

Reinterpretation Religious Aesthetic Values in the Pre-Marriage Tradition of Malay Traditional Merisik in the Riau Islands

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Abstract

The merisik tradition is an integral part of the wedding culture of the Malay community of the Riau Islands which serves as the first step in getting to know the prospective partner. This process not only aims to obtain information about the bride-to-be, but also to build a harmonious relationship between families. Over time, this tradition has undergone significant changes, from what was initially simple and solemn to a larger event that involved many parties. The study of hadith related to merisik shows that this tradition is still relevant in the contemporary era, with values that must be maintained. Therefore, it is important to adapt the implementation of merisik to the times without neglecting the underlying principles, so that this tradition can continue and adapt in the future.

Keyword: Hadith; Marriage; Merisik Tradition; Sosial Change

Introduction

The tradition of marriage in Malay society has very strong roots in customs and cultural values that are passed down from generation to generation. One of the important stages in the Malay traditional marriage process, especially in the Riau Islands, is merisik. As a first step before proposing or proposing, merisik is a tradition that is not only symbolic, but also meaningful in the context of establishing relationships between families (Tahib, 2009). The Malay community, which highly values politeness, honor, and social etiquette, sees merisik as a subtle and respectful way to start the marriage process (Dahri et al., 2024).

In simple terms, merisik is the process by which the man "finds out" about the bride-to-be. This is done to assess or know more about the bride-to-be. In addition, it is also important to see the willingness of the bride-to-

be and her family to accept the proposal, as well as to ensure that the bride-to-be is not tied to someone else. In Malay culture, this step is very important to maintain the honor of both parties, so that the application process can be carried out with full respect (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

In practice, merisik has a strong foundation in Islamic teachings, as can be found in hadith texts. One of the hadiths that is often used as a reference is the hadith narrated by Jabir bin 'Abdillah, where the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ، نَا عَبْدُ الْوَاحِدِ بْنُ زِيَادٍ ، نَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ إِسْحَاقَ، عَنِ دَاوُدَ بْنِ حُصَيْنٍ ، عَنْ
وَاقِدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعْدِ بْنِ مُعَاذٍ عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ
عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: "إِذَا حَطَبَ أَحَدُكُمْ الْمَرْأَةَ فَإِنْ اسْتَطَاعَ أَنْ يَنْظُرَ إِلَى مَا يَدْعُوهُ إِلَى نِكَاحِهَا فَلْيَفْعَلْ
ثُمَّ قَالَ: فَحَطَبْتُ جَارِيَةً فَكُنْتُ أُحِبُّهَا حَتَّى رَأَيْتُ مِنْهَا مَا دَعَانِي إِلَى نِكَاحِهَا فَتَزَوَّجْتُ

"If one of you proposes to a woman, then if he can see what motivates him to marry her, let him do it." (As-Sijistani, 1905).

Although it does not specifically mention the merisik tradition, this hadith contextually emphasizes the importance of getting to know the prospective partner before stepping into marriage, and this is in line with the essence of merisik in Malay customs (Dahlan, 2011).

In the study of contemporary hadith, the importance of the merisik tradition as part of the marriage process is also increasingly understood in the context of local culture. The contemporary approach to hadith allows researchers to relate the values contained in the hadith to local customs, such as merisik. This study highlights the flexibility and relevance of Islamic teachings in daily life, including in the marriage process. Thus, the merisik tradition is not only seen as a cultural heritage, but also as a form of implementation of Islamic values that have been adapted to the social context of the Malay community (Dahlan, 2011).

Previous research has straightforwardly discussed Islamic values in the landscape of Malay marriage traditions, including, Indra. (2016), *Nilai-
Nilai Pendidikan dalam Tradisi Pernikahan Melayu di Kabupaten Bengkalis dan
Implikasinya dalam Kehidupan Modern*", Akademika: Jurnal Keagamaan dan
Pendidikan, Vol. 12 No. 1, Juni 2016. This type of research is qualitative, the
research found that the educational values in the Malay marriage tradition
in Bengkalis Regency include the values of faith, honesty, responsibility,
morals, and social. Factors that affect the implementation of these values
are customs, environment, and economy. The implications of the tradition

include cultural, scientific and technological aspects, as well as morals and ethics. This study concludes that the Malay wedding tradition in Bengkalis Regency remains relevant to modernity, showing important educational values in social life (Indra, 2016). Meanwhile, other research by Cici Sylvia, Sitti Nursetiawati, dan Agus Dudung. (2022), "*Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang*", *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Maret 2022. This research is qualitative with an ethnographic approach. This study shows that the tradition of traditional Malay wedding ceremonies in Deli has undergone significant changes due to the influence of the times and Islamic teachings. However, the outline of the tradition remains the same even though there are variations between regions. This research shows that the Deli Malay wedding tradition in Paluh Sibaji Village continues to change to adapt to the context of religion and modernity, while still maintaining the cultural core (Sylvia et al., 2022).

Then, in a more specific research on the theme of merisik tradition in the Malay community, including by Prayogo. (2021), "*Tindak Tutur dan Pola Alih Tutur Tradisi Berpantun dalam Upacara Adat Merisik pada Masyarakat Melayu Batubara*", Thesis Master, University of North Sumatra. This research is a descriptive qualitative research. This study suggests that the speech acts used in this tradition include assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive illocutions, with assertives being the most dominant (67.90%). The perfect pattern of speech switching is found in the structure of the merisik ceremony, which still maintains the tradition of rhyming even though it is influenced by the times. Meanwhile, this study concludes that the Batubara Malay community merisik ceremony shows a pattern of speech switching that reflects local wisdom and adaptation to changing times (Prayogo, 2021). Other research has also been conducted by Gadty Febyanti Putri. (2021), "*Tradisi Lisan Merisik pada Upacara Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat*", Thesis, University of North Sumatra. This research is qualitative. Research has found that the oral tradition of merisik has meaning, function, and local wisdom explained through the theory of local wisdom. This research provides an overview of the traditional phenomenon based on facts in the field. This study concludes that the merisik tradition in Langkat has strong cultural value, but requires preservation efforts in the midst of modernization (Putri, 2021).

Based on the highlights of existing research, along with the times, the merisik tradition has undergone several changes in its implementation. In the past, the merisik process was carried out very formally, involving respected envoys, and often without the knowledge of the bride-to-be. However, nowadays, with the influence of globalization and changing people's perception of marriage, merisik tends to become more relaxed and open (Pangaribuan, 2024). Many modern couples do the grooming

indirectly through family meetings or even direct conversations between the two brides-to-be. Even so, the essence of this tradition is still maintained, namely maintaining honor and politeness in family relations (Pangaribuan, 2024; Putri, 2021). In this paper, we will discuss further how the meaning of merisik and the foundation of the hadith behind this tradition, as well as how the changing times can affect its implementation today.

Research Method

This research method uses a qualitative-descriptive approach to explore the value of religious aesthetics in the traditional Malay merisik pre-marriage tradition in the Riau Islands (Darmalaksana, 2020). The research is carried out through the stages of data analysis which includes three main steps: inventory or unitization, where data is collected and organized based on relevant units; classification or categorization, which is the grouping of data based on the main themes or categories that emerge from the merisik tradition; and interpretation, which is an in-depth analysis to understand the dynamics of religious values, both fixed and those that have undergone changes due to the influence of modernization, social, and cultural (Darmalaksana & Kulsum, 2022). Data collection techniques include observation, and study of relevant documents, so that the results of the research can provide a comprehensive picture of the changes in religious and aesthetic values in the context of Malay culture (Bergold & Thomas, 2012).

Results and Discussion

1. A Glimpse of the Malay Traditional Merisik Tradition

The merisik tradition is one of the important stages in the Malay traditional marriage process, including in the Riau Islands. This tradition has a deep meaning and reflects the values of politeness, honor, and social interaction in Malay culture. In general, merisik serves as the first step to establishing family relationships before the next steps, such as proposing and marriage, are carried out (Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, 2019).

a. Definition of Merisik

Merisik comes from the word "risik" which means to search or research. In the context of marriage, merisik is a process in which the man's family sends a representative or the man himself to find out more about the bride-to-be. This process has become very important in Malay culture, where marriage involves not only two individuals, but also two extended families. Merisik is not just a formality, but rather a tradition that upholds social and ethical norms, ensuring that both parties can accept and understand each other before entering into a more serious relationship (Prayogo, 2021; Putri, 2021; Sylvia et al., 2022).

b. Narrative of Religion Perspective

The merisik tradition also has a foundation in Islamic teachings. One of the hadiths that is often used as a reference is the words of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH about the importance of getting to know a prospective partner before marriage.

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مَنِيعٍ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا ابْنُ أَبِي زَائِدَةَ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنِي عَاصِمُ بْنُ سُلَيْمَانَ هُوَ الْأَحْوَلُ ،
عَنْ بَكْرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْمُزَنِّيِّ، عَنِ الْمُغِيرَةِ بْنِ شُعْبَةَ «أَنَّه حَظَبَ امْرَأَةً، فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ: انْظُرْ إِلَيْهَا، فَإِنَّهُ آخَرَى أَنْ يُؤَدَمَ بَيْنَكُمَا

“Look at the woman, for that is more appropriate to perpetuate (the love) between you both” (At-Tirmidzi, 1996).

This hadith indirectly underlines the values underlying the merisik tradition, in which the bride and groom and their families need to get to know each other better before taking a more serious step. The tradition emphasises the importance of harmony and compatibility between the couple, which are basic principles in marriage according to Islamic teachings (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

c. Implementation of Tradition Merisik in Malay

The implementation of merisik usually begins with preparation from the man's family. They will select several respected family members or community leaders to be sent to this event (Tahib, 2009). This process can be described in several steps:

a. Preparation (Besiap)

Before making a noise, the man must prepare various things. This includes selecting representatives who are reputable and able to communicate effectively. The man's family needs to have internal talks to make sure that they are all on the same page about the bride-to-be. In addition, there are also some practical considerations such as the right time to make a visit. Usually, certain days are considered better based on the local calendar or custom (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

b. Visiting (Bekunjong)

The man will visit the bride-to-be's house. This visit is usually carried out at an agreed time so as not to disturb the woman's family. Upon arrival, the envoy is expected to respect the norms of politeness, such as wearing modest clothing and maintaining a good attitude (Dahri et al., 2024). During this visit, the men introduced themselves and the purpose of their arrival openly. The female side will welcome the envoy respectfully, and a good atmosphere is essential to create positive interactions (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

c. Interview (Betanye)

The man will start by asking subtle and indirect questions about the background of the bride-to-be. This question can include family conditions, education, and whether the bride-to-be has had a relationship or a previous proposal. In addition, men can also dig up information about the character, habits, and hobbies of the bride-to-be. This aims to get a more complete picture of the bride-to-be's personality and whether they are compatible with each other. This process must be done carefully, so as not to seem intimidating or too direct, which can make the woman feel uncomfortable (Prayogo, 2021; Putri, 2021; Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

d. Discuss (Berembok)

During the process of merisik, it is important for the envoy to establish a good relationship with the woman's family. They will discuss the values held by the female family, as well as how the male family can synergize well. This discussion also included the traditional values embraced by each family. For example, whether there are any special traditions to follow in weddings or celebrations that need to be considered. The woman's family will also feel more comfortable discussing the potential of this relationship if the envoy shows a polite and respectful attitude. It is an opportunity to build trust between the two families (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

e. Conclude (Ngasel)

After the question and answer process and discussion, the man's family will get an overview of the bride-to-be. If all goes well and positively, the messenger will bring good news back to the man's side. However, if there are concerns or questions that have not been answered, the process can be carried out again at a later time with a more in-depth approach. Otherwise, the merisik process can be closed politely without forcing the woman. The results of this squeezing are usually an important consideration for the man's family before proceeding to the application stage (Sanopaka & Siam, 2018).

2. Changes in Moral Values in the Merisik Tradition

Over time, the tradition of merisik in traditional Malay weddings in the Riau Islands has undergone a number of significant changes. From what was initially carried out in a simple and sacred manner, it has now changed in several quite striking aspects. This tradition that basically serves as an initial link between two families before the marriage process has evolved following the current of modernity and the socio-economic conditions of today's society (Hendra, 2023).

1) From Simplicity to Glamour

In the past, the merisik tradition was carried out with simplicity and wisdom. The essence of merisik is a warm and intimate meeting between the groom-to-be, his family, and the bride-to-be's family. This meeting was

held at the bride-to-be's house, with only a few people closest to her attending. The atmosphere created is very private and focused on the core purpose of *merisik*, which is to get information about the bride-to-be and build a good relationship between the two families (Dahlan, 2011).

However, in this modern era, *merisik* has undergone major changes in terms of its implementation. Now, this tradition is no longer limited to small and simple gatherings. In some cases, *merisik* is now held with a large number of people involved and often combined with larger events. The process that used to be intimate and limited is now more open, with invitations that include distant relatives to family friends. Many Riau Malays now attend *merisik* events that are more like celebrations, complete with decorations, catering, and entertainment (Mustafid, 2023).

This change is also followed by an increase in the costs that must be incurred to carry out the *merisik*. The tradition that initially only cost a little for transportation and simple food preparation now requires a larger budget to accommodate various aspects such as venues, special clothing, and souvenirs for guests. As a result, not a few Malay families find it difficult to carry out the *merisik* tradition in accordance with modern standards. The high cost burden makes many families choose to no longer carry out this tradition or replace it in a simpler and more practical way.

2) Expanding Participation from Small Families to Many Parties

Apart from luxury, another striking change in the *merisik* tradition is the widespread participation of the parties involved. In ancient times, *merisik* only involved the groom-to-be and the woman's nuclear family. Usually, the groom's father or the next closest family member will be the representative of the event, while the woman's family represented by her parents will receive the visit. In its traditional format, *merisik* is a very private and exclusive meeting. The whole process was carried out with great care, and only the immediate family knew the progress of the conversation. This is done to maintain the honor and dignity of both families and ensure that if there is a disagreement, the process is not known to many parties and does not cause embarrassment (Mustafid, 2023).

However, nowadays, *merisik* has turned into an event that involves more people outside the nuclear family circle. Many families choose to invite distant relatives, friends, and even other relatives who are not directly involved with the bride-to-be. This wider participation makes *merisik* no longer a private event, but more akin to a small party or large gathering. The involvement of many parties in this *merisik* tradition has shifted the original meaning of the process. If in the past the purpose of *merisik* was to get to know each other personally and intimately between two families, now the process has become more open and involves the opinions of many parties. Sometimes, this adds to the complexity of the

merisik process, because there are more opinions and viewpoints that must be considered by the bride-to-be and her family (Hendra, 2023; Mustafid, 2023).

The change in the merisik tradition among the Malay community of the Riau Islands shows that there is a shift from simplicity to luxury, and involves more people than in the past. Traditions that were once private and sacred are now large events that often require large costs, so many families choose to no longer carry them out. In addition, if previously it only involved the nuclear family, now more and more parties outside the family are involved, changing the process that used to be intimate to more open. This shift reflects the influence of modernity and changing social values in Malay society today (Dahlan, 2011; Mohammad Arif, 2021).

3) Degradation of Spiritual Aesthetic Values in the Merisik Tradition

In every marriage tradition, there are profound aspects that reflect the cultural and religious values of the community. One of the traditions that is rich in meaning in the context of marriage of the Malay community of the Riau Islands is merisik. The process of making a name is not just about looking for information about a potential partner, but also involves interaction between families which is important for building a harmonious relationship. In the contemporary era, various social, cultural, and economic changes have affected the implementation of this tradition, bringing new challenges and opportunities. In this part of the analysis, two main points will be discussed. First, the study of hadiths related to merisik and their relevance in the modern context, which provides a strong foundation for the implementation of this tradition. Second, an analysis of the changes values that occurred in the merisik tradition in the contemporary era, including their causes and impacts. It is hoped that this analysis can provide deeper insights into how the merisik tradition remains relevant and adapts to the times, while still maintaining the values contained in it.

3. Interpretation Hadith About Merisik in the Contemporary Era

In the merisik tradition, the role of Islam is very strong, especially in terms of getting to know the prospective partner before marriage. In general, the concept of merisik can be associated with several hadiths that emphasize the importance of seeking information about potential partners, so that marriage is based on compatibility and mutual understanding. In this context, there is a hadith from the Prophet Muhammad PBUH which reads: "Look at your prospective partner first, because by looking it will be easier to tie the relationship." (HR Tirmidhi). This hadith is often used as a reference to the merisik tradition, where the man's family is expected to get to know their future wife more closely before deciding to propose.

In this modern era, many contemporary scholars see the merisik tradition as something that remains relevant, but needs to be adjusted to the times. More flexible approaches, such as the use of technology to obtain information about potential partners (for example through social media or matchmaking applications), are considered part of the expansion of the concept of merisik. However, the essence of merisik, namely getting to know the prospective spouse and his family well, must be maintained in accordance with Islamic values. In the contemporary era, the study of these hadiths has an important role in understanding the relevance of the merisik tradition.

In the study of contemporary hadith, scholars and scholars emphasize the aspect of sharia maqasid or the purpose of Islamic law, namely to achieve happiness and prosperity in life. In this context, the merisik tradition is considered one way to avoid future conflicts, as an early introduction between two families can provide a clearer picture of the compatibility between the two prospective brides. In addition, the study of contemporary hadith also encourages the importance of maintaining good morals in the merisik process. Politeness, honesty, and openness remain key principles in this process. In this context, merisik is not only about getting information, but also establishing harmonious relationships between families in a dignified way. Thus, although some aspects of the merisik tradition have changed, its basic principles based on Islamic teachings must be maintained.

4. Changes in the Value of Merisik Tradition in the Contemporary Era

Changes in the merisik tradition in the contemporary era can be seen from various perspectives, including social, economic, and cultural. In the past, merisik was a tradition that was carried out with simplicity and within the scope of a small family. However, along with the times, changes in the economic and social aspects of the community also affect how this tradition is implemented. Overall, the change in the merisik tradition reflects the social dynamics of the Malay community in the Riau Islands that continues to grow. However, despite the transformation of this tradition, its basic values of mutual respect, courtesy, and the importance of getting to know each other remain relevant and upheld.

One of the factors that causes this change is the change in people's lifestyles. Modern society tends to consider wedding events as a symbol of social status, so that the ceremony that used to be done simply, is now often carried out in a grand manner and involves many people. People's lives, which are increasingly connected to social media, also play a role in this change. More and more people feel the need to show every stage in their marriage process, including meris, as part of social imagery. In addition, economic changes also play an important role. The improvement of the

welfare and financial ability of some people has made the tradition that used to be carried out at minimal cost now more luxurious. Many families are willing to spend a lot of money to hold a merisik event that involves many guests, complete with luxurious decorations and consumption. However, on the other hand, this change also causes many families to feel financially burdened and choose not to carry out the merisik tradition.

In the contemporary era, merisik involves not only the groom-to-be and his family, but also relatives and friends from both sides. This reflects a change in the social structure of society, where wider community involvement in personal matters such as marriage is becoming more common. This involvement of outsiders can enrich the process of merisik, but it can also make the process more complex and less private than it used to be. Another cause of this change is the influence of culture from outside, especially from the media and entertainment. Many modern families are inspired by the way weddings and events are portrayed in movies, dramas, or other media. This led to a change in the public's perception of how this tradition should be carried out, where the luxury and publicity of the event took precedence over its essence and simplicity.

Conclusion

Along with the times, merisik has undergone various significant changes, especially in the contemporary era. From what was initially carried out simply and solemnly, this tradition is now often a big event that involves many parties and has a high cost. This reflects a change in the lifestyle of society that is increasingly influenced by the values of modernity, where luxury and publicity are part of a tradition that was previously private. Nevertheless, the essence of merisik as a means to build relationships between prospective partners and families still needs to be maintained. On the other hand, the study of hadith related to merisik shows that this tradition still has relevance in the modern context. The application of values in hadith is important to ensure that the process of merisik is not just a formality, but also strengthens family and community ties. Therefore, it is important for the community to continue to adjust the implementation of merisik to the development of the times without ignoring the noble values contained in it, so that this tradition can continue and develop well in the future.

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