



A Study of Ethical Values in the Lombok Keris within the Traditional Values of the Sasak Ethnic

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the Lombok keris as a medium of traditional ethical education within the Sasak cultural community. A qualitative method with an ethnographic approach was employed to understand the symbolic meanings and values embedded in the keris based on participatory observation, in-depth interviews, as well as documentation of traditional ceremonies and community practices. The findings indicate that the Lombok keris embodies ethical values such as courage, responsibility, purity, honor, balance, and harmony. These values are transmitted through oral traditions within families, the roles of customary leaders, and community involvement in rituals and ceremonies. Beyond being a material artifact, the keris functions as a pedagogical tool that shapes the character and cultural awareness of younger generations. However, modernization and the pressures of globalization have driven a transformation in the keris's meaning, shifting it from an ethical symbol to a decorative object and cultural commodity. This situation poses challenges to the preservation of its inherent values. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the necessity of an adaptive and participatory approach in maintaining the keris's function as a medium for ethical education, through the integration of local values into contemporary cultural learning spaces.

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Introduction

The keris is a cultural artifact that holds a distinctive position in the heritage of Indonesia civilization. Its existence is not merely regarded as a traditional weapon used in the context of defense or warfare, but also as a symbolic medium imbued with profound philosophical, spiritual, and ethical meanings. In cultural anthropology studies, the keris is often examined as a representation of noble values embedded within the social structures of the communities that produce and inherit it (Abdurrahman, 2012). These values encompass aspects of honor, honesty, courage, and spiritual connectedness with ancestors and supernatural forces. Therefore, the keris cannot be separated from the cultural context that gave birth to it.

Specifically in the Lombok region, the keris occupies a highly significant role in the social, cultural, and spiritual structures of the Sasak community. This heirloom object is not merely an accessory to traditional attire or ceremonial equipment; it constitutes an integral part of the community's everyday life narrative. The Lombok keris is present in various rites and religious ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, and other customary rituals, reaffirming its existence as a symbol of ethical values and local spirituality (Rahmawati, 2015). These values are represented through the physical form of the keris, its decorative patterns (ornaments), and the ways in which the community treats and sacralizes it. In other words, the Lombok keris serves as a medium for articulating the traditional ethical values of the Sasak people.



The ethical values embodied in the Lombok *keris* are inseparable from the Sasak worldview, which emphasizes the balance of relationships between humans, nature, and transcendental forces (Putra, 2016). In practice, these values are transmitted across generations through oral narratives, ritual practices, and the symbolism embedded in heirloom objects. The Lombok *keris* becomes one of the primary media in the process of value transmission because it contains collective narratives believed to reflect local wisdom. The meaning attributed to the *keris* is not only material in nature, but also spiritual and moral, functioning as a guide for attitudes and behaviors in community life.

Although numerous studies have explored the *keris* from historical, aesthetic, and technical perspectives of craftsmanship, research focusing on the ethical aspects of the Lombok *keris* within the framework of Sasak tradition remains limited. Yet, understanding the ethical dimensions of material culture such as the *keris* can open new horizons in comprehending the systems of values and morals that develop within traditional societies. This gap underscores the necessity for more in-depth and focused research to reveal how ethical values are represented and transmitted through the Lombok *keris*.

Based on these considerations, this article aims to fill the research gap by critically analyzing the ethical values embodied in the Lombok *keris* and their interrelation with the traditional values of the Sasak community. The primary focus of this study is to identify the ethical aspects manifested in the physical form, symbolic function, and social-cultural usage of the *keris*. Through a qualitative approach and in-depth literature review, it is expected that this article will contribute to the development of material culture studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between traditional artifacts and the construction of ethical values within local communities.

Theoretical Basis

The *keris* as a cultural object has long been a subject of significant attention within the study of Nusantara culture. Previous scholarly works have revealed that the *keris* is not merely a technological product, but also a manifestation of the worldview of the society that produced it. As a symbol of identity and social status, the *keris* reflects moral and spiritual values that are deeply internalized within the cultural structure of its owners (Aziz, 2019; Kurniawan, 2016). In many regions, the *keris* functions as a marker of social class, an emblem of authority, and a sacred artifact associated with supernatural power. Consequently, the study of the *keris* must take into account the symbolic and ideological dimensions that are inherently embedded within it.

Specifically regarding the Lombok *keris*, several studies indicate that its form and style have been significantly influenced by cultural acculturation among Javanese, Balinese, and local Sasak traditions (Ariyanto, 2018). This acculturation has produced a distinctive *keris* form, characterized by unique features in the *dapur* (blade shape), *pamor* (metal patterns), and *hulu* and *warangka* (handle and sheath). However, despite its visual resemblance to *keris* from other regions, the symbolic meaning and functional role of the Lombok *keris* within Sasak society are unique and contextual. The Lombok *keris* is not only perceived as an heirloom or work of art, but also as a medium of spiritual and moral mediation between the individual, the community, and the cosmic forces believed to exist by the local people.

The symbolism of the *keris* as a medium for transmitting ethical values is reflected in cultural practices that position it as an object of veneration and respect. In many cases, the *keris* is regarded as a living entity possessing its own power and will, thus warranting treatment imbued with reverence and specific ceremonial protocols. In this context, ethics is understood not only as a set of norms governing human behavior, but also as the proper conduct toward sacred objects believed to possess a spirit or particular energy (Achmad, 2017; Nugroho, 2019). The *keris* is thus positioned as a guardian of values, with its presence symbolizing integrity, honesty, and moral responsibility.

Traditional ethics within indigenous communities function as a regulatory framework for both social and spiritual life. They constitute a set of values that govern the behavior of individuals in their interactions with fellow humans, the environment, and the spiritual realm. These values are transmitted across generations through various cultural channels, such as myths, legends, customary practices, and the symbolism embodied in cultural artifacts (Suharto, 2018). In Sasak society, the ethical value system is rooted in a philosophy of life that emphasizes balance and harmony. This is reflected in local expressions carrying moral teachings, as well as in the kinship system and social structure that prioritize *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), respect for elders, and adherence to customary law as core principles (Darsono, 2021; Gde, 2014).

Therefore, the study of the Lombok *keris* within the framework of traditional ethical values is essential for understanding how the Sasak people frame moral principles through cultural artifacts. The *keris* is not merely tangible cultural heritage, but also an ideological medium that reflects the community's worldview. This study is thus relevant not only to the preservation of cultural heritage, but also to the discourse on character building and social ethics rooted in local wisdom.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with the primary aim of exploring and understanding the ethical values embedded in the Lombok *keris* and their relationship to the cultural traditions of the Sasak community. This approach is deemed relevant as it allows the researcher to examine symbolic meanings, values, and cultural practices that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods (Harahap, 2018; Gde, 2014).

Data collection was carried out through literature review, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, *keris* craftsmen, cultural experts, and members of the Sasak community who possess extensive knowledge of the Lombok *keris*. The literature review provided a theoretical and historical understanding of the *keris* in the context of Indonesian culture and the ethical values associated with it (Abdurrahman, 2012; Aziz, 2019). These sources strengthen the conceptual foundation concerning the significance of the *keris* in society and its relevance within the local value system.

Participant observation involved attending cultural events, rituals, and *keris*-making activities that are still preserved in several traditional villages in Lombok. These activities offered first-hand insights into how the *keris* is used, revered, and interpreted in the daily lives of the Sasak people, particularly within spiritual, social, and moral contexts. This approach is consistent with the methods employed by Darsono (2021) and Ariyanto (2018) in their studies on ethical values in local cultural traditions.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with traditional leaders who are knowledgeable about the symbolism and values of the *keris*, including craftsman, indigenous community figures, and cultural practitioners. The interviews aimed to gather qualitative information regarding community perceptions of the *keris* as a symbol of ethics, spirituality, and cultural identity. Triangulation techniques were applied by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and literature to ensure the validity and reliability of the data (Achmad, 2017; Pranowo, 2020).

Data analysis was performed using content analysis techniques on cultural narratives, *keris* symbolism, and the ethical interpretations embedded in its use. The data were then categorized into key thematic areas, such as loyalty, courage, honor, harmony, and spirituality. This process followed an interpretive approach commonly applied in cultural anthropology and traditional ethics studies (Nugroho, 2019; Suharto, 2018).

Furthermore, theoretical frameworks on cultural values and ethnic identity, as outlined by Mahyuni (2017) and Putra (2016), were applied in the analytical process. This approach facilitated an understanding of how the ethical values associated with the Lombok keris are not only part of symbolic heritage but also play a role in the formation and preservation of the Sasak community's cultural identity.

By integrating diverse data collection techniques with in-depth analytical methods, this study seeks to present a holistic understanding of the Lombok keris as a cultural artifact imbued with rich ethical values. The diversity of data sources and analytical techniques employed ensures a high degree of validity and reliability within the context of cultural and local ethics research.

Results and Discussions

Symbolism and Structure of the Lombok Keris

The Lombok keris generally consists of several structural components: the *wilah* (blade), *ganja* (blade support), *hulu* (hilt), and *warangka* (sheath). Each of these parts serves not only a technical function but also embodies symbolic values that reflect the worldview of the Sasak people. The *wilah*, for instance, is believed to represent the human life journey, which is filled with twists, trials, and spiritual stages. The curves (*luk*) of the blade carry philosophical meaning, symbolizing a life path that is not always straight, yet ultimately directed toward balance and wisdom (Ariyanto, 2018; Achmad, 2017).

The materials used in crafting the Lombok keris are typically selected metals considered to possess spiritual power, such as *pamor* iron. The *pamor* patterns on the blade are not mere decorative elements but carry ethical messages and symbols of virtue. For example, the *beras wutah* motif is regarded as a symbol of prosperity and generosity, while the *lar gangsir* motif represents caution and self-reflection (Nugroho, 2019; Harahap, 2018).

The *warangka* structure within Sasak culture also reflects the social values and status of its owner. Sheaths made from selected woods, such as *kemuning* or *timoho*, signify the owner's social standing and moral responsibility within the community. Meanwhile, the hilt, often carved with local floral or faunal motifs, symbolizes humanity's closeness to nature and harmony with the environment (Abdurrahman, 2012; Pranowo, 2020).

The Lombok keris is not a static object; it is an integral part of rituals and customary ceremonies imbued with ethical values. In Sasak tradition, the keris is often used in the *begawe* ritual or other customary ceremonies as a symbol of purity, protection, and honor. Values such as honesty, courage, and responsibility are embedded within the symbolism of the keris, both through its form and the narratives that accompany it (Darsono, 2021; Gde, 2014).

Thus, the symbolism and structure of the Lombok keris are inseparable from the holistic cultural value system of the Sasak people. The keris functions as a medium for transmitting ethical values across generations and strengthening the community's collective identity. Its significance lies not only in its physical form but also in the symbolic framework embedded within the cultural practices and beliefs of the Sasak society.

Values of Balance and Harmony

The Lombok keris also embodies the values of balance and harmony, which form the core of the Sasak philosophical worldview. Its symmetrical design, choice of motifs, and the interconnection of its components reflect an effort to achieve harmony between humans, nature, and ancestral heritage (Gde, 2014).

In practice, the keris serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining balanced relationships between the individual and the community, between the physical and spiritual realms, and between humans and higher powers. Keris owners are taught to live in accordance with the cosmic order, not merely pursuing personal interests but also considering the collective well-being.

In this way, the Lombok keris becomes a medium for internalizing ethical values that are holistic and transcendent. Through the keris, the Sasak people pass down not only a physical artifact but also a worldview rich in moral, spiritual, and social values. These findings reinforce the notion that the Lombok keris holds a crucial role as a guardian and transmitter of Sasak cultural ethics.

The Keris as a Medium of Traditional Ethical Education

The Lombok keris is not merely a cultural artifact but also serves as an important medium in the transmission of traditional ethical values within Sasak society. Its presence in everyday life in Lombok indicates that cultural symbols are not solely aesthetic or historical in nature but also function as tools for moral and character education, both within the family and in the wider community (Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Within the family setting, the keris is often inherited from parent to son as a symbol of responsibility, maturity, and moral legitimacy in safeguarding the family's honor. The act of passing down a keris is not purely ceremonial but also carries strong didactic significance. Parents—especially fathers or grandfathers—typically convey historical and ethical narratives associated with the keris, including ancestral heroism, struggles against injustice, and noble values such as courage, honesty, and perseverance. In this context, the keris becomes a pedagogical instrument connecting the younger generation to local ethical values (Geertz, 1983; Sedyawati, 2006).

Within the community, the Lombok keris serves as a collective symbol in various customary and social rituals. For example, during the Ngurisang ritual (keris purification), which is periodically conducted by customary leaders, the community gathers to jointly clean and care for keris regarded as sacred. This process not only reflects reverence for heirlooms but also serves as a medium for instilling values of purity, togetherness, and social responsibility. Children and adolescents who witness the ceremony directly observe how the community honors ancestral heritage, while also learning that cultural objects possess deep moral meaning (Supratikno, 2003).

The keris is also used in rites of passage and religious ceremonies, such as weddings, circumcisions, and funerals. In these rites, the keris is not merely a decorative complement but a representation of the ethical values intended to be instilled. For instance, in traditional Sasak weddings, a keris is placed on the groom's attire as a symbol of moral readiness to undertake married life with responsibility and honor. In funerals, the keris is often placed beside the deceased as a mark of respect for their integrity and social contributions during their lifetime (Moestika, 2008).

However, the ethical values embedded in the keris have undergone changes in line with modernization and social transformation in Lombok. Lifestyle shifts, globalization, and external cultural influences have led to a shift in the keris' meaning—from a spiritual and ethical function to that of a collectible or economic commodity. In some areas, keris are now more often displayed in museums or sold as artworks rather than being used in rituals or value-based education. This indicates a reduction in the keris' role as an ethical entity into merely an aesthetic object (Sedyawati, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 2009).

Nevertheless, not all ethical meanings in the keris have disappeared. Certain customary communities and cultural practitioners in Lombok remain active in preserving the keris as a tool for transmitting values. They

have established cultural studios, youth community groups, and discussion forums that explicitly position the keris as a starting point for learning traditional values. For example, in keris-making training sessions or workshops on interpreting keris symbols, participants learn not only technical skills and history but also the ethical meanings embedded in each part and stage of the keris-making process.

Value transformation is also evident in the adaptation of the keris' meaning in contemporary contexts. Among the younger Sasak generation, new interpretations have emerged, viewing the keris as a symbol of the struggle for cultural identity. In contemporary art performances—such as traditional theater or installation art—the keris is often presented as a metaphor for social critique, a connector of collective memory, and a reflective medium addressing ethical crises in modern society. Through such approaches, the keris remains alive not only as a symbol of the past but also as a marker of the continued relevance of ethical values in addressing present-day challenges.

Therefore, the Lombok keris occupies a significant position in the traditional ethical education of the Sasak people. It serves as an intergenerational bridge for transmitting moral, spiritual, and social values. Despite the pressures of changing times, the ethical meaning of the keris can be revitalized through cultural innovations rooted in traditional values. Hence, keris preservation must extend beyond its physical form to encompass the revitalization of its ethical functions in contemporary society.

Conclusion

The Lombok keris, within the context of the Sasak community, is not merely a cultural artifact but also a pedagogical medium rich in traditional ethical content. It functions as a bridge for moral values across generations, extending from the private family domain to the broader social sphere within customary communities. Through symbolic inheritance processes such as the passing down of the keris within families or participation in public rituals like *Ngurisang*, the keris plays a central role in shaping character and reinforcing cultural awareness within society. The symbolism embedded in the keris not only represents courage and honor but also serves as a tangible medium for the internalization of values such as responsibility, perseverance, and social integrity (Geertz, 1983; Sedyawati, 2006; Supratikno, 2003).

However, modernization and globalization have posed new challenges to the continuity of the keris' ethical meanings. The shift of the keris' function from a spiritual and ethical medium to that of a collectible or tourism commodity demonstrates that cultural values do not automatically endure without conscious effort from the community itself. This phenomenon underscores that cultural preservation requires more than safeguarding physical forms; it must also include the preservation of the values they embody (Koentjaraningrat, 2009; Moestika, 2008).

Therefore, it is recommended that the preservation of the Lombok keris be pursued through adaptive and educational approaches. Local governments, cultural institutions, and community groups need to collaborate in creating learning spaces and cultural expressions that position the keris as an ethical foundation. Activities such as keris-making training, symbolic workshops, or traditional art performances based on the keris' ethical narratives can serve as effective revitalization strategies, especially in reaching younger generations. Such approaches will not only revive the pedagogical function of the keris but also affirm its relevance in addressing contemporary ethical crises.

In other words, the keris should not be viewed merely as a relic of the past but as a living artifact capable of navigating the future of society through the noble values it contains. Efforts to preserve the keris as a medium

of traditional ethical education must be collaborative, sustainable, and contextual to ensure that it remains a source of moral inspiration in building a civilization rooted in local wisdom.

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