

Negotiating Religion, State, and Custom: Islamic Values in the Malay Merisik Pre-marital Tradition at Medan City

Muhammad Hafizh,¹ Muhammad Yusuf Rangkuti,^{2*} Muhammad Rizal Khoirul Umam,³ Ali Baroroh Al Muflih,⁴ Rahmi Amalia,⁵ Muhammad Fauzan Ni'ami,⁶

Ministry of Religious Affairs West Java Regional Office and Tarbiyah Tanggamus College of Sciences,¹Tidar University,²Ministry of Religious Affairs of Karo Regency,³Tidar University,⁴ University of Muhammadiyah Malang,⁵ International Islamic University Darullughah Wadda'wah,⁶

Email: mh00.hafizh@gmail.com,¹ yusufrangkuti@untidar.ac.id,² rizalkhairul1414@gmail.com,³ alibaroroh@untidar.ac.id,⁴ rahmiamalia512@gmail.com,⁵ niamifauzan01@gmail.com,⁶

Keywords:

Merisik Marriage;
Malay Society;
Islamic Values;
Malay Customary
Law; Indonesian
Law

Kata Kunci:

Pernikahan
Merisik;
Masyarakat
Melayu; Nilai-nilai
Islam; Hukum
Adat Melayu;
Hukum Indonesia

Abstract:

The practice of merisik remains alive and continues to be preserved in the Malay customs of Medan, even though there are no explicit regulations regarding the merisik tradition in either Islamic law or state law. This article will discuss how the diversity of traditional wedding practices in Indonesia, specifically the merisik tradition among the Malay community in Medan, is negotiated within a multicultural context from the perspectives of Islam and customary law. The objective of this study is to identify Islamic values within the merisik tradition and to analyze their relevance to Malay customary law. This research employs a qualitative approach based on field research, utilizing data collection techniques such as interviews and observation, supported by secondary data from literature and Google Scholar journals over the past decade, which are analyzed using a descriptive-normative approach. The results of this study indicate that the merisik tradition reflects religious, personal, and social values that are closely linked to both Malay customary law and Islamic values. The main argument of this article centers on the negotiation between the merisik tradition and Islamic law and Malay customary law. This tradition has historical ties to the process of Islamization among the Malay community in Medan and embodies Islamic values, namely, religious (*kafā'ah*), personal (trustworthiness and honesty), and social (consultation, etiquette in visiting and hosting), which align with Malay customary law in fostering family harmony and social sustainability.

Abstrak:

Praktik merisik tetap hidup dan terus dilestarikan dalam adat Melayu Kota Medan meskipun tidak ada regulasi eksplisit mengenai tradisi merisik dalam hukum Islam maupun hukum negara. Artikel ini akan mendiskusikan bagaimana praktik keragaman adat pernikahan di Indonesia, khususnya tradisi merisik dalam masyarakat Melayu Kota Medan, yang dinegosiasikan dengan kondisi multikultural dari perspektif Islam dan hukum adat. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai Islam dalam tradisi merisik serta menganalisis relevansinya dengan hukum adat Melayu. Riset ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis *field research* dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara dan observasi, didukung data sekunder dari literatur dan

jurnal Google Scholar dalam kurun waktu satu dekade terakhir, yang dianalisis secara deskriptif-normatif. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tradisi merisik mencerminkan nilai-nilai keagamaan, pribadi, dan sosial yang erat kaitannya dengan hukum adat Melayu maupun nilai-nilai Islam. Argumentasi utama artikel ini terletak pada negosiasi tradisi merisik dengan hukum Islam dan adat Melayu. Tradisi ini memiliki keterkaitan historis dengan proses Islamisasi masyarakat Melayu di Medan serta mengandung nilai Islam, yaitu religius (kafā'ah), kepribadian (amanah dan kejujuran), serta sosial (musyawarah, adab bertamu dan menjamu), yang selaras dengan hukum adat Melayu dalam membangun harmonisasi keluarga dan keberlanjutan sosial.

A. Introduction

Indonesia's cultural diversity is reflected in its numerous ethnic traditions, including marriage customs that remain preserved across generations. These traditions are considered sacred and are governed by customary norms and sanctions.¹ Although marriage is legally regulated through Law No. 1 of 1974, as amended by Law No. 16 of 2019, several customary practices, such as the Malay merisik tradition, are not specifically accommodated within positive law.² In Islamic law, marriage is both a legal and religious institution that unites a man and a woman in a sacred bond to achieve harmony, tranquility, and family well-being, as emphasized in Q.S. Ar-Rūm (30): 21. Marriage in Islam is a sacred institution that legitimizes the fulfillment of human needs through a lawful contract aimed at establishing a harmonious family. Before marriage, prospective spouses generally undergo stages such as acquaintance, proposal, dowry agreement, and walimah preparation.³ In Indonesia, however, these pre-marital processes are understood through different legal frameworks. Customary law emphasizes social traditions and communal agreements, Islamic law focuses on sharia principles and ethical values, while positive law prioritizes legality, administration, and legal certainty.⁴

One important Malay pre-marital tradition is *merisik*, a process through which the prospective groom's family investigates the character, family background, and compatibility of

¹ Qurrotul Ainiyah, "Ta'aruf Lokalitas: Integrasi Hukum Islam dan Hukum Adat Terhadap Fenomena Greoan di Suku Using Banyuwangi," *Jurnal Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality* 3, no. 2 (2018): 198.

² Ahmad Gifari Alamsyah et al., "Budaya Melayu dan Pengaruh Islam dalam Upacara Pernikahan Di Tanjung Balai," *Mukadimah: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sejarah, dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 6, no. 2 (2022): 410, <https://doi.org/10.30743/mukadimah.v6i2.5532>.

³ Hari Widiyanto, "The Concept of Marriage in Islam (A Phenomenological Study of Marriage Postponement in the Pandemic Period)," *Journal of Islam Nusantara* 04, no. 01 (2020): 106, <https://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalin.v4i1.213>.

⁴ M.A. Tihami and Sohari Sahrani, *Fikih Munakabat: Kajian Fikih Nikah Lengkap* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2009), 22–23.

a prospective bride before proceeding to a formal proposal.⁵ Although still widely practiced among the Malay community of Medan, *merisik* is not explicitly regulated in either Indonesian positive law or Islamic legal texts.⁶ This situation creates a normative gap between customary practices, religious norms, and state regulations. The concept of *ta'aruf* in Islam encourages mutual acquaintance before marriage but does not prescribe detailed procedures, allowing local traditions such as *merisik* to develop as culturally accepted mechanisms. The study of *merisik* is important because it represents the intersection of religion, culture, and law in contemporary Malay society. A comparative examination of Islamic law, positive law, and Malay customary law is therefore necessary to understand the legal position, social function, and religious legitimacy of *merisik*. Such a comparison also contributes to broader discussions on legal pluralism, living law, and the integration of Islamic values within local cultural traditions, particularly in preserving family harmony and social cohesion in the marriage process.

Previous studies on the *merisik* tradition and Malay marriage customs can be grouped into three categories. First, cultural studies such as “Local Wisdom of Merisik in Malay Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study”⁷ and “The Oral Tradition of Merisik at the Langkat Malay Traditional Ceremony”⁸ focus on the history, local wisdom, and implementation of *merisik* as an oral tradition. Second, studies on Islam and Malay customs, including “The Relationship Between Islam and Traditional Marriage of Siak Malay”⁹ and “Changes in the Tradition of the Deli Malay Ethnic Wedding Ceremony”¹⁰, examine the integration of Islamic values into Malay wedding practices through the concept of ‘urf. Third, legal studies such as “Marriage Actualization of the Malay Indigenous Peoples of Riau Province in the Legal Perspective”¹¹

⁵ Ari Pusparini, *Agar Ta'aruf Cinta Berbuah Pabala* (Yogyakarta: Pro-U Media, 2013).

⁶ Rozanna Mulyani, Asni Barus, and Iskandar Muda, “Local Wisdom of Merisik in Melayu Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study,” *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology* 9, no. 11 (2018): 2714–20.

⁷ Mulyani, Barus, and Muda.

⁸ GF Putri, “Tradisi Lisan *Merisik* Pada Upacara Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat” (2021), <https://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/41013>.

⁹ Zikri Darussamin, Rahman Rahman, and Imam Ghozali, “The Relationship Between Islam and Traditional Marriage of Siak Malay,” *Justicia Islamica* 17, no. 2 (November 27, 2020): 323–42, <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v17i2.2152>.

¹⁰ Cici Sylvia, S Nursetiawati, and Agus Dudung, “Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli Di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan (JISIP)* 6, no. 2 (2022): 3644–53, <https://doi.org/10.36312/jisip.v6i1.2898/>; Amalia Haq, Amrullah Hayatudin, and Muhammad Yunus, “Tinjauan Hukum Adat Tentang Larangan Perkawinan Satu Suku Di Minangkabau Berdasarkan Kaidah Urf,” *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law* 4, no. 2 (2024): 169–76, <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsifl.v4i2.14903>.

¹¹ Ratna Riyanti, Yuli Heriyanti, and Hafiz Sutrisno, “Marriage Actualization of the Malay Indigenous Peoples of Riau Province in the Legal Perspective,” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)* 5, no. 4 (October 6, 2022): 28904–12, <https://doi.org/10.33258/BIRCI.V5I4.7043>.

and several international publications analyze marriage traditions through customary law, Islamic law, legal pluralism, living law, and 'urf in Islamic family law, ex: "Revitalizing 'Urf in State Legal Development: The Case of Minangkabau Marriage Traditions," 'Urf Analysis of the Nipa'bajikang Tradition among the Muslim Community of Gowa Regency,"¹² "The Existence of 'Urf in the Resolution of Marriage Disputes in Islamic Law: A Living Law Perspective,"¹³ "Telaah Ulang Hak Paksa dalam Perkawinan Islam melalui Pendekatan Fiqh, Munâsib al-'Illah dan 'Urf,"¹⁴ 'Urf to Digital 'Urf: Accommodating the Values of the Young Generation on Husband-Wife Relations in the Framework of Ushûl al-Fiqh,"¹⁵ "Genealogy and Reform of Islamic Family Law: Study of Islamic Marriage Law Products in Malaysia."¹⁶ However, existing studies largely emphasize cultural, historical, and legal dimensions, while limited attention has been given to the Islamic educational values embedded in *merisik* from a Qur'anic perspective. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining *merisik* as a medium for transmitting Qur'anic educational values and exploring its relevance within Malay customary law as a form of living law in contemporary society.

This research offers novelty by specifically examining the *merisik* tradition of the Malay community in Medan through the perspectives of Islamic values, Qur'anic teachings, and Malay customary law simultaneously. Previous studies generally focused only on the historical, anthropological, or cultural aspects of the *merisik* tradition, without comprehensively analysing the relationship between Islamic educational values and the operation of customary law within the tradition. In contrast, this study seeks to reveal how the *merisik* tradition reflects Islamic values embedded in Malay social life, considering that Malay identity is inseparable from Islam, Malay language, and Malay culture. This research focuses on examining the Islamic values contained within the tradition from the perspective of the Qur'an and analyzing their relevance

¹² R. AMelia, "Ritual Perkawinan Adat dan Penalaran Hukum Islam: Analisis 'Urf Tentang Tradisi Nipa'bajikang Di Kalangan Komunitas Muslim Di Kabupaten Gowa," *Shautuna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Perbandingan*, accessed May 29, 2026, <https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/shautuna/article/view/56866>.

¹³ M Luthfi et al., "The Existence of Urf in the Resolution of Marriage Disputes in Islamic Law: A Living Law Perspective," *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum dan Keadilan*, 12 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.29303/v12i1.1356>.

¹⁴ Moh. Dliya'ul Chaq, "Telaah Ulang Hak Paksa Dalam Perkawinan Islam Melalui Pendekatan Fiqh, Munâsib Al-'Illah dan 'Urf," *Tafaqquh: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2018): 108–32, <https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqquh.v5i2.114>.

¹⁵ Zulfaidah et al., "From 'Traditional Urf to Digital Urf: Accommodating Young Generation's Values on Husband-Wife Relations in the Framework of Ushûl Al-Fiqh," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 10, no. 2 (2025): 784–808, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v10i2.14630>.

¹⁶ Siti Aminah and Arif Sugitanata, "Genealogy and Reform of Islamic Family Law: Study of Islamic Marriage Law Products in Malaysia," *Journal of Islamic Law* 3, no. 1 (2022): 94–110, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v3i1.556>.

to Malay customary law. So, the question of this problem research is What Islamic values are reflected in the tradition according to the perspective of the Qur'an, and how are these values relevant to the principles and practices of Malay customary law? The research problem is centered on the relationship between religious values and cultural traditions that continue to develop within Malay society. Therefore, the main research addressed in this study is what Islamic values are reflected in the tradition according to the Qur'anic perspective and how these values are related to and relevant within Malay customary law. Based on this formulation, the purpose of the research is to identify, analyze, and explain the Islamic values embodied in the tradition through Qur'anic teachings and to determine their relevance and integration within the principles and practices of Malay customary law.

B. Method

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method and a field research-based research type. This research also has multidisciplinary approaches from socio-kultur, hadith, and law to elaborate the theories and result. Interviews, observation, and documentation are primary sources in this research which collected from the field. Meanwhile, the secondary data is in the form of research, scientific papers and books obtained from g-scholar to support the elaboration and analysis of primary data. While in analysing the data, researchers focused on descriptive-normative. The data collection techniques used in this research consist of interviews, observations, and documentation. Descriptive analysis is the process of analysing data by prioritising the description, description and explanation in detail related to the discussion on the subject matter.¹⁷ Descriptive analysis of the *merisik* tradition aims to reveal the values of Islamic education that exist in the tradition which is then relied on the Prophet's traditions as a normative approach to the Koranic and customary law perspective.

C. Results

The findings of this study indicate that the *merisik* tradition embodies religious, personal, and social values that are closely related to both Malay customary law and Islamic teachings. Furthermore, this research analyses the relevance between Islamic values contained

¹⁷ Fredi Suhendra, "Kisah Dramatisasi Saudara-Saudara Nabi Yusuf Dalam Al-Qur'an Dengan Pendekatan Teori Konspirasi," *Jurnal Semiotika Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2021): 37–48, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v1i1.8986>.

in the *merisik* tradition and the principles of Malay customary law that continue to function as living law in the community. The study argues that the *merisik* tradition is not merely a cultural ritual, but also represents a socio-religious mechanism that embodies Islamic ethics, family values, manners, and social harmony within Malay society in Medan. Therefore, this research contributes to providing a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between tradition, Islamic law, and customary law in contemporary Malay Muslim society.

The novelty of this research also lies in its effort to position the *merisik* tradition as a form of legal-cultural integration between Islamic teachings and Malay customary practices. Unlike previous studies, which tended to discuss Malay wedding traditions descriptively, this study critically analyses the educational values of Islam in the *merisik* tradition from the perspective of the Qur'an and examines their relevance to the customary law practiced by the Malay community in Medan. Thus, this research is expected to enrich the discourse on Islamic family law, legal pluralism, and the preservation of local wisdom within the framework of Islamic values.

D. Discussions

1. *Ta'āruf* in Islamic Discourse: Definition and History

Ta'āruf (*ta'ārafā*) comes from the root word 'arafa which means to know or recognize.¹⁸ The addition of the letters ta and alif in the form of *tsulāṣī mazīd bi ḥarfain* gives the meaning of mutual knowledge between the two parties as explained in *al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*.¹⁹ Literally, *ta'āruf* means a process of getting to know each other that is not neutral, but has the purpose of learning and deep understanding between the parties who interact within a certain period of time. In the context of Islamic law, *ta'āruf* is not understood as the free interaction of man and woman, but rather as a mechanism of premarital arranged in sharia ethics. The scholars of *fiqh al-munākahāt* explain that *ta'āruf* serves as a preventive measure to avoid forbidden relationships as well as a means of understanding character, religious commitments, family background, and compatibility of prospective partners before marriage. Thus, *ta'āruf* reflects

¹⁸ al-Fāiruzabādī, "*Al-Qamus Al-Mubīth*" (Mesir: Dar al-Hadits al-Qahirah, 2008), 1560.

¹⁹ Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Waseet* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Syuruq al-Dauliyyah, 2004).

the principles of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*, namely safeguarding offspring (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), maintaining honor (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*), and maintaining social morality.²⁰²¹

Practically, *ta'āruf* is an interpersonal communication between two potential partners that aims to get to know each other deeply through a directed process, usually involving an intermediary or family.²² This process involves the direct exchange of information with the role of the sender and receiver of the message who respond to each other within the bounds of Islamic ethics.²³ The ultimate goal is to find a match to build the ideal household, namely *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*.²⁴ In contemporary developments, socio-religious studies show that *ta'āruf* has become a socio-cultural practice in Muslim societies, particularly Southeast Asia, as an alternative to free courtship. This practice emphasizes family involvement, supervision of religious values, and ethical boundaries of interaction, so that *ta'āruf* becomes not only a theological concept, but also a social institution shaped by Islamic moral values and the local cultural context.²⁵ The essence of *ta'āruf* in pre-marriage is the relationship between the prospective bride and groom proportionally and does not cross the reasonable limits in Islamic norms so that this becomes evidence that pious people should actually keep their distance between the opposite sex before the official bond in marriage, so the values of *ta'āruf* can be implemented in both lives. This is very clear in Qs. al-Hujurāt/49:13.

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”

This narration highlights that the Qur'anic concept of *ta'āruf* carries egalitarian and ethical values in social relations, emphasizing moral character and religiosity over lineage or social status. The Prophet's guidance in the case of Abu Hindin illustrates that marriage considerations should prioritize goodness and compatibility rather than tribal hierarchy, the

²⁰ Ahmad Muhtadi Anshor and Muhammad Ngizzul Muttaqin, “Pre-Marriage Course Based on Religious Moderation in Sadd Al-Zari'ah Perspective,” *Samarah* 6, no. 1 (2022): 74–97, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i1.9111>.

²¹ Ismail Firano, “Maqāṣid Az-Zuwāj Asy-Syar'iyah; Dirāsaton Li-Ahamm Maqāṣid Az-Zawāj Al-Aṣliyyah Wa At-Taba'iyah,” *Jurnal Al-Dustur* 7, no. 2 (2024): 170-197. <https://doi.org/10.30863/aldustur.v7i2.7131>

²² Muftisany Hafidz, *Pacaran vs Ta'āruf* (Jakarta: Intera Paperless Publishing, 2021).

²³ Elysia, Chatra, and Arif, “Transformasi Makna *Ta'āruf* Di Era Digital.”

²⁴ Arika Zulfitri Karim and Dinie Ratri Desiningrum, “Eksplorasi Pengalaman Penemuan Makna Cinta Dengan Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Abstrak Berdasarkan Data Yang Dipaparkan Oleh Statistik Mitra Perempuan Women's Crisis Center Tahun 2011 Menunjukkan Bahwa Teman Dekat Atau Pacar Merupakan Pelak,” *Jurnal Empati* 4, no. 1 (2015): 44.

²⁵ Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, “The New Muslim Romance: Changing Patterns of Courtship and Marriage among Educated Javanese Youth,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 441–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002246340500024X>.

story narrated by Abū Dāwūd.²⁶ It also shows that ta‘āraf must be free from arrogance, discrimination, or emotional harm.²⁷ Thus, social stratification is not a valid basis for rejecting a proposal or undermining another person.

The tradition of *merisik* can be understood as a cultural form of ta‘āraf that implicitly embodies Islamic values without altering the essence of Islamic teachings. In Malay society, *merisik* is an initial family-based process to gather information about a prospective spouse before engagement or marriage. Although rooted in local custom,²⁸ its substance aligns with the Qur’anic principle of *li ta‘ārafū* (Q.S. al-Ḥujurāt/49:13), which emphasizes mutual recognition and ethical social relations. From a legal pluralism perspective, *merisik* reflects the integration of Islamic norms and Malay customary law, demonstrating how local wisdom operationalizes Islamic ethical values in culturally accepted forms. It functions not only as tradition but also as a socio-religious mechanism that promotes family involvement, moral safeguarding, and social harmony in pre-marital relations.²⁹ Through this process, the interaction between prospective spouses is conducted respectfully within religious and social boundaries, reinforcing Islamic principles such as guarding modesty (*ḥifz al-‘ird*),³⁰ maintaining proper gender interaction, prioritizing character and religiosity over social status, and involving families in marital decision-making.

Furthermore, the values of humility and equality reflected in the prophetic narrative of Abū Hindin are also evident in *merisik*. The tradition does not prioritize lineage, wealth, or social hierarchy, but instead emphasizes compatibility, morality, family background, and sincere intentions between both parties, in line with the prophetic principle that nobility is based on *taqwa*, not ancestry or class. Thus, integrating *merisik* into the concept of ta‘āraf shows a harmonious relationship between Islamic teachings and local culture. Culture becomes a medium for embodying Islamic ethical values through customs and familial engagement, while

²⁶ Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur’an dan Tafsirnya Jakarta : Departemen Agama RI* (Jakarta: Percetakan Ikrar Mandiriabadi, 2011).

²⁷ Smith-Hefner, “The New Muslim Romance: Changing Patterns of Courtship and Marriage among Educated Javanese Youth.”

²⁸ Mulyani, Barus, and Muda, “Local Wisdom of Merisik in Melayu Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study”; Asrizal Saiin et al., “The Domination Of Islamic Law In Customary Matrimonial Ceremonies: Islamic Values within the Malay Marriage Tradition in Kepulauan Riau,” *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 29, 2023): 320–41, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2023.16207>.

²⁹ Elysia, Chatra, and Arif, “Transformasi Makna Ta’aruf Di Era Digital.”

³⁰ Muhammad Nur et al., “Beyond Marxist Materialism: H.O.S Tjokroaminoto’s Islamic Socialism and Its Maqāṣidī Foundations,” *Ayy-Syir’ab: Jurnal Ilmu Syari’ah dan Hukum* 58, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 331–50, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.v58i2.1596>.

Islam provides the moral and spiritual foundation that ensures the tradition remains just, dignified, and value-oriented.³¹

2. *Merisik* as a Malay Customs in Medan City

The Malay custom called *merisik* in etymology comes from the Malay language and the Indonesian language whose root word is *risik*. *Risik* in the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) online has three meanings, namely groping, conducting investigations in advance before a proposal or proposal activity and investigating whether a proposal is successful or not through the intermediary of others, whispering and whispering. According to the author, the meaning of *risik* is very close to the second meaning in the Big Indonesian Dictionary.³²

The term *merisik* in Malay custom at Medan refers to a pre-marital process in which both families and prospective spouses gather comprehensive information before marriage.³³ It shares the same objective as the Islamic concept of *ta'aruf*, namely introducing and understanding a partner's background, character, and family to reduce uncertainty and build mutual understanding. Unlike *ta'aruf*, which is grounded in Islamic ethical principles, *merisik* also reflects Malay cultural values and customary practices, particularly in Medan. As noted by Mulyani and Setia, it functions as an important preparatory stage for marriage, assessing compatibility, including considerations of lineage, character, and social suitability.³⁴ The *merisik* is also carried out in Medan City to see the extent to which the bride and groom can be assessed both in terms of seed bebet and weight, especially when looking for a consort for a Malay king of Deli.³⁵

In Malay custom, when a man is interested in a woman, the intention is usually conveyed through the process of *merisik*. This mechanism reflects a pattern similar to *ta'aruf* in

³¹ Syahrudin Usman et al., "Islamic Educational Values Contained In The Wedding Tradition Of The Sambas Malay Community," *IJGIE Scientific Journal* 6, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.37567/ijgie.v6i1.3703>; Muspita Sari and Andi Aprilianti, "Fenomena Independent Woman Terhadap Keharmonisan Keluarga : Studi Kondisi Kurangnya Komunikasi Dalam Keluarga Karir Ganda," *AN-NISA* 17, no. 2 (2024): 86–93, <https://doi.org/10.30863/an.v17i2.7194>.

³² Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008).

³³ Mulyani, Barus, and Muda, "Local Wisdom of *Merisik* in Melayu Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study."

³⁴ Prayogo, Rozanna Mulyani, and Eddy Setia, "Turn Taking Patterns in *Merisik* Tradition of Malays Batubara Society Pola Alih Tutur Dalam Tradisi *Merisik* Pada Masyarakat Melayu Batubara," *Ljurnal Didaktika: Jurnal Bahasa dan Pembelajaran* 15, no. 2 (2022): 177–93, <https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v15i2.109199>.

³⁵ Muhammad Ashshubli, *Islam dan Kebudayaan Melayu Nusantara (Menggali Hukum dan Politik Melayu dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia, 2018).

Islam, where interaction between prospective spouses is conducted through ethical and socially controlled procedures involving family members or intermediaries. Such involvement demonstrates that both *merisik* and *ta'aruf* prioritize morality, family participation, and social propriety in pre-marital relationships. The *risik* process usually involves other people as intermediaries, for example, if a man fancies a woman, it is the woman and usually the man's family who conducts the enquiry.³⁶ According to custom, *merisik* is not only carried out by the man's family, but the woman's family may conduct *merisik* to see how far the man can support his wife in the future both physically and mentally.³⁷

In Malay custom in Medan City, *merisik* is divided into three stages. First, *merisik berbisik* occurs when the male family discreetly inquires about a prospective bride through close family members, with outcomes of acceptance or rejection known only to the nuclear family. Second, *merisik kecil* follows acceptance, where a representative (*Puang*) conveys the man's intention, often using Malay pantun and presenting betel (*tepak sirih*), while also discussing dowry and marriage preparations such as prayer sets, clothing, and household necessities.³⁸ Third, *merisik besar* involves the groom's family formally visiting the bride's home to proceed toward engagement.³⁹ Overall, *merisik* in Medan reflects integration between Malay customary law and Islamic values, aligning with *ta'aruf* in promoting ethical conduct, family involvement, and social harmony, making it a form of cultural acculturation in pre-marital practice.

3. *Merisik* Process in Malay Customs in Medan

Merisik in its process in Medan City is divided into two in general, namely the process of small *merisik* and big *merisik*. According to Syahril Fadhli, both small *merisik* and big *merisik* are conducted before the marriage contract and have different functions within the Malay marriage tradition in Medan.

“Small *Merisik* is a process of initial investigation conducted by the groom's family to know the background, personality, and religious character of the prospective bride, while big *merisik* is related to deliberation between both families regarding marriage preparations.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Elly Prihasti Wuriyani Fitri Yani and Rosmawaty Harahap, “Makna Simbolik Tradisi Berbalas Pantun Pada Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat,” *Journal of Educational and Language Research* 1, no. 10 (2022): 1495–1502.

³⁷ Ashshubli, *Islam dan Kebudayaan Melayu Nusantara (Menggali Hukum dan Politik Melayu Dalam Islam)*.

³⁸ Mulyani, Barus, and Muda, “Local Wisdom of *Merisik* in Melayu Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study.”

³⁹ Sylvia, Nursetiawati, and Dudung, “Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang.”

⁴⁰ Syahril Fadhly, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

The small *merisik* process is actually a review process from the man's family of the woman who will be his wife. to the woman who will be made a wife to get to know and assess how appropriate the woman is to be the wife of the man who wants to marry her, in terms of personality, religion, and in terms of personality, religion, habits, and so on. In the practice of *merisik kecil*, the investigation is usually conducted by a representative from the groom's family known as Mak Inang.

“The representative called Mak Inang is responsible for conveying information honestly regarding the prospective bride based on the findings obtained during the *merisik* process.”⁴¹

Other people who do not belong to the family (according to Sarikhul Hanif and Syarbaini OK Jabbar, a graduate student of UIN Sunan Kalijaga and Institute of Indonesian Art who resides in Medan City, who resides in Medan City, interview result on 3 January 2023). The representative is called 'Mak Inang' and his/her job is to convey what is known during the process of process honestly and truthfully (based on the facts). Fadhly explained that at this *merisik* only the arrival of 'Mak Inang' as a representative of the groom's family to the house of the representative of the prospective groom's family to the house of the prospective bride and no requirements must be fulfilled or brought. there are no requirements that must be fulfilled or brought, but it is also not appropriate to visit someone in the house of the bride-to-be. it is also not appropriate to visit someone in their home without bringing anything (fruit) (Syahrial Fadhly and ulul Bahri).⁴²

According to Fadhly, the *merisik kecil* stage in Malay tradition is gradually declining and being replaced by the ta'aruf process, which shares the same objective of introducing prospective spouses. However, ta'aruf differs fundamentally from *merisik kecil*, as the latter is traditionally facilitated by a single intermediary (*Mak Inang*), whereas ta'aruf involves broader participation, including direct interaction between families and prospective spouses. Despite this shift, *merisik kecil* still exists in limited practice.⁴³ In contrast, *merisik besar* continues as a formal continuation involving a full meeting between both families to deliberate on dowry, engagement items, wedding preparations, household furnishings, and reception costs. The groom's family typically brings gifts as a gesture of courtesy. This stage also finalizes agreements on marriage arrangements, including dowry and the wedding date, reflecting both

⁴¹ Sarikhul Hanif, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 3 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 3 January 2023.

⁴² Syahrial Fadhly and Syamsul Bahri, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

⁴³ Syahrial Fadhly and Syamsul Bahri, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

customary law and social consensus.⁴⁴ Merisik is a pre-marital family agreement that introduces both parties to ensure smooth marriage arrangements and long-term harmony. It reduces misunderstandings, assesses the prospective spouse's character and background, and supports the formation of a *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* family.

4. Islamic Values in *Merisik* (Malay Customs)

Based on interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, and members of the Malay community in Medan, the *merisik* tradition reflects several Islamic values that continue to be practiced in contemporary Malay society, particularly trustworthiness (*amānah*), honesty (*ṣidq*), deliberation (*shūrā*), hospitality, and the consideration of *kafāah* in selecting a spouse. These values include trustworthiness (*amānah*), honesty (*ṣidq*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), hospitality, and the consideration of *kafāah* in choosing a spouse. As explained by one of the informants:

“In Malay custom, merisik is not merely a cultural ceremony, but also contains Islamic moral values such as honesty, politeness, and responsibility in conveying information about the prospective bride and groom.”⁴⁵

Alvian and Hanif state that *merisik* in Deli Malay custom in Medan contains key Islamic values. The *perisik* or *Mak Inang* must act honestly and responsibly in conveying entrusted information. The selection of *Mak Inang* reflects deliberation (*musyawarah*) as a representative tasked with assessing the prospective bride's qualifications. The process also emphasizes adab in visiting, including bringing gifts and proper manners in receiving guests, as well as ethical evaluation of suitability. These practices align with Islamic teachings that strengthen social relations and bring blessings such as increased sustenance and longevity. Field findings further show that *merisik besar* involves mutual agreement on dowry, wedding preparations, and other marital arrangements between both families.

Interview findings indicate that the role of *Mak Inang* in the *merisik* process highly emphasizes honesty and trustworthiness.

“Mak Inang must honestly convey all information regarding the prospective bride because the family depends on the accuracy of the information delivered.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Syahril Fadhy and M. Mathla'ul Fajri, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

⁴⁵ Alvian Syahputra and Sarikhul Hanif, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

⁴⁶ Sarikhul Hanif, a telangkai and activist of Malay culture in North Sumatra Province, interview dated 4 April 2018). North Sumatra, interview on 4 January 2023.

More deeply, 'Mak Inang' must also have an honest attitude as well and is inseparable from her trustworthy attitude to be able to carry out the *risikan* well. In addition, an honest attitude must also be possessed by the family who wants to be noticed and seen by 'Mak Inang', in the sense that the prospective woman's family must reveal all the criteria of the prospective bride honestly and factually. These two values are very much in line with two verses of the Qur'an (Qs. An-Nisā'/4:58 and Al-Aḥzāb/33:70) and also emphasized by the Prophet's hadith regarding the recommendation of trustworthiness and honesty.

The verses mentioned before clearly instructs that every individual must deliver the "trust" to the rightful recipient, highlighting the importance of trust and responsibility in all aspects of life. The term "trust" in this verse carries a broad meaning, encompassing everything entrusted to someone for proper execution and with full awareness. This trust includes the trust placed by Allah upon His servants, the trust between individuals, and the trust concerning one's own self. The trust from Allah to His servants, for instance, involves the obligation to faithfully carry out all of His commands with sincerity and devotion, while avoiding all of His prohibitions. Furthermore, we are reminded to utilise every blessing bestowed by Allah to draw closer to Him (*taqarrub*), ensuring that every gift received serves as a means to attain His pleasure, rather than merely being a worldly benefit.

Trust (*amānah*) plays a crucial role in social life, requiring honesty, integrity, and accountability in fulfilling responsibilities. It includes returning entrusted items to their rightful owners without reduction, avoiding deceit and betrayal, maintaining confidentiality, and honoring promises and obligations. *Amānah* applies both in the relationship between humans and Allah and in interpersonal relations, making it a comprehensive moral ethic rather than merely a formal duty. When properly upheld, it fosters harmony, trust, and responsibility within society.⁴⁷ The Prophet Muhammad also emphasized fulfilling *amānah* and prohibited harming it through deviant speech or actions, as stated in the hadith, reinforcing its ethical and spiritual significance in all aspects of life.

"Narrated to us Muhammad bin Al-'Ala and Ahmad ibn Ibrahim they said, narrated to us Talq bin Ghannam from Shari'a Ibn al-'Ala and Qais said from Abu Hushain from Abu Shalih from Abu Hurairah he said, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Fulfill the trust to those who believe in you and do not betray those who betray you!" (HR. Abu Daud no. 3068).⁴⁸

"O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice." (Qs. Al-Aḥzāb/33: 70)

⁴⁷ Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* (Jakarta : Departemen Agama RI, 2011); Wahbah Al-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir: Fi Al-'Aqidah, Wa Al-Syari'ah, Wa Al-Manhaj*, Jilid 6 (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2009).

⁴⁸ Abu Daud Sulaiman, *Sunan Abi Daud* (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.).

This verse invites every believer to consistently be mindful of their duty to Allah SWT, by adhering to His commands and avoiding His prohibitions. The concept of piety (taqwa) here is not merely the physical performance of religious duties, but also a profound inner awareness, where each action is performed solely for the sake of Allah, and one feels His presence in every aspect of life. This piety encompasses the understanding of *imtiṣāl awāmīrih wa ijtināb nawāhih*, meaning to comply with Allah's commands with complete obedience and to avoid His prohibitions wholeheartedly. Thus, a person who is pious not only safeguards their deeds but also remains conscious of their intentions and inner awareness in every action they undertake.

Furthermore, this verse teaches the importance of worshipping with *iḥsān*, which means performing every act of worship in the best possible manner, with deep sincerity and profound understanding. *Iḥsān* in this context refers to worshipping as though one is witnessing Allah SWT directly, or at the very least, being acutely aware that Allah is always observing. Every word and action of a believer must be guided by an awareness of Allah's greatness, coupled with fear and hope towards Him. Additionally, the verse stresses the necessity of speaking truthfully and justly, in accordance with Allah's commands. A believer must ensure that their words are free from falsehood or slander and consistently align with the truth as revealed by Allah. Therefore, a person's faith is not only manifested in ritual worship but also in their conduct, speech, and actions in daily life, which all reflect their piety and obedience to Allah.⁴⁹ The following is a hadith that hints that heaven and hell are rewards for one's words:

"Narrated to us Abu Mu'awiyah, narrated to us al-A'masy from of Allah ﷺ Shaqiq from Abdullah said, the Messenger said, "Be honest, because honesty shows goodness and goodness can show to heaven, a person is always honest until he is written in the sight of Allah 'Azza wa Jalla as an honest person. And stay away from lying because lies can indicate sinful deeds and sinful deeds can enter hell, a person always lies until he is written in the sight of Allah as a liar." (HR. Ahmad No. 3456).⁵⁰

Several informants explained that deliberation is an inseparable part of the *merisik besar* process because both families discuss the dowry, wedding preparations, and the wedding date collectively.

"Before determining the wedding arrangements, both families usually deliberate to avoid misunderstandings and to reach mutual agreement."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Wahbah Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir: Aqidah, Syari'ah, Manhaj, Gema Insani*, Jilid 6 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013); Abdulmalik Abdulkarim Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Jilid 5 (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 1982).

⁵⁰ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīṣ, n.d.).

⁵¹ Syamsul.

Deliberation (*shūrā*) aims to reach decisions considered beneficial for the majority or best for both parties. In the *merisik* tradition, this value is clearly reflected in various stages of agreement-making.⁵² It begins with the selection of *Mak Inang*, which must be mutually approved by the groom's family, and continues in *merisik besar*, where both families deliberate on dowry, engagement rings, household furnishings, bedroom and bathroom equipment, wedding attire, reception costs (affection money), as well as contract and wedding dates and other technical matters. These deliberations seek shared understanding through opinions, perspectives, and solutions that serve as a middle ground for both sides. Thus, *merisik* embodies the essence of Islamic deliberation as encouraged in the Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings, particularly in Q.S. ash-Shūrā/42:38, which emphasizes consultation in social and communal decision-making.

"(It is also better and more eternal for) those who accept (obey) the call of God and perform prayers, while their affairs are (decided) by deliberation among them. They give away part of the sustenance that We bestow upon them."

Allah SWT is teaching humanity that both vertical and horizontal relationships are highly recommended. This is exemplified through acts of prayer, deliberation on urgent matters, and giving to others. These three aspects serve as fundamental means to support essential harmony in *dār al-ākhirah*. This concept is related to the need for information from Mak Inang, which plays a critical role in evaluating whether a prospective bride is suitable for marriage, based on her temperament, attitude, and devotion in worship. This evaluation becomes urgent because Islam advises choosing a partner who can live together harmoniously, prioritising the *ukhrāwī* (spiritual) aspect while still considering worldly matters. Regardless of the final decision, deliberation is crucial, as the decision should not stem from a single opinion but from a thoughtful process involving the family and the bride-to-be, reflecting a comprehensive and careful consideration over time.

"Narrated to us Abu Mu'awiyah, narrated to us Al-A'masy from Ibrahim from 'Al-Qamah from Umar, he said, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ deliberated all night with Abu Bakr on the affairs of the Muslims, and I was with him." (HR. Ahmad No. 173).⁵³

Substantively, although the hadith is not directly related to marital deliberation, it shares a common foundation with the *merisik* tradition as both address Muslim social affairs within the framework of marriage. *Merisik* is part of pre-marital practice that reflects Islamic nuances in selecting a life partner through careful assessment. Islam also emphasizes *kafā'ah*

⁵² Muhamad Nasir, "The Value of Morality in the Shura System (A Model of a Political System Based on Hadith)," *Al-Ulum* 18, no. 1 (2018): 8, <https://doi.org/10.30603/au.v18i1.310>.

⁵³ Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*.

as a criterion in choosing a spouse, encompassing beauty, wealth/economy, lineage, and religiosity. While legally *kafā'ah* functions as a status consideration, its urgency lies in its impact on marital harmony. The *merisik* tradition highlights moral qualities such as character, behavior, and temperament, which are subsumed under religiosity, the most prioritized criterion.⁵⁴ Religiosity guides family life toward goodness in both worlds and is reinforced in Q.S. an-Nūr/24:2, emphasizing moral accountability and ethical conduct.

“The fornicator does not marry except a [female] fornicator or polytheist, and none marries her except a fornicator or a polytheist, and that has been made unlawful to the believers.”

The verse clearly prohibits looking for a partner who has a bad past and his behavior. This indicates that a Muslim should look for an equal partner or choose a good one so that his behavior and past do not cause them to divorce in the future.⁵⁵ On the basis of this concept of *kafa'ah*, the hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) describes the indications or criteria in choosing a partner so that the integrity of the household can be well maintained.

"Narrated to us Musaddad, narrated to us Yahya from Ubaidah, he said, narrated to me Sa'id bin Abu Sa'id from his father from Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him), from the Prophet ﷺ he said, "The woman was married because of four things, because of her wealth, because of her offspring, because of her beauty and because of her religion. So choose because of your religion, and you will be lucky." (HR. Bukhārī no. 4700).⁵⁶

According to Sri Ulfa Rahayu, *ṣilah al-raḥm* is a well-established bond of brotherhood that brings various benefits, including increased sustenance and the extension of life, based on prophetic traditions.⁵⁷ This view aligns with Hanif's statement regarding the *merisik* tradition. In *merisik*, the value of *ṣilah al-raḥm* is reflected in the visit and introduction between the groom's and bride's families, which strengthens social ties within the framework of *ukhuwah islāmiyyah*. Thus, *merisik* not only serves a cultural function but also embodies Islamic teachings on maintaining kinship, which is strongly associated with blessings in sustenance and longevity.

"Narrated to us Yahya bin Bukair, narrated to us Al-Laits from 'Uqail from Ibn Shihab he said, he has informed me Anas bin Malik that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Whoever wants to open the door of sustenance for him and prolong his life, he should continue the bond of friendship." (HR. Bukhārī No. 5527).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ahmad Muzakki and Himami Hafshawati.

⁵⁵ AK EFENDI, "Urgensi Kesetaraan Konsep Kafa'ah Dalam Al-Quran (Analisis Tafsir Maqasidi)" (Universitas Yudharta, 2023), 5, <https://repository.yudharta.ac.id/4619/>.

⁵⁶ Abdullāh Muḥammad Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, Jilid 9 (Damaskus: Dar Thauq al-Najah, 1989).

⁵⁷ Sri Ulfa Rahayu, "Hadith on the Field of Sustenance and Longevity with Shilaturrahim," *Al-I'jaz : Journal of Islamic Revelation* 7, no. 1 (2021): 101.

⁵⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*.

The *merisik* tradition embodies strong ethics of hospitality and guest reception, reflecting both Malay cultural norms and Islamic values. Visiting etiquette includes respectful behavior and speech, bringing gifts, giving greetings, informing arrival, and dressing properly. These practices aim to create a positive and respectful impression, strengthening familial relations between both parties. The host is also expected to welcome guests warmly with joy, conversation, and goodwill. This value is present in both *merisik kecil* and *merisik besar*, as visits to the bride's home are essential. The Prophet's teachings also emphasize hospitality and gift-giving as means of fostering love and strengthening social bonds.

"Still through the same narration as the previous hadith from Abu Sa'id, with sanad he said, the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Day of Resurrection should glorify his guest," he repeated three times. Abu Sa'id said, "O Messenger of Allah, how to honor the guest?" he said, "Three days, if after three days it is still remaining, then it is almsgiving." (HR. Ahmad No. 11301).

"Malik from 'Atha bin Abu Muslim Abdullah Al Khurasani narrated to me and said, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Shake hands with each other, and then the malice will disappear. Let you give gifts to one another, you will surely love one another and enmity will disappear." (Imam Malik No. 1413).

Based on some of the explanations above, the author classifies these values into three aspects, namely religiosity, *personality*, and social. The breakdown of the classification is as follows:

Table 1. Islamic Values in the *Merisik* Tradition

No.	Jenis Aspek	Islamic Values
1.	Religiosity	<i>Kafāah atau kufu'</i>
2.	Personality	Trust and honesty
3.	Social	Deliberation, the custom of visiting and welcoming them

5. The Relevance of the *Merisik* Tradition in the Perspektif of Malay Customary Law

The *merisik* tradition remains one of the pre-marital customs preserved by the Malay community in Medan. Within the framework of Malay customary law, *merisik* functions as an important mechanism to assess compatibility between prospective spouses before marriage. The practice also reflects the integration between Malay customary norms and Islamic teachings, particularly regarding prudence, family deliberation, and moral considerations in selecting a spouse. One tradition that is still maintained today is the *merisik* tradition in the marriage of the Malay community in Medan City. This tradition has a close relationship with

the teachings of Islam and customary law that developed in the Malay community. In the context of customary law, the *merisik* tradition is part of the Malay customary legal system which has an important role in ensuring the suitability of prospective couples before entering marriage. The existence of this tradition shows that Malay customs still adhere to the values that have been passed down from generation to generation, despite experiencing developments as Islam entered Nusantara.⁵⁹

This study analyses the *merisik* tradition from the perspective of Malay customary law and examines how Islamic teachings influence and reinforce the values embedded within the tradition. In Malay customary law, marriage is not merely a union between two individuals, but also a social relationship involving the extended families of both parties. The study confirms that Malay customary law and Islamic teachings in the hadith have a strong connection in shaping marriage norms in the Malay community in Medan. In Malay customary law, marriage is not only a union between two individuals, but also involves the extended families of both parties. Therefore, before a marriage takes place, there is an initial stage called *merisik*, which is the process of investigating potential partners to ensure compatibility from various aspects, such as religion, descent, economy, and personality.⁶⁰

Malay customary law views *merisik* as a crucial stage in marriage because it contains elements of caution and careful consideration before the marriage contract is carried out. In the perspective of customary law, some of the principles contained in the *merisik* tradition include:⁶¹

1. First, the principle of *kafāah* (compatibility) in the *merisik* tradition functions to assess the suitability of prospective spouses in terms of religion, family background, character, and social conditions. This principle demonstrates that Malay customary law emphasizes prudence before marriage, which is also consistent with Islamic teachings regarding compatibility in choosing a spouse.⁶² Islam also emphasizes the importance of *kafāah* in choosing a life partner as mentioned in the hadith: "*The woman is married*

⁵⁹ Rini Mulyani, Anwar Barus, and Iskandar Muda, "Local Wisdom of *Merisik* in Malay Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study," *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal)* 2, no. 4 (2018): 320, <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=10331789533602747619&hl=en&oi=scholar>.

⁶⁰ Putri, "Tradisi Lisan Merisik Pada Upacara Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat."

⁶¹ C Sylvia et al., "Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang," *Jurnal Sosial Budaya* 14, no. 1 (2022): 320, <https://doi.org/10.36312/jisip.v6i1.2898/http://ejournal.mandalanursa.org/index.php/JISIP/index>.

⁶² Abdullah Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Al-Jami' Al-Sahih* (Egypt: al-Matba'ah al-Salafiyah wa Maktabatuha, 1980).

because of four things: because of her wealth, her offspring, her beauty, and her religion. So choose a religious one, and you will be lucky." (HR. Bukhārī and Muslim).⁶³⁶⁴

2. Principles of family deliberation (*musyawarah*) occupies an important position within Malay customary law. The *merisik* tradition involves discussions between both families to ensure collective agreement and social harmony before marriage takes place. This reflects the communal character of Malay customary law as well as the Islamic principle of *shūrā*.⁶⁵
3. The Principles of Politeness and Social Ethics of the *merisik* Tradition also instills the value of good hospitality and communication ethics in the Malay community. The man's family must come with polite manners, bring souvenirs, and convey his intentions politely. This ethics is in line with Islamic teachings that emphasize the importance of manners in interacting.⁶⁶

Although Malay customary law and Islamic teachings originate from different normative foundations, both complement one another in regulating pre-marital relations within the Malay community. The *merisik* tradition demonstrates a process of acculturation in which Islamic values are integrated into Malay customary practices without eliminating local cultural identity.⁶⁷

The findings of this study indicate that the *merisik* tradition embodies religious, personal, and social values that are closely related to both Malay customary law and Islamic teachings. From the religious dimension, the tradition emphasizes the importance of selecting a spouse who possesses good religious commitment and moral integrity in order to maintain harmony within family life. From the personal dimension, *merisik* functions as a mechanism to assess the character, behavior, and morality of the prospective bride and groom before marriage takes place. Meanwhile, from the social dimension, the tradition prioritizes deliberation, mutual agreement, and the involvement of extended families in the marriage

⁶³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*; Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ Al-‘Uṣāimin, *Syarḥ Riḥāḍ Al-Ṣāliḥīn* (b. 156-158). see also, M. ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Syaukānī, *Nail Al-Auṭār, Jilid 5, Mesir: Dār Al-Ḥadīṣ, 1993. (b. 245-246, (al-Riyād: : Dār al-Waṭn li al-Nasyr, 1426).*

⁶⁴ Imam Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār iḥyā' Turāṣ, 2003).

⁶⁵ Muslim.

⁶⁶ Muslim.

⁶⁷ Sylvia et al., "Changes in the Traditional Tradition of Wedding Ceremonies of the Deli Malay Ethnic Nation in Paluh Sibaji Village, Pantai Labu District, Deli Serdang Regency."

process, reflecting the communal character of Malay customary law and the Islamic principle of *shūrā*.

The result of this research highlights that the *merisik* tradition in the Malay community of Medan plays a crucial role in ensuring compatibility between prospective marriage partners, aligning closely with both Malay customary law and Islamic teachings. The study reveals that *merisik*, which involves assessing aspects such as religion, family background, economy, and personality, emphasizes careful consideration and caution before marriage. It underscores the importance of *kafāah* (compatibility), family deliberation, and social ethics, which mirror Islamic principles on marriage. The tradition fosters the values of religiosity, good character, and family involvement, all of which contribute to a harmonious union. The findings demonstrate that, despite the distinct origins of customary law and Islamic teachings, they complement each other in promoting a prudent, respectful, and well-supported approach to marriage.

E. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the *merisik* tradition among the Malay community of Medan represents a harmonious integration of Malay customary law and Islamic values in pre-marital practices. Using descriptive-normative and empirical approaches, the study finds that *merisik* functions as a social and religious mechanism to assess compatibility, preserve family harmony, and strengthen inter-family relations before marriage. The tradition embodies religious, personal, and social values, including *kafāah*, trustworthiness (*amānah*), honesty (*ṣidq*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), social ethics, and *ṣilāh al-rahīm*. As part of Malay customary law, *merisik* reflects the understanding of marriage as a union of families and social networks rather than merely two individuals. The study contributes to discussions on Islamic family law, customary law, and legal pluralism by showing that local traditions can operate in harmony with Islamic principles. However, the research is limited to the Malay community of Medan, suggesting the need for broader comparative studies.

F. References

Ahmad Muzakki, and Himami Hafshawati. "Kedudukan dan Standarisasi Kafaah Dalam Pernikahan Perspektif Ulama Madzhab Empat." *Ayy-Syari'ah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2021): 19–38. <https://doi.org/10.55210/assyariah.v7i1.429>.

- Ahmad Zarkasih. "Menakar Kufu' Dalam Memilih Jodoh," 2018.
- Ainiyah, Qurrotul. "Ta'aruf Lokalitas: Integrasi Hukum Islam dan Hukum Adat Terhadap Fenomena Gredoan Di Suku Using Banyuwangi." *Jurnal Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality* 3, no. 2 (2018): 197–212. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30984/ajip.v3i2.721>.
- Al-'Uṣaimin, Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ. *Syarḥ Riyāḍ Al-Ṣāliḥīn*(b. 156-158).
- Al-Syaukānī, M. 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad. *Nail Al-Auṭār, Jilid 5*, Mesir: Dār Al-Ḥadīṣ, 1993. (b. 245-246,. al-Riyāḍ: Dār al-Waṭn li al-Nasyr, 1426.
- al-Bukhari, Abdullah Muhammad. *Al-Jami' Al-Sabih*. Kairo: al-Matba'ah al-Salafiyah wa Maktabatuha, 1980.
- Al-Bukhārī, Abdullāh Muḥammad. *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*. Jilid 9. Damaskus: Dar 'Thauq al-Najah, 1989.
- al-Fāiruzabādī. "Al-Qamus Al-Muhith," 1560. Mesir: Dar al-Hadits al-Qahirah, 2008.
- Al-Zuhailī, Wahbah. *Tafsīr Al-Munīr: Fī Al-'Aqīdah, Wa Al-Syari'Ab, Wa Al-Manhaj*. Jilid 6. Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2009.
- Alamsyah, Ahmad Gifari, Andhika Nugraha, Muhammad Reza, Hasan Sazali, and Maulana Andinata. "Budaya Melayu dan Pengaruh Islam Dalam Upacara Pernikahan Di Tanjung Balai," 2022.
- Amalia Haq, Amrullah Hayatudin, and Muhammad Yunus. "Tinjauan Hukum Adat Tentang Larangan Perkawinan Satu Suku Di Minangkabau Berdasarkan Kaidah Urf." *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law* 4, no. 2 (2024): 169–76. <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsifl.v4i2.14903>.
- Amelia, R. "Ritual Perkawinan Adat dan Penalaran Hukum Islam: Analisis' Urf Tentang Tradisi Nipa'bajikang Di Kalangan Komunitas Muslim Di Kabupaten Gowa." *Shautuna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Perbandingan*. Accessed May 29, 2026. <https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/shautuna/article/view/56866>.
- Aminah, Siti, and Arif Sugitanata. "Genealogy and Reform of Islamic Family Law: Study of Islamic Marriage Law Products in Malaysia." *Journal of Islamic Law* 3, no. 1 (2022): 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v3i1.556>.
- Amrullah, Abdulmalik Abdulkarim. *Tafsīr Al-Azḥar*. Jilid 5. Singapura: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 1982.

- Anshor, Ahmad Muhtadi, and Muhammad Ngizzul Muttaqin. "Pre-Marriage Course Based on Religious Moderation in Sadd Al-Zari'ah Perspective." *Samarah* 6, no. 1 (2022): 74–97. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i1.9111>.
- Ashshubli, Muhammad. *Islam dan Kebudayaan Melayu Nusantara (Menggali Hukum Dan Politik Melayu Dalam Islam)*. Jakarta: Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia, 2018.
- Chaq, Moh. Dliya'ul. "Telaah Ulang Hak Paksa dalam Perkawinan Islam Melalui Pendekatan Fiqh, Munâsib Al-'Illah dan 'Urf." *Tafâqquh: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2018): 108–32. <https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqquh.v5i2.114>.
- Darussamin, Zikri, Rahman Rahman, and Imam Ghozali. "The Relationship Between Islam and Traditional Marriage of Siak Malay." *Justicia Islamica* 17, no. 2 (November 27, 2020): 323–42. <https://doi.org/10.21154/justicia.v17i2.2152>.
- Departemen Agama RI. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya Jakarta: Departemen Agama RI*. Jakarta: Percetakan Ikrar Mandiriabadi, 2011.
- EFENDI, AK. "Urgensi Kesetaraan Konsep Kafa'ah Dalam Al-Quran (Analisis Tafsir Maqasidi)." Universitas Yudharta, 2023. <https://repository.yudharta.ac.id/4619/>.
- Elysia, Eda, Emeraldy Chatra, and Ernita Arif. "Transformasi Makna Ta'aruf Di Era Digital." *Jurnal Komunikasi Global* 10, no. 1 (2021): 24–53. <https://doi.org/10.24815/jkg.v10i1.19717>.
- Fitri Yani, Elly Prihasti Wuriyani, and Rosmawaty Harahap. "Makna Simbolik Tradisi Berbalas Pantun Pada Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat." *Journal of Educational and Language Research* 1, no. 10 (2022): 1495–1502.
- Firano, Ismail. "Maqāṣid Az-Zuwāj Asy-Syar'iyah; Dirāsaton Li-Ahamm Maqāṣid Az-Zawāj Al-Aṣliyyah Wa At-Taba'iyah." *Jurnal Al-Dustur* 7, no. 2 (2024): 170-197. <https://doi.org/10.30863/aldustur.v7i2.7131>
- Hafidz, Muftisany. *Pacaran vs Ta'aruf*. Jakarta: Intera Paperless Publishing, 2021.
- Hanbal, Ahmad ibn. *Al-Musnad*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīṣ, n.d.
- Karim, Arika Zulfitri, and Dinie Ratri Desiningrum. "Eksplorasi Pengalaman Penemuan Makna Cinta Dengan Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Abstrak Berdasarkan Data Yang Dipaparkan Oleh Statistik Mitra Perempuan Women 's Crisis Center Tahun 2011 Menunjukkan Bahwa Teman Dekat Atau Pacar Merupakan Pelak" 4, no. 1 (2015): 43–48.

- Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008.
- Luthfi, M, YA Fajrin, H Bachtiar “The Existence of Urf in the Resolution of Marriage Disputes in Islamic Law: A Living Law Perspective.” *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum dan Keadilan*, (2024). <https://doi.org/10.29303/v12i1.1356>.
- Majma’ al-Lughah al-’Arabiyyah. *Al-Mu’jam Al-Waseet*. Kairo: Maktabah al-Syuruq al-Dauliyyah, 2004.
- Mulyani, Rini, Anwar Barus, and Iskandar Muda. “Local Wisdom of Merisik in Malay Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study.” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal)* 2, no. 4 (2018): 320. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=10331789533602747619&hl=en&oi=scholar>.
- Mulyani, Rozanna, Asni Barus, and Iskandar Muda. “Local Wisdom of Merisik in Melayu Langkat Society: Oral Tradition Study.” *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology* 9, no. 11 (2018): 2714–20.
- Muslim, Imam. *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ Turāṣ, 2003.
- Nasir, Muhamad. “Nilai Moralitas Dalam Sistem Syura (Suatu Model Sistem Politik Berdasarkan Hadis).” *Al-Ulum* 18, no. 1 (2018): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.30603/au.v18i1.310>.
- Nur, Muhammad, Kholis Al-Amin, Fattah Setiawan Santoso, Ibnu Murtadho, Salahuding Daman Wahuri, Uin Mataram Indonesia, Pengajian Tinggi, Islam Darul, and Maarif Patani Thailand. “Beyond Marxist Materialism: H.O.S Tjokroaminoto’s Islamic Socialism and Its Maqāṣidī Foundations.” *Asy-Syir’ah: Jurnal Ilmu Syari’ah dan Hukum* 58, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 331–50. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.v58i2.1596>.
- Prayogo, Rozanna Mulyani, and Eddy Setia. “Turn Taking Patterns in Merisik Tradition of Malays Batubara Society Pola Alih Tutur Dalam Tradisi Merisik Pada Masyarakat Melayu Batubara.” *Ljurnal Didaktika: Jurnal Bahasa dan Pembelajaran* 15, no. 2 (2022): 177–93. <https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v15i2.109199>.
- Pusparini, Ari. *Agar Ta’aruf Cinta Berbuah Pabala*. Yogyakarta: Pro-U Media, 2013.
- Putri, GF. “Tradisi Lisan Merisik Pada Upacara Perkawinan Adat Melayu Langkat,” 2021. <https://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/41013>.
- Rahayu, Sri ulfa. “Hadis Tentang Lapang Rezeki dan Panjang Umur Dengan Shilaturrahim” 7,

no. 1 (2021): 90–102.

- Riyanti, Ratna, Yuli Heriyanti, and Hafiz Sutrisno. “Marriage Actualization of the Malay Indigenous Peoples of Riau Province in the Legal Perspective.” *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)* 5, no. 4 (October 6, 2022): 28904–12. <https://doi.org/10.33258/BIRCI.V5I4.7043>.
- Saiin, Asrizal, M. Hasbi Umar, Badarussyamsi, Moh Zaidi Hajazi, and Maulana Yusuf. “The Domination Of Islamic Law In Customary Matrimonial Ceremonies: Islamic Values within the Malay Marriage Tradition in Kepulauan Riau.” *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 29, 2023): 320–41. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2023.16207>.
- Sari, Muspita, and Andi Aprilianti. “Fenomena Independent Woman Terhadap Keharmonisan Keluarga : Studi Kondisi Kurangnya Komunikasi Dalam Keluarga Karir Ganda.” *AN-NISA* 17, no. 2 (2024): 86–93. <https://doi.org/10.30863/an.v17i2.7194>.
- Smith-Hefner, Nancy J. “The New Muslim Romance: Changing Patterns of Courtship and Marriage among Educated Javanese Youth.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 441–59. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002246340500024X>.
- Suhendra, Fredi. “Kisah Dramatisasi Saudara-Saudara Nabi Yusuf Dalam Al-Qur’an Dengan Pendekatan Teori Konspirasi.” *Jurnal Semiotika Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2021): 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v1i1.8986>.
- Sulaiman, Abu Daud. *Sunan Abi Daud*. Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.
- Sylvia, C, S Nursetiawati, A Dudung. “Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli Di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang.” *Jurnal Sosial Budaya* 14, no. 1 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.36312/jisip.v6i1.2898/http://ejournal.mandalanursa.org/index.php/JISIP/index>.
- Sylvia, Cici, S Nursetiawati, and Agus Dudung. “Perubahan Tradisi Upacara Adat Pernikahan Etnis Melayu Deli Di Desa Paluh Sibaji Kecamatan Pantai Labu Kabupaten Deli Serdang.” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan (JISIP)* 6, no. 2 (2022): 3644–53. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jisip.v6i1.2898/>.
- Tihami, M.A., and Sohari Sahrani. *Fikih Munakahat: Kajian Fikih Nikah Lengkap*. Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2009.
- Usman, Syahrudin, Purniadi Putra, Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, and

Universitas Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas. "Islamic Educational Values Contained In The Wedding Tradition Of The Sambas Malay Community." *IJGIE Scientific Journal* 6, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37567/ijgie.v6i1.3703>.

Widiyanto, Hari. "Konsep Pernikahan Dalam Islam (Studi Fenomenologis Penundaanpernikahan Di Masa Pandemi)." *Jurnal Islam Nusantara* 04, no. 01 (2020): 103–10. <https://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalin.v4i1.213>.

Zuhaili, Wahbah. *Tafsir Al-Munir: Aqidah, Syari'ah, Manhaj*. Jilid 6. Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013.

Zulbaidah, Harry Yuniardi, Januri, Nandang Najmudin, and Christoper Cason. "From 'Traditional Urf to Digital Urf: Accommodating Young Generation's Values on Husband-Wife Relations in the Framework of Ushūl Al-Fiqh.'" *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 10, no. 2 (2025): 784–808. <https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v10i2.14630>.

Interviews

Bahri, Syamsul. 2023. "The Culture of Marriage *Merisik* Adat Melayu". Personal Interview Results: January 3, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

Fadhly, Syahrial. 2023. "The *Tradition of Merisik* in the City of Medan". Personal interview results: January 4, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

Fajri, M. Mathla'ul. 2023. "The *Tradition of Merisik* in the City of Medan". Personal interview results: January 4, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

Hanif, Sarikhul. 2023. "The Culture of Marriage *Merisik* Adat Melayu". Personal Interview Results: January 3, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

Jabbar, Syarbaini OK. 2023. "The Culture of Marriage *Merisik* Adat Melayu". Personal Interview Results: January 3, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

Syahputra, Alvian. 2023. "The Culture of Marriage *Merisik* Adat Melayu". Personal Interview Results: January 3, 2023. Online via Whatsapp.

G. Author Biography

Muhammad Hafizh

Muhammad Hafizh., S.Ag., M.Pd. is a freshgraduate who has been accepted as a Civil Servant at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, precisely the West Java Regional Office. He is also a

lecturer in Islamic education field at STIT Tanggamus, Lampung Province. His writings have been published in various national journals that are accredited by Scopus and Sinta 2-4, and even his writings have been published at the Karabuk University conference in Turkey in 2024. His writings have also been referred to by various academic circles.

Muhammad Yusuf Rangkuti

Muhammad Yusuf Rangkuti, S.H., M.H., is a Lecturer at Tidar University in Magelang and he has some articles focused on Islamic Law, especially for comparative Islamic Law and Customary Law, published on some Journals that accredited on Sinta.

Muhammad Rizal Khoirul Umam

Muhammad Rizal Khoirul Umam, is a Civil Servant at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, precisely the West Java Regional Office and he has some articles focused on Islamic Law, published on some Journals that accredited on Sinta.

Ali Baroroh Al Muflih

Ali Baroroh Al Muflih, is a Lecturer at Tidar University in Magelang and he has some articles focused on Islamic Law, especially for comparative Law and Customary Law, published on some Journals that accredited on Sinta.


Rahmi Amalia

Rahmi Amalia, is a Lecturer at Muhammadiyah Malang University and she has published on some Journals that accredited on Sinta.

Muhammad Fauzan Ni'ami

Muhammad Fauzan Ni'ami, is a Lecturer at International Islamic University Darullughah Wadda'wah.

DOI, Copyright, and License	DOI: https://doi.org/10.14421/al-mazaahib.v14i1.4521 Copyright (c) 2026 Muhammad Hafizh, Muhammad Yusuf Rangkuti, Muhammad Rizal Khoirul Umam, Ali Baroroh Al Muflih, Rahmi Amalia, Muhammad Fauzan Ni'ami.
-----------------------------	--

	<p>This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License</p> 
How to cite	<p>Hafizh, Muhammad et al. "Negotiating Religion, State, and Custom: Islamic Values in the Malay Merisik Pre-marital Tradition at Medan City." <i>Al-Mazaahib: Jurnal Perbandingan Hukum</i> 14, no. 1 (2026): 120-146. https://doi.org/10.14421/al-mazaahib.v14i1.4521</p>