

Dharmagita and Character Education: An Ethnographic Perspective on Literary Traditions among Ubud Youth

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Abstract

This ethnographic study examines the influence of Dharmagita, a traditional Balinese literary form, on character education among youth in Ubud. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and analysis of Dharmagita texts, engaging 30 Balinese youths aged 15-21. The study employs semiotic analysis to decode the symbolic representations within the texts and psychoanalytic theory to explore their impact on the psychological development of moral values. The findings highlight Dharmagita's role in embedding values such as care, fairness, honesty, forgiveness, cooperation, responsibility, and community awareness into the fabric of youth education. Integrating these values into everyday life through literary traditions provides a dual benefit: moral development and cultural continuity. Additionally, the study notes Dharmagita's entertaining elements enhance its receptivity among youth, suggesting its potential as an accessible tool for moral instruction. Limitations regarding the diverse interpretations of Dharmagita and its applicability across different educational settings are discussed. This research contributes to the dialogue on culturally responsive pedagogy, offering Dharmagita as a model for integrating indigenous literary practices into character education frameworks.

Keywords: *dharmagita, balinese youth, character education.*

Introduction

The preservation of cultural heritage has become an essential topic in the globalized era, where local traditions face the threat of being overshadowed by modern influences. Dharmagita, a traditional form of Balinese sung poetry, is vital to Hindu religious practices. Derived from Sanskrit, "Dharma" signifies truth, duty, and moral law, while "Gita" means song. Together, Dharmagita translates to a "song of truth," typically performed during religious ceremonies (yadnya). Each performance is tailored to the specific type of yadnya being offered, making it an integral component of the Panca Gita, which encompasses five sacred sounds: mantra vibrations, the bell, kidung (songs), gamelan, and kentongan or kukul (wooden bells).

Dharmagita has several forms, including Sekar Rare, Sekar Alit, Sekar Madya, Sekar Agung, and Palawakya (Dwiwana, 2020). Beyond their aesthetic value, these sung recitations embody a devotion (bhakti) system, imparting profound moral and spiritual teachings rooted in texts like the Bhagavata Purana VII.5.23. These teachings contribute to the development of religious character, which serves as a cornerstone for holistic personal growth.

Despite its cultural significance, mastering Dharmagita demands rigorous training, exceptional memory, and long-term commitment. In Ubud, this art form has seen predominantly female participation, highlighting a gender imbalance that calls for attention. While Dharmagita is commonly performed in temples and homes during religious ceremonies, its potential as a medium for character education among youth remains largely untapped. Interviews with Ubud youth indicate a lack of awareness about the character-building aspects inherent in Dharmagita.

Previous research, such as the works of Gitananda and Trisdyani (2020), underscores the critical role of character education in fostering human excellence. Effective character formation requires comprehensive learning approaches within supportive environments. However, the integration of character education into Dharmagita training programs is minimal, and the deeper meanings of the Dharmagita texts are seldom fully conveyed to participants.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how Dharmagita can promote character education through non-formal education programs within Sekaa Santi communities in Ubud. By aligning the literary

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and moral dimensions of Dharmagita with character education, this research aims to reveal its potential as a transformative tool for youth development. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on integrating cultural heritage into modern educational practices, emphasizing the preservation of Balinese traditions while fostering moral development in an increasingly globalized world.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the role of Dharmagita in character education among Balinese youth in Ubud. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation to capture the multifaceted nature of Dharmagita as both a cultural and educational practice. The interviews involved youth participants, Dharmagita trainers, and cultural experts to gain comprehensive insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the integration of Dharmagita into character education. Additionally, the interviews examined the linguistic capabilities of the youth, informing the selection of an appropriate language medium for teaching Dharmagita.

Document analysis focused on primary sources, including Dharmagita texts, interpretative commentaries, and training materials, aiming to extract moral and cultural values pertinent to character formation. Participant observation was conducted during training sessions within Sekaa Santi community groups in Ubud. This approach provided an in-depth understanding of teaching practices, participant interactions, and lived experiences, ensuring a holistic interpretation of Dharmagita's educational impact.

Data analysis employed semiotic and psychoanalytic theories. Semiotic analysis was used to decode the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in Dharmagita texts, while psychoanalytic theory helped explore participants' emotional and psychological engagement, shedding light on how Dharmagita learning contributes to character development. This theoretical framework facilitated a comprehensive examination of the moral and psychological growth fostered through Dharmagita.

Multiple strategies were utilized to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, including data triangulation across interviews, document analysis, and observations. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to confirm accuracy and ensure trustworthiness. Reflexivity was maintained through continuous documentation of the researcher's reflections and potential biases throughout the study.

The research was conducted in Ubud, a region renowned for its rich cultural heritage and active engagement in Dharmagita. Ethical considerations were meticulously followed, with informed consent obtained from all participants, anonymity preserved, and cultural sensitivities respected throughout the study. This rigorous methodological approach, combined with theoretical integration and ethical diligence, ensures that the findings offer valuable insights into Dharmagita's role as a medium for character education among Balinese youth.

Findings and Discussion

Dharmagita Literature Learning

Dharmagita, as a form of Balinese literary tradition, serves as a crucial component of Hindu worship, embodying profound moral and ethical values. Literature, including prose, poetry, and drama, plays a pivotal role in cultural and educational contexts (Fahmiasih, 2012). Learning literature in Indonesia encompasses various activities like listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are essential for developing literary competence (Ermawati, 2015). In this context, Gorter et al. (2021) highlight the pedagogical potential of language, emphasizing that it can be an effective tool for language acquisition and can be integrated with other fields to enhance children's education. Similarly, Yuan and Shen (2016) assert that well-designed cultural and literary presentations, particularly those utilizing relevant technology, can captivate children's attention and foster engagement.

Dharmagita, often in the form of sung kidung verses, is replete with moral values intrinsic to Hindu ethics, which emphasize good and noble behavior aligned with Dharma and Yadnya principles. These principles advocate for sincerity and compassion as foundational to harmonious relationships (Parisada Hindu Dharma). The appreciation and learning of Dharmagita are pivotal in instilling these values, necessitating a pedagogical approach that involves checking students' prior knowledge and connecting it with new content (Mahan, 2022).

The stages of Dharmagita learning in Ubud involve selecting appropriate materials, such as sekar alit and sekar madya, followed by understanding the text, mastering musical notations, and engaging in vocal and breathing exercises (Sudirga et al., 2022). This approach aligns with the semiotic theory, which interprets Dharmagita's symbolic and cultural meanings through its textual and performative elements. The notations and vocal practices serve as semiotic tools that convey cultural values, reinforcing the moral lessons embedded in the texts.

The psychoanalytic perspective offers further insights into youth's emotional and psychological engagement with Dharmagita. Learning and performing Dharmagita allows for a deeper connection with cultural identity, fostering a sense of belonging and moral development. This emotional engagement is crucial for internalizing the ethical values presented in Dharmagita, contributing to the holistic development of the youth.

Evaluation in Dharmagita learning involves assessing participants' mastery of the verses, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement. Habók and Magyar (2020) emphasize perseverance as a key determinant of learning success, which is particularly relevant in mastering Dharmagita. The iterative process of practice, demonstration, and evaluation aligns with the concept of effective learning, where demonstration, auditory, and visual elements enhance learning outcomes (Nurhidayati, 2019).

The integration of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Dharmagita's educational impact on youth. This study underscores Dharmagita's potential as a transformative tool for character education by decoding its symbolic meanings and examining the emotional engagement it fosters.



Figure 1. Dharmagita Performance

Dharmagita in the Development of Character-Based Literature

The ten pillars of character according to Pranowo (2013) include: 1) Caring, 2) being Aware of the community, 3) Cooperating, 4) being Fair, 5) Utilizing, 6) Honest, 7) Maintaining relationships, 8) Respecting others, 9) Responsible, and 10) Prioritizing safety. Gitananda and Trisdyani (2020) view education as a system of instilling good values in children so that children have knowledge and awareness and actions in implementing these values. Suyanto (2012) stated that children are instilled with character education from an early age because what children get will be firmly embedded in their minds. Silahuddin (2017) revealed the importance of formal and non-formal education in building children's character. Furthermore, Mahaputra et al. (2016) stated that one of the factors that determines the quality of a nation's life is education.

Education plays a vital role in the formation of intelligent, open, and democratic people. Character education should be encouraged to improve human resources quality. Character development should be integrated into learning and relevant formal, informal, and non-formal activities. Thus, character education can be instilled effectively and efficiently. Gearailt et al. (2023) revealed the importance of integrated language learning. It can attract children's interest and support successful learning. In line with what was revealed, literature learning (Dharmagita) in this study was integrated with non-formal character education. Efforts were made to form Sekaa Shanti, whose members were young people who were generally from grade III junior high and high school students. In Sekaa Shanti, they happily met and practiced with cooperation and sharpened each other, loved each other, and cared for each other. They also united to promote young people's progress, especially in Dharmagita activities. Hamburger (1993) stated that integrated learning presentations support the success of achieving learning objectives. In addition to learning presentations, according to Hansen and Broekhuizen (2021), support from the environment also supports the success of learning presentations. In line with what was revealed, the presentation of Dharmagita to young people is directed at the integration of Dharmagita Literature with vocal arts, language mastery, and support from parents and the Bale Agung Ubud community.

Álvarez et al. (2020) view language as having instrumental value in learning. From this statement, the young Dharmagita students, before being presented with Dharmagita learning, were checked for their language skills related to the language used in the translation of the Dharmagita text. Mastery of language that is relevant to the Dharmagita material greatly determines the soul and ability to recite Dharmagita poetry. Without mastery of language, one will be hampered in understanding the meaning and arranging pauses when reciting Dharmagita poetry. In reciting Dharmagita poetry, knowledge is also needed about how to make listeners or listeners interested and understand their meaning. In line with what was expressed by Srihayati (2016), listeners will be able to appreciate and interpret information conveyed verbally if the information is conveyed in accordance with the language mastery of the listener or listener.

The presentation of Dharmagita material should be balanced or alternated with the chanting of Dharmagita poetry. In this way, young people who learn can sing more quickly and master the meaning. Rohmanurmeta (2017) states that comprehensive involvement, both physical, intellectual, and emotional, is necessary to master language and literature. Likewise, studying Dharmagita requires physical, intellectual, and emotional involvement to sing the poem and understand its meaning optimally. Dharmagita teachers or trainers try to awaken activity and activeness in young people who study Dharmagita. In line with efforts in language learning expressed by Nasirah (2017), learning will be effective if it is accompanied by student activity and activeness in the community using the language being studied.

The Dharmagita, which is full of character education content, is shown in the following quotes:

Pupuh Mijil

Cening bagus, sarat rawuh mangkin, misadya matakon, gunan tatwa ring Bhuta Yadnyane, bapa twara midartayang sami, wantah ne utami, maguna panuntun hidup.

(Sangskara, 2000)

Translation:

Good child, feel the need to come now to ask about the function of bhuta yadnya. Fathers and teachers do not explain everything; they only explain the important things that are urgent for guidance in life.

The quote is an appeal to care about religious literature, even though it is not explained by parents or religious leaders. One should know the meaning of yadnya, or holy sacrifice, so that the implementation of religious ceremonies and upakara can be done with confidence and sincerity. The quote from the pupuh above can be used during the Bhuta Yadnya ceremony.



Figure 2. The Bhuta Yadnya ceremony is accompanied by the singing of the Dharmagita

Character education that is aware of community and cooperation is shown in the following quote.

Pupuh Ginanti

Malih yan margane tedun, ngayah ring genabe suci, ring pura rawuh ke warga, ditu polih galah becik, saling taken tinakenan, caluh pada saling unyain.

(Sangskara, 2000)

Translation:

Again, when people come to work in the holy place, from the temple to the highway, they can have a good time, greet each other, and visit each other.

The quote above is an appeal for awareness of living in society, working together and in harmony, and working together to uphold holy and public places. The quote from the pupuh is used during the Dewa Yadnya ceremony so that the atmosphere of the ceremony becomes more lively, more alive, and meaningful. The character education of fairness, honesty, and forgiveness is shown in the following quote:

Pupuh Sinom

Sebet kabhyune manyingak, ring indike sapunika, ngawetuang kabrahmantian Ida mangda dharma jati, manggabe ngawe becik, ngicen ajah I manusa, mangda tan mamanan wagig, yan telebang tampenin, Ida jati ngawe ayu, mapaiica ajah-ajah.

Translation:

Empu Iswara Bawosang, Hyang Iswara Sira Tui, Mawesa Ida Manusa. Get down from the earth, Brahmin, now to leave this place. However, it will be a learning experience.

The quote above shows the fair attitude of religious leaders to reward everyone who makes a mistake. The character of honesty is shown in the following quote

Pupuh Sinom

Toya lateke maliyah tekaning lubune sami ising eyeh avor samyan, muncrat mumbul nyajeribin, Ne makardi kabungsi, Ragan Ida Teken Wuwung, katatur saparan-paran, Tan Sidha mangkin makedid, ye kakepung, kaliput saparan-paran.

(Degung, 2013)

Translation:

The murky waters are clear, and he is aware of himself now, only his behavior is wrong; he immediately apologizes, facing the Rsi politely. Clasp his hands, he said: Queen, forgive me, but still in a state of being chased by the Rsi and cannot escape.

The character of honesty and forgiveness is shown in the following quote:

Pupuh Sinom

Nunas ica ratu titiang, ampura indik puniki, kadi purun pangpang cangah, ring paduka manga suci, nenten pacing mawali, kadi laksana ring dangu, sapunika nora rarad, atur titian puniki, mangda asung, mahawiku ngampurayang.

Translation:

Empu Iswara said, Hi Nanda, now no longer doubt and be ashamed of past wrongdoings; the important thing is that Nanda remembers and admits his mistakes. Father should not be angry with someone who has apologized. A wiku must be willing to forgive.

The character of maintaining relationships is depicted in the following excerpt from the Brahmana Angisep Sari song:

Mogi tan kacakrabhawa

Titian I Katuman sami

Nista kaya wak lan manah

Langgeng ngulati Hyang Widhi

Sang Sukma Maba Achintya

Nirbhana siva kasengguh

Singodan ring tampak aksi

(www.pasraman.com)

Translation:

Hopefully not cursed

I am a person with many shortcomings

Always faithfully worship Him

Sang Hyang Widhi is in a subtle form

And unthinkable

Called Nirbhana Siwa

Invisible cannot be seen

With the naked eye

But He still exists

From the excerpt of the Brahmana Angisep Sari song, it can be stated that there is an appeal to be confident and maintain a relationship with God by believing, prostrating, and serving Him who is All-Existing. Suarka (2015) stated that the song has a value of *skala* (real) and *niskala* (a higher or invisible realm). It all comes down to God. The character of respecting others, being responsible, and prioritizing safety can be shown in the Kidung Sekar Gadung which is sung during the Dewa Yadnya ceremony, namely during the nunas *tirta*. In the Kidung Sekar Gadung, it is implied and explicit that water plays an important role in life. In Hindu teachings, water embodies the power of the God Vishnu. Water is glorified by Hindu society and carried out in rituals, depending on the traditions and literary references of specific regional communities. Water plays a vital role in both scale and niskala. Without water, living things will die. Without water (*tirta*), a yadnya is considered imperfect. In addition, the Kidung Sekar Gadung also implies maintaining a harmonious relationship with nature, such as not polluting water. The responsible character is also implied in Kidung Sekar Gadung, namely in utilizing or digging water sources must be accounted for. Surna (1996) describes the Dewa Yadnya kidung. One of the Dewa Yadnya kidung, namely Kidung Sekar Gadung, is as follows

Tirta baning, ye tirta

Hening, sibub emas

Yoga ring sangku,

Siratin ragan I Dewa

Ketisin juru kidunge

Wus maketis ye tirta baning

Manglukat malane, ring raga

Dumadak Ida sweca

Mrelina loba angkara

Wus punika, dumadak mentik

Manah titian, sane galang

Budi amkera waras

Solah anut ring ke Darman

Translation:

Clear holy water is holy water

Like gold placed in a sangku

Dropped or sprayed on oneself

After finishing the water makeup

Removes all dirt

Bad attitudes.

Greedy, arrogant, jealous

And other bad attitudes will be eliminated

By the *tirta* (holy water).

Hopefully, bright thoughts will emerge or grow,

Good attitudes according to religious teachings.

Kidung Sekar Gadung also implies responsible character education. *Tirta* (holy water) prayed for salvation to God must be accounted for in its use. That means water should not be prayed for or dug for things that deviate from the ethics of utilizing natural resources created by God.



Figure 3. Upacara Dewa Yadnya diiringi Aktivitas Dharmagita

Kidung, as Dharmagita literature, has a positive impact on blood pressure in the elderly (Artana, 2016). Thus, Dharmagita as a literary work can be used as a means or bridge to convey messages, a means of narrative, a conveyor of feelings, enlightenment, and appeal. A melodious and rhythmic voice can create a sense of entertainment because it is pleasant to hear and provides advice.

The implementation of Dharmagita exercises guided by demonstrators (Ni Wayan Ayundari, Ni Ketut Dearth, and I Gusti Pekak) is carried out every school holiday because the youth members are generally students in grade 3 of junior high and high school. The exercises are carried out in each banjar (Banjar Ubud Kelod, Banjar Ubud Tengah, Banjar Ubud Kaja, and Banjar Sambahan). After 6 months of training (from September 2021 to March 2022), the youth are considered capable of carrying out makidung sekar madya and mageguritan (sekar alit) activities in religious ceremonies at the temple and at home.

The results of the researcher's interview with Ni Wayan Ayundari on April 20, 2022, stated that female teenagers are generally interested and active in Dharmagita activities. The number of Dharmagita training participants in each Banjar varies, namely: Banjar Ubud Kelod, totaling 40 people; Banjar Ubud Tengah, totaling 30 people; Banjar Ubud Kaja, totaling 25 people; and Banjar Sambahan, totaling 35 people. Young people from the four banjars often call her and ask about the meaning contained in the Dharmagita. This can indicate that the character content contained in the Dharmagita will be understood and applied. Kidung and geguritan singing competitions are held in the Balinese Language month. It turns out that in addition to young people, PKK mothers also participate in the activities; even many tourists watch the competition held at the Ubud Wantilan. The results of the interview with Desak Putu and several Dharmagita training participants on May 1, 2022, stated that Dharmagita's activities are entertainment for her. Carrying out daily activities at home is often accompanied by chanting the Dharmagita. This fact will positively impact the preservation of literary culture, especially traditional *literature*.

The Dharmagita, as a traditional form of Hindu literature, serves as a rich semiotic system wherein each verse and symbol conveys deeper cultural and spiritual meanings. According to Barthes' (1977) semiotic theory, texts like the Dharmagita function as signs communicating specific cultural values and norms. For instance, the verses in Pupuh Mijil and Pupuh Ginanti are not mere literary expressions but signify the transmission of religious and moral values from one generation to the next. Symbols such as 'Bhuta Yadnya' and 'Tirta' (holy water) embody the sacralization of daily life and reinforce community cohesion through shared rituals and moral frameworks.

The Pupuh Mijil emphasizes the significance of Bhuta Yadnya and symbolizes the importance of understanding and internalizing religious rituals. This semiotic representation extends to the community's collective consciousness, perpetuated through the rituals of the Dewa Yadnya ceremony. The ritual singing of Dharmagita during these ceremonies creates a shared cultural memory, embedding the values of care, cooperation, and fairness into the fabric of the community's identity.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on Freud's superego theory, the Dharmagita can be seen as a vehicle for developing moral consciousness in young individuals. The recitation and internalization of verses such as those in Pupuh Sinom contribute to forming a moral compass, which guides the individual's behavior in alignment with societal expectations. The repetitive nature of the chants and the structured environment of Sekaa Shanti provide a stable framework for the superego to assimilate these moral values, fostering a sense of responsibility and ethical behavior.

Moreover, Pupuh Sinom's appeal for forgiveness and acknowledgment of one's mistakes reflects the psychoanalytic process of catharsis, where expressing remorse and seeking forgiveness relieves psychological tension and guilt. This process is vital in the development of a balanced and empathetic personality, which aligns with Erikson's stage of psychosocial development, where the individual learns to balance personal needs with social responsibilities.

The combination of semiotic and psychoanalytic theories offers a comprehensive understanding of how Dharmagita functions as a tool for character development. The semiotic elements of Dharmagita provide the symbolic framework through which cultural values are communicated, while the psychoanalytic perspective elucidates the internal psychological processes that occur as the individual internalizes these values.

The use of Dharmagita in character education, as depicted in the study, highlights its role in nurturing young minds to become morally conscious and socially responsible individuals. The integration of character

education with the vocal arts and language mastery in Dharmagita activities creates a holistic learning environment that engages the learners' physical, intellectual, and emotional faculties. This comprehensive engagement ensures that the values embedded in the Dharmagita are understood cognitively and felt emotionally and behaviorally.

Conclusion

The existence of Dharmagita in the development of character education-based literature is primarily determined by the community groups that support it. The many results of implementing Dharmagita learning and training for young people in Ubud Bali found that Dharmagita is worthy of being used as a medium in developing traditional literature. The presentation of Dharmagita poetry can attract interest and raise awareness of the importance of Dharmagita activities in religious ceremonies, especially Hindu ceremonies. In addition, the development and learning of Dharmagita among young people in Ubud Bali are among the actions that preserve traditional literature. Dharmagita activities can be an alternative for instilling and developing character education, especially among young people in Ubud Bali. Character education instilled and developed through the presentation of Dharmagita texts for young people in Ubud Bali includes caring character education, as found in the Pupuh Mijil quote. Character education is aware of the community and works together as found in the Pupuh Ginanti quote. Character education is fair, honest, and forgiving, as found in the Pupuh Sinom quote. The character of maintaining relationships is written in the Kidung Brahmana Angisep Sari quote. The responsible character is found in Kidung Sekar Gadung. In addition, Dharmagita activities can entertain the public because of the melodious and fascinating poetry recitation. The pupuhs that contain character education are quoted from geguritan. Geguritan is formed by pupuhs with texts that are relevant to the theme.

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