

IMPLICATIONS AND REINTERPRETATION OF THE *HAK MEULAKEE* TRADITION FOR THE MUSLIM GENERATION IN BANDA ACEH

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Abstract

The *Hak Meulakee* tradition is an initial engagement ceremony within the marriage customs of Banda Aceh. This study examines its form and meaning in Gampong Pango Deah, where the practice includes the unique presentation of half a mayam of gold, outside the mahar, from the groom's family to the bride's family through village officials. Using a socio-legal qualitative method through interviews with youths, village officials, and the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama of Banda Aceh, the study finds that *Hak Meulakee* is regarded as part of the living law, adhered to despite the absence of formal regulation. It also serves to assist bride's families with limited financial capacity in preparing wedding receptions. The findings reveal three key implications. First, as customary law, the tradition functions as a moral norm within the community. Second, socially, it may create burdens for young people due to rising gold prices, economic readiness, and differences in customary practices, leading some to postpone marriage or adjust the mahar. Third, culturally, it preserves family honor and identity but may cause cultural friction for those from outside the village. The study highlights the need for reinterpretation by emphasizing respect, flexibility, and alignment with Islamic principles that promote ease in marriage.

Keywords: Hak Meulakee; Reinterpretation; Acehese Customary Law; Muslim Generation

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Acehese society is characterized by a distinctive customary structure rich in symbolic meaning. The enactment of Qanun Aceh Number 09 of 2008 on the Development of Customary Practices provides a foundation for implementing and preserving long-standing traditions, including those related to marriage. One of the early processes that continues to be maintained is the *Meulakee* tradition, a formal visit by the groom's family to express the intention of proposing and to initiate communication between families. In general Acehese practice, this process is carried out through customary intermediaries and accompanied by the presentation of symbolic gifts as a gesture of respect, reflecting the values of politeness and social etiquette in Aceh.

If the proposal is accepted, the next step is determining the amount of *mahar* to be given. The *mahar* is typically divided into a small portion as a *tanda jadi* (a sign of commitment) given during the engagement ceremony, while the larger portion is given at the marriage contract. If the engagement is broken, certain consequences apply: if the termination is caused by the groom, the *tanda jadi* is considered a gift to the bride (MAA,

2013). Among Acehese communities, the *mahar* is generally given in the form of gold measured in *mayam*, with one *mayam* equivalent to 3.3 grams of gold. The amount varies across regions, ranging from a dozen to several dozen *mayam* (Zainuddin, 2022, p. 3), not including additional payments such as *uang hangus* or wedding expenses.

Similarly, in the local context of Gampong Pango Deah, Banda Aceh, this study identifies the presence of a distinctive tradition. As part of the customary process, the groom's family presents half a *mayam* of gold (± 1.665 grams) to the bride's family through village officials, a practice known as *Hak Meulakee*. For the local community, this gold is not viewed as an additional *mahar* but as a gesture of customary respect symbolizing seriousness and good etiquette in establishing relations between families.

This practice is noteworthy for further study because today's younger generation lives in an increasingly modern, practical, and rational social environment. Every society undergoes change, and such change is a normal social phenomenon. Consequently, human needs and perspectives evolve (Novita Sari, 2018, p. 34). The shifting perspectives of contemporary Muslim youth influence how they assess, understand, and carry out this tradition. Interviews with customary leaders reveal that some young people still accept *Hak Meulakee* as an important cultural heritage, while others question its relevance in light of current socio-economic conditions and contemporary religious life.

Although *Hak Meulakee* has long been part of Acehese marriage traditions, rapid social developments and intergenerational shifts have created new dynamics in how the tradition is perceived and practiced. The younger Muslim generation in Banda Aceh now lives in an environment shaped by educational mobility, technological advancement, and more egalitarian family communication. These conditions lead many not to follow traditions exactly as practiced by earlier generations. This change creates intergenerational tension: older generations uphold values of patience and gradual process, whereas younger generations operate with a logic of speed and instant results (Bustamam Ahmad, 2025). These differences highlight the need to examine how *Hak Meulakee* is perceived today, how it is implemented in practice, and how customary and religious values are negotiated within contemporary Muslim families.

Based on this background, the study focuses on:

1. How the form and meaning of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition are understood within Banda Aceh society;
2. The customary, social, and cultural implications of the practice for the Muslim generation in Banda Aceh;
3. How the tradition can be reinterpreted to align with the dynamics of modern Muslim life.

METHOD

This study employs a socio-legal qualitative approach, which examines customary traditions not only from their normative aspects but also from the socio-cultural practices that develop within the community (Hamida, 2022). This approach is appropriate because the *Hak Meulakee* tradition functions as a living customary norm (*living law*) and carries legal, social, cultural, and religious implications for the Muslim generation in Banda Aceh. Several studies have used the same approach in the context of this study, such as

(Apriliyanti & Rizki, 2023; Mulia et al., 2024; Murad & Rizki, 2023; Rizki et al., 2022; Syamsuar et al., 2024).

1. Type of Research

This research is descriptive-qualitative, aiming to describe the form of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition, explain its implementation process, and identify the implications that emerge within society, particularly for the Muslim generation.

2. Research Location

The study was conducted in Gampong Pango Deah, Ulee Kareng District, Banda Aceh City, an area where the *Hak Meulakee* tradition is still actively practiced. This village has unique customary characteristics, including the presentation of half a mayam of gold as part of the engagement process.

3. Sources of Data

a. Primary Data

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with: customary leaders, village officials involved in the *Hak Meulakee* process, heads of hamlets, and several community members who possess knowledge of the tradition. The interviews aimed to explore information about its implementation, symbolic meaning, variations in practice, and community perceptions.

b. Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from: documents of the Majelis Adat Aceh (MAA), references on Acehese marriage culture, literature on living law and the sociology of law, and academic writings on Acehese customary traditions and Muslim communities.

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through:

In-depth interviews, using open-ended questions to allow informants to elaborate on their experiences and understanding; Non-participatory observation, by observing customary situations and social interactions related to the *Hak Meulakee* ceremony; Document analysis, involving customary records, village archives, and documents related to the local implementation of the tradition.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis model through the following stages:

Data reduction, by selecting relevant information on the implementation of *Hak Meulakee* and its implications; Theme categorization, such as cultural, social, customary law, and religious themes; Interpretation, by drawing meaning and relationships among themes to explain how this tradition is perceived and responded to by the Muslim generation in Banda Aceh.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that *Hak Meulakee* in Gampong Pango Deah is a marriage-related ceremony with distinct local characteristics. The tradition is carried out through customary intermediaries and village officials, accompanied by the presentation of half a mayam of gold (± 1.665 grams) from the groom's family to the bride's family as a symbol of respect and sincerity. Unlike other regions in Aceh, which generally present only symbolic gifts, this tradition is understood as a form of social etiquette and an essential part of the village's cultural identity.

From the perspective of customary law, *Hak Meulakee* functions as a *living law*, a customary norm adhered to by the community despite lacking formal regulation. It is regarded as a social obligation that upholds family honor. The MPU (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama) of Banda Aceh emphasizes that customary practices may continue as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles and do not impose excessive burdens. Therefore, the practice of *Hak Meulakee* must consider fairness and the financial capacity of the families involved.

The social implications are evident from the experiences of several young individuals who were forced to postpone their marriages for up to six months after learning about the requirement of *Hak Meulakee*. In some cases, the *mahar* had to be reduced from 10 mayam to 9 mayam in order to fulfill this tradition, causing delays and discomfort for the groom's family. Additionally, rising gold prices have made the tradition increasingly burdensome, particularly for young couples.

Cultural implications are the most dominant aspect. *Hak Meulakee* helps maintain family honor, politeness, and social harmony. However, the tradition may also cause cultural friction when the groom comes from a village unfamiliar with such a practice. Differences in customary norms across Aceh can influence the readiness, perception, and comfort of the groom's family, thereby creating challenges in the engagement process.

Based on these findings, the study highlights the need for a reinterpretation of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition to ensure its relevance for the modern Muslim generation. Reinterpretation requires prioritizing the value of respect over material form, allowing flexibility in the amount of gold required, and opening space for consultation among families, customary leaders, and religious scholars. These steps are essential to ensure that the tradition continues as part of Aceh's cultural identity without becoming a burden that hinders the Islamic objective of facilitating marriage and safeguarding family welfare.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study is directed toward three main focuses: the community's understanding of the form and meaning of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition, the customary, social, and cultural implications of the tradition for the Muslim generation in Banda Aceh, and efforts of reinterpretation to ensure the tradition remains relevant to modern life.

1. The Form and Meaning of the *Hak Meulakee* Tradition in Banda Aceh Society

One of the early processes in a marriage ceremony is the proposal (*meulakee* in the Acehnese context), also known as *meminang*, which in Islamic jurisprudence is referred to as *khitbah*, a process in which the groom's family formally proposes marriage to the bride through close relatives. This process is typically carried out by a *seulangke* (Yuliza, 2020, p. 144). A *seulangke* is a customary intermediary such as an *imeum meunasah*, village officials, or traditional leaders who convey the intention to propose and open communication between the families. This ceremony is not merely a formal visit; it also symbolizes respect. This is reflected in the presentation of customary gifts

such as betel leaves, traditional cakes, or fruits, which represent the politeness and social etiquette of Acehese society.

Once the proposal is accepted, the next stage is typically the deliberation to determine the *mahar* (*jeulamee*). In Acehese custom, *jeulamee* refers to the gold dowry that must be given by the groom to the bride. Gold in Aceh is measured in *mayam*, with one *mayam* equivalent to 3.3 grams of gold (Zainuddin, 2022). The amount of *mahar* varies across regions, ranging from 5–20 *mayam* in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar (Mawarni, 2024), while Pidie has the highest customary standard at 50–70 *mayam* (Sitompul et al., 2018, p. 491). Although the *mahar* is usually determined by the bride's family, it may also be decided through mutual agreement between both families. In some rare cases, the groom is allowed to set the amount himself according to his financial capacity, although the final decision is generally reached through family consensus (Ikhsan, 2022, p. 54).

According to Zulfikar, the *Keuchik* of Gampong Pango Deah, beyond the *mahar*, the village also practices the *Hak Meulakee* tradition during the proposal stage. This involves the presentation of half a *mayam* of gold (± 1.665 grams) from the groom to the village officials, who then deliver it to the bride's family. This gold is not considered part of the *mahar*, but rather a gesture intended to assist with wedding reception expenses and to honor the groom's family (Interview, 17 July 2025). The tradition originally emerged to assist families who lacked financial means to organize the wedding feast (*kenduri*), which is customary from both the groom's and bride's sides. Although initially intended to support economically disadvantaged families, *Hak Meulakee* is now practiced by families of all socio-economic backgrounds (Zulfikar, Interview, 17 July 2025).

From a cultural perspective, *Hak Meulakee* carries deeper meaning beyond the presentation of gold. It is regarded as a form of respect, humility, and acknowledgment of the bride's family's honor, strengthening emotional and social ties between the families. In customary law, this tradition is practiced as a form of *living law*—a social norm adhered to by the community even without formal regulation (Apriani & Hanafiah, 2022). This indicates that *Hak Meulakee* is not merely a hereditary custom, but also a cultural identity of Aceh that embodies values of politeness, harmony, and dignity. Thus, the form and meaning of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition are rooted not only in the steps of the proposal ceremony, but also in its symbolic function as a marker of the groom's sincerity, a bond between families, and a manifestation of Acehese values preserved across generations.

2. Implications of Customary Law, Social, and Cultural Aspects for the Muslim Generation in Banda Aceh

The *Hak Meulakee* tradition carries significant implications for the social life of the younger generation. From the perspective of customary law, this tradition is regarded as a moral norm ideally followed by the community. The absence of formal sanctions for those who do not fully carry out the ceremony indicates that its binding nature relies more on social legitimacy than legal obligation. As *Hak Meulakee* is considered part of the *living law*, the Muslim community adheres to and respects it as a living customary norm. One of the characteristics of customary law is the presence of sanctions. As Van

Vollenhoven explains, customary law consists of behavioral rules applicable to indigenous and Eastern foreign peoples, which on the one hand may include sanctions and on the other hand are not codified (Alfariel et al., 2025, p. 146). In the case of *Hak Meulakee*, no formal sanctions are imposed, as the tradition only applies to those who intend to marry a woman from Gampong Pango Deah. If a family disagrees with this custom, their intention to marry will inevitably be hindered.

According to Zulfikar, the *Keuchik* (village head) of Gampong Pango Deah, *Hak Meulakee* has become deeply rooted in the community's way of life. The tradition has been practiced from generation to generation and is viewed as an essential element of the village's customary identity. He stated that as long as communication between the families and village officials remains clear during the marriage process, the tradition has never sparked disagreement within the community. He further emphasized that *Hak Meulakee* should be preserved because it provides tangible benefits, especially in assisting the bride's family in preparing for wedding reception expenses. For the people of Pango Deah, the values of mutual assistance and solidarity embodied in this tradition are strong reasons why *Hak Meulakee* continues to be upheld today (Interview, 17 July 2025).

The social implications of *Hak Meulakee* are further reflected in the experiences of young individuals who must confront real-life challenges. One of them, Muhammad Nahyan, a youth from Gampong Keuramat who intended to propose to a woman from Gampong Pango Deah, admitted that he felt pressured upon learning that *Hak Meulakee* was part of the marriage process in the village (Interview, 18 July 2025). He was surprised because such a tradition did not exist in his own village, making it an unexpected financial burden. Although not from an economically disadvantaged family, he explained that fulfilling this tradition required considerable financial readiness. This challenge is amplified by the fact that the Acehnese *mahar* must be given in gold, often in significant quantities, while gold prices have risen sharply in recent years. The increasing cost of gold makes saving for the *mahar* more difficult, and the additional requirement of half a mayam for *Hak Meulakee* intensifies the financial burden. These fluctuations in gold prices directly affect traditions that use gold as a symbol of honor and dignity. Consequently, young people must adjust their economic preparedness to meet relatively high customary standards. Nahyan stated that he postponed his proposal for six months to meet the customary requirements without burdening his family (Interview, 18 July 2025).

This experience demonstrates that the social implications of *Hak Meulakee* extend beyond norms and expectations; they are also closely tied to economic dynamics that influence the younger generation's ability to fulfill customary obligations. Social pressure to "follow tradition" despite the absence of formal sanctions often leads young people to delay marriage until all customary requirements are met. Therefore, the social implications of *Hak Meulakee* are complex: while it maintains family honor and social ties, it also presents challenges for the younger generation in terms of economic planning, emotional stability, and family decision-making. This phenomenon underscores the need for reinterpretation to preserve cultural values without imposing disproportionate pressure on individuals living in evolving socio-economic conditions.

Culturally, *Hak Meulakee* remains a mechanism for preserving family honor, strengthening inter-family relationships, and maintaining social harmony. The ceremony instills values of politeness, decorum, and social closeness characteristic of Acehnese society. However, the tradition may become problematic when cultural differences arise between families from different villages. Acehnese customs vary significantly across regions, and each village may have its own unique marriage practices. This was experienced by Heni, a resident of Gampong Pango, whose proposal ceremony had to be postponed because her fiancé only learned of the *Hak Meulakee* requirement on the day of the engagement. Coming from a village unfamiliar with the tradition, her fiancé experienced cultural mismatch, resulting in surprise, embarrassment, and social discomfort—especially when the *mahar* originally prepared at 10 mayam had to be reduced to 9 mayam to meet the *Hak Meulakee* requirement (Interview, 18 July 2025).

This case highlights that when a tradition is culturally significant, families unfamiliar with it may feel marginalized or perceived as disrespectful toward local customs. This illustrates how a tradition intended to maintain harmony can inadvertently create cultural friction when confronted with diverse customary practices. Cultural implications also influence how young people understand and respond to tradition. Some feel compelled to preserve customs to uphold family honor, while others struggle with inconsistencies between village traditions. This indicates that *Hak Meulakee* functions not only as a customary norm but also as a marker of cultural identity that can foster belonging or pressure depending on the readiness and understanding of both families. Thus, the cultural implications of *Hak Meulakee* appear more prominent than its social or legal aspects. The tradition remains significant in maintaining Aceh's cultural framework, yet it also has the potential to generate cultural tensions if misunderstood by outsiders or by younger generations navigating an increasingly diverse society.

3. Reinterpretation of the Tradition to Align with Modern Muslim Society

Reinterpretation is a process of re-interpreting a tradition, concept, or practice by adjusting its meaning so that it remains relevant to contemporary conditions (Rusli, 2012). This process does not aim to remove the foundational values that have been passed down, but rather to present a renewed understanding that preserves the identity of the tradition while adapting it to the needs of the contemporary Muslim generation. The need to reinterpret the *Hak Meulakee* tradition has become increasingly urgent in light of changing social, economic, and religious structures in Banda Aceh, especially for younger generations living in environments shaped by educational mobility, technological advancement, more egalitarian family dynamics, and the implementation of Islamic law (*syariat*) in Aceh.

According to Abi Wahyu Mimbar (Deputy Secretariat of Commission A for Fatwa, MPU Banda Aceh), the philosophical relationship between *adat* (custom) and *syariat* in Aceh is described as the relationship between “substance and attribute,” meaning that *adat* may serve as a legal reference as long as it does not contradict Islamic law and remains in line with the objectives of *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah* (Interview, 17 July 2025). This view underlines that the strengthening or reinterpretation of customary practices must ensure that the values upheld do not result in harm, excessive burden, or injustice within marriage practices. Within this framework, *Hak Meulakee* can be

categorized as *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* (a valid and acceptable custom) as long as it is carried out in a reasonable, voluntary, and non-coercive manner.

Abi Wahyu Mimbar also explained that the amount of *mahar* and the variations of customs among villages are strongly influenced by social factors such as educational level, family status, and community dynamics. Therefore, determining the *mahar* or additional customary contributions cannot be standardized across all regions. In practice, although the woman has the right to determine the *mahar* according to Islamic law, families are often influenced by prevailing social expectations, including the tradition of matching the *mahar* with that of older siblings or local customary standards (Interview, 17 July 2025). In this context, the reinterpretation of *Hak Meulakee* should emphasize its symbolic meaning rather than its rigid form. The essence of the tradition is respect, modesty, and social etiquette when initiating family relations. Therefore, the symbolic requirement of half a mayam of gold may be reconsidered so that it is not treated as a fixed obligation that burdens the groom's family. *Hak Meulakee* can continue to be practiced through other forms of symbolic respect that are more flexible and based on the family's capabilities, such as customary gifts or symbolic contributions.

Furthermore, reinterpretation must involve the younger generation, as they are the group most directly affected by the tradition. As noted by Abi Wahyu Mimbar, many young men aged 27 and above delay marriage due to challenges in meeting the *mahar* and customary expectations of their village. This reality highlights the need for dialogue between customary leaders, religious scholars, and the younger generation to formulate a version of the tradition that preserves honor while not hindering the Islamic objective of facilitating marriage (Interview, 17 July 2025). Thus, the reinterpretation of *Hak Meulakee* is necessary not only to reduce the burden on the younger generation but also to ensure that *adat* continues to strengthen social harmony rather than cause delays in marriage or cultural tension between villages. Reinterpretation serves as a middle path to preserve Acehese cultural values while ensuring that the tradition aligns with the principles of justice, ease, and public welfare promoted in Islamic law.

CONCLUSION

The *Hak Meulakee* tradition is one of the key ceremonial stages in the engagement customs of the Banda Aceh community, particularly in Gampong Pango Deah. This tradition features a distinctive practice: the presentation of half a mayam of gold by the groom's family to the village officials, to be delivered to the bride's family. This gold is not regarded as an additional *mahar*, but rather as a symbol of respect, modesty, and commitment in initiating kinship relations. This variation demonstrates that Acehese customs are not uniform; each *gampong* possesses its own characteristics embedded as *living law*—customary norms that are alive and observed by the community.

In terms of customary legal implications, *Hak Meulakee* is viewed as a moral norm that is socially binding despite lacking formal regulation. The tradition continues to be practiced because it aligns with customary values that emphasize family honor. From the perspective of social implications, the study finds that some young people experience social pressure, particularly when economic capacity is limited or when differences in customs between villages arise.

Regarding cultural implications, *Hak Meulakee* serves as a marker of Acehnese cultural identity, a means of safeguarding family dignity, and a mechanism that strengthens social relations. However, this cultural dominance may also create challenges in modern contexts, especially when cultural clashes occur between villages or when rising gold prices and wedding expenses make the tradition increasingly burdensome for the younger generation.

Based on these findings, this study underscores the need for a reinterpretation of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition. Reinterpretation is not the elimination of the tradition but an adjustment of its meaning, form, and mechanism so that it remains aligned with Islamic values that promote ease and discourage excessive burdens. The principle of *'urf ṣaḥīḥ* allows the tradition to be preserved as long as it does not create hardship and remains within the framework of Islamic law, which prioritizes public welfare. Therefore, the symbolic gesture of respect in *Hak Meulakee* may be expressed in more flexible forms, adapted to the family's capacity, and decided through open deliberation.

In conclusion, *Hak Meulakee* retains important cultural value for the people of Banda Aceh, but its implementation must be adapted to the contemporary context of the modern Muslim generation so that the tradition does not become a burden. Instead, it should continue to function as a means of strengthening family ties, preserving cultural identity, and affirming the values of modesty and honor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their highest appreciation and gratitude to the traditional leaders, residents, and village officials of Gampong Pango Deah, Banda Aceh, as well as the Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama of Banda Aceh City, for their cooperation and the valuable information provided regarding the implementation of the *Hak Meulakee* tradition. The authors also extend their sincere thanks to colleagues at the Law Studies Program of Teuku Umar University for their support and constructive feedback during the preparation of this research

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