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ASJRAQ MAGAZINE 1925–1928: MINANGKABAU WOMEN AND MODERNITY

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the progression of Minangkabau women during the 20th century as reflected through modern education represented in the women's press. As historical research, this research uses the historical method, which includes heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The focus is on the progress and development of Minangkabau women as represented in Asjraq magazine, published in Padang, West Sumatra. Asjraq was one of the women's magazines actively advocating for the advancement and empowerment of Minangkabau women. The exploration of women's ideas consistently colored every issue of Asjraq, presenting concepts that contributed to redefining women's roles in an evolving modern world. These ideas also provoked reactions from Minangkabau society. Elements and expressions of modernity found in Asjraq include education, participation in associations and mass media, as well as artistic expression.

Keywords: Magazine; Women; Minangkabau; Modernity.

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-19th century, the Minangkabau people began to engage with Western education. This was encouraged by the Dutch colonial administration, which sought a class of literate and "civilized" *penghulu* (traditional leaders) to serve its colonial interests in governing Minangkabau or West Sumatra. With the opening of secular schools, Minangkabau society responded with enthusiasm (Grave, 2007, p. 151). The progress of the Minangkabau community cannot be separated from the development of education—both Islamic education (which had already been established earlier) and Western-style schooling (Samry & Omar, 2012, p. 25). Minangkabau society advanced further as modern education became increasingly accessible to women. Education also gave rise to a new social group within Minangkabau society: educated women. These women began to recognize the social injustices that restricted their rights and mobility, particularly in access to modern education. This growing awareness of gender inequality empowered women to advocate for the advancement of their community. Such efforts make the study of women's struggles especially compelling, as we can now observe their impact on contemporary society.

Minangkabau custom follows a matrilineal kinship system, where lineage is traced through the mother's line. As the bearers of lineage, women are entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding their clan's ancestral property. This responsibility is seen as a form of cultural protection and reverence for women. At the same time, women's perceived traits—gentleness, fragility, and beauty—were considered incompatible with laborious or public work, as such roles were deemed to contradict women's "natural" roles (Sofyan, 1989, pp. 3–4). As a result, Minangkabau women were generally denied opportunities to participate in activities outside their domestic environment, including attending school. Their lives were confined to the household, rice fields, farmlands, and local religious centers (*surau*).

Anthropologically, women's roles were characterized as natural, reproductive, domestic, passive, influenced, articulated through others, inferior, and objectified (Samry, 1998, p. 14). This portrayal positioned women primarily as mothers responsible for giving birth, nurturing, and

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educating children, with their activities limited to the domestic sphere. In contrast, men in Minangkabau culture were seen as cultural subjects—active, public leaders who operated beyond the household (Samry, 1998, p. 14). However, this contrast does not imply that women were marginalized within Minangkabau customs. Men and women had distinct but complementary roles: women as *bundo kanduang* (literally 'biological mother', refers to the matriarchal figure responsible for managing clan inheritance and cultural values), and men as mamak (maternal uncles) and *urang sumando* (men who marry into a Minangkabau family but are considered outsiders). In their natal clans, men held a high position as mamak, while in their wives' families, they were *urang sumando*, outsiders.

Modernization in the Dutch East Indies accelerated with the introduction of Western education by the colonial government. This education was a key driver of modernity, including for women in Minangkabau. Initially, the colonial government's educational agenda aimed to produce low-level bureaucrats and combat illiteracy (Abdullah, 2018, p. 14; Grave, 2007, p. 151). In this early phase, only boys were permitted to attend school. Girls were excluded on the grounds that they did not need education, as their expected roles were confined to household duties. This viewpoint led to the widespread denial of schooling for girls in Minangkabau.

As education developed and a local educated elite emerged, the number of formal schools established by the Dutch in West Sumatra—such as Kweekschool, Normal School, and Volkschool—grew significantly. The expansion of education also spurred the establishment of private schools, which emerged in response to the rising demand for education. In Padang alone, there were 23 private schools operating without Dutch government support (Grave, 2007, p. 273). Simultaneously, religious centers (*surau*) evolved into semi-secular schools or Islamic schools with expanded curricula incorporating Malay, Arabic, and Latin (Grave, 2007, p. 273). During this period, Minangkabau women gradually gained permission to attend both Dutch-run schools and indigenous institutions. Nevertheless, not all women received access to education. Those who did benefit from modern education became advocates for their peers, fighting especially for equal access to education.

Education also ignited a spirit of progress among women. This was evident in the increasing number of Minangkabau women participating in organizations, social movements (Ilma & Andoni, 2024, p. 5), and the women's press. The emergence of the women's press was a manifestation of the modernization experienced by Minangkabau women during that time. Through the press, women could openly voice the concerns they had long endured. The constraints imposed on their lives became central topics in newspapers and women's magazines. The first publication that addressed women's issues in Minangkabau was *Soenting Melajoe*, first published in 1912. It was initiated by Datuk Soetan Maharadja as part of his efforts to elevate the status of women. *Soenting Melajoe* was managed entirely by women, from editors to contributors. Its establishment marked the beginning of a wave of female-led publications in Minangkabau, including *Soeara Perempoean*, *Asjraq* (1925), *Medan Poetri* (1933), and *Soeara Kaoem Iboe Soematra* (1925).

Asjraq was a monthly magazine published by a coalition of women's organizations that began in January 1925 in Padang. These organizations included the Teachers' Association (*Perserikatan Guru-Guru*), the Women's Association (*Perserikatan Kaoem Iboe*), *Vrouwenbond*, *Meisjesvereeniging*, and *Meisjesbond*. Although it was produced by a specific women's alliance, *Asjraq* was distributed publicly and intended to reach a broad readership. Its mission was to attain emancipation for Minangkabau and Sumatran women as a whole. In the context of the magazine, emancipation referred to freedom of thought and movement. This notion emerged alongside the rise of educated women in Minangkabau who recognized the cultural constraints imposed upon them, particularly regarding education and personal liberty. Thus, *Asjraq* served as a platform for challenging traditional customs that had long restricted women's lives.

This study focuses on analyzing the ideas of female modernity expressed in *Asjraq* between 1925 and 1928. The magazine featured various sections including poetry, education, teaching, folklore, association news, Malay literature, general interest, and more. One of its articles stated, "The work for the nation and country is largely borne by women with good character and

knowledge." This quote was intended to encourage women to cultivate both morality and knowledge. Through the magazine's content, we can trace the intellectual development of Minangkabau women during the Dutch colonial era.

The aim of this article is to fill a gap in existing studies on Minangkabau women and the development of the women's press in the region. Prior literature includes works by Idris Hakimy (1978), Yunita Sofyan (1989), Jeffrey Hadler (2010), Wannofri Samry (1998), Ahmad Adam (2012), Wannofri Samry and Rahilah Omar (2012), Yessy Hermawati (2015), Elizabeth E. Grave (2017), Taufik Abdullah (2018), Silfia Hanani (2018), and Ema P. Agustiningsih (2019). Idris Hakimy's *Buku Pegangan Bundo Kanduang* discusses the Minangkabau matriarchal figure, her virtues, responsibilities, and societal restrictions—topics also covered by Sofyan and Hermawati. Hadler addresses the matrilineal system itself, while Grave and Abdullah both explore Minangkabau's transformation through Western education. However, no study has focused specifically on *Asjraq* and the concept of female modernity within it. Therefore, this article seeks to examine the history and evolution of *Asjraq* magazine and the modernist ideas it disseminated.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a historical method, which includes four stages: heuristics (source collection), source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. During the heuristic phase, both primary and secondary sources were collected. Primary sources include issues of *Asjraq* magazine, period photographs, and contemporaneous news reports. Primary sources include 36 editions of *Asjraq* magazine from 1925 to 1928, period photographs, and contemporaneous news reports. Secondary sources used in this study consist of scholarly journal articles, media writings, and books that discuss the women's press in Minangkabau during the colonial period. These materials were gathered from the library of the Faculty of Humanities at Andalas University, the main university library, the West Sumatra Regional Library, PDIKM (Minangkabau Culture Documentation and Information Center), and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia (PNRI) in Jakarta.

All primary and secondary sources were examined critically and verified to ensure the validity of the information. The third stage involved interpretation, which included analyzing historical facts to identify their relationships and causality, allowing for a better understanding of how female modernity evolved. The final step of the historical method is historiography, where the interpreted and contextualized facts are written in a narrative form to convey the findings of this historical inquiry into the Minangkabau women's press.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Women's Press and Gender Reality in Minangkabau

West Sumatra is known for its dynamic press landscape, which has flourished since the late 19th century and continues to this day. The history of the local press began with the publication of Dutch-language newspapers, starting in 1859 with *Padangsch Nieuws- en Advertentieblad*, later renamed *Sumatra Courant* in 1862. The emergence of Malay-language newspapers in West Sumatra began with *Bintang Timoer*, launched in 1864 by van Zadelhoff and Fabritius. This milestone spurred the publication of other Malay-language newspapers in the region, including *Bentara Melajoe* (1877), *Palita Ketjil* (1886), *Pertja Barat* (1890), *Sinar Menang-Kabau* (1894), and *Tjahaja-Sumatra* (1897) (Adam, 2012, p. 34). The success of 19th-century newspaper publishing led to even greater proliferation in the 20th century. Early 20th-century publications included *Insulinde* (1902), *Wasir Hindia* (1903), *Alam Minangkabau* (1904), *Taman Hindia* (1904), and *Sinar Sumatra* (1905) (Adam, 2012, pp. 33–34).

The growth of the Malay-language press also paved the way for the emergence of women's newspapers in Minangkabau. One of the most notable signs of female modernity in early 20th-century Minangkabau society was the presence of women's press and their participation in mass media. The existence of newspapers and magazines served as indicators of women's growing intellectual engagement (Hanani, 2018, p. 78). *Soenting Melajoe*, published from 1912 to 1921 in

Padang, was among the earliest examples. It was pioneered by Rohana Kudus and Datuk Sutan Maharadja, with Zubaidah Ratna Djuwita serving as editor (Abdullah, 2007, p. 217; Djaja, 1980, pp. 47–48).

Rohana Kudus, deeply concerned about the stagnation of her fellow women, undertook efforts to advance their condition by establishing associations, founding schools, and launching newspapers. Through print media, her voice could reach and resonate with thousands (Djaja, 1980, p. 47). This vision inspired the founding of *Soenting Melajoe* as a platform for women. In its pages, Rohana Kudus wrote about social issues, politics, domestic affairs, and women's fashion (Djaja, 1980, p. 52).

The progressive articles published in *Soenting Melajoe* quickly drew attention from readers across West Sumatra. Through these writings, Minangkabau women began absorbing new ideas and information, developing an awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and questioning their position and roles in society (Yati, 2020, pp. 153–154). As a result, *Soenting Melajoe* became a catalyst for the rise of other women's newspapers and magazines in the region. Among them were *Soeara Perempoean* (1918), *Soeara Poetri*, *Djauharah* (1923), *Asjraq* (1925), *Soeara Kaoem Iboe Soematra* (1929), *Soeara Kaoem Iboe Semoeanja* (1939), *Medan Poetri* (1933), and *Menara Poetri* (1938) (Adam, 2012, pp. 53–54).

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Minangkabau women had begun to cultivate a more critical awareness of their societal roles and status (Ilma & Andoni, 2024, p. 4). In line with this awakening, the women's press in Minangkabau provided a platform for expressing their concerns about their place in society and the broader development of the community. Women used print media as a campaign tool to demand liberation from customary constraints that limited their freedom.

In Minangkabau's matrilineal kinship system, a person's lineage is traced through the mother, granting women an honored and esteemed position in local culture. This close association between women and the *rumah gadang* (traditional Minangkabau house) signifies their integral role in Minangkabau tradition. In fact, women are regarded as the symbolic keyholders of the *rumah gadang* (Samry & Omar, 2012, p. 27). As such, women and the *rumah gadang* are considered inseparable representations of Minangkabau's matrilineal heritage. The symbolic figure of *bundo kanduang* embodies this tradition. While literally meaning "biological mother," *bundo kanduang* carries multiple connotations. It refers to a female leader who emerges naturally among women—recognized for her charisma, leadership, and wisdom (Hermawati, 2015, p. 68).

The role of women in Minangkabau intersects with various societal domains: economic continuity, inheritance, social cohesion, and the identity of a *nagari* (village) (Samry, 1998, p. 15). In customary law, women not only safeguard communal property (*harta pusaka*) but also have the right to own it—unlike men, who are merely tasked with managing it (Navis, 1984, p. 159). A man's authority over inherited property stems from his role as a *mamak*, or maternal uncle, who bears responsibility for the welfare of his nieces and nephews (Grave, 2007, p. 14). This responsibility includes not only protection, but also the provision of education, food, and basic needs. As such, decisions regarding *rumah gadang* and communal property must be made by the *mamak*. Consequently, women are expected to follow his direction.

The roles of men and women in Minangkabau can be seen through this dichotomy: women are situated in the domestic realm of the *rumah gadang*, nurturing and educating children, following prescribed roles, and therefore occupying a passive and objectified position in the cultural framework. In contrast, men are cultural subjects—dominant, powerful, and superior—holding primary roles in public life (Samry, 1998, p. 14). The image of *bundo kanduang* as a female leader is often seen merely as a symbolic representation of Minangkabau womanhood. Although women's roles are acknowledged and elevated in theory, this does not necessarily translate into power in the public sphere. In practice, authority and control remain in the hands of men. The only domain where women wield influence is within the domestic setting. Still, this gendered distribution of roles does not mean that Minangkabau women are marginalized in society (Samry, 1998, p. 16).

Rather, men and women in Minangkabau hold distinct roles: women as *bundo kanduang* and men as *mamak* or *urang sumando*. The role of *bundo kanduang* confines women largely to the domestic environment of the *rumah gadang*, thereby limiting their involvement in public life. This restriction is rooted in the belief that women's participation in activities beyond the home contradicts their natural roles. As a result, Minangkabau women were historically excluded from modern education.

It is this lived reality—where women's lives were tightly constrained by custom and where they had little control over their futures—that Minangkabau women voiced in various newspapers and magazines. Their mobility was confined to the domestic space, preventing them from pursuing education or entering the public sphere. Through these media, they articulated ideas and visions for progress. Minangkabau women used their writings to call on customary leaders and society at large to recognize and address the actual conditions they faced.

Education for Minangkabau Women

The modernization and social progress experienced by Minangkabau society in the 20th century cannot be separated from the impact of both Western and Islamic education. The first introduction of Western education in Minangkabau is credited to C.P.C. Steinmetz, the Resident of West Padang from 1837 to 1848. He founded the first and most successful secular school in Minangkabau, known as the *Sekolah Nagari* (State School) in West Padang, located in the interior highlands in the 1840s (Grave, 2007, p. 153). This initiative was Steinmetz's personal project, with the initial goal of producing "good citizens" capable of performing certain administrative and societal roles (Grave, 2007, p. 153). The *Sekolah Nagari* model later served as the prototype for other schools across West Sumatra up until the early 1870s. The curriculum was divided into four levels: basic reading at the lowest level, reading and writing in the third class, basic arithmetic in the second class, and essay writing, bookkeeping, geography, and advanced arithmetic in the top class (Grave, 2007, p. 155). These schools generally used the Malay as instruction language.

The expansion of education in Minangkabau accelerated by the end of the 19th century, coinciding with the Dutch colonial administration's Ethical Policy. This growth was marked by the increasing number of schools established for indigenous students. In 1913, there were 111 primary schools, and by 1915, that number had risen to 358 (Abdullah, 2018, pp. 14–15). In 1914, Dutch-Indigenous schools, known as *Hollandsch-Inlandsche School* (HIS), were founded in Padang and Bukittinggi. The establishment of these schools is regarded as a turning point in the educational history of the Dutch East Indies (Abdullah, 2021, p. 57).

Although Minangkabau society had a strong interest in education, women were still largely excluded from participating. Obstacles to women's advancement came not only from within Minangkabau society but also from the Dutch colonial government. Minangkabau girls were denied equal access to education compared to boys. This restriction was often justified as a measure to protect girls from the outside world. Meanwhile, traditional leaders and community members commonly believed that educating girls was unnecessary, since women were expected to marry and manage domestic affairs.

Before the 20th century, the education that Minangkabau women received was mostly limited to family-based and religious instruction at the *surau* (Islamic prayer and learning center). Within the family, girls were taught household skills and other domestic responsibilities as preparation for marriage. In addition, they were educated about Minangkabau customs and traditions, usually by their mothers, maternal uncles (*mamak*), or fathers. This customary education focused on traditional values and the duties expected of women in Minangkabau society. For religious instruction, besides learning from their family members, girls also studied at the *surau*, usually after dawn (*subuh*) and evening (*maghrib*) prayers. They were also taught practical skills such as weaving and sewing—both to fill their time productively and to help contribute to the household income.

According to traditional norms and local beliefs, this level of education was considered sufficient for Minangkabau women. In fact, among conservative segments of society, sending girls to school was viewed as leading them down a dangerous path. Some families believed that enrolling a daughter in school was akin to leading her into ruin (Alim, 1936, p. 31). While boys were already attending secular schools established by Dutch officials in West Sumatra and gaining considerable knowledge, many Minangkabau girls remained illiterate and unskilled in basic arithmetic. Thus, despite the progress made under the Ethical Policy, these changes did not initially extend to women. Neither the Dutch colonial government nor Minangkabau society at large permitted women to attend school.

The progress of Minangkabau women in education cannot be discussed without acknowledging the contributions of Datuk Soetan Maharadja, who boldly advocated for women's advancement and questioned restrictive traditions (Samry, 2020, p. 26). His commitment to women's emancipation included the founding of a weaving school in Padang in 1909. Datuk Soetan Maharadja believed that education was key to helping women reclaim their elevated status as enshrined in tradition. The goal of the weaving school was not only to teach women how to weave properly but also to train them to become instructors for future weaving schools. By 1915, the school had already produced many skilled students who created various items such as clothing and table linens (Samry, 2020, p. 27).

The establishment of the weaving school attracted attention from various sectors. Many began to recognize the educational disparity experienced by Minangkabau women, particularly in terms of access and opportunity. Consequently, calls for expanding formal education for girls began to emerge from several local leaders. In parallel, during the early 20th century, the Dutch colonial government gradually began to revise its policies to allow women to participate in formal education. In 1907, a girl named Sjarifah became the first female student admitted to the *Kweekschool* in Fort de Kock (now Bukittinggi) (Hadler, 2010, p. 158). Sjarifah was the daughter of Nawawi, a teacher at the school.

The modernity brought about by education transformed many aspects of Minangkabau women's lives. No longer confined solely to domestic roles, women increasingly gained space in the public sphere. Education expanded their functions beyond those prescribed by custom (Angraini, 2021, p. 2). Through modern schooling—often provided by local Minangkabau leaders—women experienced significant shifts in perspective. They became aware of the systemic inequalities embedded within customary practices. Education empowered them to critique these injustices and to view societal problems from new angles. One way in which women voiced their critiques of restrictive traditions was through the press.

Asjraq Magazine and the Modernity of Minangkabau Women

Asjraq was a women's magazine published in Padang between January 1925 and 1928. Its foundational principle, as stated in the opening pages of the magazine, was to achieve emancipation for women. The magazine's establishment was supported by R. Effendi, M. Rasjid Manggis, and Abisin Abbas. It was envisioned as a bridge to facilitate the progress of women in Minangkabau and across Sumatra. *Asjraq* primarily targeted Minangkabau women, particularly those residing in West Sumatra. Its publication during the Dutch colonial era made it a significant focus of attention across various social circles. The magazine's articles boldly criticized the injustices faced by Minangkabau women and urged them to liberate themselves from their disadvantaged conditions (Hanani, 2018). As a result, *Asjraq* garnered a wide readership.

Asjraq featured a variety of columns written by Minangkabau women, including *Senggama Poestaka Melajoe*, *Boeah Toetoer*, *Warta Perkoempoelan*, *Peladjaran*, *Pendidikan dan Pengetahoean*, and *Serba Jenis*. These sections included poetry, serialized stories, cooking recipes, advertisements, educational content, and news related to the women's organizations supporting the magazine. These organizations included associations that held meetings with other women's groups across West Sumatra. Through these diverse articles, one can observe the development and perspectives of Minangkabau women during this transformative period.

Both the organization SKIS (*Serikat Kaoem Iboe Soematra*) and the *Asjraq* magazine worked in tandem to campaign for the liberation and advancement of Minangkabau women. Through this platform, one can identify clear expressions of modernity among Minangkabau women—especially in their increasing participation in public life. These expressions include advocacy for education, national consciousness, organizational involvement, media engagement, and artistic expression.

1. The Idea of Education for Women

The importance of education—especially for women—was a recurring theme in *Asjraq* magazine. One notable example is the article titled *"Should Women Be Given Knowledge?"* by Sjaf, which outlines why women must be educated. According to the article, women are the ones who remain in the *rumah gadang* and are constantly engaged with family members of all ages. For this reason, women need to possess knowledge. Without education, who will teach the children, care for the household, and enrich the domestic space? Historically, Minangkabau women have often acted merely according to habit, without understanding whether such practices were right or wrong. Therefore, education is essential to help them improve their lives and empower them to advance with the times.

In addition to promoting educational ideals through writing, the editorial team and leadership of *Asjraq* were also involved in establishing schools for women. One example is the *Vrouwenbond* in Payakumbuh, which founded a handicraft school for young women and housewives. This school was led by Sjamsoe, the *Asjraq* regional editor for Payakumbuh, and it had approximately 80 students. Besides teaching handicrafts, the school also provided lessons in literacy, arithmetic, and religious knowledge.

> "The association (Vrouwenbond) has also established a handicraft school for young girls, led by Miss Sjamsoe, the president, with about 80 students. Members who are not yet literate are taught by their leader, while Mr. Malin Moeda and Mr. Rasoel Hamidi serve as instructors guiding them toward Islamic knowledge." (Asjraq, 1925, p. 85)

The growing access to education for Minangkabau women signaled that they had begun to experience one of the defining aspects of modernity. Although not all Minangkabau women were allowed to attend Dutch schools, the emergence of local, community-founded institutions and schools specifically for women made education accessible to those from lower social classes as well. These women were therefore also able to participate in their community's broader progress. The education they received extended beyond domestic skills and handicrafts; it also encompassed language, arithmetic, geography, history, natural sciences, and more.

2. National Consciousness

One of the articles in *Asjraq* that reflects a sense of national consciousness is titled "Indonesia *and Its History"*, written by Roselty. In this piece, Roselty discusses the identity of colonial rulers, the Western nations that colonized Indonesia, and the native peoples (*bumiputra*), while emphasizing the importance of knowing one's own national history. Knowledge, she argues, allows the *bumiputra* to become aware of their true national condition.

> "Looking at Indonesia, we can see from external behaviors that not only is there no mention of love for the homeland, but our own people still revere foreigners and harshly disparage their fellow countrymen." (Asjraq, 1927, p. 1)

In this quote, Roselty criticizes *bumiputra* (indigineous) who fail to support their nation and instead glorify the colonizers. She believes this is largely due to their dependence on jobs under the Dutch, from which they benefit personally. Roselty argues that this happens because they lack a sense of nationalism and are easily enticed by the material comforts offered by colonial rule.

> "The youth of today must be educated with the ideals and narratives of nationalism. And mothers must begin nurturing their children from the cradle in this way, so their hearts may be filled with the voices of their nation's leaders and its history. In doing so, children will be raised to harbor seeds of love for their country, which will grow strong and deep within their hearts." (Asjraq, 1927, p. 1)

Roselty urges that young people must be taught national ideals and historical knowledge to foster a strong sense of patriotism. She emphasizes that this education should begin at home, especially with mothers, who serve as a child's first teacher. National consciousness must be instilled early in life so that, as they grow, children will have a deep and resilient love for their homeland and be prepared to defend it from foreign domination.

3. Organizations and Associations

Education awakened Minangkabau women to actively participate in efforts to improve the status of their gender (Ilma & Andoni, 2024, pp. 4–5). One of the ways this manifested was through their involvement in organizations—not merely as passive members but as active leaders and decision-makers. Their participation reflected their commitment to enacting change (Agustiningsih, 2019, p. 263).

Minangkabau women also founded various associations that eventually evolved into formal women's organizations. These organizations arose from a growing awareness among educated Minangkabau women of their potential social and political roles. One early example was the *Vereeniging Kerajinan Amai Setia*, pioneered by Rohana Kudus and established on February 11, 1911. It focused on empowering women through education and vocational training (Agustiningsih, 2019, p. 270).

Asjraq magazine was a product of collaboration among several women's associations in West Sumatra, including the Teachers' Association (*Perserikatan Guru-Guru*) in Padang Panjang, the Women's Association (*Perserikatan Kaoem Iboe*) in Bukittinggi, *Vrouwenbond* in Payakumbuh, and *Meisjesvereeniging* in Padang. These associations united under a single umbrella organization called *Serikat Kaoem Iboe Soematra* (SKIS). The primary aim of SKIS was to promote the advancement of women across Sumatra, with a focus on education, economic empowerment, and social welfare. The organization consistently advocated for raising awareness among Minangkabau women about the importance of education as a foundation for engaging in modern society. This was reflected in various SKIS activities and in *Asjraq* articles, particularly those discussing education for women. Notable examples include "*Rentjana tentang Pendidikan*" (*Plan for Education*) by Melati and "Ketjerdasan" (*Intelligence*) by S.D. Watt.

> "This association is called P.P.D, short for Pemuda Perintis Djalan—a tennis club originally intended for native women only. Since the city already had four similar clubs for native men, and given that there were not yet enough female members, the doors were opened to male participants." (Asjraq, 1927, p. 227)

In addition to organizations focused on women's advancement and national liberation, there were also groups formed around shared interests and hobbies, such as tennis. One example is the *Pemuda Perintis Djalan* (P.P.D.) club in Padang, initially intended for female members. However, due to the limited number of women participating in tennis at the time, the club also welcomed male members.

4. Newspapers and Magazines

As Minangkabau women gradually gained access to public spaces in the early 20th century, their roles and influence began to expand. One key arena where this transformation became evident was in the realm of the press and mass media. The emergence of newspapers and magazines that focused on women's progress in West Sumatra offered a vital platform for women to share their voices. Through the press, they published writings that championed the

advancement of their gender, leading to the rise of a new generation of female journalists in the region.

The involvement of Minangkabau women in *Asjraq* magazine exemplified this progress. These women were not only readers but also contributors—submitting their essays, ideas, and literary works for publication. For example, the column *Senggama Poestaka Melajoe* featured short stories written by a contributor named "Si Tjantik." Her stories often used traditional Minangkabau settings and customs to resonate with local readers, while subtly criticizing the restrictive cultural norms faced by women at the time.

> "Ah, if only you knew how deeply Mariam's heart burned when she was to be married—how she spent days and nights soaking her pillow with tears, mourning her bed, her eyes sinking deeper each day, how bitterly she choked down her meals... If Anwar only knew a fraction of what Mariam suffered, he would never have accused her of betrayal. Do you not know, Anwar, that Mariam was forced into marriage by her parents, by custom?" (Asjraq, 1925, p. 89)

This excerpt reveals how arranged marriages, conducted by parental and *mamak* authority, were often portrayed as acts of honor and responsibility. Yet, for the women involved—like Mariam—they were sources of immense suffering. Si Tjantik's story served as a veiled protest against the coercive marital customs of the time. In addition to short stories, *Asjraq* also published serialized fiction such as "*Djoerang Jang Tiada Dapat di Djembatani*" (*The Abyss That Cannot Be Bridged*) by Rineff, and "*Manakah Tjinta jang Sebenarnja*!" (*Which Love Is True?*) by Roselty. The magazine also featured a column called *Boeah Toetoer*, offering advice for Minangkabau women. One of Sjaf's reflections read:

> "No matter how wicked a person may seem, they can always be won over by sincere, pure, and noble love." (Asjraq, 1925, p. 171)

The magazine also included poetry expressing sorrow and longing. One such piece, titled "*Sebatang Kara*" (*Alone*) by Lenggoendi Lajoer, portrayed the loneliness of someone abandoned by a loved one. In *Asjraq*, Minangkabau women could fully express their thoughts—not only through advice, fiction, and poetry, but also by sharing cooking recipes, ranging from traditional Minangkabau dishes to European cuisine.

The rise and popularity of *Asjraq* within Minangkabau society was a clear manifestation of female modernity. The press and media were powerful tools of modernization, and by participating in them, Minangkabau women engaged directly with modern life. Their contributions were not limited to writing—many were actively involved in managing and developing the magazine. Among the women who played key roles in *Asjraq* were Sjarifah Nawawi, Ramoeinas, Zoebaidah, Noerani, Aisjah, Ratna, Sjafiah, and others.

5. Talent and Artistic Expression

One of the positive outcomes of modernity for Minangkabau women was the freedom to express their creative talents. These expressions took many forms—narration, acting, singing, or through traditional crafts such as crocheting, embroidery, and needlework. While the opportunities were still somewhat limited, they nonetheless marked significant progress in the cultural and social lives of Minangkabau women.

For instance, *Meisjes Normaalschool* in Padang Panjang organized a graduation ceremony that showcased the students' talents and artistic skills. Female students performed in a variety of ways—singing, dancing, playing *keroncong* music, participating in fashion shows, and acting in stage dramas. These performances were warmly welcomed by both progressive-minded Minangkabau women and supporters of women's advancement.

In addition, the SKIS organization and *Asjraq* magazine, through their youth wing *Nawa Putri*, frequently organized exhibitions to present women's handcrafted works. These displays included crocheting, embroidery, and other needle arts. Beyond showcasing the

artistic skills of Minangkabau women, these exhibitions also provided financial support—crafts sold during these events generated additional income for both SKIS and *Asjraq*.

Minangkabau Society's Response to Women's Advancement

The achievements of Minangkabau women in pursuing modernity—as reflected in *Asjraq* magazine—were not without criticism. One notable critique directed at SKIS concerned its organization of the theatrical performance *Sabai Nan Aluih*.

> "Writer A.A expressed his regret that the performance featured only women, claiming the girls lacked the proper skills in theater. He criticized the stage props as distracting, saying they were borrowed from a traditional opera troupe. According to him, the curtains and other decorations were worn out, making the play resemble a comedic opera. He harshly criticized the girls who acted in the play. This was the tone of the scathing review published in the Dutch-language newspaper." (Asjraq, 1928, p. 21)

In response, *Asjraq* magazine published a rebuttal in its June–July 1928 issue, under the *Reta-Reta* column. The editorial, written by "N," defended the women's efforts and responded firmly to A.A.'s criticisms.

> "SKIS does not yet have a formal theater troupe, nor does it have members specifically trained in the theatrical arts. Forming a complete and well-organized troupe is no easy task. SKIS is fully aware of these challenges." (Asjraq, 1928, p. 22)

Through this rebuttal, the editorial emphasized that A.A.'s criticisms lacked clarity and were unjustified attacks on the sincere efforts of Minangkabau women. The reaction from A.A. may be interpreted as a reflection of society's general unpreparedness—or even shock—at seeing women stepping into public and cultural arenas. In this light, the critique was part of a broader resistance to the growing momentum of women's progress in Minangkabau.

CONCLUSION

In Minangkabau, the emergence and development of female modernity occurred alongside the rise of an educated elite of women who gained access to knowledge through Western-style education. This education reshaped women's perceptions of their roles and positions within a society undergoing rapid transformation. Minangkabau women became aware of the constraints imposed by customary law, particularly on their mobility and public participation. At the same time, the press and mass media were flourishing in Minangkabau, creating opportunities for the emergence of a women's press. This became a crucial medium through which Minangkabau women could campaign for progress and empowerment.

Modernization, driven by Western education and the women's press, brought significant changes to women's lives. Publications such as Asjraq (1925–1928) served as platforms for voicing progressive ideas about education, nationalism, and women's rights to public participation. Through access to knowledge and print media, Minangkabau women not only gained intellectual empowerment but also the courage to critique systemic inequality embedded in tradition and to advocate for a more prominent role in public life. This study significantly contributes to understanding women's roles in colonial-era Indonesia, providing insights into how print media influenced societal transformations. This research is supported by a research grant from the LPPM Andalas University Undergraduate Thesis Research Program (PSS), contract number 275/UN16.19/PT.01.03/PSS/2024. We are very grateful for the financial support provided.

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