



Uang Pelangkah in Mandailing Natal Traditional Marriage: The Perspective of 'Urf in Islamic Law

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Abstract

This study discusses the practice of dowry in traditional Mandailing Natal marriages from the perspective of 'urf in Islamic law. Dowry is a tradition given to older sisters when their younger sisters marry first. This study employs a qualitative method with an empirical approach through interviews and direct observation in the village of Gunung Tua Tonga, Mandailing Natal. The findings reveal that dowry money holds social value as a form of respect and preservation of tradition. Under Islamic law, this practice can be categorized as a valid custom ('urf shahih) as long as it does not impose undue hardship and does not become a condition for the validity of the marriage contract. However, if the practice becomes a burden and hinders marriage, it falls under the category of 'urf fasid. Therefore, the implementation of this tradition needs to be guided so that it remains in line with the values of Sharia and does not cause *harm*.

Keywords: *Uang Pelangkah; Urf; Islamic Law*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas praktik mahar dalam perkawinan Natal Mandailing tradisional dari perspektif 'urf dalam hukum Islam. Mahar adalah tradisi yang diberikan kepada kakak perempuan ketika adik perempuan mereka menikah terlebih dahulu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan empiris melalui wawancara dan observasi langsung di desa Gunung Tua Tonga, Mandailing Natal. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa uang mahar memiliki nilai sosial sebagai bentuk penghormatan dan pelestarian tradisi. Di bawah hukum Islam, praktik ini dapat dikategorikan sebagai adat yang sah ('urf shahih) selama tidak menimbulkan kesulitan yang tidak semestinya dan tidak menjadi syarat untuk keabsahan kontrak perkawinan. Namun, jika praktik tersebut menjadi beban dan menghambat pernikahan, itu termasuk dalam kategori 'urf fasid. Oleh karena itu, penerapan tradisi ini perlu dibimbing agar tetap sejalan dengan nilai-nilai Syariah dan tidak merugikan.

Kata Kunci: *Uang Pelangkah; Urf; Hukum Islam*

Introduction

In the practice of Mandailing Natal traditional marriage, the existence of the tradition of the stepper is still a phenomenon that raises various real problems in the field. One of the main problems is the emergence of tensions between customs and religious laws.¹ Some people of Mandailing Natal consider this tradition as a customary obligation

¹ Sahrul Sahrul dan Afrahul Fadhila Daulai, "THE LOCAL WISDOM OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND INTELLECTUALS IN MITIGATING THE SOCIAL IMPACTS

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(adat na torop) that must be fulfilled in order to maintain family honor, while in terms of Islamic law, there is no normative basis that explicitly obliges it.² This difference often poses a dilemma for families who want to still respect customs, but at the same time do not want to leave the sharia corridor.³ In addition, the practice of stepping often poses a fairly heavy economic burden on families, especially for those from the lower middle class. Customary demands in the form of giving money, goods, or organizing additional events make the wedding procession even more expensive. As a result, not a few couples postpone marriage because they have not been able to meet these demands, even in some cases triggering disputes between extended families.

Another problem that is quite prominent is the potential for gender discrimination in the tradition of the stepper.⁴ The application of this custom more often places women as the "stepped party", thus creating a stigma that an unmarried older sister is considered a barrier for her younger sister. Greater social pressure tends to be experienced by women, resulting in shame or marginalization in the family and social environment. This situation often causes conflicts between siblings when the provision of steps is considered not in accordance with applicable customs. On the other hand, there is also a difference in acceptance among the people of Mandailing Natal regarding the urgency of this tradition.⁵ Older generations tend to maintain it as part of their traditional identity, while younger generations or groups with a deeper understanding of religion often reject the practice because it is seen as incompatible with Islamic principles. This difference of views creates a uniformity of practice in the field, even sparking a debate about which is more important between custom and religion.

OF ILLEGAL GOLD MINING IN WEST PASAMAN, WEST SUMATRA," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 50–73.

² Sakban Lubis dkk., "Share Of Inheritance In Muslim Community Mandailing Natal (Sociological Studies Of Islamic Law In Mandailing Natal)," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)* 9, no. 8 (2020): 33–41.

³ Håkon Rydland, *Islamic (Comm) unity in Ethnic Diversity*, 2024, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/622461958.pdf>.

⁴ Mel Bartley dan Michelle Kelly-Irving, *Health inequality: an introduction to concepts, theories and methods* (John Wiley & Sons, 2024), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=YfsvEQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT1&dq=2024+Another+problem+that+is+quite+prominent+is+the+potential+for+gender+discrimination+in+the+tradition+of+the+stepper.+&ots=L7HfFp9bO&sig=9VLNE36o02a80kNAXfwO9b2W2xA>.

⁵ Mukhlis Lubis Mukhlis Lubis, "Religious Life and Subjective Experiences in the Mandailing Natal Community: Subjective Experiences in the Practice of Religious Devotion within the Local Community," *Servina: Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat* 1, no. 1 (2025): 36–43.

Marriage in the Islamic view is not only a legal contract between two individuals, but also a manifestation of worship and a way to build a family that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. Marriage is recommended to be simplified, as affirmed in the Qur'an. An-Nur verse 32 and the hadiths of the Prophet who encourage young people to marry if they are able.⁶ However, in a society that is thick with customs, such as the Mandailing Natal community, the wedding procession is not solely carried out according to religious laws, but also follows local traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. One of the traditions that is still carried out is step-by-step money, which is the gift (in the form of money or goods) to an unmarried older sister when her younger sister is about to get married first.⁷

This practice is actually intended as a form of respect and maintaining family harmony. However, in the real world, this tradition often becomes a burdensome financial burden and even hinders the implementation of marriage. Lailan Nahari's research shows that the practice of stepping money in the form of customary fines can reach a large nominal, causing various negative consequences such as elopement, pregnancy out of wedlock, annulment of marriage, and even the choice not to marry at all.⁸ This shows that customs that were originally of noble value can turn into *mudharat* when carried out rigidly and burdensomely. In the context of Islamic law, local traditions or customs are known as '*urf*', which can be used as a legal basis if they do not contradict the *nash shar'i*. This is in accordance with the rules of *al-'adah muhakkamah* (habits can be made into laws).⁹

The study of the tradition of steppings in Mandailing Natal traditional marriage has actually not received much special attention in the scientific literature. However, a number of studies related to Mandailing traditional marriage and its interaction with Islamic law provide a fairly relevant picture. Siregar's (2018) research, for example, highlights the practice of marriage carried out as a solution to violations of norms, especially marriage due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies in the Batak Mandailing community. The results of the

⁶Abdul Hafidz Miftahuddin and M. Sinwanudin, "The Law of Marriage for Men Who Cannot Afford to Afford Marriage", *Journal of Thought: Journal of Islamic Education and Law Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January (2023).

⁷Sakinah Azzahra Hsb, Thesis, "A Review of Islamic Law on the Tradition of Payment of Step-by-Step Money in Marriage (Case Study of Gunung Tua Tonga Village, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency)," 2023.

⁸Lailan Nahari, Thesis, "Legal Consequences of Mastepi Marriage in Mandailing Customary Marriage Reviewed According to Islamic Law and Marriage Law in Indonesia," 2021.

⁹Yasir Fauji, "*Tradisi Kalangkah Dalam Perkawinan Adat Sunda Perspektif 'Urf*," *Jurnal Ilmiah Nusantara (JINU)*, Vol.2, No.3 Mei (2025).

study show that customs are often used as an instrument to maintain family honor, even though they are sometimes confronted with religious norms. These findings show a pattern similar to the tradition of steppers, where customs are used as a tool to maintain family honor, although it raises debate from the perspective of Islamic law.

In addition, Lubis' (2020) research examines the existence of Mandailing marriage customs from the perspective of Islamic law, emphasizing that many customary elements are 'urf, so they can be accepted as long as they do not contradict the sharia. This research found that the Mandailing people try to combine customs and religion in the practice of marriage, but there are parts of the customs that cause polemics, especially when they are considered burdensome or potentially violate sharia principles. This study provides a conceptual basis that the stepper needs to be analyzed as part of the 'urf to assess whether it belongs to 'urf *ṣaḥīḥ* (a valid custom) or a 'urf *fāsid* (a broken custom).

Another study by Nasution (2021) discusses the dynamics of Mandailing customary law in maintaining social harmony. His main findings confirm that customs often serve as social glues in extended families, including in the practice of marriage. However, customs can also be a source of conflict when the demands are felt to be burdensome or not in line with religious values. This is in line with the phenomenon of stepping, which in practice often causes economic burdens and conflicts between brothers. Outside of Mandailing, studies of similar traditions have also been found. For example, a study on the "adat metr" in the Minangkabau and Bugis communities shows that there is a practice of respecting an unmarried brother when the younger brother precedes him. These studies reveal that the tradition is essentially meant to maintain family harmony, but its practice often poses an additional burden and debate from a sharia perspective. Thus, the tradition of the marcher in Mandailing Natal can be understood as part of a broader phenomenon in the indigenous peoples of the archipelago

The urgency of this research lies in the need to bring together local cultural values with the basic principles of Islamic law. Good traditions can certainly be preserved, but if they give birth to harm, they need to be reviewed. Especially considering that marriage is a teaching of the Prophet that must be carried out with ease, not difficulty. The fiqh rules of *al-masyaqqah tajlib al-taysir* (difficulty brings convenience) and *al-dharar yuzal* (harm should be eliminated) are the normative basis for assessing this practice.³

Method

This research is a qualitative research with an empirical approach, which aims to describe and understand directly the practice of the traditional money in the Mandailing Natal community. An empirical approach is used to obtain factual data through field observations and in-depth interviews with traditional actors, religious leaders, and communities involved in the traditional wedding procession.¹⁰ This approach is used because the tradition of stepping money is part of the 'urf 'amali (practice habits of the community) that develop and be carried out from generation to generation in daily life. In Islamic law, 'urf is recognized as one of the sources of law as long as it does not contradict the principles of sharia. Therefore, to understand the legal value of this tradition, it is necessary to take an approach that directly touches the social reality of the community, so that it can be seen whether the tradition falls under the category of 'urf *sahih* (valid custom) or 'urf *fasid* (corrupt custom).

This research was carried out in Gunung Tua Tonga Village, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province. This location was chosen because the people still carry out the tradition of money in traditional marriage. Subjects were selected by *purposive sampling technique*, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on their knowledge and involvement in the practice of the traditional money of the stepper.¹¹

This research began with the preliminary study stage and the initial information collection through a literature review on Mandailing customs and the theory of 'urf in Islamic law. After that, the preparation of observation instruments and interview guidelines was carried out. The data collection process is carried out directly in the field, followed by recording and documentation. All the data collected is classified and analyzed descriptively to obtain in-depth and relevant conclusions. The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, scholars, and communities involved in the practice of stepping money, as well as from direct observation of traditional marriage activities. Meanwhile, secondary data is collected through a literature review that includes reference books, scientific journals, customary documents, and previous research results relevant to the research topic.¹² The data in this study was analyzed using a **qualitative descriptive**

¹⁰Muhaimin, *Legal Research Methods*, (Mataram: Mataram University Press, 2020).

¹¹Abdul Fattah Nasution, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Harfa Creative, 2023), h. 80.

¹²Ishaq, *Legal Research Methods and Thesis Writing, Thesis, and Dissertation* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2020), p. 71.

method, with steps in the form of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.¹³ The information from interviews and observations was compiled systematically, then interpreted to understand the meaning of the practice of stepping money. The analysis is carried out based on the concept of 'urf in Islamic law, by comparing the characteristics of the tradition to the categories of 'urf *saheeh* and 'urf *fasid*, in order to determine its conformity with the principles of sharia. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher uses source triangulation, which is comparing data from various informants and the methods used, so that the results of the analysis are more objective and reliable.

Results and Discussion

Step-Up Money in Mandailing Marriage

In the Indonesian legal system, in addition to written laws and regulations resulting from the products of authorized institutions, there is also known to be unwritten laws. This law is a rule that grows and develops in the community and continues to be preserved, which is commonly referred to as customary law. The applicability of these customs cannot be separated from the influence of ancestral teachings, because the village community highly respects these values and feels a moral responsibility to practice them as part of their identity and cultural heritage.¹⁴

This research found that the practice of stepping money is still alive and maintained in the Mandailing Natal community, especially in Gunung Tua Village of Tonga. This tradition arises when a younger sister will marry earlier than her older sister. In this situation, the groom's family gives a sum of money or goods as a form of respect to the older sister who is not married. This money is referred to as stepper money or in local terms known as '*money mangastepi*'.

The practice of paying the steppe money has been rooted in the lives of the people of Gunung Tua Village, Tonga and has been passed down from generation to generation. Based on information from the community, this tradition began from the agreement of previous ancestors and is still carried out today. Although it looks similar to giving dowry in a wedding, the implementation of the step money has a fundamental difference. This tradition is not officially regulated in the form of customary rules or binding '*markobar*'. The

¹³Feny Rita Fiantika et al., *Qualitative Research Methods* (Padang: Global Technology Executive, 2022), p. 91.

¹⁴Erwin Owan Hermansyah Soetoto, Zulkifli Ismail, and Melanie Pita Lestar, *Textbook of Customary Law* (Malang: Madza Media, 2021), p.1.

implementation is flexible and does not have written standard provisions.¹⁵ The value of the stepping money is not determined by default, but based on family agreement. However, in practice, there is a difference in implementation: in some families, the step-by-step money is only symbolic, while in other families it is a burden because of the high nominal. This indicates that the understanding and implementation of this tradition is relative and depends on the interpretation of each family and the role of traditional leaders.

Based on the results of interviews with local traditional leaders¹⁶ and scholars, it is known that the stepping money is considered a form of appreciation for the elder, which is considered worthy of respect because of the age and order of birth. However, from the point of view of Islamic law, some scholars argue that this practice does not have a strong shari'i basis, and should not be used as a condition for the validity of marriage.¹⁷ If the step-up money is made a burdensome obligation or hinders the implementation of the marriage, then this tradition has the potential to be contrary to the principles of sharia.¹⁸

Analysis of the Perspective of 'Urf in Islamic Law

In Islamic legal theory, the custom is called *'urf*, which is also often interpreted as custom. Etymologically, *al-'ādah* comes from a word meaning "repetition", while *al-'urf* means "mutual understanding". Although the origin of the word is different, both have similar meanings in the legal context. Differences only arise when studied from the perspective of philosophy, literature, or grammar. Custom is generally understood as behavior or speech that is carried out repeatedly, both by individuals and groups, until it becomes a habit that is considered reasonable. In Arabic, this is known as *al-tabī'ah al-tsāniyah*, which is a secondary habit in humans.¹⁹

The practice of stepping money in the Mandailing custom can be analyzed using *the theory of 'urf*, which is a community custom recognized in Islamic law as long as it does not contradict the postulates of sharia.²⁰ In the perspective of *'urf*, this practice can be

¹⁵M. Hajji Hsb, Interview, Traditional Leaders of Gunung Tua, 2023.

¹⁶Muhammad Amin Nasution, Traditional Leader of Gunung Tua Village, 2023.

¹⁷Sogopan Siregar, "KUA Kec. Panyabungan," 2023.

¹⁸Ahmad Fauzi Ranguti, Religious Leader of Gunung Tua Village, Tonga, 2023.

¹⁹Ngainurrofik Ngainurrofik, Moh. Durrul Ainun Nafis, and Rizky Maulidah Khasanah, "Polemic of Traditional Marriage of Steps in Srimartani Village, Piyungan District, Bantul Regency," *Ar-Risalah Media Keislaman Education and Islamic Law* 20, no. 1 (April 9, 2022): 001, <https://doi.org/10.69552/ar-risalah.v20i1.1306>.

²⁰Asriani Mardi and Muhammad Fajri, "A Review of Islamic Law on Pallangkai Customs in Marriage Practices in Garuntungan Village, Kindang District, Bulukumba Regency," *Qadauna: Islamic Family Law Student Scientific Journal* 4, No. 1 (December 28, 2022): 170–82, <https://doi.org/10.24252/qadauna.v4i1.30025>.

categorized as *'urf sahih* when carried out voluntarily, without any element of coercion or heavy burden on behalf of the family. On the other hand, if the gift becomes a necessity that is not sincerely agreed, and causes harm or delays the marriage contract,²¹ then the practice can be included in the category of *'urf fasid*.²² This is in line with the rules of fiqh *al-dharar yuzal* (harm must be eliminated) and *al-masyaqqah tajlibu al-taysir* (difficulty brings convenience).

The researchers also found that some of the Mandailing people began to question the relevance of the practice of pestep money in the current context. Changes in social and economic conditions, as well as increasing religious understanding, have made some people more flexible. Some continue to carry out this tradition as a form of cultural preservation, but there are also those who choose to eliminate this practice to avoid harm or tension between family members.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research, the money of the stepper in the Mandailing marriage custom is part of the local culture that is still preserved, as a form of respect for the older sister who is not married. In the view of Islamic law, this practice can be accepted as *'urf sahih* if it is done voluntarily and is not made a valid condition for marriage. As long as it is not burdensome or harmful, this tradition is in harmony with the principles of kinship and respect. However, if it becomes a burden or hinders the marriage, it is categorized as *'urf fasid* which is contrary to the sharia. Therefore, it is necessary to continuously evaluate this practice to remain in accordance with Islamic teachings. Support from traditional leaders and scholars is important to maintain a balance between cultural preservation and the application of sharia values.

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²¹Mirsa Astuti and Ida Nadirah, "Giving Step-by-Step Gifts in Marriage According to Customary Law and Islamic Law," *Journal of Indonesian Customary Law (JIAL)* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2023).

²²Abi Hasan, "'Urf's View of Pechanjangan Money in Marriage Steps Over Siblings", *Istinbath: Journal of Islamic Law and Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, June (2021).

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