

**THE ROLE OF ISLAM
IN THE PRESERVATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF SASAK TRADITIONS:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE MERARIQ TRADITION AMONG MINORS**

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69552/mumtaz.v5i3.3627>

Received:
October 05, 2025

Revised:
November 29, 2025

Accepted:
December 18, 2025

Published:
December, 2025

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Abstract

Early marriage remains a pressing social issue in Indonesia, particularly in Lombok, where the Sasak community practices merariq (elopement). While deeply rooted in local culture, merariq often intersects with underage marriage, raising concerns about child protection, education, and health. Islam plays a pivotal role in addressing this challenge, not only as a source of religious doctrine but also as a moral and ethical framework guiding family life and social responsibility. This study explores how Islamic values interact with Sasak traditions, functioning both as a preservative force and as an agent of transformation. The research employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, combining fieldwork in Banyu Urip Village, Central Lombok, with policy brief analysis. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews with community leaders, religious figures, parents, and youth, as well as document review. Findings reveal that while merariq embodies symbolic meanings of freedom, honor, and cultural identity, its contemporary practice often perpetuates early marriage due to economic hardship, social pressure, and limited educational access. At the same time, Islamic teachings emphasize maturity, responsibility, and protection of children's rights, creating tension between tradition, religion, and state law. This study concludes that Islam provides a normative foundation to reinterpret merariq in ways that discourage underage marriage, offering pathways for cultural integration that respect local wisdom while safeguarding children. The results contribute to broader discussions on how religion can mediate tradition and modern legal frameworks, informing culturally sensitive policies for child protection in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Islam; Merariq; Sasak tradition; Early marriage; Child protection; Cultural transformation.*



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Abstrak

Pernikahan dini masih menjadi persoalan sosial yang mendesak di Indonesia, khususnya di Lombok, di mana masyarakat Sasak mempraktikkan tradisi merariq (kawin lari). Tradisi yang berakar kuat dalam budaya lokal ini sering kali beririsan dengan praktik pernikahan di bawah umur, sehingga menimbulkan persoalan perlindungan anak, pendidikan, dan kesehatan. Islam berperan penting dalam menghadapi tantangan tersebut, bukan hanya sebagai sumber ajaran agama, tetapi juga sebagai kerangka moral dan etika yang menuntun kehidupan keluarga dan tanggung jawab sosial. Penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam berinteraksi dengan tradisi Sasak, berfungsi sebagai kekuatan pelestari sekaligus agen transformasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kualitatif, dengan kombinasi penelitian lapangan di Desa Banyu Urip, Lombok Tengah, serta analisis policy brief. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara dengan tokoh masyarakat, pemuka agama, orang tua, dan remaja, serta telaah dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa merariq mengandung makna simbolik tentang kebebasan, kehormatan, dan identitas budaya, namun dalam praktik kontemporer sering mendorong pernikahan dini akibat tekanan ekonomi, tuntutan sosial, dan keterbatasan akses pendidikan. Di sisi lain, ajaran Islam menekankan pentingnya kematangan fisik, emosional, dan mental sebelum menikah, sehingga menimbulkan ketegangan antara tradisi, agama, dan hukum negara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Islam memberikan landasan normatif untuk menafsirkan ulang tradisi merariq agar tidak mendorong pernikahan dini, sekaligus membuka jalan bagi integrasi budaya yang menghormati kearifan lokal dan melindungi anak. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada diskusi lebih luas mengenai peran agama dalam memediasi tradisi dan regulasi modern, serta mendukung kebijakan perlindungan anak yang sensitif terhadap budaya di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Islam; Merariq; Tradisi Sasak; Pernikahan dini; Perlindungan anak; Transformasi budaya.*

INTRODUCTION

Underage marriage is still a persistent social problem in various regions of Indonesia, including in West Nusa Tenggara. Local government data and child protection agency reports show that Central Lombok Regency is consistently among the regions with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the province. This practice not only violates the minimum age limit for marriage as stipulated in Law Number 16 of 2019 concerning Marriage, but also has a multidimensional impact on reproductive health, educational continuity, household economic stability, and protection of children's rights (Mubasyaroh, 2016). Studies have shown that girls who marry at an early age are more prone to pregnancy complications, school dropouts, domestic violence, and intergenerational poverty

Islam plays an important role as a key factor in preventing and overcoming the practice of early marriage. In this context, Islam not only serves to convey religious teachings, but also serves as a profound moral and ethical guideline. Through Islam, individuals are given the ability to understand spiritual values, live a responsible family life, and avoid the practice of early marriage, which can have negative consequences (Kurniawati, 2022). Islamic teachings provide a strong foundation on the importance of physical, emotional, and mental maturity before marriage.

This education helps individuals understand the importance of building a strong foundation for maintaining a marriage, emphasizing values such as loyalty, responsibility, and commitment. As a result, individuals have a more mature perspective when making decisions related to marriage, thereby reducing the social, economic, and psychological risks that often arise from early marriage (Ernawati et al., 2022).

Marriage is one of the most valuable and fundamental aspects of life in Islam, as it embodies various noble purposes that reflect high spiritual and social values (Agustina et al., 2026). As an institution considered sacred, marriage is not only regarded as an official means of fulfilling human biological needs, but also seen as a means of achieving peace of mind, fostering sincere love, and creating deep affection between husband and wife (Mukarrom, 2021). This allows for the formation of a harmonious, blessed household that is pleasing to Allah SWT.

In the Qur'an, marriage is considered a *mitsaqan* (covenant), a sacred covenant with high spiritual and social significance. This idea emphasizes the importance of the marriage relationship as a form of responsibility towards one's spouse, family, and Allah SWT.

In today's modern era, marked by rapid and dynamic social change, the important values inherent in the institution of marriage often face various challenges that cannot be ignored (Yaqin, 2025). One clear sign of this situation is the emergence of phenomena such as an alarming increase in divorce rates, marriages without strong commitment, and high rates of conflict within households. All of this illustrates the widening gap between the understanding of marriage in Islam and the application of Islamic values.

Seeing the prevalence of early marriage on the island of Lombok, often referred to as the island of a thousand mosques with the largest Muslim population, Lombok is known not only for its natural beauty but also for the rich culture inherited from its indigenous tribe, the Sasak. The Sasak people have a strong belief system and traditional customs, which have been an integral part of their identity for centuries. With the arrival of Islam, which is now embraced by the majority of

the Sasak people, a complex process of acculturation and assimilation between religious teachings and local traditions has taken place.

This phenomenon presents an interesting dynamic of how religion plays a role in both preserving and transforming traditional customs, creating a unique and ever-evolving cultural identity. One of the most prominent and meaningful traditional customs of the Sasak tribe is Merariq, a traditional marriage ritual with distinctive stages and procedures. Merariq is not merely a procession to unite two individuals, but also a reflection of the social, economic, and spiritual values of the Sasak community. However, in its development, the Merariq tradition has not been immune to challenges and changes, particularly regarding the issue of underage marriage (Hariati et al., 2024). This practice, which is still found in some Sasak communities, has sparked a discourse between the traditional values that are held dear, religious teachings that prohibit such practices, and state legal regulations. Although there are clear legal regulations regarding the age limit for marriage, some communities still practice underage marriage. This has led to a tension between traditional values, religious teachings, and state regulations.

Child marriage has serious multidimensional impacts. In terms of health, adolescents who marry early are vulnerable to complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as nutritional problems. From an educational perspective, this practice is often the main cause of school dropouts, limiting children's access to a better future. Socially and psychologically, underage marriage can deprive children of their right to develop, play, and enjoy their childhood, and increase the risk of domestic violence and early divorce.

Although prevention and treatment efforts have been promoted by the government and various non-governmental organizations, the practice of underage marriage in Lombok remains a persistent phenomenon. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the root causes, driving factors, and surrounding social and cultural dynamics is needed.

This study aims to conduct an ethnographic study of the Merariq tradition, particularly as it relates to underage marriage, among the Sasak tribe. (Kusumawati & Rachmawati, 2017) Through this study, the researcher will explore in depth how Islam, both through formal teachings and local interpretations, influences the practice, understanding, and preservation of the Merariq tradition. Second, it will also analyze how religion becomes an agent of transformation, seeking to adapt or even reform aspects of tradition that are considered incompatible with Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses qualitative methods that are descriptive and analytical with a narrative and holistic approach to comprehensively and in-depth understanding the practice of merariq. The research process is carried out gradually and systematically, starting from initial mapping, field data collection, to analysis and interpretation, resulting in an understanding that is not instant or one-time observation (Adlini et al., 2022). This field research was carried out in Banyu Urip Village, West Praya District, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, as one of the areas known to have a relatively high practice of merariq codeq, and lasted for four months, from March to June 2024. The merariq tradition is a traditional form of marriage among the Sasak tribe that has strong cultural values, but in contemporary practice it often involves underage marriage which raises serious problems in the context of child protection and development. Therefore, an ethnographic approach is used to holistically capture how these practices are carried out, negotiated, and interpreted by social actors in the Sasak community, particularly in their relationship to Islamic teachings and state law. This approach allows researchers to understand not only what society does, but also how and why the practice continues to be maintained or questioned. This approach involves:

- a. **Active Observation:** Researchers will reside within the community and participate in the daily lives of residents to gain a deeper understanding of the norms, values, and practices that form the basis of the merariq tradition.
- b. **Detailed Interviews:** Conduct interviews with a number of key informants, such as community leaders, parents, prospective brides and grooms (including minors), religious leaders, teachers, and health workers. These interviews aim to explore their views, motivations, and experiences related to merariq.
- c. **Document Review:** Collect and analyze relevant documents, such as traditional marriage records, village regulations, or reports from relevant agencies.

This study will explore several important aspects: First: **History and Philosophy of Merariq:** Understanding the origins, symbolic meanings, and noble values contained in the merariq tradition from the perspective of the Sasak community. Second: **Factors Driving Underage Marriage:** Identifying social, economic, cultural, and religious factors that contribute to the practice of underage marriage in the merariq tradition (Hamzah, 2020). These may include:

Views on maturity and readiness for marriage, social and family pressure, economic conditions (poverty), education level and access to education, religious interpretation, protection of family honor. First, the **Impact of Underage Marriage:** Analyzing the consequences of underage marriage on children's physical and mental health, education, economic welfare, and social development. Second, **Community**

Perceptions: Mapping how the Sasak community, especially the younger generation, views the practice of underage marriage in merariq, whether there are changes in views or resistance. Third, Customary and Legal Mechanisms: Examining how customary law interacts with state law regarding the age limit for marriage, as well as how conflict resolution or violation mechanisms work at the community level. Fourth, Prevention and Intervention Efforts: Identifying existing initiatives from the government, NGOs, or the community itself in preventing and addressing underage marriage, as well as the obstacles and opportunities.

This ethnographic study is expected to provide in-depth insights and nuances about the merariq tradition, especially as it relates to early marriage. The findings of this study can certainly serve as a basis for the development of more efficient, culturally sensitive, and sustainable policies and programs to protect the rights of children in Lombok, while preserving local cultural diversity.

Results and Discussion

Definition and History of Merariq Philosophy in Sasak Society

Marriage is a significant social event that every individual must go through. In every community, marriage serves as a connecting foundation. Marriage is an institution that regulates the relationship between a man and a woman, a man and several women, or a woman and several men, which is legalized in accordance with the customs, laws, or religions that apply in society (Kholidi et al., 2021).

From a cultural perspective, marriage is a mechanism that regulates human behavior related to their sexual life, namely sexual acts, especially intimate relationships (Koentjaraningrat, 2000). In another sense, marriage is a legal agreement and contract between a man and a woman that establishes their ongoing right to have sexual relations with each other, as well as confirming that the woman has met the criteria for childbearing. Meanwhile, according to Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jaziri, marriage is an agreement that gives men the right (legitimacy) to use women's bodies for their sexual satisfaction (Nadar, 2012).

Merariq etymologically comes from the word "lari" (run). Merari'an means to run away: to escape. Eloping is a wedding tradition that is still practiced in Lombok. In the Sasak language, eloping is called merariq. Terminologically, merariq comes from the Sasak word "berariq" which means to run and has two meanings: First, to run. This is the actual meaning. Second, the entire marriage process according to Sasak tradition. Elopement is a real action to free a girl from the bonds of her parents and family.

Merariq as a tradition that initiates marriage is a very unique phenomenon, and may only be found in the Sasak community in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

This tradition is so ingrained in society that when someone wants to know the marital status of another person, they simply ask whether that person has merariq or not. Merariq plays a very significant role in the marriage bonds of the Sasak aristocracy in Lombok. In fact, asking a woman's parents directly for her hand in marriage is not much different from asking for a chicken.

Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi, a lecturer at UIN Mataram, explains in his book about the Merariq Tradition of the Sasak Tribe various views on the early history of the merariq tradition on the island of Lombok. First, regarding the authenticity of merariq. The tradition of elopement was adopted as a local culture that is a pure ritual and has been practiced by the ancestors of the Sasak people before the arrival of the Balinese and Dutch colonists. Nieuwenhuyzen, who was referred to by the Ministry of Education and Culture team, mentioned that many customs among the Sasak people are similar to those of the Balinese tribe, but specifically for marriage, it is the Sasak customs that are authentic. Second, regarding the acculturation of merariq. Elopement is considered an imported cultural element and is not an original tradition of the Sasak ancestors, and was not practiced by the community before the arrival of the Balinese colonists (Zuhdi, 2012).

This opinion was directly supported by a group of Sasak people and initiated by religious leaders. In 1955, in Bengkel, West Lombok, Tuan Guru Haji Saleh Hambali abolished the tradition of elopement because it was considered to be influenced by Balinese Hinduism and not in line with Islamic teachings. A similar phenomenon can also be found as the basis for Islamic activities in Lombok, such as in Pancor, Kelayu, and other places. Dutch researcher Lieftimek also agreed with these religious leaders. John Ryan Bartolomew argued that the tradition of elopement was taken from Balinese culture. Solichin Salam emphasized that the practice of elopement in Lombok was an effect of the caste tradition that exists in Hindu-Balinese culture (Zuhdi, 2012).

The marriage process in the Sasak tribe community in Lombok can be divided into two main phases, namely before the marriage contract and after the marriage contract. The following explanation will describe several stages that must be passed by the male and female couple (Lalu, RadendenganDedareatauLale) on their journey to marriage, including:

a. Raditions before the Marriage Contract

Marriage generally begins with an introduction between a man and a woman. In the culture of the Sasak tribe in Lombok, this tradition is known as beberayean or berkenalan, which means the process of courting each other. The term berayean or bekenalan implies a mutual emotional connection between young people (men and

women). The activity of berayean or dating is an important first step before marriage in the Sasak tradition. The purpose of beberayean is similar to the concept of ta'aruf, which is a way for two young people to get to know each other in order to prepare for their future married life. Among the people of Lombok, it is quite surprising if a man and woman get married without ever having been in a relationship or dating before, because people around them often ask questions such as, "wah ngonekpadebeberayean or bekemelean?" (have they been dating for a long time?), and sometimes the length of the relationship can affect the level of difficulty or severity of the ajikrame. The culture in Lombok provides various opportunities for men and women to get to know each other, such as during begawe (parties), both those related to death, such as nelung (third day), mitu' (seventh day), nyuwa' (ninth day), and nyatus (the hundredth day), or begaweurip (life) such as ngurisang (baby hair cutting), nyunatang (circumcision), and merariq (marriage). All types of begawe events provide opportunities for young people to get to know each other during the event, which usually takes place in the evening. Usually, the host prepares a special place for young people to get to know each other while participating in various activities, such as making ketupat and banget (sticky rice dishes), grating coconut, cooking rice, and other things. Although these activities are not completely unrestricted, they must still be supervised by parents. Generally, these meetings and introductions through this suggestion lead to couples forming.

b. Traditional Processes After the Marriage Contract

The procession after the marriage contract held by the community in Lombok focuses more on the ceremonial moment. After many processes have been gone through before the wedding, both by the man and woman, such as dating, midang, merariq, besejati, nylabar, and the marriage contract. Then, the event will continue with several activities, namely: First, the begawe process, which means a party, celebration, or thanksgiving. The most festive begawai is usually the begawemerariq (wedding party). The wedding party for men is called nanggep, while for women it is called ngadap. The days and activities that take place in begawe are held after the marriage ceremony, or according to an agreement between the two parties from the male and female families to carry out begawe. Second, ajikrame; which literally means sorong-serah, namely witness, with ajikrame representing degree or value, and krame meaning dignity (Sarmini et al., 2018).

Thus, sorong-serahajikrame serves as a witness to the degree of dignity. This is the culmination of the traditional Sasak wedding ceremony, because at this moment, the two families, who were previously at odds, can come together and be witnessed by all family members and other invited guests. Third, the Nyongkolan Tradition

During nyongkolan, relatives from the groom's side invite all family members and close friends to attend the nyongkolan celebration, and the bride's family does the same. The nyongkolan event held by the bride's family is generally called nanggep, which is a formal event held at the bride's family residence to welcome the bride for the handover ceremony. Fourth, there is bales nae, which is an activity aimed at making a return visit to the bride's family. This activity is carried out one or two days after the nyongkolan ceremony. This activity is only attended by family members and close relatives from both sides, without any ceremonial events or activities. At this moment, each family member from both sides is introduced to one another with the aim of building harmonious relationships between families that have been united through the bond of marriage.

c. The Meaning of MerariqKodeq in the Sasak Community in Lombok

Marriage or merariqkodeq has various impacts and perspectives in the Sasak community, which can be supportive or oppositional. Of course, this will give rise to different points of view for each person, which can then give meaning or significance to early marriage according to what is seen and felt.

First, the positive meaning. For some people, early marriage is considered to have its good side. Marriage is seen as a form of worship, and this view also applies to marriages that occur at an age that is not ideal according to general standards. Even though it is carried out by individuals who are still underage, early marriage in some beliefs is considered an act that perfects worship. The following is an interview with BaiqRengganis, an individual who married at the age of 18. "I understand this marriage to be a beautiful bond in a family full of peace, love, and blessings. I accepted this proposal in accordance with my heart's desire to perfect my sister's worship" (Rahim, 2018).

Early marriage is not only seen as a religious obligation, but also has positive connotations in the form of happiness in being united with one's chosen partner. The beautiful hopes regarding marriage held by those who marry young are often in line with the reality they experience, namely happiness in building a household. Another happiness felt is the opportunity to build and live a family life with a spouse and children. In addition, the economic limitations of the family are also a driver of early marriage. Early marriage can also improve the economic conditions of the family for those involved, as experienced by Baiq Lulu, who married at the age of 18.

"Since getting married, I have been very happy with my husband. We both work hard to build our family's economy, and thank God we were able to buy a motorcycle and enjoy traveling, even though we don't always go to shopping malls. It still feels enjoyable because we are together with my husband and child".

Second, Negative Impacts: Early marriage in Kateng Village has dual consequences, bringing not only positive outcomes but also negative ones. For young women involved, early marriage has the potential to cause trauma and become a bitter experience due to a lack of mental and emotional readiness, which ultimately becomes a poor lesson in their lives. Getting married at the age of 18 makes her consider marriage a negative experience in her life. Life after marriage turns out to be full of challenges and burdens, especially for those who have not reached the ideal age for marriage. Ningsih reveals that early marriage has the following meaning. "Marriage, in my opinion, is a very strange experience and feels like the worst experience. Living life after marriage is not easy; marriage is the hardest thing to face and many problems arise.

Marriage at a young age, according to Ningsih, is an unpleasant and difficult experience. Renggina herself experienced various problems in her marriage, and she felt that her early marriage only brought sadness and burdensome responsibilities. In an interview, Renggina expressed this directly. "Alcohol tastes bitter and sweet, like a song that cuts through the heart and feels painful. The bitterness is like a household journey that is not always smooth. However, I am willing to migrate far away to Malaysia, fight for my children, and continue to try to set aside money to meet their needs. The heavy burden I carry, coupled with sadness, makes me constantly think about family and children's problems."

Research on young urban women's views on early marriage reveals both positive and negative interpretations. These interpretations are based on the personal experiences of those who entered into early marriage, the perceptions of the surrounding community, and the consequences arising from such marriages, resulting in a variety of perspectives from the research sources. Furthermore, differences of opinion regarding approval or rejection of early marriage also shape the meanings that emerge.

Explanation of the phenomenon of early marriage among young women in the Sasak tribe The researcher himself refers to the theory of Symbolic Interactionism proposed by George Herbert Mead. This theory emphasizes the important role of self-concept and how individuals view themselves based on their interactions with others. According to Symbolic Interactionism, humans actively create and use symbols. Mead identified three main concepts in this theory, namely Mind, Self, and Society. Socializing and deviant behavior among peers also shape normal views of dating relationships that are not bound by rules. On the other hand, a strong environment of religious values and traditions also contributes to the practice of early marriage, which is part of social interaction among the young Sasak community in Lombok.

This study shows that the Sasak people have diverse interpretations of early marriage, depending on how they view the associated symbols, resulting in both positive and negative meanings. This is based on the theoretical foundation of Symbolic Interactionism: First, Mind, Marriage (merariqkodeq) at a young age, caused by factors within the individual and their environment, then giving rise to various consequences of early marriage. This study focuses on how individuals process and interpret these impacts, as well as the responses that arise in their minds, taking into account the symbols contained therein. Second, Self. In this phase, MerariqKodeq undergoes a process in which "I" becomes the subject and "Me" becomes the object. He internalizes symbols from his environment and then projects them into the formation of his Self. By understanding and participating in the behavior around them, merariqkodeq acts based on the social interpretation that they understand. In this context, this interpretation is expressed through "I" as the subject observing 'myself' as the object, which is manifested in the symbols of early marriage and its impact felt by "I" as perceived by the community that practices early marriage. Third, society This study also involved supporting informants, including young women who delayed marriage and parents of young women who married early. The results of the study show that the majority of society does not approve of early marriage, considering the negative consequences that may be experienced by those involved. Merariqkodeq is considered a wrong action because it has the potential to harm young women, and criticism and ridicule from the surrounding environment can trigger psychological pressure for them.

Influencing Merariq Kodeq Practices among the Sasak Tribe in Lombok

In essence, all organisms are created in pairs, namely male and female. The same applies to humans, where humans form relationships based on love and affection, which are then expressed through marriage. The purpose of marriage is to form a family that integrates love and affection, thereby creating a harmonious, loving, and blessed family. In addition, marriage begins with the desire to share life together, with the hope of living a happier and more prosperous life, as well as to continue the family line.

From the point of view of psychological science, marriage at a young age can cause a variety of adverse effects such as depression, emotional instability, stress, anxiety, and even divorce. Teens who marry at an early age are usually not emotionally and mentally ready to live life together and become parents, so they are particularly vulnerable to severe psychological distress. They also often experience disputes that are difficult to overcome due to undeveloped adaptability and emotional management. In addition, marriage at a young age can result in mental

trauma and regret, as well as the loss of adolescence that should have been used for learning and socializing, related to the inability to live a new role efficiently (Goel et al., 2022).

This effect not only impacts individuals, but also contributes to disharmony within families and suboptimal parenting patterns for their children, making early marriage an issue that receives serious attention at both the national and regional levels. Therefore, various regions are making efforts to reduce the number of early marriages so as not to create new problems that will harm individuals and society in the future. Research shows that in order to prevent adverse effects, it is very important to make thorough preparations in physical, psychological, educational, and economic aspects before a person gets married. Early marriage is a complex issue that is influenced by many factors, including social, economic, and cultural aspects. In Indonesia, especially in Lombok, this phenomenon remains a significant challenge. Here are some of the main factors that cause early marriage to occur:

a. Economic Factors

Difficult financial circumstances are the main trigger for early marriage; families struggling with economic problems tend to marry off their children at an early age. These marriages are expected to be the answer to the family's financial problems, with the hope of easing their economic burden, which in turn will help overcome their economic difficulties. In addition, low economic status and poverty result in parents' inability to meet their children's needs and provide for their education, so they choose to marry off their children on the assumption that they have relinquished their financial responsibility or in the hope that their children will have a better life after marriage (Shufiyah, 2018).

Early marriage among adolescent girls is often caused by poor family economic conditions. Early marriage among adolescent girls is more common among poor families, where the family does not have sufficient resources to support their children. As a result, they choose to marry off their daughters in the hope of reducing the financial burden on the family. After marriage, responsibility for the daughter shifts from her family to her husband, who is expected to provide for all her needs. In addition, families believe that by marrying off their daughters, they can improve the family's economic conditions, for example, by receiving monthly allowances or assistance to finance the education of their younger siblings. However, reality often shows that the economic conditions of children after marriage are not much different from those of their families. This causes parents' expectations to go unfulfilled and actually has the potential to increase poverty rates in Lombok.

Research by Wulandari and Sarwititi Sarwoprasodjo reinforces that family economic status has a significant influence on the motive for early marriage. Every increase in family economic status will decrease the average motive for early marriage. Field data shows that around 80 percent of respondents come from families with lower-middle economic status, with average expenditures of less than Rp1,360,000 per month. This low economic status is related to the educational level of adolescents, where approximately 66.6 percent of respondents only had a junior high school education, and not all of them had completed junior high school. Approximately 23.3 percent of respondents only reached the second grade of junior high school because their parents were unable to pay for their education. This situation causes adolescents to drop out of school and choose early marriage to avoid undesirable circumstances. Developing social norms also view girls as economic assets of the family who are expected to raise the family's economic status, one of which is through early marriage, Wulandari and Sarwoprasodjo. Low economic conditions do play a significant role in encouraging adolescents to marry early, as explained in the research by Wulandari and Sarwititi Sarwoprasodjo and from the field observations presented by the researchers, including:

1. **Poverty:** This is one of the main causes. For disadvantaged families, marrying off children at a young age is often seen as a solution to ease the financial burden. There is a belief that girls will have a better life by depending on their husbands, or at least that the economic burden will be transferred to their husbands.
2. **Traditional Wedding Costs:** In some cultures, holding a “normal” wedding can be very expensive. Marrying at a young age, especially through “elopement” or unregistered marriage, is often used as a way to avoid these expenses. In the traditional marriage system in southern Central Lombok, especially in Banyu Urip Village, Praya Barat Subdistrict, marrying or eloping within the same hamlet can reduce costs from the preparations to after the wedding, because both processes can be carried out in the same location.
3. **Improving Social Status:** Although rare, there are situations where early marriage is carried out in the hope of improving the social image of the family if the prospective spouse is seen as having better economic potential.

b. Education

Education is one of the factors that influence a person's perception. With higher education, a person will more easily accept or choose a change for the better. The level of education is closely related to the family's understanding of family life

(Aji et al., 2023). The results of the study show that the average level of education of the parents and partners of adolescents who marry early is still relatively low. None of the adolescents continued their education to college, and some did not even complete 12 years of basic education. Lack of funds is an obstacle to continuing education.

1. **Low Level of Education:** The lower the level of education of an individual or family, the greater the tendency for early marriage. Lack of understanding about the negative impacts of early marriage on health, child development, and future opportunities makes this decision easier to make.
2. **School Dropouts:** Early marriage often causes children to drop out of school, either due to pregnancy, household responsibilities, or the assumption that education is no longer important after marriage. This creates a vicious cycle of poverty and limited access.

Lack of Sexual Education: Limited knowledge about sexuality and reproductive health can increase the risk of pregnancy outside of marriage, which then encourages early marriage as a solution to “cover up the shame” or gain social legitimacy.

c. Parents

On the other hand, early marriage can also be triggered by encouragement or even pressure from parents. There are a number of considerations that lead parents to decide to marry off their children at an immature age, one of which is the fear that their children will fall into unhealthy social circles and suffer negative consequences. Another reason is the desire to maintain ties with relatives through arranged marriages. Some parents arrange marriages between their children and their own nieces or nephews so that the family fortune does not fall into the hands of outsiders, but remains within the family circle.

d. Accidents

Pregnancy outside of marriage is caused by children breaking the rules, which then forces them to get married at a young age in order to provide clarity on the status of the child they are carrying. This type of marriage requires them to marry and take on the responsibilities of being a husband and wife, as well as a father and mother, which can ultimately lead to premature aging, as they are not yet mentally or physically ready. In addition, pregnancy outside of marriage and parents' concerns about pregnancy outside of marriage also encourage their children to marry at a relatively young age.

e. Perpetuating the Relationship

These deliberately planned and carefully executed early marriages take place in order to perpetuate the relationship that has already been established between the two individuals. This situation leads them to get married at a very young age, or what is known as early marriage, with the aim of clarifying their relationship status. Furthermore, this marriage is also carried out as an effort to avoid actions that violate religious rules and norms that apply in society. It is hoped that this marriage will have a positive influence on both parties.

f. Low level of education

A lack of understanding of the crucial importance of education is one of the main reasons that triggers early marriage. Parents who only completed elementary school feel happy when their children find someone they are interested in, and they do not realize the negative impact of marriage at a young age. In addition to limited economic resources and low parental education levels, this can also result in limited thinking. As a result, parents tend to be influenced to marry off their children (Jannah, 2012).

The Islamic Perspective on Early Marriage in the Sasak Community

Islam is a religion that is in accordance with basic human instincts, created by Allah SWT without changing human nature. Marriage is part of human instinct. Therefore, Islam encourages its followers to marry, because marriage is part of human instinct. If this instinct is not fulfilled in the right way, namely through marriage, then wrong paths will emerge that can lead to negative behavior. Allah SWT says in Surah Ar-Rum verse 30, which means as follows:

"So set your face toward the religion (of Allah); (remain upon) the fitrah of Allah in which He has created mankind. There is no change in Allah's nature. (That is) the straight religion; but most people do not know." (QS. 30: 30). (Translation by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs)

The concept of marriage has three aspects. First, linguistically, marriage means a physical relationship and union between two parties, as expressed in the idea that trees can be said to be married when they provide nutrients to each other and unite with each other. Additionally, in a figurative sense, marriage refers to a contract because it is through this contract that two people can be physically united. According to Abu Hanifah, what is meant by Wati' is the contract, not the physical union. Second, in a real sense, marriage is a contract, and in a figurative sense,

marriage is also understood as a physical union, contrary to the literal meaning (Humaidy, 2023). There are many arguments that affirm that marriage is a contract, as explained in the Quran and Hadith. This view is most widely accepted by the Shafi'i and Imam Malik schools of thought. Third, the definition of marriage covers two aspects, namely contract and physical relationship, because sometimes marriage is understood as a contract and sometimes as an intimate relationship.

Marriage at a young age remains an issue in various countries, including Indonesia, triggered by economic, cultural, social, and religious factors that allow underage marriage. However, religion also has the potential to prevent this practice. Although Islam allows early marriage with certain restrictions, these provisions are often not obeyed by parents and the surrounding community. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the requirements for marriage in accordance with religious teachings is crucial in efforts to prevent early marriage (Mubasyaroh, 2016).

One of the efforts that can be made is to strengthen religious education and understanding of the obligation to comply with applicable marriage provisions. This can be realized through various religious activities in the community, such as recitation of the scriptures, lectures, and in-depth study of the holy book. Through these activities, religious scholars and leaders can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the pillars of marriage according to religious teachings, so that the community has better knowledge and obedience to these rules.

Religion also contributes to raising awareness of the essence of education and self-improvement as preparation before entering into marriage. In the context of Islam, both of these things are highly valued because they help a person become more mature and independent in life, including in creating a prosperous and harmonious family. Therefore, education and self-development can be factors that prevent marriage at a young age, because individuals will be more aware of the urgency of completing their education and preparing themselves comprehensively before getting married (Irawati et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Ahmad Wafiq and SetiawanSantoso also indicates that religion plays a significant role in combating early marriage in Indonesia (Wafiq & Santoso, 2017). The study reveals that individuals with higher levels of faith tend to have a more comprehensive understanding of marriage and sexuality, enabling them to make more mature decisions regarding timing and life partners. These findings emphasize the importance of religion in preventing early marriage and highlight the need for religious leaders and communities to continue promoting values that prioritize education, gender equality, and child protection. Furthermore, continuous educational efforts and public awareness campaigns are needed to

increase understanding of the risks and consequences of early marriage for the health and well-being of children and families.

In practice, religion can play a role in preventing early marriage through various programs and activities that focus on religious education, general education, and personal development. Furthermore, effective synergy between citizens, religious leaders, and the government is needed in efforts to combat early marriage. Thus, it is hoped that the significant role of religion will reduce the rate of early marriage and improve the welfare of families in the community.

Meanwhile, fiqh experts explain that their definition of a contract is: "A contract is something that connects two intentions, either through words or other means, and from this arises certainty or determination for both parties." In every contract, rights and obligations arise for both parties. This means that if there is a willingness or ability that is combined in an agreement and expressed in language, or in a way that can be understood, then this will trigger a legal situation known as a contract (Ernawati et al., 2022).

Considering the above description, efforts to strengthen religious education as a means of preventing early marriage can be implemented through several steps, such as:

- a. Providing appropriate and comprehensive religious education on marriage and reproductive health, including an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives, and the negative impacts of early marriage.
- b. Organizing training for religious leaders and parents to equip them with the knowledge to provide their children with a good and accurate understanding of early marriage.
- c. Utilizing social media and conducting educational campaigns in the community to spread information about the risks of early marriage and the urgency of delaying marriage until reaching the ideal age.
- d. Encouraging the active involvement of religious leaders in advocating for the prevention of early marriage in the community.

This study also reveals that early marriage is not limited to economically disadvantaged groups, but also occurs in affluent communities. Thus, combating early marriage requires more than just financial assistance for underprivileged families; it requires a comprehensive strategy involving various elements, including religious leaders. In conclusion, increasing the role of religion in preventing early marriage can be achieved through appropriate and in-depth religious education, training for religious leaders and parents, the use of social media and public education campaigns, and encouraging the active involvement of religious leaders

in voicing this issue. Effectively addressing early marriage requires cooperation from various parties, including religious leaders.

CONCLUSION

Religion, especially Islam as the majority religion in Lombok, plays a complex and ambivalent role in the preservation and transformation of Sasak tribal traditions, particularly in the context of underage merariq (early marriage) practices. Ethnographic studies of the merariq tradition show that although religion (Islam) is the moral and legal foundation for the Sasak people, its interpretation and application often interact strongly with deep-rooted customs.

On the one hand, Islam legitimizes and reinforces several values in the merariq tradition, such as the recommendation to marry (sunnah) and maintain personal purity. However, on the other hand, there is a clear tension between Islamic teachings that encourage readiness (*istiṭā'ah*) in marriage and the negative impacts of underage merariq. Islam universally emphasizes the importance of *akilbalig*, emotional maturity, and financial capability in marriage, which are often ignored in the practice of early marriage.

Nevertheless, religion also has great potential as an agent of positive transformation. Through the role of scholars, religious leaders, and Islamic educational institutions, awareness of the importance of the ideal age for marriage based on holistic sharia (covering physical, mental, and economic readiness) can be increased. Comprehensive religious education can help the community understand that Islamic teachings are not only about the formalities of marriage, but also about forming a family that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, *warahmah*, which requires full maturity.

Ultimately, preserving the tradition of merariq and transforming the practice of merariq underage requires synergy between a correct understanding of religion, enforcement of state law, and community empowerment. Religion can be a powerful instrument for preserving the positive essence of traditional customs (such as family unity and noble values), while gradually transforming them to be in line with Islamic principles that favor the interests and welfare of children and families. This means not eliminating traditions, but revitalizing them to suit the demands of the times and Sharia law that brings goodness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the institutions and individuals who contributed to the completion of this study. Appreciation is extended to the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram

and Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram for their academic support and facilitation during the research process. The authors also acknowledge the valuable assistance of community leaders, religious figures, and residents of the Sasak community in Lombok who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights, making this ethnographic research possible. Finally, heartfelt thanks are conveyed to colleagues and reviewers whose constructive feedback significantly improved the quality of this manuscript

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