



THE QURAN AND THE DOWRY-GIVING TRADITION: A RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

AL-QURAN DAN TRADISI PEMBERIAN MAHAR: ANALISIS PERSPEKTIF AGAMA DAN BUDAYA

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the relationship between the values contained in the Qur'an and the traditional practice of dowry (mahr) giving, viewed from both religious and cultural perspectives. Using a qualitative approach based on the textual analysis of Qur'anic verses and in-depth interviews with experts in religious studies and cultural anthropology, this research integrates the frameworks of *maqasid al-sharia* and cultural anthropology theory to analyze the historical and contemporary transformation of dowry practices. The study also explores the symbolic meaning of dowry, not merely as an obligation but as a form of recognition of women's dignity and rights within the family. Furthermore, it examines the socio-economic factors influencing the amount of dowry and how these factors affect social structures and gender relations within society. In addition, comparisons are made with dowry practices in various other cultures and religions, enabling a deeper understanding of both the unique and shared aspects of universal human values. This comprehensive analysis seeks to provide new insights and a concrete contribution to contemporary discussions on the role of religion in social and cultural life, as well as the challenges of integrating tradition with the needs of modern society. The findings indicate that the practice of dowry giving, as prescribed in the Qur'anic verses, possesses profound normative and strategic values in ensuring justice and social balance within the family structure. Every element of the dowry is not merely symbolic but also embodies meanings that reflect responsibility, respect, and commitment in married life. Over time, the understanding and implementation of this tradition have undergone significant changes, influenced by evolving social, economic, and cultural conditions. This highlights the importance of not only preserving the tradition but also adapting it to meet the demands of contemporary society.

Keywords : Qur'an, Tradition, Dowry (Mahr), Religion, Culture.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap hubungan antara nilai-nilai yang terkandung dalam Al-Qur'an dan praktik pemberian mahar tradisional, dilihat dari perspektif agama dan budaya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berdasarkan analisis tekstual ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an dan wawancara mendalam dengan para ahli di bidang studi agama dan antropologi budaya, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan kerangka kerja *maqasid al-sharia* dan teori antropologi budaya untuk menganalisis transformasi historis dan kontemporer praktik mahar. Studi ini juga mengeksplorasi makna simbolis



mahar, bukan hanya sebagai kewajiban tetapi sebagai bentuk pengakuan martabat dan hak perempuan dalam keluarga. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor sosial-ekonomi yang memengaruhi jumlah mahar dan bagaimana faktor-faktor ini memengaruhi struktur sosial dan hubungan gender dalam masyarakat. Selain itu, perbandingan dilakukan dengan praktik mahar di berbagai budaya dan agama lain, sehingga memungkinkan pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang aspek-aspek unik dan bersama dari nilai-nilai kemanusiaan universal. Analisis komprehensif ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan baru dan kontribusi konkret terhadap diskusi kontemporer tentang peran agama dalam kehidupan sosial dan budaya, serta tantangan dalam mengintegrasikan tradisi dengan kebutuhan masyarakat modern. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa praktik pemberian mahar, sebagaimana diatur dalam ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an, memiliki nilai normatif dan strategis yang mendalam dalam memastikan keadilan dan keseimbangan sosial dalam struktur keluarga. Setiap elemen mahar tidak hanya bersifat simbolis tetapi juga mengandung makna yang mencerminkan tanggung jawab, rasa hormat, dan komitmen dalam kehidupan pernikahan. Seiring waktu, pemahaman dan implementasi tradisi ini telah mengalami perubahan signifikan, dipengaruhi oleh kondisi sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya yang terus berkembang. Hal ini menyoroti pentingnya tidak hanya melestarikan tradisi tetapi juga menyesuaikannya untuk memenuhi tuntutan masyarakat kontemporer.

Kata Kunci : Al-Qur'an, Tradisi, Mas Kawin (Mahr), Agama, Budaya.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of giving a dowry (*mahr*) is one of the fundamental elements of the marriage institution among Muslims, possessing profound meaning and diverse dimensions. Dowry, often referred to as *sadaqah*, is not merely a form of property or wealth but symbolizes deep respect, moral assurance, and a sign of commitment between two individuals who are about to establish a family. Historically, the meaning of dowry has evolved, and in many cultures, it signifies recognition of women's dignity within the institution of marriage, where its value and contextualization reflect the complexity of broader social relationships.

In practice, the giving of dowry does not merely reflect economic aspects, such as the amount provided, but also embodies religious and cultural values that have been passed down from generation to generation. The Qur'an, as the holy scripture of Islam, serves as a theological guide governing this practice, emphasizing values such as justice, balance, and public welfare through relevant verses that encourage societal behavior in accordance with these teachings. At the same time, the meaning of dowry within a religious context remains open to interpretation, creating space for differing perspectives among Islamic scholars and the general public.

Nevertheless, differences in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning dowry have generated tensions between textual interpretations and cultural practices in society. In the modern era, characterized by dynamic social changes and the expansion of contemporary thought, new challenges have emerged. In particular, as traditional norms encounter contemporary values, many couples have chosen to innovate in terms of dowry, redefining its form and meaning to align with their needs and aspirations while maintaining the spiritual values that underpin it. This process often generates constructive and reflective dialogue regarding the meaning of marriage in the context of social transformation, creating a bridge between tradition and modernity.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study also highlights the need to adjust traditional interpretations of dowry to contemporary contexts so that the values of justice and public welfare remain relevant and acceptable to present generations. For instance, in the digital era, many couples have begun to emphasize the material essence and practical significance of dowry rather than focusing solely on its nominal value, thereby promoting fairness and equality within marriage. The implications of this study are highly relevant to the development of academic scholarship at the postgraduate level and among lecturers in religious



studies, who are expected to integrate this deeper understanding into curricula and educational practices, particularly in efforts to bridge traditional customs with contemporary principles oriented toward social justice and humanity.

1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- a. **To analyze the Qur'anic values related to the practice of giving dowry.** This study investigates how Qur'anic verses explain dowry as an essential component of Islamic marriage while considering the social and historical contexts surrounding these verses. Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover the moral and ethical guidance embedded in Islamic teachings regarding dowry and its implications for marital relationships in Islam.
- b. **To explore the transformation of dowry traditions from historical and contemporary perspectives.** The process of cultural transformation is often influenced by various factors, including globalization, social development, and cultural change. This study seeks to identify how dowry traditions have adapted to modern contexts and examine the impact of shifting societal values on dowry practices. This includes analyzing changes in societal expectations regarding the amount, form, and function of dowry.
- c. **To present an interdisciplinary analysis by integrating the theories of Maqasid al-Sharia and Cultural Anthropology.** This approach aims to determine the compatibility of traditional practices with the demands of justice and public welfare in modern society. It is expected to reveal how the values of social justice and well-being embedded in Maqasid al-Sharia may align with or conflict with contemporary dowry practices. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, the study also explores how customs and social norms shape public perceptions of dowry as a symbol of prestige, commitment, and responsibility within marriage.

This study is intended for postgraduate students, lecturers in religious studies, and practitioners interested in the dynamics of interaction between sacred texts and cultural traditions. By providing deeper insights into the relationship between Qur'anic teachings and local cultural practices, the findings are expected to enrich academic discourse on dowry in the context of Islamic marriage and serve as a valuable reference for related policies and practices.

2. Data Sources

The data sources utilized in this study include several references that provide a strong argumentative and analytical foundation:

- a. **The Qur'an and Classical and Contemporary Tafsir Literature:** The Qur'an serves as the primary source, enabling researchers to explore a comprehensive understanding of the concept of dowry. Classical tafsir works written by early Islamic scholars provide important historical and contextual perspectives, while contemporary interpretations offer insights relevant to modern challenges, including changes in social and cultural values.
- b. **Secondary Literature:** This study also involves the collection and analysis of secondary literature, including indexed journals, books, and scholarly articles. These sources provide broader perspectives on dowry from various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and gender studies. Such perspectives are essential for understanding how dowry practices have evolved and been influenced by social dynamics and legal developments within Muslim societies.
- c. **Primary Data:** Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with ten expert informants, including Islamic scholars, academics, and cultural anthropologists. These informants provide valuable insights into the meaning of dowry in everyday practice. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences offer rich perspectives and nuances that may not be captured in written texts alone. The interviews were designed to explore personal views, social norms, and values that shape their understanding of dowry within religious and social contexts.



3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through several structured and systematic techniques as follows:

- a. **Literature Review:** This involved collecting and analyzing relevant literature from Scopus-indexed sources to ensure that the study was grounded in valid and reliable information. This process also helped develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic and identify existing gaps in the literature.
- b. **Textual Analysis:** An in-depth analysis was conducted on Qur'anic verses related to dowry, accompanied by reviews of classical and contemporary commentaries that provide historical and modern perspectives on their interpretation. This analysis includes the exploration of linguistic meanings and social contexts surrounding the verses in order to uncover underlying messages.
- c. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** This technique was designed to explore informants' perceptions and interpretations of dowry practices and the relevance of religious values in modern contexts. Through these interviews, the researcher sought to gain deeper insights into the personal experiences and narratives of participants and how these experiences influence their views on dowry within a changing society.

This study adopts two primary theoretical frameworks that provide comprehensive guidance for understanding the practice of dowry giving within religious and cultural contexts:

- a. **Maqasid al-Sharia Theory:** This theory emphasizes the fundamental objectives of Islamic law, including justice, public welfare, protection of rights, and social balance. It also explores the relevance and practical application of these objectives in contemporary contexts. Through this framework, the study seeks to demonstrate that religious values should not only be understood within traditional contexts but should also evolve alongside societal developments, creating harmony between religious norms and changing social dynamics. This approach enables a more inclusive and responsive interpretation of dowry practices and encourages society to view dowry as a means of fostering respect and recognition of women's roles within marriage.
- b. **Cultural Anthropology Theory:** This approach highlights the role of culture and complex social dynamics in shaping the practices and traditions surrounding dowry. Through the lens of cultural anthropology, this study aims to demonstrate how local cultural norms, often intertwined with religious values, create unique layers of meaning within the institution of marriage. By understanding deeper cultural contexts, the research reveals potential conflicts or synergies between religious values and local traditions, as well as how communities adapt in their efforts to preserve religious principles while responding to social change. This perspective provides rich insights into how Muslim communities in Indonesia interact with both tradition and religion in their daily lives.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An in-depth analysis of the Qur'anic verses related to *mahr* (dowry) reveals that the provision of dowry is regarded as a symbol of appreciation for the wife and a form of acknowledgment of the social and economic roles that both spouses will undertake together. Dowry is not merely a financial obligation but also reflects responsibility and emotional commitment between the couple. The findings further indicate that dowry serves as an official and public recognition of the wife's position within the marital bond. Beyond being a material transaction, dowry carries a deeper meaning concerning the value and dignity of women in the context of marriage.

The analysis identified several key findings:

- a. **The Qur'anic verses emphasize the importance of justice and respect in marriage**, where dowry functions as a form of recognition of women's dignity. In many interpretations, dowry is viewed as a symbol of women's access to their rights, underscoring that women are not objects or commodities but individuals whose rights must be respected and acknowledged.
- b. **The application of the dowry concept within socio-cultural contexts extends beyond material value**, encompassing messages that promote balance in the relationship between husband and wife.



Dowry may serve as a shared reminder of the husband's responsibility to fulfill the wife's emotional and financial needs while fostering healthy cooperation within family life.

- c. **Historical interpretations demonstrate that dowry has undergone significant transformation**, adapting to changing social, economic, and cultural conditions. In contemporary contexts, there is an increasing tendency to view dowry not merely in terms of monetary value but also through broader dimensions such as education, employment opportunities, and mutual moral support between spouses, thereby fostering more equitable and harmonious marriages.

From a historical perspective, the tradition of giving dowry originated from social norms that developed within early Islamic society, where dowry was not merely a transaction but an expression of respect and commitment between husband and wife. It was traditionally regarded as a form of security for women and a symbol of commitment carrying significant moral value within marriage. This demonstrates that marriage is more than a relationship between two individuals; it is a respected and honored institution within society.

Over time, adaptations in dowry practices have emerged in response to increasingly complex social conditions. Several factors influencing these transformations include:

- a. **Shifts in gender relations and economic roles within the family.** In contemporary society, women's participation in the workforce has increased substantially, accompanied by a growing understanding that family economic responsibilities are shared rather than borne by a single party. This development has encouraged the redefinition of dowry values, both in terms of amount and form, to reflect equality and mutual respect within marriage.
- b. **The transformation of religious values through modern interpretations without neglecting cultural traditions.** Islamic scholars and contemporary thinkers seek to translate timeless Islamic principles into present-day contexts, ensuring that dowry is not viewed merely as a financial burden but also as a means of promoting awareness and shared responsibility within marriage. Consequently, many families have become more innovative in determining dowry, incorporating considerations such as education and emotional stability.
- c. **Socio-economic conditions that necessitate adjustments to dowry values in order to remain relevant in contemporary society.** Amid rising living costs and economic pressures, there is a growing tendency to avoid treating dowry as an excessive burden. Instead, emphasis is placed on values that are more functional and realistic. This creates opportunities for more flexible marriages that can adapt to modern needs, allowing couples to celebrate their commitment without facing excessive financial obstacles.

Through in-depth interviews with experts, several important insights emerged:

- a. **Most participants emphasized the need for reinterpretation of dowry based on the principles of justice and public welfare (*maslahah*)**, in line with the objectives of *Maqasid al-Sharia*. They argued that such reinterpretation is important not only for ensuring equitable rights within society but also for responding to demographic changes and evolving moral values. This perspective suggests that dowry should not be viewed solely as a symbolic obligation but also as a form of social responsibility shared by both parties in marriage.
- b. **Many participants noted that the interaction between Qur'anic values and cultural practices demonstrates an adaptive dynamic that must continuously evolve to remain relevant to contemporary social conditions.** Several respondents highlighted examples of dowry practices integrated with social initiatives, such as skills training programs or investments in education. These practices reflect broader humanitarian values aimed at improving the welfare of families and communities.
- c. **Participants identified that differences between traditional and modern interpretations frequently generate debate; however, such debates also create opportunities for dialogue between academics and practitioners.** These discussions, often conducted through forums and seminars, play an important role in fostering a shared understanding of how Islamic values can be applied flexibly across different contexts while preserving the essence of the teachings. Such



exchanges encourage innovation in dowry practices that reflect the aspirations of younger generations while maintaining their cultural identity.

Socio-Cultural Implications and the Challenges of Modernization

This study finds that the modernization of dowry practices requires adjustments between traditional values and contemporary social realities. Several socio-cultural implications were identified:

- a. **Renewed understandings of dowry must accommodate the demands of gender equality and economic justice.** In this regard, it is important to develop frameworks that prioritize women's participation in decision-making processes related to dowry, ensuring that they are not merely recipients but also active agents in determining its meaning and form.
- b. **The transformation of dowry practices requires multidisciplinary involvement among religious scholars, anthropologists, and policymakers.** Such collaboration can facilitate constructive dialogue, integrate religious values with broader social perspectives, and generate policies that are not only culturally relevant but also responsive to contemporary issues such as poverty and education.
- c. **The limitations of literal interpretations of religious texts should be complemented by contextual approaches that respond to the dynamics of modern society.** This involves understanding the historical and social contexts underlying religious texts and considering how their principles can be applied within the diverse realities of contemporary life. Through this approach, dowry is viewed not merely as a formality but as a practice that reflects justice and respect for human rights.

The application of *Maqasid al-Sharia* theory in the context of dowry directs attention toward the primary objectives of marriage, namely achieving justice, public welfare, and the protection of the rights of both spouses. This theory emphasizes that all marital practices should be grounded in universal moral values that are not limited to specific communities but can be broadly accepted across different contexts. Consequently, decision-making processes concerning dowry become part of a broader global discourse involving ethical and moral considerations.

Meanwhile, Cultural Anthropology Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how norms, customs, and local traditions influence interpretations of religious teachings. This perspective highlights that although recognized religious standards exist, each community develops unique ways of applying and discussing those teachings according to its cultural environment.

The synergy between these two theoretical frameworks enables:

- a. **A deeper understanding of cultural transformations over time**, demonstrating how interpretations of dowry evolve alongside social and economic developments within society.
- b. **The identification of cultural factors contributing to differences in dowry interpretations**, including gender roles, social status, and educational development, all of which influence individual and collective perceptions of dowry practices.
- c. **The formulation of adaptive policy recommendations that are sensitive to both religious and socio-cultural values**, enabling policymakers to design regulations that promote justice and inclusivity without compromising the essence of religious teachings. Such recommendations may also encourage further dialogue among stakeholders, including community leaders, religious authorities, academics, and younger generations.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the values contained in the Qur'an provide a strong moral foundation, the reality of dowry (*mahr*) practices reveals various challenges in their implementation. One of the primary criticisms concerns the disparity between literal textual interpretations and the contextual needs of modern society. Many individuals perceive that traditional understandings of dowry do not fully correspond to the realities they encounter in everyday life. In increasingly interconnected global



societies, values that were once closely tied to local norms may appear rigid and less relevant, creating a gap between religious beliefs and contemporary social realities.

Furthermore, the practice of dowry giving is often influenced by economic factors and social conditions that are not fully reflected in religious texts. In many cases, financial pressures have contributed to a shift in the meaning of dowry—from a symbol of appreciation and commitment to a form of commodification. As a result, dowry is sometimes perceived more as a burden or obligation than as an expression of affection, respect, and mutual understanding between spouses.

Differences in perception between traditional and modern approaches indicate the need for continuous dialogue among religious scholars, academics, and legal practitioners in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of dowry. Such collaboration is essential not only for aligning practices with spiritual values but also for developing solutions that accommodate the evolving dynamics of contemporary society. Through ongoing dialogue, new interpretations may emerge that are more responsive to present-day needs while preserving the cultural and spiritual foundations that remain significant within Muslim communities.

The implications of this study include the importance of reinterpreting the values of dowry in order to harmonize traditional practices with contemporary demands. In this context, reinterpretation should be understood not merely as adaptation but as a deeper examination of the rights and responsibilities of spouses within modern marriage. This includes evaluating the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of dowry so that it may contribute to the development of more equitable and harmonious marital relationships in the contemporary era.

In addition, the reconceptualization of dowry through interdisciplinary dialogue between religious and cultural perspectives is necessary to produce policies and practices that are more responsive to societal changes. By involving experts from various fields, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and religious studies, such dialogue can generate practical and relevant guidelines that consider both tradition and contemporary social needs. For example, greater attention may be given to the role of education and women's empowerment in transforming dowry practices into more inclusive and equitable forms.

The application of the *Maqasid al-Sharia* framework in ethical and normative evaluations of marriage practices also offers an important pathway toward achieving public welfare (*maslahah*). This framework encourages a deeper exploration of how the objectives, values, and purposes of Islamic law can be utilized to develop dowry practices that are not only legally valid but also morally and ethically meaningful. Such an approach supports the creation of a just and prosperous society by promoting transparency, fairness, and mutual respect in marital arrangements.

Finally, future research is expected to broaden the scope of inquiry by comparing dowry practices across different regions and cultural settings while integrating more comprehensive empirical data from cross-sectoral studies. Such an approach would enable a deeper understanding of both the similarities and differences in dowry traditions, as well as the factors influencing their evolution, including economic transformation, migration patterns, and advances in information technology. This multidimensional perspective would provide richer and more holistic insights into the dynamics of dowry practices within marriage in an increasingly changing world.

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