

The Chronicle of the Prohibition of Marriage in the Month of Suro: A Historical, Philosophical, and Community Education Analysis

Faiqqotus Sakdiyah ^{a,1,*} Eka Mahargiani Rokhma ^{b,2}, Sumarjoko ^{c,3} * Zainal Arifin ^{d,4}

^aInstitut Islam Nahdlatul Ulama (INISNU) Temanggung, Indonesia;

^bInstitut Islam Nahdlatul Ulama (INISNU) Temanggung, Indonesia;

^cIslam Nahdlatul Ulama (INISNU) Temanggung, Indonesia.

⁴STAIA Syubbanul Wathon Magelang, Indonesia;

¹faiqqotussakdiyah27@gmail.com; ²mahargianieka@gmail.com; ³sumarjoko.kusumo@gmail.com ⁴zainalarifin@staia_sw.or.id;

*Correspondent Author; Email Author

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ABSTRACT

The prohibition of marriage during the month of Suro remains a widely observed tradition in Javanese society, reflecting the dynamic interaction between local cultural practices and Islamic values, particularly in relation to Javanese cosmology and the concept of the sacredness of time. This study aims to examine the historical development and philosophical significance of the tradition of prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro from the perspectives of Javanese culture and Islamic law. The research employs a qualitative library research method using historical and philosophical approaches. Data were collected from historical literature, studies on Javanese culture, scholarly journal articles, and previous research, and were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method. The findings indicate that this tradition constitutes a form of cultural heritage shaped through a long historical process, rooted in pre-Islamic cosmological beliefs and subsequently developed through the acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic traditions. Philosophically, the tradition embodies values of prudence, respect for ancestors, and the preservation of harmony between human beings, nature, and the spiritual realm. Over time, its function has shifted from a binding social norm to a cultural symbol and an expression of local wisdom. From the perspective of Islamic law, there is no prohibition against marriage in any specific month. Therefore, this tradition may be regarded as a form of customary practice ('urf) that is acceptable as long as it does not contradict the principles of Islamic law.

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Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with rich cultural diversity, encompassing a wide range of traditions and customary practices across its regions. In Javanese society, customs that have been transmitted from generation to generation embody profound symbolic

and philosophical meanings, serving not only as social guidelines but also as reflections of the community's worldview (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Khusaini et al., 2024). Within the Javanese tradition, marriage is understood not merely as a social celebration but also as a ritual imbued with spiritual and cosmological significance. Consequently, Javanese people often consider auspicious timing, favorable days, and cosmic harmony before performing a marriage ceremony (Geertz, 1976).

One of the enduring traditions is the prohibition against conducting marriages during the month of Suro. As the first month of the Javanese calendar, Suro occupies a significant place in Javanese cosmology. Historically, the perception of sacred time originated in the pre-Islamic period and was subsequently shaped through the acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic traditions. The calendar reform introduced by Sultan Agung in the seventeenth century marked a pivotal moment in integrating the Javanese calendrical system with the Islamic Hijri calendar, whereby Suro became associated with the month of Muharram (Fitriani & Sholikhah, 2020). As a result, the prohibition of marriage during Suro evolved into a cultural construct that reflects the intersection of Javanese cosmology and Islamic religiosity.

Although this tradition has long been recognized and practiced, studies that systematically reconstruct its historical development from the pre-Islamic period to the contemporary era remain relatively limited. Previous studies by Prayitno and Ishaq (2022), Hartatiningsih et al. (2022), Maghfur and Safrudin (2023), Khusaini et al. (2024), and Rohmah et al. (2026) have examined this tradition from various perspectives. However, these studies generally provide only partial explanations and have yet to integrate historical and philosophical analyses comprehensively. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) examine the historical development of the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro in Javanese society; and (2) analyze its philosophical meanings and the transformation of its values from the perspectives of Javanese culture and Islamic law.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as its primary research design. A historical approach is applied to trace the development of the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro across different historical periods, including the pre-Islamic era, the Islamization of Java, the colonial period, and the modern era. Meanwhile, a philosophical approach is employed to examine the meanings, values, symbols, and Javanese worldview regarding the sacredness of time embedded in this tradition (Gottschalk, 2008; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). The data were collected from historical literature, studies on Javanese culture, scholarly journal articles, and relevant previous research (Moleong, 2018; Zed, 2018). The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method by identifying, classifying, and interpreting the sources according to their thematic content and historical periods (Sugiyono, 2020).

Result and Analysis

1. The Origins of the Prohibition of Marriage during the Month of Suro

The prohibition of marriage during the month of Suro in Javanese tradition constitutes a cultural construct that emerged through a long historical process in which indigenous belief systems, collective experiences, and the Javanese cosmological order became intertwined in shaping perceptions of time (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Geertz, 1976). Within the Javanese cultural worldview, time is not merely understood as a linear sequence of events but also as a symbolic and spiritual entity. As the first month of the Javanese calendar, Suro is regarded as a period possessing unique characteristics, making it more appropriate for spiritual activities such as *tirakat* (spiritual asceticism), prayer, and self-reflection than for ceremonial events such as marriage.

The origins of the significance of the month of Suro cannot be separated from the historical formation of the Javanese calendar, which integrated indigenous elements with previously established calendrical systems (Raffles, 1817; Zaenuddin, 2023). Suro functions not only as a temporal marker but also as a symbol embodying sacredness and prudence in human conduct. Accordingly, the prohibition of marriage during Suro may be understood as an expression of the collective belief that emphasizes harmony between life events, time, and the cosmic order as an essential prerequisite for maintaining social and spiritual balance. This worldview is reflected in social traditions transmitted across generations through family guidance and unwritten social norms that continue to influence community behavior.

From a broader historical perspective, this tradition can be interpreted as the product of the interaction between belief systems, cultural values, and the historical experiences of Javanese society in constructing the meaning of time. The month of Suro occupies a distinctive position within the collective consciousness of the Javanese because it is associated with sacredness, prudence, and reverence for a higher cosmic order (Lestari, 2021). Therefore, the prohibition of marriage during Suro is more appropriately understood as part of the historical evolution of Javanese culture and identity rather than as a religious prohibition explicitly prescribed by Islamic doctrine.

2. The Influence of Pre-Islamic Culture on the Tradition of Prohibiting Marriage

Before the arrival of the major world religions, Javanese society had embraced systems of animistic and dynamistic beliefs that regarded nature as an entity possessing supernatural powers capable of influencing human life (Koentjaraningrat, 1994). Within these belief systems, certain periods of time were considered to possess distinctive characteristics that could bring either good fortune or misfortune. This perception shaped the community's understanding of various social activities, including the determination of auspicious times for marriage (Utami, 2024). In the pre-Islamic context, the month of Suro already occupied a special position, serving not only as a marker of the passage of time but also as a representation of social order and harmony with nature and the cosmic realm.

The subsequent influence of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in Java further reinforced this cosmological worldview. During this period, the concept of balance became a fundamental principle of human life, in which marriage was understood not merely as the union of two individuals but also as the integration of two extended families within a broader cosmological order. Consideration of particular days and months emerged as an expression of prudence to ensure that marriage would bring safety, harmony, and blessings (Rahmawati, 2022). Consequently, during the pre-Islamic period, the month of Suro occupied an important place in the Javanese calendrical system and social life, as it was regarded as a sacred and symbolic period reflecting the community's understanding of cosmic order and social ethics.

3. The Acculturation of Javanese Tradition and Islam in the Month of Suro

The spread of Islam in Java took place through an accommodative approach toward local culture, allowing a process of acculturation between Islamic teachings and existing Javanese traditions (Ricklefs, 2008). The month of Suro, which had long been regarded as sacred, subsequently acquired new interpretations within an Islamic framework without entirely losing its pre-existing cultural identity. One of the most significant outcomes of this process was the establishment of the Javanese-Islamic calendar during the reign of Sultan Agung of Mataram, which integrated the Saka calendar with the Islamic Hijri calendar (Fitriani & Sholikhah, 2020). In Islamic tradition, Muharram is recognized as one of the sacred months (*al-ashhur al-hurum*). Within Javanese culture, however, the month underwent a process of reinterpretation and came to be regarded as a sacred period requiring heightened caution and spiritual reflection (Jamaly, 2024).

This process demonstrates the capacity of Javanese culture to selectively adopt and adapt external influences, thereby transforming meanings without eliminating the essential form of the tradition itself. These findings are consistent with Ricklefs' (2012) argument that the Islamization of Java occurred through adaptation and cultural acculturation rather than cultural replacement. Moreover, the concept of 'urf (custom) in Islamic jurisprudence provides legitimacy for local traditions as long as they do not contradict the fundamental principles of Islamic law (Khallaf, 1978). Consequently, the acculturation of the Suro tradition occurred not only at the cultural level but also within the normative framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Rather than being abandoned with the spread of Islam, the tradition of Suro underwent a process of reinterpretation that enabled it to retain its significant role in the religious and cultural life of Javanese society.

4. The Development of the Tradition Prohibiting Marriage during the Month of Suro Across Historical Periods

The development of the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro demonstrates that culture is not static but continuously evolves in response to social dynamics and shifting societal values (Khusaini et al., 2024). This tradition should not be understood as a practice that emerged abruptly; rather, it is the product of a long historical process involving the transmission of values, cultural adaptation, and the transformation of meanings across generations. Initially, the tradition was rooted in the Javanese belief system, which regarded time as sacred. With the spread of Islam in Java, the tradition did not disappear but instead underwent a process of adaptation that enabled its continuity in a more accommodative form (Ricklefs, 2008).

During the colonial period, Raffles (1817), in *The History of Java*, documented that beliefs concerning the sacredness of time continued to occupy a significant place in the social structure of Javanese society. Within this context, the prohibition against conducting marriages during the month of Suro was maintained as an expression of both spiritual and social prudence. In the modern era, however, the expansion of formal education, technological advancement, and greater access to information have gradually reshaped public perceptions. Some members of society have begun to question the normative basis of the prohibition, since Islamic law contains no explicit injunction against marriage during the month of Muharram (Maghfur & Safrudin, 2023). Nevertheless, modernization has not led to the disappearance of this tradition, demonstrating the resilience of local culture in preserving its identity while simultaneously adapting to changing social conditions.

5. The Contemporary Existence of the Tradition Prohibiting Marriage during the Month of Suro

The continued existence of the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro in contemporary society indicates its enduring cultural significance despite ongoing social transformation (Ricklefs, 2008). Although modernization, formal education, and the growing influence of rational thinking have reshaped public perspectives, the tradition remains an integral part of Javanese social life. Many people continue to regard the month of Suro as a period possessing particular sacredness, believing that conducting a marriage during this time is inappropriate in order to preserve domestic harmony and well-being (Hidayat, 2022). This belief is sustained through the intergenerational transmission of cultural values within families and local communities. As argued by Koentjaraningrat (1994), such cultural values continue to function as normative guidelines that shape the way communities understand and preserve their traditions.

Nevertheless, the persistence of this tradition in the modern era is no longer uniform. While

some communities continue to observe it strictly, others regard it as a flexible customary practice rather than an absolute obligation. Among younger generations, some continue to comply with the prohibition out of respect for family traditions, whereas others increasingly perceive it as a cultural heritage that does not necessarily require strict observance (Prayitno & Ishaq, 2022). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the way people engage with this tradition by providing broader access to academic, cultural, and religious perspectives (Rohmah et al., 2026). As a result, the transmission of cultural values in the contemporary era no longer occurs through a one-way process but rather through continuous dialogue, negotiation, and reinterpretation. Accordingly, the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro has gradually shifted from a collectively binding social prohibition to a respected cultural symbol that is interpreted and practiced with greater flexibility.

Philosophical Analysis of the Meaning and Transformation of Values in the Prohibition of Marriage during the Month of Suro from the Perspectives of Javanese Culture and Islam

1. The Philosophical Meaning of the Month of Suro in Javanese Culture

The month of Suro in Javanese culture is understood as a concept of time with profound philosophical dimensions. It functions not merely as a marker within the calendrical system but also as a symbolic space containing values of inner awareness, prudence, and life order (Geertz, 1976; Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Within the framework of Javanese cultural thought, this month is positioned as part of a system of meaning that connects human beings with a broader order, namely the relationship between individuals, society, nature, and the spiritual dimension believed to exist within human life. Therefore, Suro is not regarded as a neutral period of time, but rather as a period that requires particular attitudes, such as self-restraint, contemplation, and inner balance.

The philosophical values of Suro are also reflected in the way Javanese society constructs collective awareness regarding the importance of harmony in life. In Javanese tradition, harmony is not merely understood as social order but also encompasses the balance between human desires and the spiritual order believed to influence everyday life (Magnis-Suseno, 2001). The principle of *eling lan waspada* (awareness and vigilance) teaches that human beings must always recognize their limitations while exercising caution in making decisions that may affect the future. The symbolism of Suro demonstrates a close relationship between tradition, belief systems, and social structures within Javanese society. This perspective corresponds with Geertz's (1976) argument that cultural symbols constitute a system of meaning through which societies interpret and organize their social life.

2. The Spiritual and Symbolic Values of the Prohibition of Marriage during the Month of Suro

The prohibition of marriage during the month of Suro cannot be separated from the symbolic system and sacred meanings embedded within Javanese culture (Geertz, 1976). From the Javanese cultural perspective, time is not merely understood as a chronological sequence within a calendar but also as a space possessing particular values and qualities. Consequently, certain periods are considered more appropriate for attitudes of caution and self-restraint. The community's belief in the significance of Suro is rooted in the perception that this month occupies a special position within the Javanese cultural value system, namely as a period more suitable for reflective activities such as *tirakat* (spiritual discipline), prayer, and ancestral pilgrimage rather than major celebrations such as marriage ceremonies (Mulyono, 2023).

This indicates that the prohibition of marriage during Suro does not merely function as a

social restriction but also serves as an ethical symbol that places the sacredness of time above ceremonial interests. From a value perspective, this tradition reflects several important principles within Javanese culture: (1) the value of prudence (*eling lan waspada*), emphasizing the importance of maintaining life balance; (2) respect for ancestral cultural heritage, which is perceived as containing wisdom proven through historical experience; (3) spiritual awareness connecting human activities with the cosmic order; and (4) a social function in strengthening collective solidarity within the community (Magnis-Suseno, 2001; Rohmah et al., 2026).

3. The Tradition of Prohibiting Marriage as a Form of 'Urf in Islamic Law

The tradition of prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro can be understood within the framework of *urf* as a living social custom that is recognized, practiced, and continuously maintained within society (Khallaf, 1978). From the perspective of Islamic law, *urf* is essentially regarded as a social reality that may serve as a consideration in legal reasoning as long as it does not contradict *nash shar'ī* (Islamic legal texts), the fundamental principles of Islamic law, and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). Islamic legal scholars classify '*urf* into several categories: '*urf qawlī* (customary expressions or verbal practices) and '*urf fi'lī* (customary practices in actions), as well as '*urf ṣaḥīḥ** (customs that are compatible with Islamic teachings) and '*urf fāsid* (customs that contradict Islamic principles) (Zaidan, 2014; Syarifuddin, 2014). Based on this classification, the prohibition of marriage during the month of Suro can be categorized as '*urf fi'lī*, because it exists in the form of repeated social practices within community life rather than as a formal legal regulation.

In social practice, the prohibition of marriage during Suro continues to be understood as a tradition containing both customary and religious dimensions (Sarjana & Kamaluddin, 2017). This condition corresponds with Ricklefs' (2012) perspective on the Islamization of Java, which occurred through interaction and acculturation with pre-existing local traditions. From the viewpoint of Islamic law, social customs may be accepted as long as they do not contain beliefs that contradict the principle of *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God), do not establish absolute harm without a legitimate Islamic basis, and do not violate fundamental religious principles (Khallaf, 1978). Therefore, the tradition of prohibiting marriage during Suro can be understood as a contextual form of '*urf*, namely a local custom that continues to exist because of its social and symbolic functions, provided that it remains positioned as a cultural practice rather than being treated as an absolute religious obligation (Shodiq, 2023).

4. Islamic Legal Perspectives on Beliefs Regarding the Month of Suro

From the perspective of Islamic law, a tradition may be accepted if it fulfills the requirements of valid '*urf* ('*urf ṣaḥīḥ*), namely a custom that exists within society, does not contradict Islamic legal texts, does not contain elements of harm, and does not violate the fundamental principles of faith and Islamic law (Khallaf, 1978). In Islamic legal studies on marriage, a marriage contract is considered valid when it fulfills the pillars (*arkān*) and requirements (*shurūṭ*) established by Islamic law, without any specific month determining its validity (Rofiq, 2017; Mardani, 2016). Nevertheless, the month of Muharram holds a special position in Islam as one of the four sacred months (*al-ashhur al-ḥurum*) mentioned in Qur'an Surah al-Tawbah (9:36), during which Muslims are encouraged to increase righteous deeds. In Javanese cultural development, Muharram became known as Suro and acquired distinctive cultural meanings as a sacred month associated with spiritual activities such as **tirakat** (spiritual discipline), communal prayers, and ancestral grave visitation (*ziarah*) (Purwadi, 2007).

From the Islamic perspective, time does not possess independent power capable of determining human destiny, as all events occur solely by the will of Allah (Shihab, 1996). Islam rejects beliefs that attribute fortune or misfortune absolutely to particular months or periods

of time. Therefore, if Suro is believed absolutely to bring misfortune, such a belief may potentially conflict with the principle of *tawhīd* because it attributes causality to time itself rather than to Allah's will. However, as long as this tradition is understood as social prudence or respect for customary values rather than as a binding religious obligation, it remains acceptable within the framework of *'urf* (Izzah, 2024). Islamic law thus approaches beliefs regarding Suro selectively: they may be accepted when understood as cultural customs and symbolic expressions, but they cannot be justified when believed to possess supernatural power that absolutely determines human destiny.

5. The Dynamics of Value Transformation in the Tradition of Prohibiting Marriage amid Modernization

Social change represents one of the primary factors influencing the continuity of the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). From the perspective of cultural change, tradition is not understood as a fixed entity but as part of a social system that continuously adapts in response to developments in education, patterns of thought, and societal transformation. In the past, the prohibition of marriage during Suro was generally accepted as a customary rule that had to be followed. Such obedience emerged from the belief that ancestral traditions contained values and wisdom that had been tested through collective experience (Prayitno & Ishaq, 2022). Changes began to emerge as formal education expanded, encouraging some members of society to question the relevance of this prohibition through a more rational perspective while still preserving the cultural values embedded within it (Khusaini et al., 2024).

Another factor contributing to this transformation is the increasing understanding of Islamic teachings. Awareness that Islamic law does not explicitly prohibit marriage during Muharram has encouraged some communities to distinguish between religious norms and cultural traditions (Maghfur & Safrudin, 2023). Some communities attempt to integrate cultural values and Islamic teachings proportionally: respecting tradition as part of cultural identity while not considering it a binding religious rule. This perspective corresponds with the concept of *'urf* in Islamic law, which provides space for social customs as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles (Sarjana & Kamaluddin, 2017). The preservation of this tradition has also changed: whereas it was previously maintained through strict obedience to customary rules, it is now more commonly preserved through efforts to understand its history, values, and meanings. Thus, this transformation does not indicate the disappearance of the tradition but rather a shift from collective-sacred interpretations toward more rational, individual, and contextual meanings.

6. The Relevance of the Tradition Prohibiting Marriage during Suro in the Life of Javanese Muslim Communities

The tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro remains relevant within Javanese Muslim communities when understood as part of a cultural system containing values of prudence, respect, and self-restraint (Magnis-Suseno, 2001). Within the philosophical framework of Javanese prudence, this practice reflects the community's efforts to maintain harmony between human actions, social order, and spiritual beliefs. The relevance of this tradition does not lie in its normative obligation but rather in its symbolic function as a moral guideline encouraging individuals to exercise caution when making important life decisions, including marriage. Furthermore, the tradition contains educational values, such as avoiding impulsive decision-making, respecting cultural heritage, and developing spiritual awareness when facing significant life events.

From the perspective of Islamic law, Islam emphasizes that no month inherently brings misfortune or fortune by itself; therefore, interpretations of Suro cannot serve as a binding religious basis (Nuha, 2025). However, as long as the tradition is positioned as a social custom

originating from local culture and does not contradict Islamic principles of faith, it may be accepted as part of the cultural expression of Javanese Muslims. The relevance of this tradition is also reflected in its role in preserving the cultural identity of Javanese Muslim communities amid social transformation (Nuha, 2025). Accordingly, the tradition prohibiting marriage during Suro can be understood as a bridge between Javanese cultural values and Islamic teachings, provided that it remains appropriately positioned as a respected cultural heritage rather than an absolute religious requirement. Both can coexist harmoniously within the framework of *Islam Nusantara*, which appreciates the diversity of local cultural expressions.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the tradition prohibiting marriage during the month of Suro represents a cultural heritage of Javanese society that has been shaped through a long historical process. This tradition is rooted in the Javanese cosmological worldview concerning the sacredness of time since the pre-Islamic period and subsequently developed through processes of acculturation with Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic elements, including the reform of the Javanese calendar during the reign of Sultan Agung, which integrated the month of Suro with Muharram in the Hijri calendar. Although modernization and changing patterns of thought have influenced its continuity, some communities continue to preserve this tradition as an expression of respect for ancestors and as an effort to maintain cultural values inherited across generations. Philosophically, the prohibition of marriage during the month of Suro embodies values of prudence, respect for ancestral heritage, and the effort to maintain harmony between human beings, nature, and the spiritual dimension. However, a transformation of values has occurred in modern society, where the tradition, once understood as a binding rule that had to be followed, is now increasingly interpreted as a cultural symbol and an expression of local wisdom. From the perspective of Islamic law, there is no legal provision prohibiting marriage during any particular month, including Suro or Muharram. Therefore, the tradition prohibiting marriage during Suro may be regarded as a customary practice (*‘urf*) whose existence can be respected as long as it is not considered an absolute religious teaching and does not contradict the principles of Islamic law. Thus, this tradition demonstrates the dynamic relationship between local culture and Islamic teachings within Javanese society.

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