinese marriage, situating them within a framework of power relations and symbolic meaning. The analysis draws on textual sources, academic studies, and conceptual findings concerning how Catur Warna is understood, reproduced and interpreted in contemporary social life. The primary focus is not only on the normative and philosophical dimensions of Catur Warna but also on its operationalization in social practice, particularly within the institution of marriage.

The discussion further demonstrates that Catur Warna does not function as a neutral system but rather as a hegemonic mechanism that regulates gender relations and distributes social positions within Balinese society. Marriage constitutes a strategic arena for observing how symbolic hierarchies are institutionalized through customary rules, language, and norms of social propriety that are accepted as natural and legitimate by society. Within this context, women emerge as the subjects most profoundly affected by these hegemonic processes, particularly in inter-group marriages. Women’s subordination does not appear as the result of overt coercion but rather as a moral consequence of life choices that have already been framed by prevailing social norms. Accordingly, the following subsection elaborates on the concept of Catur Warna in Bali as the historical and ideological foundation that sustains the operation of hegemony in marital practices and shapes women’s social experiences.

#### ***4.1 Catur Warna in Bali***

Catur Warna is a concept of social differentiation that is deeply rooted in classical Hindu tradition. It emphasizes the need to recognize individuals based on their respective functions and contributions. Its purpose is to acknowledge human achievement in accordance with one’s capacities and fields of endeavor.

The concept of Catur Warna appears in several Hindu scriptures, including the Yajurveda. The Yajur Veda states:

Brahmane Brahmanam, Kshtriya Rajanyam, Marudbhyo Vaishyam, Tapase Sudram (Yajur Weda, XXX.5, as cited in Sudarsini, 2018).

Translation:

God created the Brahmana for knowledge, Ksatria for protection, Vaishya for trade, and Sudra for physical labor.

Based on this passage, it is explicitly stated that the concept of Catur Warna is founded on ability and occupational function. From its inception, Catur Warna was not determined by inherited titles or ascribed status attached to an individual. Rather, this concept was originally formulated within a functional framework that allowed individuals to position themselves according to their talents and social duties instead of serving as a static hierarchy imposed upon others (Hartanto, 2023).

Historically, this concept was incorporated into Balinese social practices following the introduction of Hinduism to the Indonesian archipelago, particularly through texts such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Mahabharata, which became integral to Balinese liturgical and ritual traditions (Sudarsini, 2018). The values of Catur Warna were fundamentally intended to educate and cultivate moral conduct through informal education and family practices, whereby individuals were taught that one's warna should be determined by occupational capacity (karma) and personal disposition (guna) in the pursuit of spiritual and social virtues. The doctrine of varna is inherently horizontal and dynamic, as each individual is free to choose a role or social function in accordance with their guna and karma, thereby serving the wider community. Accordingly, in its original textual and philosophical formulation, Catur Warna was not intended to constitute a closed or exclusive system of social stratification based on descent, but rather a division of social functions that was ideally flexible and responsive to society's needs.

However, alongside historical and social developments in Bali, a shift has occurred in the interpretation of Catur Warna from a horizontal functional concept to an increasingly static social hierarchy that conceals class-like structures. Within Balinese society, this transformation is more commonly recognized as the Catur Kasta or Wangsa system. Purana (2022) observes that the blurring of the Catur Varna system as a functional concept has been shaped by both Balinese royal politics and Dutch colonial policies, which introduced more rigid forms of social stratification in which social status and access to education and official positions were frequently restricted to specific groups. His study further reveals that the Tri Wangsa groups (Brahmana, Ksatria, and Waisya) tend to preserve their ascribed hereditary status, whereas the Sudra or jaba groups pursue an achieved status. This divergence has generated social tensions concerning mobility and social legitimacy within the Hindu Balinese society.

As a consequence of this misinterpretation of Catur Warna, distortions have emerged in the understanding of the egalitarian values embedded in the Balinese Hindu culture. Contemporary youth's interpretations of Catur Warna often diverge from traditional readings that equate warna with caste, producing tensions between younger generations' ideals of social solidarity and traditional values that are increasingly perceived as discriminatory. (Sintia, 2025). This condition further confirms the gap between Hindu religious texts, which define varna as categories based on individual qualities and occupations, and social practices that frequently treat these categories as hereditary identities that restrict social mobility and shape the everyday social structures in Bali.

In contemporary Balinese society, the terms Catur Kasta or Wangsa are widely used by many social groups to denote an inherited social status determined by lineage rather than by individual guna and karma. Wangsa is commonly understood as a relatively fixed form of social identity in which family names, titles, and hierarchical positions remain important references in various social practices, such as the selection of

marriage partners across communities, the allocation of ritual roles, and access to symbolic and economic resources. Consequently, Catur Warna is more readily recognized through naming systems and family titles than through functional roles based on guna and karma.

The Brahmana group is generally identified by names such as Ida Bagus (for men) and Ida Ayu (for women), which are socially associated with the priestly lineage. The Ksatria group typically bears names such as Anak Agung, Cokorda, or Dewa Agung, referring to aristocratic or royal descent. The Waisya group is often recognized by names such as I Gusti, which were historically associated with merchants and administrative officials during the royal period. Meanwhile, the Sudra or Jaba group uses birth-order names such as Wayan, Made, Nyoman, and Ketut, which are numerical in nature and do not carry hierarchical status markers. These naming systems and family titles function as symbolic indicators of social identity rather than merely administrative labels, implicitly signaling one's wangsa origin in everyday social interactions.

This reduction in the understanding of the Catur Warna concept has direct implications for the regulation of marriage in Bali, particularly in relation to both endogamous and exogamous wangsa practices. Within this context, marriage is no longer understood primarily as a personal relationship between individuals but rather as part of a social strategy to preserve lineage purity and family honor.

#### ***4.2 Catur Warna as a Mechanism of Social Regulation in Marriage***

In Hindu Balinese society, marriage has traditionally been regarded as a sacred institution that binds not only two individuals but also their families and the wider community. In everyday practice, Catur Warna serves as a key indicator for evaluating the suitability of prospective partners, particularly within the Triwangsa groups (Brahmana, Ksatria, and Waisya) and the Jaba group (*Sudra*) (Subawa, 2022). These unwritten rules shape family expectations regarding partner choice, whereby endogamous marriage is generally regarded as more normative than exogamous marriage because it is believed to preserve the customary balance and social order. Extended families commonly intervene in the marriage approval process to ensure that the prospective partner's warna aligns with family expectations and hereditary titles, often without considering the couple's individual preferences. Women, particularly those from the Triwangsa group, are frequently subjected to strong pressure to preserve their family status by selecting partners of equal or higher social status (homogamy).

Such social regulations generate a culture of partner selection that is systematically co-opted by the normative narratives of Catur Warna. This process has significant implications for interpersonal experiences and individual life decisions, as marital choices become embedded within the broader structures of symbolic hierarchy and social control. Astari et al. research (2023) indicates that in Balinese culture, the wangsa structure influences patterns of interaction between women and men within family and community contexts, particularly regarding marital choices that deviate from social expectations. Women originating from the three higher wangsa who marry men from groups perceived as having lower caste status experience changes in their patterns of communication with extended family members and their surrounding social environment, which subsequently affects their relational status within the community. These findings demonstrate that Catur Warna functions not only as a normative or theoretical category but also as a symbolic system that shapes social reality and the ways in which individuals' roles and statuses are evaluated within family relations. This cultural factor ultimately affects decision-making structures in marriage, as partner choice is not regarded solely as a personal matter but as a social practice that is monitored and regulated by broader collective norms. Consequently, social regulation based on Catur Warna contributes significantly to the formation of marital norms in Balinese societies. Inter-wangsa marriages—locally referred to as *nyerod* when women are considered to “descend in warna”—are often perceived as violations of the established social order, even though they do not contravene either religious or state law.

Wagiswari and Valentina's (2025) systematic study demonstrates that Balinese women who engage in inter-wangsa marriages often encounter resistance from both family and community, as such unions are perceived

as bringing shame and lowering the family's social status, even when the relationships are founded on love, equality, and ideals of modernity. This resistance underscores that although formal legal frameworks support the right to freely choose one's spouse, traditional social norms persist as powerful and coercive forms of informal regulation in Balinese Hindu communities. Such regulations operate through social sanctions, moral pressure, and the risk of exclusion from broader community networks. Thus, Catur Warna functions as an evaluative framework that assesses not only the cultural compatibility of a couple but also the social legitimacy of the marital relationship itself.

Social regulation through Catur Warna also shapes marriage strategies. Women's partner selection decisions are often influenced by parental upbringing that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a stable family social status, constituting a social strategy within the traditional warna system. From an early age, higher-caste women are socialized into specific expectations regarding partner selection and the social sanctions they may face if they deviate from these norms. Such upbringing patterns internalize social norms that reinforce marital homogamy, ultimately constraining women's autonomy in decision-making processes. Consequently, through these social norms, the warna system profoundly shapes women's marriage experiences across generations.

#### ***4.3 Caste-Based Women as the Most Vulnerable Subjects***

Within the context of Catur Warna, women occupy the most vulnerable position because their bodies and life choices are the primary medium for reproducing family social status. Women are positioned as moral representatives of the family, such that decisions about marriage are no longer fully situated within the realm of individual autonomy. In many cases, family preferences for partners of "equal warna" are stronger for daughters than for their sons. This produces a gendered asymmetry in marital practices, wherein women are more closely monitored, controlled, and evaluated according to their compliance with wangsa norms. Accordingly, women's vulnerability does not arise from the institution of marriage itself but from the power relations operating through social norms grounded in Catur Warna.

This vulnerability becomes even more evident in inter-wangsa marriages, particularly when women from groups perceived as higher in warna marry men from groups perceived as lower (nyerod). Within the Balinese kinship system, based on the concepts of purusa and pradana, men are generally positioned as the continuers of lineage and holders of symbolic family rights (purusa), whereas women are regarded as "leaving" their natal families upon marriage and entering their husband's lineage (pradana). (Wedanti, IGA Jatiana Manik; Saskara, I Putu Ade; Sugita, 2023). Consequently, to maintain harmonious relations with the bajang family (the family of origin) and avoid symbolic conflict, women are indirectly directed to marry men of equal wangsa status. When women violate this unwritten rule by entering into a nyerod marriage, their actions are interpreted not merely as personal choices but as moral failures in preserving the honor and symbolic continuity of their natal family. Women in this position often experience psychological pressure in the form of guilt, social stigma, and relational conflict with their families of origin (Wagiswari and Suryaning, 2025). Meanwhile, men in inter-wangsa marriages are relatively less likely to experience social delegitimation of their identity because the purusa system continues to guarantee the continuity of lineage and the family's symbolic status.

This differential treatment indicates the existence of a gender-based double standard within Balinese Hindu society, wherein women's bodies and life choices become the primary terrain of social regulation. This inequality is reinforced by customary narratives that construct women as those who "nyerod" or "descend in status," whereas men's entry into inter-wangsa marriages does not entail a symmetrical loss of dignity. Within a Gramscian framework of hegemony, such a normative order can be understood as a form of cultural hegemony, namely, a process through which the values and interests of dominant groups are accepted as social common sense (common sense) by the wider society (Gramsci, 1999). Norms concerning wangsa compatibility in marriage do not appear as formal, coercive rules but rather as moral obligations that are internalized by women as part of their responsibility toward their family of origin. This mechanism

operates not primarily through force but through social consent formed from an early age via family upbringing, customary practices, and cultural discourses on honor and cosmic harmony.

Caste-based Balinese women are socialized from childhood to accept that maintaining wangsa congruence in marriage is an act of devotion and respect toward family and tradition. Consequently, restrictions on their life choices are not perceived as oppression but as a moral duty. Thus, domination does not manifest as an overtly repressive power relation but rather as a norm regarded as natural and proper to uphold.

It is precisely here that hegemony operates: social structures based on the purusa–pradana system and the wangsa hierarchy are reproduced through women’s consciousness, as they come to accept these limitations as integral to their identity and responsibilities as caste-based Balinese women. Hegemony functions through a series of processes that create, maintain, preserve, and reproduce authoritative meanings, ideologies, and practices (Barker, 2014, p. 119)

Beyond the loss of status, the consequences for caste-based Balinese women who marry across wangsa also affect the way they are addressed, their symbolic position in customary rituals, and the reduction of their symbolic legitimacy within their new social environment. When caste-based women enter a nyered marriage, changes in their names or adjustments to their identities often mark a shift in their symbolic status within the social structure. These changes are not experienced neutrally; rather, they are accompanied by normative expectations of conformity to the husband’s familial standards.

In this context, women undergo a more complex identity transition than men because they must negotiate their social positions within two family structures simultaneously. The norm that women must adapt to their husbands’ wangsa status is produced as a cultural truth and therefore is not perceived as injustice but as customary propriety. Hegemony operates through women’s acceptance of changes in their identity as a moral consequence of their marital choice rather than as a result of unequal power relations.

Women’s vulnerability in caste-based marriage practices cannot be understood merely as a consequence of customary norms but as the outcome of cultural hegemony that regulates how Balinese society thinks and acts with regard to honor, status, and propriety. Women are positioned as moral guardians and as the medium for reproducing family social status through processes of social consent shaped by custom, language, and ritual, so that their subordination does not appear as coercion but as the norm. This vulnerability is not a natural condition but is produced through the internalization of norms that require women to comply with the wangsa hierarchy to maintain social harmony.

In Gramsci’s sense, hegemony operates when a historical bloc of dominant groups exercises moral and intellectual leadership over subordinate groups through a combination of power and consent. (Barker, 2014, p. 119). Understanding Catur Warna as a hierarchical and hereditary system positions women as subjects who bear the greatest social consequences for normative transgressions because their bodies and marital choices become the primary locus of symbolic control. Such social authority is exercised not mainly through prohibitions or physical sanctions but through the production of meanings surrounding propriety, honor, and social order. Customary language, wangsa categories, and narratives of family harmony form evaluative frameworks that encourage women to interpret their experiences not as unequal power relations but as moral consequences of their caste-based identities. In this way, the leadership of the dominant class over the symbolic order is reproduced through social consent, which is internalized within women’s own consciousness.

#### ***4.4 Implications***

The relationship between Catur Warna, marital norms, and women’s social position does not remain at a symbolic or discursive level but produces tangible consequences in everyday social life. Hegemony operating through custom, language, and meanings of propriety shapes the boundaries of what women can

and cannot do within family and community relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to further examine how these mechanisms shape women's lived experiences, particularly regarding autonomy, power relations, and decision making in marriage.

The operation of Catur Warna hegemony in marital practices has concrete implications for restricting women's autonomy in determining their life choices. The choice of a partner is not fully understood as an individual right but rather as a collective decision that must align with the symbolic interests of the family and the wangsa. This places women in a weak bargaining position when their desires conflict with family expectations. In many cases, when women from the Triwangsa group are not permitted to marry men from the Sudra Wangsa, the option often taken is ngerorod marriage (elopement). This form of marriage is chosen when one or both parties do not obtain family approval, one of the main reasons being differences in the wangsa. The emergence of ngerorod marriage has significantly impacted the development of caste in Bali, including changes in social structure, public perceptions, and cultural identity (Sulangi and Sudanta, 2025). Within the hegemonic framework, these restrictions are generally not imposed directly but are gradually constructed and internalized from an early age so that they are eventually accepted as morally meaningful forms of obedience. Consequently, women often internalize the belief that sacrificing their own desires is a form of devotion to the family. Thus, women's autonomy is reduced without the need for overt conflict.

In addition, psychological burden constitutes one of the impacts experienced by caste-based Balinese women, particularly in inter-wangsa marriages. (Wagiswari & Suryaning, 2025). The pressure to preserve family honor, feelings of guilt associated with being considered as having "lost status," and conflicts in relationships with the family of origin shape a complex emotional experience for these women. In many cases, women must negotiate their identities between their original status and their new position within their husbands' families. This process is often accompanied by feelings of alienation and loss of symbolic legitimacy. Hegemony operates by constructing this suffering as a natural consequence of women's choices. Thus, psychological pressure is not understood as an effect of social structure but rather as a personal burden to be borne individually.

Another implication is the continued reproduction of gender inequality within the social structure of Balinese society. When women are consistently positioned as responsible for upholding the honor of the wangsa, the purusa-pradana system and the hierarchy of wangsa are maintained through everyday practices. Marriage is the primary arena for the reproduction of this ideology, as status, identity, and social legitimacy are negotiated within marriage. Hegemony ensures that these patterns are transmitted across generations through child-rearing practices, language, and customs. From an early age, girls are socialized to accept limitations on their bodies and their choices. In this way, inequality is sustained not only by customary structures but also by an internalized social consciousness.

The final observable impact is the strengthening of the normalization of women's subordination within customary and cultural discourse. When restrictions on women are understood as the natural order of tradition, the space for questioning injustice narrows. In Gramsci's terms, this condition is related to the operation of common sense, namely, popular attitudes and beliefs that the broader public accepts as unquestionable truths. This form of consciousness is unreflective and fragmentary, and it constitutes the principal medium through which hegemonic power operates. (Stanford Encyclopedia 2023). Because this form of consciousness is unreflective and fragmentary, it enables unequal power relations to be reproduced without being recognized as structural inequality, but rather as part of a cultural order deemed legitimate and natural. Criticism of the system is often perceived as a violation of harmony and the cosmic order. Within Gramsci's hegemonic framework, this situation demonstrates the success of cultural domination in shaping societal perceptions of what is proper. Gender inequality no longer appears as a structural problem but as a moral consequence of individual choice. Thus, the hegemony of Catur Warna not only regulates marital practices but also shapes the boundaries of social consciousness regarding women's position in Balinese society.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

This study shows that the practice of Catur Warna in Balinese society operates as a hegemonic mechanism that shapes women's social consciousness from early childhood. Through family upbringing, customary education, and marital norms, women are directed to accept the caste order as natural and unquestionable. This internalization of values occurs without physical coercion but through continuously constructed cultural consent. In this context, women's subordination is produced by social structures and reproduced through everyday practices within families and communities. Thus, caste-based power relations are maintained through social consent mechanisms rather than solely through overt domination.

The hegemony of Catur Warna in marital practices also illustrates how women's life choices are constrained by socially and culturally legitimized social norms. Women from specific castes are positioned as subjects responsible for safeguarding family honor and the continuity of social status through compliance with marital rules. This condition creates a structured gender inequality that is difficult to challenge because it is wrapped in narratives of tradition and harmony. However, modern social dynamics open up space for the emergence of symbolic resistance to these values, although they have not yet fundamentally transformed existing structures. Therefore, understanding hegemony in the context of Catur Warna is crucial for analyzing how gender inequality is produced and maintained in contemporary Balinese societies.

### **5.2. Limitation**

This study had several limitations. First, because it employs a literature review method, the analysis relies entirely on the availability and quality of written sources addressing Catur Warna, Balinese marriages, and gender relations. Consequently, the empirical experiences of caste-based Balinese women are not directly captured through interviews or field observations. Second, most of the literature focuses on customary norms and social structures; therefore, women's subjective dynamics, such as personal negotiation strategies and everyday forms of resistance, are not fully represented. Third, this study does not differentiate in detail between regional variations within Bali, even though the application of Catur Warna and marital customs may differ depending on the *desa adat* context and socio-economic background. Fourth, this study emphasizes the experiences of caste-based women in inter-Wangsa marriages and therefore does not fully encompass the experiences of women from non-triwangsa groups. Thus, the findings of this study are more conceptual and analytical than a comprehensive empirical representation of the social realities in Bali.

### **5.3. Suggestion**

Based on these findings and limitations, future research should employ qualitative field methods, such as in-depth interviews and ethnography, to explore the subjective experiences of caste-based Balinese women in confronting Catur Warna-based marital norms. Further studies should consider variations across regions and generations to examine how the hegemony of Catur Warna operates differently in the contexts of *desa adat*, urban areas, and Balinese migrant communities. Future research should integrate an intersectional perspective by considering social class, education, and religion in analyzing women's vulnerability. From a policy and social practice perspective, these findings may serve as a critical reflection for customary institutions and local communities to reassess marital rules that potentially reproduce gender inequity. Critical education regarding the non-hierarchical meaning of Catur Warna should be developed through families, schools, and customary institutions. Thus, future research will not only enrich academic scholarship but also contribute to a more just social transformation for Balinese women.

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