



## SACRED NARRATIVES UNVEILED: EXPLORING THE SYMBOLISM OF *LINTANG GOWANG* IN WAYANG KAMASAN PAINTINGS AT BALE KAMBANG TAMAN GILI KERTHA GOSA

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### Abstract

This study addresses the need for more documentation systematically analyzing the significance of wayang kamasan illustrations in Bale Kambang Taman Gili Kertha Gosa. Despite historical actors passing away and lacking comprehensive studies on these illustrations, the article examines the iconographic meaning of lintang gowang. Researchers are intrigued by this phenomenon, especially considering the absence of empirical evidence supporting the conscious self-beheading capacity, a crucial aspect from a medical perspective. The incorporation of limb offerings and blood rituals in Hinduism strengthens the motivation to explore the illustration's meaning, particularly in evolving offering traditions in Bali. This visual narrative holds distinct significance, requiring extensive scholarly inquiry. Using an iconographic approach, qualitative research reveals narrative motifs in Tantri Kamandaka stories and tantra yana teachings involving head offerings, symbolizing a surrender act reaching the pinnacle of consciousness. The dramatized beheading and voluntary surrender underscore the doctrinal essence of self-offering, transcending dualities and the human ego, aiming for the highest consciousness levels.

**Keywords:** *wayang, kamasan, blood, offering, tantra*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1908, Puri Semarapura was severely damaged due to an attack by Dutch troops on the Klungkung kingdom. The event, known as Puputan Klungkung (Agung, 1989; Ardika, 2015), was a fierce war that led to the end of the Klungkung kingdom in the face of invading Dutch forces. The event caused almost the entire structure of Puri Semarapura to catch fire, while only a small part, such as Bale Kertha Gosa, Bale Kambang, and Pemedal Agung, managed to survive. In the early 20th century, around the 1930s to 1940s, there was a process of renovation of Bale Kambang. This renovation occurred during the late Dutch colonial period and continued during the Japanese occupation. The transformation of Bale Kambang during the Dutch colonial period occurred in line with the implementation of the "Balinizing" policy, which aimed to return Bali to a state that reflected its artistic and cultural excellence (Vickers, 2013). In 1929, the Dutch government changed Klungkung's status to *zelfbestureend landschap* and appointed Cokorda Oka Geg as *Besturder* (ruler), reusing Dewa Agung (Ardika, 2015). Renovations to the paintings and physical structure of Bale Kambang were carried out during the reign of King Dewa Agung Oka Geg. Initially, the building had relatively small dimensions and a moderate height. Renovations were carried out with increased foundation height and structural displacement to the West, resulting in more significant dimensional changes to the building and the surrounding pond (Pham, 2015). Meanwhile, the commissioning and placement of the Kamasan Wayang Paintings in Bale Kambang is thought to have occurred during the Japanese colonial period. The presence of the Japanese flag in the "*lintang perau pegat*" scene may indicate the painting's place of creation during Japanese rule (Kam, 1993; Vickers, 2012).

The paintings in Bale Kambang were done by sangging from Kamasan village led by I Wayan Kayun (Kam, 1993; Vickers, 2012). Kayun is known to have participated in making the

Wayang Kamasan paintings on the ceiling of Bale Kertha Gosa in 1933 with Pan Ngales, Nyoman Dogol and Pan Seken. Nyoman Dogol and Pan Seken were recorded as members of Pita Maha (Adnyana, 2018), so Kayun and the workers who participated in the painting at Bale Kambang were likely surrounded by the atmosphere of the Pita Maha era. Some damaged parts were repaired in the 1980s by I Nyoman Mandra (Vickers, 2012). The object of this study refers to a particular narrative found in several *lintang gowang* Kamasan wayang paintings in Bale Kambang, Kertha Gosa, at Klungkung Regency. In the *lintang gowang* segment, there is a story involving a figure who decides to voluntarily behead himself and then consciously hands the head over to another figure, as reflected in the representation of the painting. The existence of this phenomenon is of interest to the researcher, given that from a medical perspective, there is no empirical evidence to support the ability of humans to perform the conscious act of decapitating themselves, especially by using their own hands. In addition, the practice of limb offerings and rituals involving the use of blood in the context of Hinduism further strengthens the researcher's motivation to explore the meaning of the illustration, especially about the offering traditions that developed in Bali. Therefore, this visual narrative is believed to involve a special meaning that requires in-depth study to reveal.

Studies that dissect the specific meaning of a scene in Wayang Kamasan paintings still need to be completed. Apart from the fact that the figures who understand the history behind it have diminished, the documentation still needs to be improved. Through documentation searches, a narrative that expresses the description and meaning of the *lintang gowang* painting has yet to be found. As for research that examines the palelintangan section by Cahyadi and Artawan (2015), it only explains the reading of four types of visuals in palelintangan, which include *lintang bade* (Balinese corps coffin), *lintang wulusung* (crab), *lintang wuluku* (plough), and *lintang sadaka* (servant of the king). Another study also only explained *lintang perau pegat* (broken boat) conducted by Cahyadi (2021). This article aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the meanings contained in the visual narrative of one of the scenes of the Kamasan wayang painting, specifically in the *lintang gowang* segment. The study is approached by comparing similar scenes found in Balinese and Hindu texts and adopting a retrospective approach to look further into the origins and true essence of the story represented in the painting. As such, this research is expected to deepen the philosophical analysis of Balinese art and culture substantially. In pursuit of this goal, this article plans to uncover and elaborate on the philosophical dimensions hidden in the Kamasan Wayang painting scene that is the focus of the study. Comparisons with relevant Hindu textual sources are expected to provide a broader and deeper knowledge base regarding the context and philosophical implications of the scene. Through this investigation, a richer understanding of the role of Balinese art and culture in depicting and conveying the philosophical values embedded in Balinese tradition will emerge.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This research is qualitative with a comparative approach. The theory used is Panofsky's iconography theory. Panofsky (1972) further explains the subject matter as a marker that can be revealed when the observer interacts with the object (in this case, the work of art). The observer interacts with the object to be studied to reveal the meaning of the work so that it can be understood. Like any connotative, metaphorical or contextual artwork, the work contains hidden meanings, as the artist's message is injected into the artwork when it is designed, created and finally displayed. On this basis, the iconographic analysis is divided into three stages, namely: 1) The pre-iconographic stage (primary or natural subject elements), which contains the structural form of a work of art both factually and expressively; 2) The iconographic analysis stage (secondary or conventional subject elements), which is thematic and is already in the first layer of iconographic meaning; 3) The iconological stage (subject elements of intrinsic meaning and content), in which there is iconographic interpretation in a more profound sense (iconographic synthesis). In this study, the first thing to be studied is the scene's structure in the wayang kamasan



painting in the *lintang gowang* section. The next stage is to look for the theme and narrative of the story that occurs, which is closed by exploring the iconological meaning behind the story by comparing it with several texts in local narratives or Hinduism with a similar display structure.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Development of Kamasan Wayang Paintings in Bale Kambang Taman Gili, Kerta Gosa

According to Kanta (1977), the Wayang Kamasan-style painting tradition continues the Wong-Wongan painting tradition, which features human objects and the surrounding environment. This tradition is perceived as a continuity of the archipelago's ancestral craftsmanship that has taken root since ancient times. Documentation investigated by Goris (1955) indicates that traces of the Wayang Kamasan painting tradition can be linked to the Wayang performance art tradition that has been known since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The documentation records that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, precisely on the Bebetin A1 inscription dating back to 818 Caka or 896 AD, there are references to types of arts, including *pamukul* (gamelan player), *pagending* (singer), *pabunjing* (bamboo beater), *papadaha* (drum beater), *parbhangsi* (flute blower), *pertapukan* (mask dancer), and *parbhwayang* (wayang performance). This document links the visual art tradition of Wayang Kamasan and the Wayang performance art practices of the period.

Documents that record and explain the existence of Wayang Kamasan paintings during the Klungkung kingdom before the Dutch presence in Bali are minimal. Several legends passed down from generation to generation mention the existence of Sangging Modara, who is considered to have passed down the Wayang Kamasan paintings during the Klungkung kingdom. His real name was I Wayan Mersadi (1771-1830), as a person whom the King highly favoured (Kanta, 1977). Wayang Kamasan paintings are usually used for ritual and magical activities. They are used to decorate shrines and temples. Kamasan wayang paintings for decorating buildings have been known since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Kanta, 1977).

Information about the paintings on the ceiling of the building in Puri Klungkung has been made. The initial source of the paintings on the ceiling of the building was made in 1849, during the joint reign of Dewa Agung Istri Kanya and Dewa Agung Putra II. It is estimated that during the reign of Dewa Agung Istri Kanya and Dewa Agung Putra, renovations were made to Puri Klungkung. This event is also related to natural disasters such as Mount Tambora erupting and earthquakes. According to Vicker, during the reign of Dewa Agung Istri Kanya and Dewa Agung Putra II, the traditional art of painting in Kamasan village was revived (Vickers, 1991). In 1938, before the Japanese occupation, the Klungkung region had the status of *zelfbestuur*, which was to restore the government system based on the royal government's rules, giving freedom to the king to manage his kingdom (Agung, 2009). In its development, the King of Klungkung Dewa Agung Oka Geg asked the sangging from the village of Kamasan to work on the painting of Wayang Kamasan in Bale Kambang. I Wayan Kayun led the work, and the colouring was done by Ketut Kiren (Vickers, 1979).

#### 3.2 Stories on Kamasan Wayang Paintings in Bale Kambang Kertha Gosa

Based on observations, Wayang Kamasan paintings on the ceiling of Bale Kambang Kertha Gosa can be categorized into three main narratives, namely the Sutasoma Story, the Brayut Story, and *Palelintangan* (astrology). The structure of this narrative arrangement is presented in three vertical layers arranged hierarchically, starting from the topmost layer containing the Sutasoma story, followed by the middle layer depicting the Brayut story, and the bottom layer presenting the *Palelintangan* story. The story of Sutasoma, composed by Mpu Tantular, recounts the journey of Sang Sutasoma by encapsulating a story steeped in Buddhist philosophy. On the ceiling of Bale Kambang Kertha Gosa, the Sutasoma narrative is represented by 60 scenes positioned on the top layer as the primary visual element.



Figure 1. One of the Scenes in Sutasoma  
Source: Research Team, 2022

Furthermore, there is also the story of Men Brayut, which describes his family's daily life of 18 children. This story is realized through 28 scenes arranged in the second layer after the Sutasoma story. This narrative tells the daily events of Men Brayut in dealing with the dynamics of domestic life while involving her role as a mother of several children (Mudra, 2019). However, there is a comparison to the story of Men Brayut based on the discovery of an artefact of the statue of Ratu Brayut or Dewi Hariti, who in the story is initially described as a woman with an evil character but undergoes a change to become good after studying religious teachings (Mardianto, 2015). However, in Bali, the story of Men Brayut is better known for its daily narrative involving 18 children.



Figure 2. The Story of the Men of Brayut Family  
Source: Research Team, 2022

In the third layer are *palelintangan* stories about astrology, character predictions, and ceremonial rituals to redeem the bad luck that rules one's birth under the influence of a particular star. According to Ardhana (2005), *palelintangan* or *palintangan* comes from the word *lintang* (star), meaning astrology or zodiac. *Palelintangan* is formulated as the meeting of *saptawara* or seven days with *pancawara* or five days. The *saptawara* are the stars, while the *pancawara* are the basic foundation of the layout. The meeting of *saptawara* and *pancawara* produces 35 kinds of latitudes believed to influence and determine the good and harmful nature of the birth of human children. *Saptawara* consists of *Redite* (Sunday), *Soma* (Monday), *Anggara* (Tuesday), *Buda* (Wednesday), *Wrehaspati* (Thursday), and *Sukra* (Friday). *Pancawara* consists of: *Umanis*, *Pahing*, *Pon*, *Wage*, *Kliwon*. The meeting of *Saptawara* and *Pancawara* produces 35 types of latitudes. In each *lintang*, there is an explanation of character, prediction and *pemahayu* or means that can be used to neutralize unwanted impacts. In addition, each day of the *Saptawara* also includes an explanation of the patron gods, puppets, wood (*taru*), birds (*manuk*) and animals (*sato*).



Figure 3. Story of Palelintangan  
Source: Research Team, 2022

### 3.3 The Self Decapitating Figure in *Lintang gowang* Painting

#### 3.3.1 Pre-Iconography Analysis



Figure 4. Visual in *Lintang gowang*  
Source: Research Team, 2022

When analyzed from a practical perspective, the illustrations in the *lintang gowang* indicate the Kamasan style, characterized by wayang representations rendered two-dimensionally on specific media, such as cloth, leather or wood. The motion imagery in these illustrations accentuates dynamics different from the wayang kulit tradition, while the narrative reflects similarities with fragments commonly found in temple reliefs. This illustration is presented in a frame bordered by a wooden border element. It contains character representations, a vegetation background, and the use of text in Balinese script. There are three characters arranged linearly, where the character on the left takes a standing position, while the characters in the middle and on the right are in a squatting position. The visualization of these characters features a topless torso,



with clothing covering the area from the waist to the feet. The skin colour of these characters is depicted with variations, with the left character having reddish-yellow skin, the middle character with yellow skin, and the most right character with black skin.

In terms of head ornaments, the character on the left shows a headdress similar to a crown that is often associated with noble figures, while the characters in the centre and on the right display simpler head ornaments that reflect the status of a servant. The left character is depicted holding a keris with his right hand while his left-hand reaches for his head, as if handing it over to the character in the center position. At the same time, the character in the centre position is depicted receiving the gift of the head, while the character on the right only observes it without taking an active role in the event. The text written on the illustration reads as follows:

*"Lintang gowang, carik ring pawakan, naro ujar ayu, denruhu bobotoh, Wisaya amaling amegal anayab, Pamahayunia, bawi ji trus gunung, ji 888, sangua suci, asuba bungkem, bebek 1, ayam 7, yen nuanon mati anak anak."*

### Translate

*Lintang gowang* are generally patient, well-mannered, gamblers, and ignorant. Avoid jobs with evil qualities because there is danger lurking there. The antidote is offerings with pigs and 888 pieces of kepeng money, a red-feathered dog, one duck, and seven chickens. If a woman is born, take good care of the child because there is a tendency for the child to die.

The text above describes the characterization of a person shaded by *lintang gowang*. Textually, the Javanese word *gowang* means a broken blade (Nardiati et al., 1993). Visually, the Wayang Kamasan illustration of the *lintang gowang* segment differs from the textual meaning. Similarly, the description of the character of *Lintang gowang* is complicated to find similarities in meaning and visuals. Therefore, the discussion will focus on the visual context of the narrative only.

### 3.3.2 Iconography Analysis

Based on an examination of the narrative in Balinese folklore, there is a representation similar to the visual expression in the painting. Narratively, the story shows similarities to the Tantri Kamandaka episode in the segment Minister Wreda (Wreda = old), where the minister gives the head to a servant sent by the king known as Gajah Druma. The story tells of a kingdom called Usinara, where a wise king assigned Minister Wreda to guard the border. By order of the king, Minister Wreda was not allowed to visit the palace to ensure that border security was maintained. When the king died, his son Gajah Druma took over the throne. The new king had an ambitious subordinate who wanted to replace Minister Wreda. The king was then incited to summon Minister Wreda to the palace, but by the king's previous instructions, Minister Wreda refused the summons from the new king. Hearing this refusal, King Gajah Druma was enraged and sent his messenger with an order from the king demanding Minister Wreda's head. Witnessing this situation, Minister Wreda responded by writing a letter explaining why he could not leave his border guard duties. The letter was then submitted along with the chief minister himself. Upon receiving the letter, King Gajah Druma deeply regretted his actions for causing the death of his loyal subordinate (Amide, 2008).

Based on the additional investigation, there is a significant visual connection between the graphic representation of the *lintang gowang* segment and one aspect of the Mahavidya, Chinnamasta/Chinnamunda. The name has a philological meaning as "She who has a severed head", iconographically depicted as a naked woman holding a sword in one hand while the other hand holds her head. The figure's neck is flowing with blood, like a fountain falling into the mouths of two yoginis. The image features the figure standing over two individuals, a man and a woman, who are asleep in an embrace (Benard, 1994).



Figure 5. Chinnamasta Illustration  
Source: Vicziany & Hardikar, 2018

His form means transcending duality (symbolized by the male and female forms he steps on) as a form of unconditional sacrifice in a spiritual experience that is sought after but frightening to live (Benard, 1994). The figure of Chinnamasta embodies one of the Dasa Mahavidya (ten highest knowledge). Dasa Mahavidya is one of the knowledges of Shaktiism in tantra yana teachings (Chauhan, 2022; Kinsley, 1998). Chinnamasta is one of the forms of Goddess Durga when given enlightenment by Lord Shiva (Benard, 1994). In one form of worship, the followers of Chinnamasta often perform worship with animal blood sacrifice. In some texts, it is even found that some worshipers sacrifice their blood (Pathak & Sarma, 2022). This condition proves that the worship of Chinnamasta is selfless and transcends the duality in the human ego.

### 3.3.3 Iconology Analysis

#### a) Blood Offerings in Balinese Tradition

Balinese people practice a diverse tradition of offerings known as yadnya. These offerings are complex expressions of the trinity of relationships between humans and God, humans and their neighbours, and humans and nature, aiming to maintain the continuity of these relationships so that they always occur in harmony. As reviewed by Fox (2015), several concepts form the basis for the implementation of rites for the Balinese people, including 1) Ritual as a process of exchange, where there is a dynamic of giving and receiving; 2) Ritual as a form of redemption; 3) Ritual as an integral part of the struggle for life, to protect humans from potential hostile threats; 4) Ritual as a vertical strengthening of sacred and profane hierarchies; 5) Ritual as a means of maintaining balance and harmony in the world; 6) Ritual as an effort to maintain vital energy nodes found in the surrounding nature. The process of performing rituals generally involves the presentation of offerings in the form of flowers, water, incense, fruit, and even animals. In the context of Bhuta Yadnya rituals, a ceremony that aims to harmonize balance with nature, animal blood is an integral element known as caru (Eiseman, 2011). Based on the interviews, animal blood was identified as a crucial element because, in this view, blood is considered the main channel of life energy flowing in the body. By utilizing blood as a symbol of life, the ceremony provides the "energy" needed by





the vital energies in the surrounding nature through blood offerings. A similar phenomenon is also observed in some cases of pasupati, where blood is used to provide "life energy" to sacred objects with a uniform conceptual understanding.

From an alternative perspective, the act of offering blood can be conceptualized as a form of sacrifice that involves giving up the most essential element in the survival of living beings. In this context, without blood, the survival of all living beings becomes impossible. By devoting this essential element of life, an offering is defined as a surrender of life that carries a transcendental meaning, indicating that nothing is more sacred and noble than such a sacrifice. This concept of blood sacrifice carries implications of meaning in life, implying that the entire existence of the human body is considered an offering to God, both in terms of the physical and the spiritual.

### b) Concept of Selfless Offering

The Bhagavadgita text indicates that when making an offering, it is essential for one to detach oneself from the personal ego in order to avoid attachment to the karma that may arise from the act of offering. This action is directed towards achieving inner purity and higher consciousness. Radhakrishnan (1970) notes that based on the principles contained in the text, any offering should be made without involving the personal ego to avoid entanglement with the dualistic aspects of the world that may hinder spiritual attainment. Offering is interpreted as a form of detachment from karmic bonds. This achievement can only be realized when the individual is mentally free from egocentrism. As depicted in the illustration of the *lintang gowang*, the act of an individual voluntarily removing the head and giving it to another figure gives rise to a symbolic interpretation that is cohesive with certain teachings. From a medical perspective, the act of decapitating one's head consciously and giving it to another person is something that cannot happen in real life. Therefore, symbolic interpretation becomes a necessity in this context. The process of removing the head can be translated as a symbol of liberation from the shackles of the mind, particularly from the egocentric concept often believed in the Hindu tradition to be a barrier to attaining supreme consciousness. Decapitating and presenting the head to another individual can be interpreted as a selfless act involving a profound sacrifice by giving away the most important aspects of one's life.

Judging from the Tantri Kamandaka story, the surrender of Minister Wreda's head shows his loyalty to the king. The concept of the king as a representative of God in the archipelago is shown by evidence, namely the Ciaruteun inscription. The inscription states that King Purnawarman embodies Lord Vishnu in the world (Santiko, 2013). Other evidence is the description of King Airlangga riding a garuda bird-like Lord Vishnu (Darma, 2019). This evidence explains that kings in the past were representatives of God, whose role was to organize the world order to be peaceful. Therefore, the king's orders were considered the same as God's revelation. There is a similar association with the story of Minister Wreda, who obediently carried out orders from the king even with the request to give up his own life. As God's revelation, the order from the king ended with a selfless sacrifice from Minister Wreda himself as a form of devotion and determination to carry out his duties.

From the tantrayana perspective of the Chinnamasta icon, cutting off the head means surrender, which leads to eternity. Cutting off the head and consciously still standing upright means transcending the cycle of life and death. From the context of tantric yoga teachings, practically, one must abandon the desire for enjoyment of the physical body to understand the essence of the highest consciousness. For this reason, yogis practice regulating their physical mechanisms to the maximum and acquire various metaphysical abilities similar to the power of the gods. This phenomenon is expressed in one of the mottos in tantric yoga, which reads, "to worship a deity, become a deity first" (Benard, 1994).

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

The illustration of *lintang gowang* can be interpreted as a representation of the act of surrender that reaches the highest level of consciousness. The dramatic scene of decapitation and voluntary surrender reflects the concept of the teaching of self-surrender that overcomes duality and the human ego to reach the highest consciousness. Within the framework of the Tantri Kamandaka story, the concept of head offering represents a form of selfless devotion by a servant to his king's orders. On the other hand, in the tantra yana context, the head offering contains a meaning that transcends the limits of the physical body, being an act that leads to the search for the highest consciousness.

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