

The Tradition of Grave Pilgrimage Among the Sasak People as a Medium of Transcendental Communication (An Ethnographic Study of Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor Graves)

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Abstract

This study was driven by the limited scholarly attention given to grave pilgrimage as a medium of transcendental communication, despite its vital role in preserving spiritual and cultural life. Focusing on the Sasak community of Lombok, the research explored how transcendental communication is conceptualized and enacted through grave pilgrimage at three sacred sites: Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor. The study examined the spiritual, cultural, and social motivations behind these practices, as well as the role of ritual expressions and the Sasak language in facilitating a deeper divine connection. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, data were collected from 25 informants, including grave custodians, long-term pilgrims, and religious leaders selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data collection methods included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, with thematic analysis conducted using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model. Triangulation and member checking ensured validity. Findings revealed that grave pilgrimage among the Sasak serves as a *wasilah* (spiritual medium) through which individuals seek proximity to Allah by invoking the presence of pious ancestors. The use of the Sasak language in ritual acts such as *dhikr*, *du'a*, Qur'anic recitation, and *Hizib Nabdlatul Wathan* enhanced emotional and spiritual engagement. Motivations for pilgrimage included *hajat* (spiritual petitions), contemplation of mortality, and the intergenerational transmission of religious and cultural values. The study

concludes that Sasak grave pilgrimage represents a syncretic practice that integrates Islamic teachings with local cultural heritage. It offers theoretical contributions to the field of religious communication and practical insights for cultural preservation, spiritual tourism, and interfaith dialogue.

Keywords: Tradition; Transcendental Communication; Grave Pilgrimage; Sasak Culture; Spiritual Heritage

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era characterized by rapid shifts in cultural and religious paradigms, spiritual traditions continue to occupy a fundamental role in shaping individual and communal identities. One such tradition is grave pilgrimage, particularly within the Sasak community of Lombok, Indonesia, where it is not only a religious act but also a sociocultural expression of transcendental communication. This practice, grounded in local metaphysical beliefs and Islamic teachings, reflects a multidimensional understanding of sacred spaces. In the Sasak view, graves—especially those belonging to revered figures such as wali or tuan guru—serve as spiritual conduits between the human and the divine (Fauzan et al., 2022; Sobry & Purnamasari, 2021)

Grave pilgrimage is a deeply spiritual ritual in which pilgrims believe that the deceased, especially the wali, possess metaphysical potency (*kesakten*), and therefore, function as mediators to channel their prayers to God (Sylviana, 2019; Jamil et al., 2022). This belief underlies their acts of supplication (*tawassul*) and spiritual reflection, as a means of approaching the divine. In the Sasak tradition, *ziarah* is not only a moment to honor the dead but also an expression of gratitude, hope, and spiritual purification, thereby cultivating both vertical (to God) and horizontal (to society) dimensions of communication (Nasih, 2025; Marwah, 2021).

Scholars have noted the cultural complexity of grave pilgrimage as it intersects religious devotion with sociocultural functions. The tradition of *besangi* at Maulana Syech Gauz Abdurrozak's grave, for example, reflects communal memory and religious transmission within local Islam (Nuruddin, 2023). The use of Sasak language in prayer and rituals further reinforces cultural continuity and spiritual intimacy (Nasri, 2024; Raudloh et al., 2024). These forms of spiritual communication, embedded in cultural heritage, signify

human efforts to reach a *paripurna* (complete) identity through divine connection (Bentley, 2023; Adiwibawa, 2021). Furthermore, the integration of cultural elements such as *tembang Sasak* or *pepaosan* in ritualized space reveals a dynamic, localized form of religious expression (Hadi, 2023).

The development of religious tourism at grave sites requires strong cross-cultural understanding, as both caretakers and visitors often come from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (Tanjung, 2023). Historically, since the Prophet Muhammad permitted Muslims to visit graves, this practice has continued as an enduring tradition in Islamic communities. As Islam spread to the Indonesian archipelago, grave pilgrimage underwent acculturation with local customs, creating a wide array of practices. The graves of socially revered figures—such as *wali*, *tuan guru*, and other esteemed leaders—often become pilgrimage destinations, attracting visitors who seek to honor their legacy, offer prayers, or obtain *barakah* (Mukti et al., 2025). This practice also reflects a strong belief in the *karomah* (spiritual power) of the Qur'an as a mantra within the ritual context, representing the mystical dimension of the human–Divine relationship (Lestari, 2020). Although slightly beyond the five-year citation window, interfaith festivals like *Lingsar* demonstrate how grave sites serve as spiritual meeting points that bridge religious and cultural boundaries (Harnish, 2019).

Previous studies have analyzed grave pilgrimage in different Sasak communities, such as the *Rea'* grave in Bayan (Mariadi et al., 2023) and the *Loang Baloq* site (Rosada & Wawansyah, 2019), which highlight the motivations and variations in ritual behavior. However, few have specifically explored the function of grave pilgrimage as a medium of transcendental communication, particularly through an ethnographic lens encompassing the sites of *Loang Baloq*, *Ketak*, and *Pancor*. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the metaphysical beliefs, symbolic practices, and communicative interactions surrounding these sacred spaces.

Theoretically, this study draws on communication and religious theories that describe transcendental communication as a non-empirical relationship between humans and the divine through metaphysical media (Sari, 2020). The practice of *habluminallah* (relationship with God) in Islam, often expressed through rituals like prayer, remembrance, and pilgrimage, underpins the spiritual aspirations of the community (Nasih, 2025).

Based on preliminary observations, pilgrims at the graves of Maulana Syech Gaus Abdurrazak (*Loang Baloq*), *Tuan Guru Lopan* (*Ketak*), and *TGH Zainuddin Abdul Majid*

(Pancor) engage in a range of devotional activities such as wirid, tahlil, Yasin recitation, and collective prayers. These spiritual practices are often imbued with personal or communal intentions, including seeking divine blessings (barakah), protection, well-being, and the removal of misfortunes (Observation, 2025). These actions, performed with varying degrees of physical, emotional, and symbolic devotion, reflect how transcendental communication is deeply rooted in both Islamic religious tradition and Sasak local culture.

Observations further reveal that the tradition of grave pilgrimage at these sites is inseparable from its historical and philosophical significance. The graves are viewed not merely as resting places for the deceased, but as sacred intermediaries through which supplications to God are conveyed—especially when the graves belong to revered saints (wali) or spiritually virtuous figures. Through this ritual, pilgrims express their aspirations for divine favor, healing, success, and protection from harm, believing that the spiritual presence associated with these sites serves as a conduit for answered prayers.

Moreover, the rituals are performed with a wide range of customs, varying from one pilgrim to another. Some arrive on foot, others by vehicle, and their ritual practices also differ. Recitations may include tahlil, surah Yasin, complete Qur'anic readings, and specific wirid, delivered either individually or communally. In addition, shalawat and other devotional chants are performed in different postures—standing, sitting, or in quiet reflection. Upon completing their rituals, some pilgrims return home immediately, while others choose to linger around the grave sites for rest or spiritual contemplation, often utilizing facilities provided by caretakers (Observation, 2025).

From these findings, it is evident that the tradition of grave pilgrimage among the Sasak people has evolved into a culturally embedded spiritual practice. It functions not only as an expression of religious devotion and remembrance but also as a meaningful way of drawing closer to the divine. The sacred sites of Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor are thus regarded as integral mediums of transcendental communication—where cultural heritage, religious belief, and metaphysical engagement converge in the lived spirituality of the community.

Accordingly, this research explores the tradition of grave pilgrimage among the Sasak people as a communicative act that connects the material and spiritual worlds. It focuses on the ethnographic dimensions of three prominent graves: Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor.

Through this study, the researcher aims to understand how this ritual acts as a medium of transcendental communication and what meanings are embedded within it.

The research questions of this study are: 1) How do the Sasak people conceptualize transcendental communication through the tradition of grave pilgrimage?; 2) What spiritual, cultural, and social motivations influence pilgrimage practices at Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor?; 3) How do rituals and local languages used during pilgrimage enhance the experience of transcendental communication?; and 4) In what ways do the practices at these sacred sites reflect a synthesis of Islamic doctrine and Sasak cultural identity?

This study aims to explore the Sasak community's understanding of transcendental communication as expressed through their grave pilgrimage traditions. Specifically, it seeks to examine how the concept of communicating with the divine is embodied in the rituals performed at the graves of religious figures in Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor. Furthermore, the research investigates the underlying spiritual, cultural, and social motivations that drive the community's engagement in these practices. It also aims to analyze how the use of ritual forms and local Sasak language contributes to the depth and authenticity of transcendental communication. Lastly, the study intends to uncover the ways in which these pilgrimage traditions reflect a syncretic relationship between Islamic teachings and the indigenous cultural values of the Sasak people.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of how traditional religious practices function as mediums of transcendental communication in contemporary society. By focusing on the Sasak grave pilgrimage tradition, the research highlights the dynamic interplay between local culture and Islamic spirituality, revealing how sacred practices continue to shape collective identity, intergenerational values, and spiritual consciousness. Additionally, this study offers valuable insights for scholars in anthropology, religious studies, and intercultural communication by demonstrating how vernacular rituals and languages preserve not only cultural heritage but also facilitate personal and communal connections with the divine. Moreover, the findings may serve as a meaningful reference for cultural preservation efforts, religious tourism management, and interfaith dialogue within pluralistic societies.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically ethnography, to provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural and symbolic meanings underlying the grave pilgrimage traditions of the Sasak people. The ethnographic method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore naturally occurring behaviors within a cultural context and to interpret symbolic acts from the emic perspective of the participants. Ethnography also enabled a holistic exploration of local rituals and their meanings through long-term engagement in the field (Black et al., 2021)

A multiple-case ethnographic design was applied, focusing on three prominent pilgrimage sites: Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor. This design facilitated comparative analysis across sites while preserving cultural specificity, thus strengthening analytical generalization. Compared to single-case studies, this design provided richer insights into shared values and variations across locations, enhancing the cultural depth and validity of the findings (Black et al., 2021).

This study was conducted from April to June 2025. The target population consisted of members of the Sasak community who regularly participated in grave pilgrimage rituals. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their deep involvement and knowledge of local religious practices (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). These included grave custodians (*juru kunci*), long-term pilgrims, and local religious figures. To expand the participant pool, snowball sampling was used, allowing initial informants to recommend additional relevant participants (Ting et al., 2025). This method proved especially effective in accessing participants with specialized knowledge or long-term experience in the tradition.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during high-frequency pilgrimage periods, where the researcher assumed a passive role, witnessing various rituals such as *wirid*, *tahlil*, and collective prayers without intervening (Gertner et al., 2021). Interviews were guided by open-ended questions that encouraged participants to elaborate on their personal experiences, beliefs, and motivations regarding the pilgrimage. Prior to formal data collection, pilot interviews were conducted to refine the interview guide. Documentation included photos, audio recordings of rituals, and textual materials such as prayer books and pilgrimage guides, which helped triangulate and validate the observational and interview data.

For data analysis, this study followed the steps of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved identifying and coding recurring themes from field notes and transcripts. Data were then organized into visual and narrative displays to uncover thematic connections. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through member checking and cross-site comparisons to ensure credibility.

RESULTS

This section presents key findings from an ethnographic study of grave pilgrimage traditions among the Sasak people at Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor, involving 25 informants. Results are structured by the four research questions. Participant distribution is shown in Figure 1.

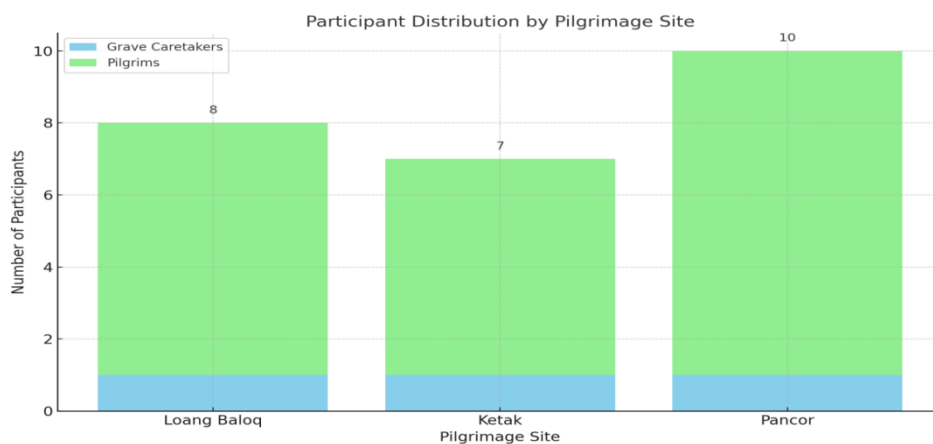


Figure 1: Participant Distribution by Pilgrimage Site

Figure 1 illustrates the number of participants involved in each pilgrimage site, distinguishing between grave caretakers and pilgrims. This visualization helps highlight the distribution of informants across the three key research locations: Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor. Each site included one key caretaker who possessed deep knowledge of the rituals and historical significance of the graves, while the remaining participants were pilgrims engaged in various spiritual practices.

1. Sasak People's Conceptualization of Transcendental Communication through Grave Pilgrimage

The data indicate that Sasak pilgrims conceptualized grave pilgrimage as a spiritual medium (*wasilah*) for establishing a closer relationship with Allah SWT. This transcendental communication was not perceived as worship of the deceased, but rather as an effort to gain divine nearness through the presence of righteous figures. One participant explained, “In the act of worshipping Allah SWT who created us, visiting graves is a *wasilah* to draw closer to Him” (P01, male, 54, Loang Baloq, personal communication, May 23, 2025). Similarly, another stated, “Pilgrimage to the grave of a pious person brings us closer to Allah” (P03, male, 45, Loang Baloq, personal communication, May 23, 2025). This view was echoed by a participant in Ketak who clarified, “We don’t worship those buried here, but we believe their presence helps us draw near to the Creator” (P02, male, 60, Ketak, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Furthermore, the experience of transcendental communication was enhanced by the use of local Sasak expressions, which deepened the spiritual and emotional connection. A pilgrim in Pancor remarked, “Using our own language during *ziarah* makes it feel closer to the heart and to our ancestors. It’s more intimate” (P06, male, 38, Pancor, personal communication, June 21, 2025). This sentiment was also expressed by a female informant who stated, “When I visit the graves of the *waliyullah*, I feel a personal nearness to Allah—especially when I use my own language in prayer. It’s like I’m speaking with my soul” (P07, female, 47, Ketak, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

These narratives reflect the belief that grave pilgrimage enables an indirect dialogue with the Divine, mediated by sacred individuals and enriched through culturally rooted language and ritual.

Table 1. Conceptual Differences in Transcendental Communication among Sasak Pilgrims

Site	Participant(s)	Focus of Concept	Key Emphasis	Cultural Element
Loang Baloq	P01, P03	Theological wasilah to Allah via pious figures	Ziarah as religious devotion, not worship of the deceased	Minimal cultural references
Ketak	P02, P07	Spiritual nearness + emotional expression	Use of local language enhances personal closeness to God	Use of Sasak language in prayer
Pancor	P06	Emotional-spiritual intimacy through cultural lens	Communication with God through ancestral tradition	Strong emphasis on heritage & language

Table 1 shows the conceptual differences in how Sasak pilgrims from three sites understand transcendental communication during grave pilgrimage. Participants from Loang Baloq emphasized pilgrimage as a theological wasilah to Allah through righteous figures, focusing on spiritual nearness without invoking cultural elements. In Ketak, participants highlighted emotional closeness enhanced by the use of the Sasak language, blending spirituality with cultural identity. Meanwhile, respondents from Pancor stressed ancestral connection and heritage-based expressions, viewing pilgrimage as both a spiritual and cultural act rooted in tradition.

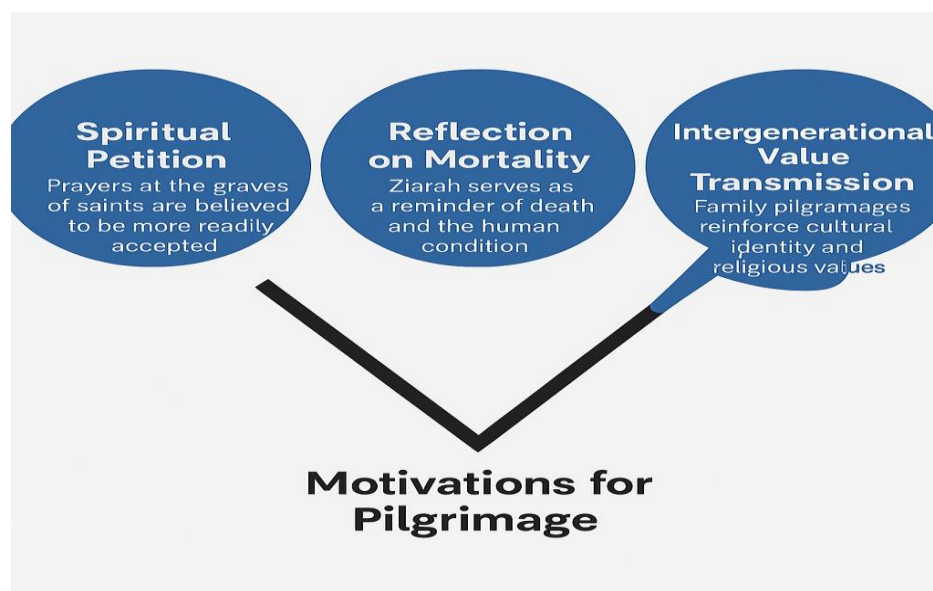
2. Spiritual, Cultural, and Social Motivations for Pilgrimage Pilgrimage to Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor

Pilgrimage to sacred graves in Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor is driven by a rich blend of spiritual, cultural, and social motivations. A prominent reason is spiritual petition (*hajat*), wherein pilgrims believe that prayers offered at the graves of saints and righteous figures are more likely to be granted. As one participant expressed, “When we visit Loang Baloq, our wishes are surely granted” (P04, female, 50, personal communication, May 23, 2025). Another participant added, “If we seek sustenance, healing, or life partners, we come here and ask through Sheikh Gaus Abdurrazak’s grave” (P02, male, 45, personal communication, May 23, 2025). This belief was consistent across sites. For instance, a pilgrim in Ketak remarked, “Visiting righteous graves accelerates the acceptance of our prayers” (P05, female, 48, personal communication, April 15, 2025).

Another recurring theme is the reflection on mortality, where the pilgrimage serves as a means of spiritual contemplation and self-awareness. Visiting graves prompts individuals to ponder their own mortality, deepening their connection with spiritual realities. “One way to remember death is by visiting graves,” shared one informant (P06,

male, 52, personal communication, June 20, 2025). Another noted, “The moment we enter a graveyard, we’re reminded of our end” (P07, female, 42, personal communication, June 20, 2025). This sentiment was echoed at Pancor, where a participant stated, “Visiting the graves of the pious reminds us of our own mortality and brings a sense of humility” (P10, male, 47, personal communication, June 21, 2025). These responses illustrate how pilgrimage cultivates not only spiritual consciousness but also moral reflection and emotional sobriety.

Furthermore, intergenerational transmission of values emerged as a significant cultural motivation. Pilgrimage is often conducted as a family ritual, transmitting religious knowledge and tradition across generations. “My mother taught me the Hizib. Now I teach my granddaughter. It’s not just a ritual; it’s our heritage,” said one pilgrim (P09, female, 52, Ketak, personal communication, April 14, 2025). This indicates that pilgrimage reinforces both Islamic values and Sasak identity, fostering continuity in cultural and spiritual practices. Families attending pilgrimage together—often in traditional attire—reflect not only religious devotion but also a lived expression of cultural continuity. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of grave pilgrimage among the Sasak people: as a form of divine supplication, a space for existential reflection, and a mechanism for cultural preservation.



**Figure 2: The Thematic Diagram of Three Primary Motivations
for Sasak Grave Pilgrimage**

The figure 2 of thematic diagram highlights three key motivations behind Sasak grave pilgrimage: spiritual petition (hajjat) for blessings, reflection on mortality as a reminder of life's impermanence, and intergenerational transmission of religious and cultural values. These elements together show that pilgrimage is both a spiritual act and a cultural tradition that nurtures faith, identity, and communal continuity.

3. Ritual and Language Use Enhancing Transcendental Experience Ritual practices form the core medium for transcendental communication.

Ritual practices form the core medium through which transcendental communication is experienced during grave pilgrimage among the Sasak community. One of the most common practices is Qur'anic recitation, performed both individually and collectively. Participants described these acts as central to creating a sacred atmosphere and invoking spiritual presence. As noted by P01 (male, 54, Loang Baloq), "We read Surah Yasin together, recite verses, and offer Fatihah" (personal communication, May 23, 2025). Similarly, P03 (male, 45, Loang Baloq) added, "We gather with family and read Qur'an together" (personal communication, May 23, 2025). At other sites such as Ketak and Pancor, similar recitations were observed, with a particular emphasis on Surah Yasin and short surahs as part of the ritual offerings.

In addition to recitation, dhikr (remembrance of God) and du'a (supplication) serve as key expressive acts that deepen spiritual engagement. Many pilgrims reported experiencing emotional clarity, inner peace, and heightened sincerity during these moments. For instance, P04 (female, 50, Loang Baloq) stated, "Praying here feels different—there's inner peace" (personal communication, May 23, 2025). P03 further affirmed, "We experience deep tranquility and sincerity during du'a at these sites" (personal communication, May 23, 2025). The communal aspect of these rituals was also emphasized by P07 (female, 42, Ketak), who shared, "Together with an ustadz, we recite dhikr and du'a collectively" (personal communication, April 14, 2025), indicating that structured group prayer adds depth and cohesion to the pilgrimage experience.

A distinctive ritual at the Pancor site is the collective reading of the Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan, a spiritual text composed by national hero Maulana Syaikh Zainuddin Abdul Majid. This recitation is regarded not only as a devotional act but also as an expression of institutional and ancestral loyalty. P08 (male, 39, Pancor) expressed, "We recite the Hizib together as a form of devotion" (personal communication, June

21, 2025). Echoing this, P09 (male, 41, Pancor) stated, “Reading Hizib is how we show our love and respect for Maulana Syaikh” (personal communication, June 21, 2025). P11 (male, 44, Pancor) added, “It’s a group activity, we read the Hizib with our fellow students during the visit” (personal communication, June 21, 2025), demonstrating how the ritual is embedded not only in personal practice but in educational and communal contexts as well.

These layered ritual expressions—recitation, remembrance, and localized liturgy—intensify the pilgrims' spiritual focus and foster a sense of sacred continuity. By using both Arabic and Sasak languages, participants also ground their transcendental experiences in cultural familiarity, enhancing emotional resonance and identity affirmation. These findings underscore that ritual language and acts are not peripheral, but essential, to how transcendental communication is constructed and internalized.

Table 2. Summary of Ritual Practices and Their Spiritual Effects

Ritual Practice	Description	Language Used	Spiritual Effect	Cultural Significance
Qur’anic Recitation	Reading Surah Yasin and other verses, individually or in groups	Arabic, Sasak	Spiritual cleansing, divine remembrance	Reinforces Islamic values through local language
Dhikr and Du’a	Collective remembrance and supplication led by religious figures	Arabic, Sasak	Inner peace, emotional sincerity, humility	Enhances community bonding and tradition
Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan	Communal recitation of Maulana Syaikh’s liturgical text at Pancor	Arabic, Sasak	Spiritual devotion, connection to heritage	Embodies religious and cultural identity continuity

The table 2 shows that Qur’anic recitation, dhikr and du’a, and reading Hizib Nahdlatul Wathan are central to Sasak pilgrimage rituals. Each practice supports spiritual focus and cultural identity—recitation fosters devotion, dhikr brings inner peace, and the Hizib connects pilgrims to their religious heritage. Together, they enhance the experience of transcendental communication.

4. Synthesis of Islamic Doctrine and Sasak Cultural Identity

The practice of grave pilgrimage among the Sasak people reflects a dynamic synthesis between Islamic doctrine and local cultural identity. Pilgrims often integrate foundational Islamic practices—such as tawassul, dhikr, and the recitation of the Qur’an—with indigenous customs including communal travel, traditional attire, and ritual offerings. This integration

fosters not only spiritual devotion but also cultural continuity. As one participant put it, “This is our way of combining what we believe as Muslims with our Sasak traditions” (P05, personal communication, June 20, 2025). Pilgrimage groups often move in clusters, bringing symbolic items, praying at specific times, and preserving oral traditions through collective practices that link generations together.

However, not all community members fully embrace this blend. Some expressed theological reservations regarding practices like *tawassul* and the intercessory role of saints. One male informant in Loang Baloq remarked, “I don’t visit graves for intercession—I go straight to God. Some people go overboard” (P12, personal communication, May 23, 2025). Similarly, a female informant in Ketak emphasized, “I believe praying should be directed only to Allah without intermediaries” (P13, personal communication, April 15, 2025). These dissenting voices underscore the diversity of belief within the Sasak Muslim community and demonstrate how interpretations of Islamic teachings vary even within culturally unified practices.

Overall, the coexistence of mainstream ritual devotion with personal theological interpretations illustrates the pluralistic nature of Islamic practice among the Sasak. It also affirms the adaptive capacity of local religious life, where tradition and orthodoxy are negotiated rather than in conflict.

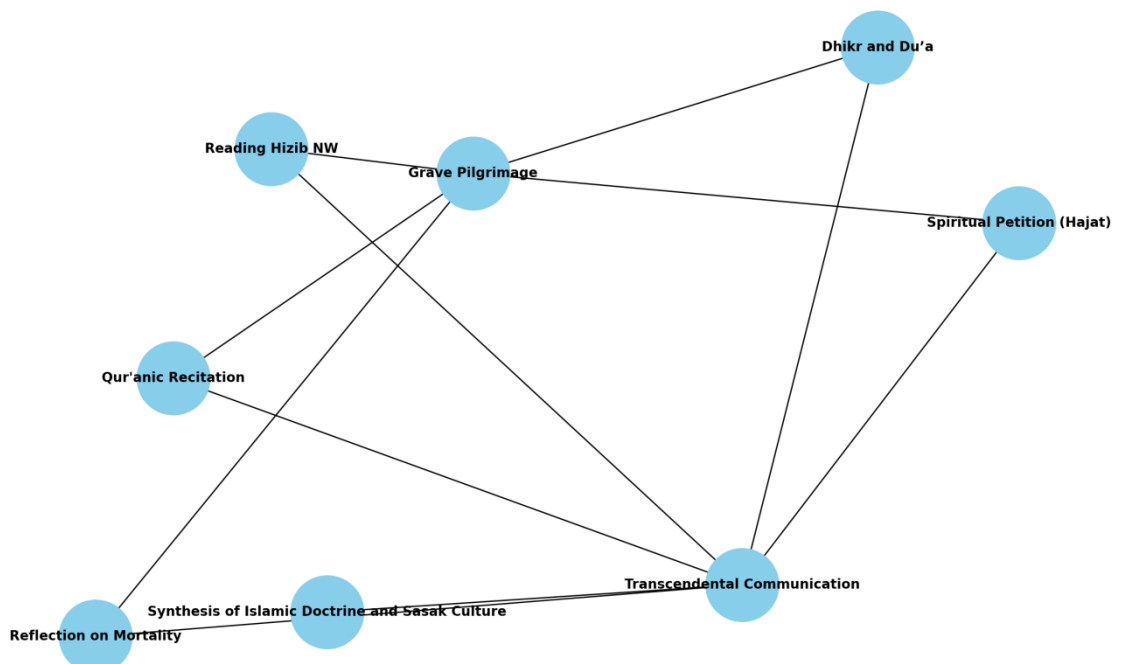


Figure 3: Thematic Flow of Pilgrimage Practice and Transcendental Communication

The Figure 3. illustrates the thematic flow from the practice of grave pilgrimage to transcendental communication and the integration of Islamic values with Sasak culture. Please let me know if you would like this diagram in a table format or if you wish to add any other elements.

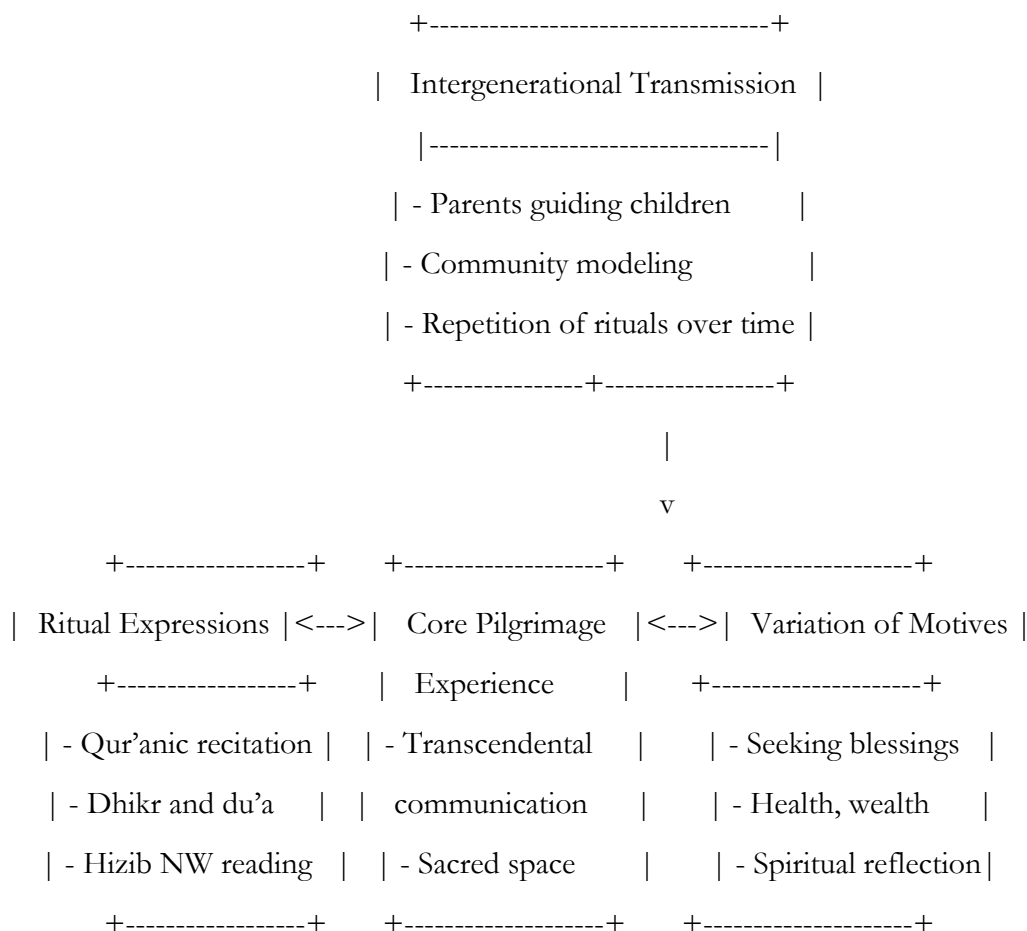


Figure 4 of Thematic Diagram: Intergenerational Transmission, Ritual Expressions, and Variation of Motives

The figure 4 of thematic diagram illustrates that intergenerational transmission serves as the foundational pillar in preserving the continuity of pilgrimage traditions among the Sasak people. It highlights how ritual expressions enhance spiritual experiences through symbolic and textual practices, such as Qur’anic recitations, dhikr, and the collective reading of Hizib. Additionally, the variation of motives reflects the diverse personal intentions—ranging from spiritual intercession to reflection on mortality—that drive participation in the pilgrimage. These three interconnected elements collectively enrich the meaning of grave

pilgrimage as a form of transcendental communication, integrating personal devotion, communal heritage, and cultural identity.

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

a. Conceptualizing Transcendental Communication

The Sasak community perceives grave pilgrimage not as the worship of the deceased, but as *wasilah*—a spiritual medium to approach Allah SWT. This theological orientation aligns with previous studies that underscore the metaphysical potency (*kesakten*) attributed to *wali* and *tuan guru* (Sylviana, 2019; Jamil et al., 2022). Participants from Loang Baloq emphasized the clarity of this theological distinction (P01, P03), while those from Ketak and Pancor articulated how the use of local language in prayer intensified their emotional and spiritual nearness to the Divine (P06, P07). This aligns with Nasri, (2024) and Raudloh et al., (2024), who argue that the Sasak language functions as a tool of spiritual intimacy, grounding transcendental experiences in cultural familiarity.

Theoretically, these findings support Sari's (2020) notion of transcendental communication as a metaphysical relationship expressed through symbolic acts and language. In the Sasak context, sacred sites such as Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor serve not only as physical locations but as spiritual conduits that connect the material and divine realms (Fauzan et al., 2022; Sobry & Purnamasari, 2021)

b. Motivations Behind Pilgrimage Practices

The motivations behind Sasak grave pilgrimage are interwoven with personal devotion, cultural heritage, and social continuity. Spiritually, the act of *ziarah* is driven by *hajat*—the belief that prayers at sacred graves are more efficacious (P02, P04, P05), which confirms Marwah's, (2021) assertion that pilgrimage fosters both vertical (*hablumminallah*) and horizontal (*hablumminannas*) dimensions of communication. Furthermore, grave visitation functions as *muraqabah*, a spiritual reflection on human mortality, fostering humility and moral clarity (P06, P07, P10).

Culturally, this study reinforces Nuruddin's, (2023) view that grave pilgrimage acts as a vehicle for intergenerational religious transmission. The practice is often carried out by families and guided by elders, ensuring the continuity of Sasak Islamic tradition. This reflects

how sacred rituals also serve as educational and social mechanisms that transmit values and reinforce group identity (Bentley, 2023).

c. **Ritual and Language as Catalysts for Spiritual Depth**

The ritual practices documented—including Qur’anic recitation, *dhikr*, and *du’a*—constitute the core medium through which transcendental communication is performed. The findings show that these acts foster inner peace, sincerity, and communal bonding (P01, P03, P04, P07), in line with Nasih (2025), who affirms that ritualized prayer constitutes a lived form of spiritual aspiration.

Significantly, the recitation of *Hizib Nabdlatul Wathan* at Pancor (P08, P09, P11) embodies not only devotional intensity but also institutional and ancestral loyalty. This supports Adiwibawa, (2021) and Hadi, (2023), who highlight the role of localized religious expressions—such as *tembang Sasak* and *pepaosan*—in reinforcing both faith and ethnic identity. Table 2 further illustrates how these ritual elements enhance transcendental experiences through their emotional, linguistic, and cultural dimensions.

d. **Integration of Islamic Doctrine and Sasak Cultural Identity**

One of the most critical insights from this study is the dynamic synthesis between Islamic teachings and Sasak cultural practices. Pilgrims engage in *tawassul*, *wirid*, and Qur’anic recitation while also incorporating local elements such as traditional dress, communal travel, and native chants (P05). This confirms Bentley, (2023) and Sobry & Purnamasari, (2021) findings on the co-existence of orthodoxy and locality in Indonesian Islamic practice.

However, theological plurality exists within the community. Some participants expressed reservations about intercessory practices, emphasizing direct supplication to Allah (P12, P13). These dissenting views highlight the negotiation of belief within a culturally cohesive yet doctrinally diverse Muslim society. Such diversity echoes the observations of Rosada & Wawansyah, (2019), who noted the internal variance in ritual adherence at the Loang Baloq site.

2. **Comparison with Previous Studies**

In comparison with other studies of Sasak pilgrimage (Rosada & Wawansyah, 2019; Mariadi et al., 2023), this research uniquely identifies grave pilgrimage as a layered communicative act—transcending mere ritual and integrating spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions. While previous works have focused primarily on the motivations behind

pilgrimage or ritual variation across locations, this study provides a deeper ethnographic insight into how transcendental communication operates within these traditions. Specifically, it highlights how acts such as *tawassul*, *wirid*, and Qur'anic recitation, when conducted in both Arabic and Sasak, become not only religious obligations but also culturally meaningful expressions of identity and intimacy.

The thematic model proposed in this research shows how motives such as spiritual petition (*hajjat*), reflection on mortality, and intergenerational value transmission form a holistic structure that supports both religious devotion and cultural sustainability. Unlike previous studies that treat ritual behaviors as isolated acts, this study emphasizes the symbolic convergence of ritual performance, vernacular language use, and sacred space as a dynamic form of transcendental communication. Furthermore, it extends the analytical framework by integrating communication theory and Islamic metaphysics, thus offering a more nuanced interpretation of *ziarah* as an emic discourse that bridges the material and spiritual realms.

3. Implications of the Findings

This study contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of Islamic spirituality. Theoretically, it expands the concept of transcendental communication by grounding it in ethnographic detail, offering a nuanced framework for interpreting ritual as both a symbolic and communicative act. It demonstrates that pilgrimage practices are not merely performative but are deeply embedded in meaning-making processes that connect the human and divine through culturally encoded symbols. As Al-Khalidi and Mahfudz (2022) emphasize, ritual is “a dialogical encounter between tradition, space, and belief that continually reconstructs sacred consciousness”, a view that aligns with the present study's findings among the Sasak community.

Practically, the findings hold implications for cultural preservation, religious tourism, and interfaith dialogue. Recognizing the cultural significance of vernacular rituals such as Sasak grave pilgrimage may inform heritage management policies and promote inclusive approaches to spiritual diversity in Indonesia. As noted by Santosa and Lazuardi (2023), sustainable religious tourism “requires the ethical integration of local cosmologies and practices into broader narratives of heritage, rather than their marginalization or commodification”. In this light, Sasak pilgrimage traditions should be protected not only for their religious value but also as vital repositories of indigenous knowledge and spiritual heritage.

Furthermore, this research serves as a valuable reference for scholars of anthropology, Islamic studies, and intercultural communication by showing how traditional practices continue to mediate sacred meaning in contemporary society. It underscores the importance of local religious expressions in fostering identity, spiritual continuity, and collective memory in a rapidly changing world.

4. Research Limitations

Despite its depth, this study has limitations. The sample size (25 informants) limits the generalizability of findings across all Sasak communities. Also, as an ethnographic study, it relies on self-reported data, which may be affected by memory bias or social desirability. The research was confined to three key sites—Loang Baloq, Ketak, and Pancor—potentially excluding other significant variations in ritual practice elsewhere on the island. Additionally, while spiritual and cultural dimensions were explored, economic or political influences on pilgrimage practices were beyond this study's scope. These limitations are consistent with broader critiques of localized ethnographic research, which often trade breadth for cultural specificity (Wirawan & Sutanto, 2021). Future research may consider comparative analysis between different ethnic Islamic communities in Indonesia or examine the impact of modernization and media on pilgrimage narratives and experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to examine the Sasak tradition of grave pilgrimage as a medium of transcendental communication. The study reveals that Sasak pilgrims do not worship the deceased but regard graves as sacred intermediaries (*wasilah*) to draw nearer to God. Their motivations are shaped by spiritual aspirations, personal needs (*hajat*), and social values, while ritual practices such as *wirid*, Qur'anic recitation, and communal prayers reinforce emotional depth and intergenerational transmission. The use of the Sasak language and traditional customs further integrates cultural identity into religious devotion. Importantly, the findings confirm that the practice of grave pilgrimage embodies a living synthesis between Islamic theology and local cultural expression, reinforcing collective memory, moral reflection, and religious pluralism.

While the study provides rich insights, it is not without limitations. The scope was confined to three pilgrimage sites and a limited number of participants, which may not capture the full diversity of practices across the broader Sasak population. Furthermore, the

study did not address economic or political influences on pilgrimage traditions, which could be relevant in broader sociocultural analysis. Future research is encouraged to investigate similar practices among other ethnic groups in Indonesia, explore generational shifts in pilgrimage participation, or analyze the effects of media and digitalization on traditional ritual practices. Such studies could deepen our understanding of how sacred traditions evolve and continue to mediate spiritual life in pluralistic and modern societies.

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