



Payment of Half the Marriage Dowry to Traditional Leaders in the Batak *Angkola* Community from Islamic Law Perspective

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Abstract: The distribution of a portion of the dowry (*mahr*) to customary leaders in marriage had long been a tradition among the *Angkola* Batak community. When examined in relation to Islamic provisions on dowry, this tradition appeared to lack a strong normative foundation. This study aimed to examine the customary system practiced by the *Angkola* community regarding the allocation of part of the dowry to customary leaders and to analyze this tradition from the perspective of Islamic law. The research employed a field research method, with primary data obtained directly from customary leaders and members of the *Angkola* Batak community, while secondary data were drawn from books, journals, and other relevant sources. The findings indicated that every woman who married was required to undergo a customary ceremony involving several traditional leaders as a means of honoring her marriage. The funds given to these customary leaders were taken from the marriage dowry that had previously been provided by the prospective husband. From the perspective of Islamic law, the allocation of a portion of the dowry as customary payment did not contradict Islamic legal principles and could be categorized as valid custom (*urf sahih*).

Keywords: Dowry, *Mahr*, *Angkola*, Batak community, Islamic Law, Hatobangon

Introduction

Islam views marriage as a form of worship. Getting married means fulfilling part of the pillars of the faith and performing half of one's religious duties. A family characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *warahmah* is also intended to be formed through marriage in order to foster harmony and love. Islam carefully regulates a number of laws related to marriage, such as the Qur'anic requirement to provide a dowry (Dwi Apriliyani J Nusi et al., 2023). The giving of a dowry to the prospective wife is a form of respect, honor, and an effort to make her happy. The dowry, which is a gift from the prospective husband to the prospective wife, becomes the wife's full right.

The dowry can take the form of money, goods, or services, depending on the agreement between the two parties. In Islam, marriage is a way to respect and



honor women, especially the bride-to-be. The tradition of giving a dowry has existed since ancient times. The amount and form of the dowry are determined by mutual agreement between both parties. Scholars agree that there is no maximum limit for the dowry, and the husband has the right to provide it according to his means and willingness (Zuhri, 2018). In the *Angkola* tradition, the giving of a dowry is a requirement for a man who wishes to propose to the woman of his choice. During the dowry presentation, several traditional leaders will attend the ceremony. These traditional leaders will offer guidance or advice, a practice often referred to as *makkobar* (Aida & Sari, 2025). However, the main point of contention regarding this dowry delivery process is the tradition of giving a portion of the dowry to the traditional leaders as a mandatory customary payment. This has led to a debate among parents who wish to marry off their children; some feel they are being shortchanged because they see no urgency in making this customary payment for the wedding, while others feel it is acceptable to give it to the traditional leaders.

Several researchers have attempted to study the same topic, such as Fakhiri Abdillah Hasibuan in his work titled *The Tradition of Pataru Sere Sahatan in Batak Angkola Traditional Marriage from the Perspective of Al-'urf* (F. A. Hasibuan, 2023), which examines the tradition of pataru sere sahatan (the giving of gifts to the prospective bride). A similar study was also conducted by Zulfan Efendi Hasibuan (2023). Research on the topic of dowry was also carried out by Muhammad Wildan Hamidi Pasaribu (2023), focusing on the determination of dowry among the Mandailing community. This study focuses on dowries set with a grace period that is quite long and protracted from the perspective of *'urf*. Ahmad Mudzakkir Azhari Lubis (2018) also researched dowries, focusing more on the basis for determining dowries through various factors such as educational background and others. Meanwhile, Mara Ongku Hasibuan (2022) studied customary sanctions regarding engagement in Huta Pasir Village, Simangambat Subdistrict, North Padang Lawas Regency, which addressed the customary sanctions imposed on engaged couples when one of the partners leaves the other before marriage. The similarities between the research conducted by the researcher and several previous studies are that they both examine the concept of *'urf* in Mandailing society's marriages and also examine dowry traditions in Mandailing and *Angkola* customs. The difference from the previous studies mentioned above is the absence of a discussion regarding the portion of the dowry allocated to traditional leaders as customary money.

In general, this study aims to explore the tradition practiced by the Batak *Angkola* community of setting aside a portion of the dowry to be given to their traditional leaders for the purpose of conducting a traditional marriage ceremony for a woman in that community, and to analyze this tradition from the perspective of Islamic law. This research is important because taking a portion of the dowry which is the woman's right is an uncommon practice in Islamic societies anywhere and appears to contradict Islamic law. Furthermore, the community needs clarification regarding this tradition due to their doubts about this practice.

Method

This study is a field research is a type of research that studies phenomena in their natural environment (Mundir, 2013). The primary data used comes from the *Angkola* indigenous community, specifically traditional leaders, to ensure that the information collected truly reflects the phenomena occurring at the research site,

while secondary data comes from books, journal articles, and other written materials related to this tradition. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews to allow the author greater flexibility in exploring this phenomenon. Additionally, the author conducted observations to clearly observe the tradition. In principle, this was done in detail by observing everything from the smallest phenomena that served as the basis for the problem to the largest phenomena, and by striving to resolve the issue for the benefit of all parties (Maros et al., 2016). Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, delving into every aspect and process involved in carrying out the tradition.

Result and Discussion

A Glimpse of Traditional Leaders in *Angkola*

Traditional leaders are figures or institutions with the authority to regulate and enforce customary laws within a community. They are typically selected based on lineage, experience, or in-depth knowledge of customs and traditions. The traditional leaders of the *Angkola* tribe are as follows:

First, the *Hatobangon*; this is a group of elders who are considered to be one rank higher in the community. They are also the elders regarded as parental figures within the customs. They are highly respected and revered within the *Hatobangon* community, where people must heed their words. They are also known as knowledgeable or experienced community members who align more closely with scholars and educated elders (Vita Sari Isnaidar et al., 2024). *Hatobangon* belong to the *natobang* (elders) group of the *Angkola* community in terms of maturity or character. The community greatly benefits from the presence of *Hatobangon* because it allows them to share ideas in resolving the issues that burden them. In deliberations or consensus-building conducted democratically, *Hatobangon* serve as advisors. In addition to providing advice and recommendations, *Hatobangon* can act as a village court that resolves disputes in accordance with local customs and traditions (Novi & Harahap, 2024). *Hatobangon* play significant roles in activities such as weddings, aqiqah ceremonies, and others.

Second, the *Harajaon*, which derives from the word *raja*, does not always mean “king” in the political or royal sense within the Batak cultural context (including *Angkola*); rather, it symbolizes traditional authority, honor, and leadership within a clan or community structure. In *Angkola* tradition, *Harajaon* refers to the traditional power structure that governs kinship relations, the division of roles, and authority in the practice of tradition, particularly regarding matters such as marriage, death, and other traditional ceremonies (Siregar et al., 2021). In the context of marriage, the *Harajaon* often serves as the party that receives customary money (including a portion of the dowry) as a form of respect for tradition. This serves as a symbol that the marriage has been recognized under customary law by the legitimate traditional power structure.

Third, the *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which consists of the *mora*, *kahanggi*, *anak boru*, and *alim ulama*. The *mora* is the female giver or the wife’s family. Within kinship relations, the *mora* is regarded as the party that must be respected and honored (Hilda, 2016). The *mora* holds the highest symbolic position within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure. The philosophy regarding the *mora* is “*somba mar mora*” (honor the *Mora*). The *kahanggi*, meanwhile, are the clan family or blood relatives. They are equal partners and typically serve as co-decision-makers in customary matters. During customary ceremonies, the *kahanggi* act as advisors and primary executors alongside the *anakboru*. The philosophy regarding *kahanggi* is “*manat mardongan*”

tubu” (be wise toward fellow clansmen). Meanwhile, *anakboru* refers to the female-line family, specifically the family of the son’s wife. *Anakboru* serves as the primary implementers of customary practices, responsible for preparing and conducting traditional ceremonies (Rohana, 2023). Although in a “serving” position, the *anakboru* is highly respected due to their vital role in the execution of customs. The philosophy regarding the *anakboru* is “*Elek Mar Anakboru*” (love the *anakboru*).

Lastly, there are the *alim ulama*, who in *Angkola* customs refer to respected Islamic religious figures honored for their religious knowledge and piety, and who play a significant role in guiding the community spiritually and socially. They serve not only as religious leaders (imams, khatibs, Quran teachers) but also hold moral authority in the practice of traditional customs, particularly during sacred ceremonies such as weddings (representing the religion in the marriage contract), funerals (washing, shrouding, and praying over the deceased), traditional prayers (for example, at feasts or housewarming ceremonies), and traditional deliberations related to Islamic law. *Alim ulama* are respected on par with traditional leaders. In many cases, the *ulama*’s voice is even more influential when it comes to matters of halal and haram, the validity of marriages, or traditional practices that touch upon religious matters. They serve as a symbol of the integration between *adat na niuhon dohot ugamo* (customs in harmony with religion) a crucial concept in *Angkola* society. (Efendi, 2020).

Taking a Portion of the Dowry as a Traditional Payment

Essentially, the understanding of the concept of a wedding dowry among the *Angkola* people is no different from the concept of a dowry in Islam, as the dowry is specified by the groom during the marriage ceremony. Mr. Di’, as the Hatobangon, stated that the marriage dowry in *Angkola* custom is something given by the male party—whether valuable items or money—that is specified at the time of the ceremony. That is the dowry; as for the customary payment, it is determined prior to the marriage ceremony (Di’, 2025). The same point was also raised by Mr. Lubis, a Hatobangon, who stated that the dowry is something of value given by the male party to the female party. As for the customary payment given by parents intending to marry off their child, it is an obligatory gift for those to be married according to custom (Lubis, 2025). These two statements reveal a distinction between the dowry and the traditional payment: the dowry is mentioned during the marriage ceremony, whereas the traditional payment is requested before the ceremony takes place, even though it is derived from the dowry agreed upon by the prospective husband prior to the ceremony.

The issue arising in the *Angkola* traditional ceremony is the inclusion of the traditional payment within the dowry. This customary payment is taken from a portion of the dowry, the amount of which varies according to the dowry given by the groom’s family, ranging from 5% to 10% of the bride’s dowry. This is what causes some parents on the bride’s side to feel disadvantaged and burdened by the amount of the customary payment required by the traditional leaders. Below are several interviews with parents of brides who have married off their daughters.

Mrs. Ritonga said: “Of course, as a parent, I feel burdened, because the amount requested by the traditional leaders is not small. When my daughter got married, the groom’s family gave a dowry of 100 million, but the traditional leaders asked us for about 7 million. We feel burdened because there is no benefit to us in

giving them that traditional money. After all, we saw that the money was just divided among themselves” (Ritonga, 2025).

Mrs. Lubis provided the following statement: *“When I married off my daughter, we received a dowry of around 20 million. Then the traditional leaders asked for about 2 million in traditional money for the traditional ceremony to send off my daughter. I also felt cheated because I didn’t know where that traditional money went. The dowry was already so small, not to mention the substantial costs of the wedding celebration” (Lubis, 2025).*

Mrs. Harahap also said: *“that the dowry given by the groom’s family to the traditional leaders is an obligation that has been passed down through generations among the Angkola indigenous community; for me, it is not a burden because it is a token of gratitude to the traditional leaders for helping with our child’s marriage” (Harahap, 2025).*

Mrs. Rangkuti, on the other hand, noted *that the custom of giving money to traditional leaders is one of the traditions for parents intending to marry off their children, and while it is not overly burdensome, it remains an issue because the amount is unilaterally determined by the traditional leaders (Rangkuti, 2025).*

Meanwhile, Mrs. Rambe stated *that when marrying off her daughter, the groom’s family provided a dowry to the bride’s family and also to the traditional leaders, and a portion of that dowry was designated as a traditional payment. In her view, this is not a problem because it is a positive practice; the traditional leaders have already provided guidance to the bride and groom, and this serves as a form of gratitude toward them (Rambe, 2025).*

From the interviews above, it can be understood that, in general, the bride’s family does not object to the customary payment requested by the Angkola traditional leaders; however, they hope that the amount is not unilaterally determined by the traditional leaders but is discussed and agreed upon together with the bride’s family.

The author also conducted interviews with traditional leaders of the Angkola community. Mr. Sihombing, a religious scholar and hatobangon, explained *that the amount of money given to the groom is not fully disclosed at the time of the wedding ceremony because, when the groom’s family delivers the money to the bride’s family, the traditional leaders first consult with the bride’s family regarding the specific purposes for which the money is intended. Only then does the remainder of the funds for the wedding become the dowry. According to him, the traditional money in a wedding ceremony is a form of gratitude from the family for having married off their child. As a traditional leader, he takes the time to attend and offer guidance to both the bride and groom (Sihombing, 2025).* According to Mr. Sihombing, there are no consequences for not observing traditional customs in a marriage. This is because the observance of customs during the wedding depends on the family whether they wish to release their child according to tradition or not. However, the general public’s perception is that such a family is not considered part of those who uphold local customs.

These are some of the interviews conducted by the researcher; the parents of the bride who married off their daughter felt burdened by these customs. There are also parents of the bride who say they feel at peace when the money is given to the traditional leaders. According to the researcher’s interviews, there is a reason why the parents of the bride must follow the custom: if they do not follow the custom when sending off their daughter to marry, they will be ridiculed by others

for not doing so with a traditional ceremonial send-off. Interviews with several traditional custodians revealed that the money provided by the groom's family is not entirely considered a dowry, as additional expenses must still be covered from the dowry funds. Based on the interview results, the author concludes that the distinction between a dowry and traditional money is that a dowry is something of value whether an object or money given by the groom's family when presenting the dowry to propose to the bride, and it is given voluntarily by the groom in accordance with the family's agreement. As for traditional money, it is a gift given to traditional leaders when parents intend to marry off their child if the marriage is conducted according to traditional customs (celebrated with traditional ceremonies) and as a token of gratitude to the traditional leaders for taking the time to provide advice to the couple getting married. According to the author, the difference of opinion between some communities and traditional leaders regarding the dowry and traditional money stems from a lack of understanding in distinguishing between the two.

A woman who marries according to *Angkola* custom will leave her home after the wedding to join her husband. In connection with this, the traditional leaders namely the hatobangon, harajaon, and dalihan natolu, along with the religious scholars will offer advice to the woman on how to manage her household and become a good and virtuous wife, as well as a mother to her future children. At least 10 to 15 traditional leaders attend this ceremony, and it is during this time that the handover of the gift from the man to the woman referred to as the "mahar" or, more accurately, the dowry takes place. Advice is given not only to the woman but also to the man who is about to marry, so that they may build a strong household and resolve any domestic issues in accordance with the teachings of their religion and local customs.

The 'urf Perspective on the Payment of a Portion of the Dowry to Traditional Leaders

Urf is one of the sources of Islamic law that examines customs that may be practiced within the Muslim community. The word *'urf* is derived from the root *'arafa-ya'rifu-irfan, 'irfah, ma'rifah*, which means to know (Munawwir, 1997). For example, *'arafa al-syai'* is synonymous with the phrase *'alima al-syai'* (to know about something) (Paryadi, 2021). The term *'arafa* also refers to the hair growing on a horse's withers. The definition of *'urf* is also listed in the al-Munjid Dictionary, and this corresponds to the meaning of the term in *usul al-fiqh*, which refers to everything ingrained in the soul and deemed correct by sound reason. According to the linguistic definition, *'urf* implies the highest of all things. Allah SWT states in the Qur'an, Surah Al-'Araf [46], which means: "And upon (al-'araf) are those who recognize each of the two groups by their signs" (kemenag, 2024).

Another view holds that, linguistically, *'urf* is a standard of custom that is practiced. In technical terms, *'urf* which encompasses both practical (*'urf amali*) and verbal (*'urf lafdzi*) aspects refers to what has become customary within society, and people use the words and actions they typically perform. In other words, *'urf* is what is understood and practiced by society, whether through speech, action, or abstention. Wahbah Al-Zuhayli argues that *'urf* is the human tendency to repeatedly engage in certain behaviors to gain approval or to assign a specific meaning to a particular term, even if the original meaning of the term in question differs (Nasution, 2022).

Scholars of *usul al-fiqh* classify *'urf* into three categories. First, based on its object, *'urf* is divided into *'urf lafzhi* and *'urf amali*. *'urf lafzhi* refers to specific expressions or idioms used to convey ideas; it is a social practice that ensures its meaning is understood and ingrained in people's minds. As for *'urf amali*, these are communal norms related to behaviors commonly practiced by society and the relationships among Muslims (Hamzawi, 2018). Second, in terms of scope, *'urf* is divided into two categories: *'urf am* and *'urf khas*. *'urf am* refers to specific customs that are widely practiced throughout society and across all regions, whereas *'urf khas* refers to customs that are practiced in specific regions and communities (Rizal, 2019). Third, from the perspective of its validity according to Islamic law, *'urf* is divided into *'urf shahih* and *'urf fasid*. *'urf shahih* is a valid social norm that does not contradict textual sources (Qur'anic verses or hadith), does not diminish their benefits, or cause harm, whereas *'urf fasid* is a practice that contradicts Islamic law and its fundamental principles.

Scholars of *usul al-fiqh* state that laws based on *'urf* may change in accordance with societal changes in specific times and places. Custom can serve as evidence for establishing Islamic law; it may be accepted as a legal foundation if it meets five conditions: it does not contradict Sharia (nash), does not cause harm, and does not negate public interest; it is widely practiced among Muslims; it does not apply to *mahdhah* worship, and it has become established in society at the time it is to be established as a legal standard (Amalia, 2020).

Regarding one of the customs that has developed within *Angkola* society, through this concept of *'urf*, the author analyzes the perspective on the giving of a portion of the dowry to traditional leaders as customary money as follows:

When viewed from the nature of *'urf*, the practice of giving a portion of the dowry as customary money in *Angkola* society falls under the category of *urf amali*. This is because the tradition of customary money is a societal tradition related to actions and social transactions. In its implementation, there are ceremonies that have become customary practices and social interaction processes that bind two individuals. When viewed from the perspective of the applicability of the *'urf*, the practice of giving a portion of the dowry to traditional leaders in *Angkola* society falls under the category of *urf khas*, because the tradition of giving a portion of the dowry to traditional leaders that is, customary money applies specifically to the *Angkola* community and specifically to communities that share the same traditional customs. It does not apply outside the *Angkola* region. Furthermore, from the perspective of the validity of the *'urf* regarding the giving of a portion of the dowry to traditional leaders in the *Angkola* community, it falls under the category of a valid *'urf*, as it is an act that does not contradict Islamic legal principles. This is because, in Islam, the dowry is a valuable asset declared during the marriage contract. This differs from the traditional money, which is given prior to the contract and is already deducted from the dowry.

In accordance with the concept of the dowry in Islam, which is a mandatory gift given by the prospective husband to the prospective wife as a sincere gesture of his desire to foster love between them (Kafi, 2020). According to Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq, the dowry is considered an obligation that must be given to the prospective wife as a sign of affection and respect and is declared at the time of the marriage contract, although payment does not necessarily have to be made at that time (Effendy et al., 2023). In another context, the dowry is also viewed as an expression of a man's empathy toward his respected fiancée, making the giving of a

dowry considered a necessity. The primary function of the dowry is to elevate a woman's dignity; furthermore, the dowry serves as proof that the prospective husband is serious about his prospective wife. Voluntarily, the husband decides to sacrifice his own wealth to give to his wife as an expression of his love and affection, as well as proof of his seriousness as a prospective husband (Mrd et al., 2024).

Based on the provisions regarding the dowry in Islam and also considering the practice of taking a portion of the dowry for traditional ceremonies in *Angkola* society, the issue essentially boils down to a difference in understanding between the true concept of the dowry and the traditional money taken from the wedding gifts. Generally, the community understands that the money handed over by the groom's family to the bride-to-be is considered a dowry, even though it is not the dowry discussed in Islamic terms. Therefore, taking a portion for traditional ceremony purposes and to honor the traditional leaders facilitating the ceremony cannot be said to contradict Islamic teachings. In fact, the involvement of traditional leaders in a marriage within *Angkola* society demonstrates that the marriage is not only valid in religious terms but also fosters a sense of community and preserves respect for traditional and religious figures within that society.

Conclusion

The tradition of giving a portion of the dowry to traditional leaders in *Angkola* society is a custom that has been passed down from generation to generation. Initially, the community understood that taking a portion of the dowry money to give to traditional leaders was not in accordance with the provisions of the dowry in Islam, which is the absolute property of a married woman. However, in reality, the money referred to as a dowry is not a dowry as defined in Islam because it is handed over before the marriage contract takes place. The money handed over is more accurately described as a gift or a token of goodwill from the groom's family to the bride's family. Some members of the community also recognize that there is no urgency in giving this money to the traditional leaders, and it does not affect the marriage itself. From the perspective of Islamic law, this tradition in *Angkola* society constitutes a valid local custom (*'urf khas*) because it does not contradict the Islamic provisions regarding the dowry. The giving of money to the traditional leaders is actually meant to demonstrate that the community there deeply respects their traditional figures and religious scholars, and the involvement of these traditional leaders in a marriage proves that the marriage is not merely a relationship between two families, but also a broader social relationship.

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Sihombing, B. (2025). Interview with Mr. Sihombing. Muaratais, 15:00.