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**Factors Changing the Gayo Ethnic's Traditional Marriage Procession in  
Lut Tawar Sub-District of Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** The Gayo ethnic has diverse and unique customs compared to their family ethics in Aceh, one of which is its indigenous marriage pattern, procession, stage, and philosophy in that tradition. This study is qualitative research using an anthropological approach. Data collection techniques used are interviews and documentation and observation studies. The results of the study show that there have been changes in Gayo society which have resulted in different traditions and rituals and have adapted very much to the present. The community now tends to adapt the series of processions and phases of marriage traditions as to fit their socio-cultural atmosphere today which is now part of Gayo ethnic life atmosphere. This has brought value shift and change when explored from all aspects of its implementation. As a result, the philosophies of the indigenous marriage pattern and its series of sacred and ritual processions in every phase which was full of valuable messages and meanings including some traditional authoritative actors that is involved within become faded, forgotten, and even eliminated. The poor knowledge of the young Gayo people about their traditional values as their ancestor's cultural heritage shifted their attitudes and mindsets. The findings show that the direction of various changes within a series of Gayo marriage processions and phases pivots and leads to the concept of modern and global culture as the results of the changing of attitude, mindset and willingness to change within the community, cultural acculturation, the crisis of tradition information sources as due to the retreat of traditional leaders who played role in transmitting their culture and tradition; and the emergence of various channel and agents of changes such as the government and religious institutions, the rising level of education, people mobility, assimilation through mixed marriages, tourist destinations and mass media and new technologies as parts of agents of changes.

**Keywords:** Central Aceh, Gayo, traditional marriage procession, social changes

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# Factors Changing the Gayo Ethnic's Traditional Marriage Procession in Lut Tawar Sub-District of Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia

*by* Luthfi Auni

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**Abstrak:** Etnis Gayo memiliki adat istiadat yang berbeda dan unik jika dibandingkan dengan keluarga etnisnya yang ada di Aceh yang salah satunya adalah model perkawinan, prosesi, tahapan dan filosofi yang ada dalam tradisi tersebut. Kajian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan antropologi. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah wawancara dan studi dokumentasi dan observasi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa terjadi perubahan dalam masyarakat Gayo yang mengakibatkan tradisi dan ritualnya telah berbeda dan sudah sangat jauh beradaptasi dengan masa kekinian. Masyarakat sekarang cenderung menyesuaikan rangkaian prosesi dan tahapan-tahapan tradisi perkawinan mereka untuk menyesuaikan dengan atmosfer sosial dan kultural sekarang yang sudah menjadi bagian kehidupan masyarakat Gayo. Hal ini telah mengakibatkan terjadinya pergeseran dan perubahan nilai ketika diamati dari seluruh aspek pelaksanaannya. Akibatnya, filosofi-filosofi yang ada pada pola perkawinan asli dan rangkaian ritual dalam setiap proses dan tahapan yang dulunya penuh dengan pesan-pesan dan makna termasuk aktor-aktor yang berhak terlibat di dalamnya menjadi kabur, terlupakan dan bahkan hilang. Minimnya pemahaman etnis muda Gayo terhadap nilai-nilai tradisi etnis Gayo yang merupakan warisan budaya nenek moyang telah mengubah sikap dan cara pikir mereka. Dari temuan-temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa arah berbagai perubahan dalam rangkaian prosesi dan tahapan-tahapan pada perkawinan etnis Gayo berporos ke konsep modern dan kultur global sebagai akibat perubahan sikap, pola pikir dan keinginan untuk berubah dalam masyarakatnya, akulturasi budaya, krisis sumber-sumber informasi dan berkurangnya pimpinan-pimpinan tradisional yang sangat berperan penting dalam transmisi budaya dan tradisi; dan munculnya berbagai saluran dan agen perubahan seperti institusi pemerintah dan agama, meningkatkan level pendidikan, mobilitas penduduk, asimilasi melalui perkawinan campuran, tujuan wisata, mass media dan teknologi baru sebagai bagian dari agen-agen perubahan.

**Kata Kunci:** Aceh tengah, gayo, adat pernikahan, perubahan sosial

### Introduction

The population of Aceh is composed of various ethnic groups, Aceh, Tamiang, Kluet, Aneuk Jamee, Alas and Gayo and other immigrants from other provinces in Indonesia which known to be rich in customs that have unique characteristics in its each region. Gayo ethnic occupies the highland of Central Aceh, but today as the spread of Gayo ethnic, they are also easily found in two other districts of Aceh, namely Gayo Lues and Bener Meriah and in some other parts of the other sub-districts like Lukup and Serbajadi, East Aceh and Southeast Aceh. Gayo ethnic has diverse and unique customs compared to their

family ethnics. Gayo people nurture a variety of cultural values, such as discipline, respect for authority, solidarity, diligence, and cooperation, as behavioral standards to support self-esteem. These basic values are manifested in various walks of life including kinship, education, economics, and arts.<sup>1</sup> In terms of marriage, there are various types of customs practiced even though some time-honored customs have changed.<sup>2</sup>

Husaini discloses that the marriage customs or traditions practiced are the reflections of the previous community's behaviors, habits, and characters to the next community as a legacy and the customs.<sup>3</sup> However, later on, as in the case of other places throughout Indonesia, when Islam reached Central Aceh, local pre-Islamic cultures and traditions which were based on animism were filtered by Islamic teachings and those elements which were deviated from Islamic points of view were adapted to Islamic norms without eliminating the whole parts of pre-Islamic cultures and traditions. As a result, the combination between the pre-Islamic and Islamic finally created new customs. One important aspect of Gayo customs which picture this combination between indigenous and Islamic influences can be seen in the marriage tradition. As in the case of Gayo ethnic marriage custom, both indigenous and Islamic teaching go together that resulted in a unique form of marriage and the ritual processions within the phases in their marriage implementation. For them, marriage does not only unite the nuclear family but also unite main family and extended family members within their *belah* or clan. It can be seen from the Gayo ethnic saying "*Perang Berpangkal, Kerje Bersukut*". This saying literally means a war needs expenses; a marriage needs family. However, this saying in fact a philosophy expressing a mutual and support and help from family members to succeed the marriage procession from the beginning up to the end. The marriage custom is practiced in the form of a distinctive procession that epitomizes the concepts of cooperation and conciliation.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, getting married is the first step for both husband and wife to build a new life. Marriage is a very personal and sacred milestone in people's

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<sup>1</sup>Mulyadi, et.al., "Indonesian Islamic Law Review on the Marriage Customs of Juelen and Angkap in Gayo Tribes, Central Aceh District," *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal) : Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, No. 2 (2019), p. 427.

<sup>2</sup>Mahmud Ibrahim, *Mujahid Dataran Tinggi Gayo* (Takengon: Yayasan Maqamamahmuda, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Husaini, "Discovering Wisdom in Gayo Tradition with Reference to Islamic Educational Values in Marriage Practice," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, No. 2 (2021), p. 210.

<sup>4</sup>Abdul Manan, "Islamic Educational Values in Life-Cycle Rituals: An Ethnographic Study in Kluet Timur Community, Aceh, Indonesia," in *Global Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Paths in Islamic Education*, ed. M. Huda et al. (Hershey: IGI Global, 2020), p. 124.



lives because it is a form of agreement made by a man and woman to foster a household. Besides, Azizah, Sudjarwo, and Pujiati emphasize that the purpose of the marriage is to preserve and continue the bloodline, unite two families, and raise social status besides following the Prophet Muhammad's advice.<sup>5</sup> Marriage, as a key transition in the life cycle, is a bio-psychological marker of maturity, while sociologically it is a first step in becoming a responsible individual.<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is very natural if the process of forming a marriage is accompanied by various customs.

Contextually, the concept of marriage in the Gayo ethnic has been passed down over generations, hence it is considered an ancestral heritage reflecting the habits and characters of the community to be learned by the next generation.<sup>7</sup> Gayo Marriage system is exogamy *belah* or clan which does not allow to marry within the same *belah* or blood line within the clan. To this end, historical records show that the Gayo ethnic has two indigenous models of marriage customs, namely *juelen* and *angkap*. *Juelen* is directed to a woman that is after marriage, she must move to her husband's clan. This kind of marriage results in patrilineal and patrilocal one, while *angkap* is directed a man after marriage must live with his wife's clan. This marriage system results in matrilineal and matrilocal one. The concepts of these indigenous models have undergone changes that consequently form a new marriage model, *kerje kuso kini* (there and here). The new model provides freedom whether to settle in the man's residence or the woman's.<sup>8</sup> This model did not exist in the earlier Gayo marriage customs. Despite the changes described above, the concept of *kuso kini* does not cross the line of Islamic teaching and it is expected to strengthen family resilience in a more diverse culture.<sup>9</sup>

Social and cultural perspectives shape people's understanding and valuation in the transition of human life,<sup>10</sup> including changing the Gayo ethnic's traditional marriage procession. Changes in the culture, customs, and psychology of a group result from inside and outside the community. Here, both

<sup>5</sup>Mas Azizah, et.al., "The Shifting Tradition of Ethnic Chinese Weddings at Pecinan Village Bandar Lampung City," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 8, No. 12 (2018), p. 59.

<sup>6</sup>M. Ghufroon, "Makna Kedewasaan Dalam perkawinan," *Al-Hukama'* 6, No. 2 (2016), p. 334.

<sup>7</sup>Husaini, *Discovering Wisdom in Gayo Tradition...*, p. 207.

<sup>8</sup>Fauzi Fauzi, "The Concept of Patah Titi: The Problem of Inheritance and Its Solution in Aceh Tengah," *Studia Islamika* 26, no. 1 (2019), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup>Ridwan Nurdin, et.al., "The Gayonese Culture of Marriage System: The Islamic Law Perspective," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 5, No. 1 (2021), p. 121.

<sup>10</sup>Abdul Manan, "Pregnancy and Childbearing in Aceh, Indonesia: An Ethnographic Study," *Mankind Quarterly* 62, No. 1 (2021), p. 10-31.

internal factors and external factors do not stand alone. Both play roles in bringing changes in cultures and customs. From an internal point of view, the community's pattern of thinking and willingness to change are the two most dominant factors that bring changes in their indigenous cultures and customs. These internal factors can be induced by the development of educational backgrounds and economic opportunities, and mass media promoting new lifestyles and belief systems and then gaining various external supporting factors as process helpers within the community.

External factors that emerged become the momentum that speeds the changes. Such external factors that speed this change are the opening of the avenue of channels of change within the community has resulted in increased contact with outsiders because of greater social and geographic mobility. The meetings of these different community's backgrounds resulted in the melting pots of the indigenous cultures and customs with the new cultures of the immigrants, and step by step the indigenous community cannot stand their pure identity as in the past; the coming of various development and advancement of technologies and mass-media into the community by various means which are speedily taking place have to promote new lifestyle and belief system within the indigenous community. Therefore, the question is how the indigenous culture is different from the culture of the immigrants and what elements of the two cultures are becoming part of the culture that is now forming by contact between them.

The details of the traditional patterns of marriage customs change gradually, some even disappear. The ceremonial pattern at each phase of Gayo wedding ceremonies has far adapted to the current styles, so that the philosophical values can no longer be understood properly by the current generation. Changes in marriage customs are a necessity as things cannot last forever. Berry states that changes in both social and cultural aspects of a society are normal because the new generation adapts to the place and time in which that generation lives.<sup>11</sup>

Changes that occur in the Gayo community have positive and negative impacts on the pre-existing cultures and customs. As times change, social institutions that have existed for a long time can collapse. In his writings, Melalatoa discusses the cultural values of the Gayo people to whom the formation of self-esteem through competition is the driving value of personal development.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Hurgronje who has been the first writer discusses all

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<sup>11</sup>John W. Berry, "Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29, No. 6 (2005), p. 698.

<sup>12</sup>M. Junus Melalatoa, *Budaya Malu: Sistem Budaya Gayo Dalam Sistem Budaya Indonesia* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1997), p. 34.

intricacies of Gayo society and culture in the early 20th century.<sup>13</sup> Later, Qaidar and Annisah discuss the concept of acculturation in an attempt to understand the various phenomena produced when groups of individuals introduce a new culture resulting in changes to the original cultural patterns.<sup>14</sup> This can be seen in the implementation of the wedding ceremony which now uses other traditional clothes and modern motives clothes, though still using the Gayo language. Acculturation that blends easily and respects any existing differences will create a blend of the two cultures for the next generation. In addition, acculturation taking the form of marriage between two different ethnicities would allow consensus and compromise to acknowledge and respect one's culture; merging of both traditions; or even degradation of both cultures.<sup>15</sup>

There have been various changes in the traditional phases of Gayo marriage procession which was previously very unique and rich in philosophical meaning. At present, even though the nuances of traditional phases of marriage custom are still there, but each phase which is consisted of certain actors who perform the marriage procession and various rituals which must be done orderly and successively changes. Somehow, today's marriage customs have so far changed and adapted to more modern in nature. Therefore, the changes in each phase of the marriage procession of the Gayo ethnic are an interesting case study of the factors that affect the lives of the Gayo people in the Central Aceh Regency.

This study used qualitative research methods combining literature and field studies, namely data sources, documentation, observations, and in-depth interviews. According to Suparlan, the aim of qualitative research is studying the social life of society as a whole, what is known as the holistic approach in anthropology.<sup>16</sup> This study is conducted in the sub-district of Lut Tawar, Takengon Central Aceh. The selection of the sub-district of Lut Tawar because this sub-district is in the capital city of Central Aceh whose population are of various and different ethnic backgrounds. This heterogeneous composition of ethnic in the district of Lut Tawar is interesting as the place of this research. Third, Lut Tawar sub-district beside the main place of government is the place of activity of tradition and cultural center, political and religious, and the office of Gayo tradition Board that has functioned as a monitor of the implementation and continuation of Gayo traditions. By doing so, there is the possibility that the

<sup>13</sup>Christian Snouck Hurgronje, *Gayo, Masyarakat Dan Kebudayaannya Awal Abad Ke 20*, trans. H. H. A. Asnah (Jakarta: Balai Bahasa, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Annurul Qaidar and Nur Anisah, "Proses Akulturasi Budaya Melalui Perkawinan Campuran Suku Jawa-Gayo Di Desa Jeget Ayu Kecamatan Jagong Jeget Kabupaten Aceh Tengah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Fakultas Ilmu Sosial & Ilmu Politik* 3, No. 3 (2018), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>Qaidar and Anisah, *Proses Akulturasi Budaya...*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Parsudi Suparlan, *Metode Penelitian Kasus* (Bandung: Yayasan Akatiga, 1994), p. 25.



informants provide new insights that are outside the researcher's pre-conceived hypotheses and could provide complete and in-depth information-rich cases for the in-depth study we envisaged about factors changing the Gayo ethnic's traditional marriage procession so that the gathered data can later represent the voice of the community or some important part of it. The researchers chose informants who have a broader understanding of a dimension or concepts of interest.<sup>17</sup>

## Changes in Traditional Marriage Procession

### a. Introduction Process (Determining a Mate)

Traditionally, the process of matchmaking in traditional Gayo could be the effort of parents and that of a boy. This may be related to Gayo traditional sayings (1) *berakah i joyah, sene i telege* and (2) *sene bubak, sene bube, sene ni kekanak, sawah ku jema tue*. These two sayings have semiotic meanings which respectively and connotatively refers to the process of matchmaking in Gayo ethnic. The first refers to the effort of parents, and the second refers to the effort of a boy.<sup>18</sup> However, the final decision was always in the hand of parents and main family in the clan or *belah*.<sup>19</sup> Today, matchmaking in the present Gayo community, the young men have more rights in choosing a mate and determining his life. As a result, matchmaking which was dominantly in the hand of parents now shifts to the hand of young men when planning a marriage.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Nursiah<sup>21</sup> said that the concept of traditional matchmaking has changed according to the life patterns of modern society, because of external influences that change society from traditional to modern behaviors. Accordingly, this phenomenon decreased the messages and philosophical values contained in the traditional introduction procedure.

### b. Pre-proposing and *Munginte* (to Propose)

The process before and while proposing in the Gayo ethnic was carried out strictly to traditional guidelines. This could be related to several phases and the traditional procedure that must be passed by different intermediaries and actors such as parents, nuclear family and main family of the same blood and *belah* or clan through *beramal tidur, bernipi jege* which consists of three steps such as

<sup>17</sup>David R. Krathwohl, *Methods of Educational and Social Science Research: An Integrated Approach* (New York: Longman, 1993), p. 690.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Yusin, Former Head of Gayo Traditional Board in Central Aceh, November 27, 2021.

<sup>19</sup>S Buniyamin, *Budaya Dan Adat Istiadat Gayo Lues* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2004), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Abdussalam, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 26, 2021.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Nursiah, Female Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, October 31, 2021.

*risik*, *kono*, and *kilo*), the roles of *kekelang rukut* (informal intermediary), *telangke sange* (a formal intermediary delegation), and *sarak opat* (four village leaders consisted of a headman, an *imam*, an adviser to the headman and a community representative).<sup>22</sup> However, with the emergent change of the introduction model which in the Gayo, traditional concept in the processes and phases of traditional pre-proposing and *munginte* (proposing) faded and changed. In this case, for example, the role of the called *kekelang rukut* (an informal intermediary) and *telangke sange* (a formal intermediary delegation), has been blurred and its function is no longer clear as in the previous concept of Gayo customs. If it is so, they just perform their duty as formality.

Mahmud revealed that the process of *beramal tidur*, *bernipi jege*, where parents, nuclear and main family run through the phases of *risik*, *kono* and *kilo* (the process of checking, rechecking and deciding a family consensus for the match), still exists.<sup>23</sup> Formerly, these three phases (*risik*, *kono* and *kilo*) took a long process through a ritual of gathering of nuclear and main family of the same blood and *belah* or clan in both sides to meet a consensus because the marriage process was fully under the responsibility of all close relatives. However, these three phases no longer took a long time because they got merged into one phase for the efficiency purpose and the basic concept now is very different, if not totally changed since the young man has more rights in seeking and determining his mate. Formerly, the concept of searching and moreover deciding a matchmaking is taken through a consensus within the main family. Today, the future groom and bride have known each other and have more rights to determine their matchmaking and have discussed with their main family before the proposing process is carried out. Therefore, the phase and proceedings of customs before and while proposing are now much shorter and do not take up much time. It is a mere formality.<sup>24</sup>

The role of *kekelang rukut* (a chosen matchmaker as an intermediary out of nuclear and main family members) in the pre-proposing process, which was once very dominant, has now disappeared, even if not completely. The change of role in the pre-proposing of matchmaking was now more dominant to the future bride and groom as a result of no stricter traditional barrier as in the past in which children had less authority in marriage process. At present, future bride and groom have broader authority in selecting and determining their pairs and

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<sup>22</sup>Sihar Pandapotan, "Proses Peminangan Menurut Adat Istiadat Gayo Di Desa Kala Lengio Kecamatan Kebayakan Kabupaten Aceh Tengah," *JUPIIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu-Ilm Sosial* 9, No. 1 (2017), p. 45.

<sup>23</sup>Ibrahim, *Mujahid Dataran Tinggi Gayo*.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Suhir, Village Leader in Central Aceh, August 29, 2021.

directly have open access to propose their plan of marriage to their nuclear family.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, a key informant explained that the process and phases, as well as the actors carrying out the process of *munginte* or proposing, still exist. In the past, the phase and process of proposing was done by a formal small chosen matchmaker delegation which is called *telangke sange*. This delegation was consisted of *wali sejuk* (composed of five main family members such as aunts, grandmothers, aunt's husbands), *sarak opat* and former *kekelang rukut*. In this process, *wali porak* (parents, uncles and grandfather) are not allowed by traditional rule to join. Traditionally, in this phase of marriage procession, the delegation took with them a number of materials as the symbol of proposing, such as rice, needles with white threads stuck in turmeric, an egg, money, betel leaves, and areca nuts.<sup>26</sup> However, the philosophical meanings and the messages of *telangke sange* and the materials of proposing which were actually symbols and have their own messages which were delivered have vanished. Subsequently, the young Gayo people no longer fully understand the philosophical meanings of the term *telangke sange*, the materials that were delivered while proposing.

It seems that the behaviors of young people now are not more concerned on the previous Gayo cultural values which were firmly held by the old Gayo generation. In this regard, the nuances of modern cultures have influenced the atmosphere of cultural life of young Gayo generation. It is a fact that as in other parts of Indonesia and other countries, in this millennial era, cultural exchange undoubtedly depends on how far local culture survives against foreign culture. As in the case of Central Aceh which now has various channels of social changes, step by step modern culture also began to influence the life of young Gayo ethnic. The question is to what extent the Gayo community is able to adapt to other cultures without eliminating their own culture. According to Jenks, these changes are driven by industrialization and technology, which are very expansionist and unstoppable. Sometimes, the cultural boundaries are getting blurred or even eliminated by so-called modernization.<sup>27</sup>

### c. *Pakat Sara Ine* (Nuclear Family Meeting)

*Pakat sara ine* has been an important phase in Gayo ethnic marriage phase. This phase is a special gathering of nuclear and the main family which

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Zulkarnain, Academician Figure in Central Aceh, November 28, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Selimah, Female Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, October 30, 2021

<sup>27</sup> Chris Jenks, *Culture*, trans. Erika Setyawati, 2nd ed. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), p. 2.



have blood line with the family.<sup>28</sup> In the Gayo ethnic, this step must be done seriously since marriage has been full responsibility of the whole nuclear and main family.<sup>29</sup> At this phase, Ibrahim and Hakim explained, the strong concept of *pakat sara ine* could be seen clearly when a family carried out a wedding procession, with the involvement of nuclear and main family of both the bride's and groom's in their respective village, starting from the preparation phase to the wedding day as a responsibility towards the family and relatives.<sup>30</sup> This act of responsibility embedded in the Gayo community is known as *alang tulung, beret berbantu* (helping each other). In the Gayo ethnic, contextually, *pakat sara ine* was an instrument to reinforce the value of cooperation within the extended family. According to Cooley, cooperation will arise when people realize that they have the same interests and at the same time have sufficient knowledge and self-control to achieve these interests through teamwork.<sup>31</sup> In the *pakat sara ine*, family members deliberated and formed a consensus on marital issues like preparation, budgeting and togetherness of mutual helping from the beginning up to the end of the marriage phases. The *pakat sara ine* conveyed the philosophical values of solidarity and social integration. According to Kutoyo, social integration was a process of assimilation between members of the community into one unit, to produce a harmonious life pattern.<sup>32</sup>

It seems that today this concept of *pakat sara ine* has begun to fade so the sense of collective responsibility has changed. First, one important aspect that brought this change has been due to the spread of nuclear family members moving to other districts or places which are far from their original settlement. Second, changes of work variations, if formerly they lived in one village with the main earning was farming and agriculture, now works in various fields of private sectors outside the districts and government agencies which have strict rule of work time, are also another factor that fades this sense of collective responsibility. These changes were inevitable because of the rapid and uncontrolled intrusion of new information and new cultures into Gayo society.

#### **d. Pakat Sudere and Beguru (Formal Family Gathering and Giving Advice)**

Based on the researchers' observation, the phase of *pakat sudere*, which is a meeting of nuclear family with the *sarak opat* (village leaders) and village

<sup>28</sup>Gunsu Nurmansyah, et.al., *Pengantar Antropologi: Sebuah Ikhtisar Mengenal Antropologi* (Bandar Lampung: Aura Publisher, 2019), p. 98.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Ibnu Hajar Former Official Figure in Central Aceh, August 28, 2021.

<sup>30</sup>Mahmud Ibrahim and Hakim, *Syariat Dan Adat Istiadat* (Takengon: Yayasan Maqammahmuda, 2002), p. 89.

<sup>31</sup>Charles Horton Cooley, *Social Organization: A Study of the Larger Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>32</sup>Sutrisno Kutoyo, *Sosiologi* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2004).



members in the respective place of the groom and bride, still existed in the Gayo marriage process even though it has changed here and there.

*Pakat sudere* was one of the important phases in the sequence in Gayo marriage customs because at this phase the family formally handed over the responsibilities related to marriage to the *sarak opat* or local community leaders which is consisted of *reje* (village head), *imem* (imam), *petue* (village head adviser), and *rakyat* the community representative. This stage was considered crucial because since then all functions and roles of the parents and nuclear family are handed over to customary institutions. Legally, the husband- and wife-to-be belong to the community, and they will be handed over to village leaders. Previously, before *pakat sudere* began, special seats had been prepared for the village head, imam, and traditional elders. Two containers were prepared. Each contained the same materials including rice (2 liters), areca nut, betel leaves, and money, covered with a piece of yellow fabric for the *reje* and the other covered with a piece of white fabric for the imam. Then the prospective groom or bride proceeded with the handover ceremony from the family to the village head and the imam by using *melangkan* (Gayo adat speech). Today, the handover process from the family to the *sarak opat* is still practiced but the process changed a lot.

There have been several changes in the values of the *pakat sudere* process in the Gayo marriage customs. For example, *pakat sudere* used to be carried out at night, generally after the *isya* (evening prayer), but can now take place at any time. It could be in the evening, afternoon, or morning around 08.00 to 11.00 AM. That is, the community now carries out the process depending on the available time.

There was one other very striking change where previously, as with traditional manners, there were other small phases in the *pakat sudere* which is called *beguru* (giving advice) procedure such as *manat fatanah* through *sebuku* (ritual wailing) in which parents, nuclear and extended main family conveyed advices to the bride and groom while crying<sup>33</sup> and *ejer marah* which had to be carried out stepwise and separately. At this time, the entire series of *beguru* proceedings has been merged so that the stages of giving advice have been carried out sequentially at the same time and place. Thus, the values, essences, and contents that were very sacred and valuable for a prospective bride and groom have been faded.

In traditional Gayo society, as tradition rule, a *reje* (village head) had a mandate and a moral responsibility to check the presence of the nuclear family

<sup>33</sup>For further description of *sebuku* or ritual wailing, see John R. Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900-1989* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 27-28.

members and close relatives of the groom- or bride-to-be. If someone was absent, then the *reje* asked the family to bring him to the room. In addition, if there was an unresolved internal issue in the family, the *beguru* procedure would be postponed and possibly cancelled. According to our key informants, the concept of trust as assigned by custom to the *reje* has now disappeared and is no longer a special concern of a *reje*. Thus, one of the important missions, as mandated in Gayo customs, has been lost and is no longer known.

The next procedure of the *beguru* phase was a ritual of watering, which is a traditional process of sprinkling water with various special leaves and sowing rice as an expression of appeal to God. In the traditional Gayo customs, the main actor who carried out this ritual was one of the *ralik* (female close relatives). The assignment of this special task to one of the lineages of the mother expressed the hope that all families must unite; therefore, the presence of all nuclear families within the extended family was a must. The main message was to act as a liaison between families that generally had moved apart due to *juelen's* marriage whose concept is patrilocal residence. *Juelen's* marriage is the bride moved permanently to her husband village, lost her original clan status and the children of this kind of marriage belong to the husband lineage and this kind of marriage produces patrilocal residence.

The stage of the *pakat sudere* is sacred gathering. Traditionally, since this gathering, the head of the village will be responsible for the entire process of marriage in Gayo ethnic, including handed over the distribution of tasks for each member of the village for succeeding the wedding ceremonies. However, it begins fading especially in the capital city of Central Aceh and in its some village surroundings as the place of this research. For example, in many cases, once a wedding was going to be held, almost all of the supporting facilities were rented, these functions and duties being shared by all the *sudere*. Likewise, the wedding banquet shifted to modern forms of catering and buffet dining, no longer served in a *beredang*, where dishes are delivered to guests on trays filled with various menus. Then when the family performed *mango* (inviting) *reje* (village head), *imem* (imam), and *petue* (adviser), and the whole family members in the village, the one in charge of conveying the invitation was supposed to be the aunty of the bride or the groom from door to door. Now, anyone in nuclear family could take on this role as the representative both through direct visits the houses and using technological tools such as the telephone. Henslin suggested that sociologically, technology has a deeper meaning than mere equipment. Technology establishes a new framework for the non-material culture of a group, but will also change the way people think and

the way they experience changes.<sup>34</sup> This is related to changes in the way people communicate with other people.<sup>35</sup> The third change was about the time when *pakat sudere* was held. In the traditional Gayo ethnic, *pakat sudere* was held at night, now generally the time for the *pakat sudere* meeting has moved to the afternoon.<sup>36</sup>

Changes that occurred in the Gayo community were primarily caused by the community wanting instant benefits in any activities under the pretext of not wanting to bother others. This especially takes place in the towns whose community members have various activities. As a result, the values of *gotong royong* and solidarity as in the past were fading. Mac Iver and Page said that society is a system of customs, procedures, authorities, and cooperation between various groups to control behaviors and liberties. Society is a fabric of social relations that keeps changing.<sup>37</sup> Whereas, Linton argued that society is any group of people who have lived and worked together for a long time so that they can organize themselves and consider themselves as a social unit with clearly defined boundaries.<sup>38</sup>

The changes in the phases and procedures of the *pakat sudere* in the Gayo marriage customs occurred due to changes in the interactional dimension. This can be related to the form of relationship that occurred in the Gayo ethnic when technology and communication changed. These changes cannot be separated from innovations that come from the community itself. According to Rogers, there are three stages as follows:

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- a) Invention, the process by which new ideas are created and developed.
- b) Diffusion, the process by which new ideas are communicated into the social system.
- c) Consequences, the changes that occur in the social system as the result of the adoption or rejection of innovations.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup>James M. Henslin, *Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings*, 14th ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 540.

<sup>35</sup>Ana Puji Astuti and Anike RPS Nuralita, "Teknologi Komunikasi Dan Perilaku Remaja," *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 3, No. 1 (2014), pp. 94-95.

<sup>36</sup>Interview with Abdussalam, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 26, 2021.

<sup>37</sup>Robert M. Mac Iver and Charles Page, *Society* (New York: Barnes and Noble College Outline Series, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Linton, *The Science of Man in the World Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 1945), p. 171.

<sup>39</sup>Mary F. Rogers, *Sociology, Ethnomethodology and Experience*, ed. Ernest Q. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 18.



**e. Igurun (Specific Advice)**

*Igurun* (specific advice) was one of the main phases in the Gayo marriage procession. In traditional Gayo community the *igurun* stage is a process of advising by the village imam to the husband- and wife-to-be at their respective imam's houses. The one who acts as a teacher (adviser) for the husband-to-be is the *male imam* in his village and for the wife-to-be is the *imem banan* (female imam) in her village.<sup>40</sup> The main point of *igurun* was specific advice related to husband-and-wife rights and responsibilities, and building a new family.<sup>41</sup> The groom-to-be is also given guidance on memorizing short verses of the Qur'an and how to answer the *ijab qabul* of the marriage contract later. Mahmud added that the function of the *igurun*, which was traditionally a ritual of religious rule and had to be performed by the full authority of village imams now changes. This change has been made by the rule of national institution.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the traditional authorities have been transferred legally to KUA or Office of Religious Affairs established by the government. This means that there are functions and roles of traditional authority that are supposed to be in the hands of the *sarak opat* and imam now moves to the government. Thus, we can observe a change in the structure of the traditional Gayo community, where a local role has shifted to a government institution, the Ministry of Religion.

**f. Wedding Party**

Traditionally, a wedding party was only held in the form of a *jege uce* or *jege kaul* event. There were no other special parties after that either when escorting the groom or when receiving the bride. It means that the celebration or party was only done with family and relatives respectively.

There was a tradition of the Gayo community on the day before the wedding at the residence of both the groom and the bride. A group of neighbors (women only) did becoming—playing musical instruments such as gongs and tambourines accompanied by Gayo poetry. The purpose of this *becanang* was to entertain the parents and women who were busy cooking and preparing food in the kitchen. In addition, the sound of the *becanang*, which could be heard hundreds of meters away, indicated that there was a celebration or wedding party in the place. The *becanang* tradition is now rare at weddings at capital city of Central Aceh, Takengon because it was degraded by modern culture.

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<sup>40</sup>Interview with Yusin, Former Head of Gayo Traditional Board in Central Aceh, November 27, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Ibrahim, *Mujahid Dataran Tinggi Gayo...*, p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> Ibrahim, *Mujahid Dataran Tinggi Gayo...*, p. 66.



The traditional arts such as traditional dances and *didong jalu*,<sup>43</sup> which were performed at the wedding party and only done in separate place for men and women, especially in Lut Tawar sub-district also changed if not completely. As in other modern societies, the Gayo wedding party today is filled with traditional arts as well as modern entertainment. Nowadays, at the wedding ceremony, a special stage is established and modern music instruments are rented and local singers are hired and at the same time the families and visitors can perform singing and dancing on the stage in front of the invited guests as in the show that was traditionally prohibited because it was *sumang* (taboo).

*Sumang* was a cultural system that had been rooted in the Gayo community as the basic pattern and foundation of life and communication, kinship, social relations, knowledge, beliefs, values, and rules that become a reference for behavior in social life.<sup>44</sup> *Sumang* (literally means a deviation of act from culture and religion which shows impoliteness) was categorized into *sumang kenunulen* (incongruous or inappropriate act in sitting), *sumang perceraken* (incongruous/inappropriate act in speaking), *sumang pelangkahan* (incongruous/ inappropriate act in walking), and *sumang penengonen* (inappropriate act of seeing congruous in. Singing and dancing as on the stage provided at the wedding party as depicted above were classified as *sumang penengonen* or *inappropriate act in seeing*, inappropriate to watch.

#### g. *Mujule Bai or Rempole* (Escorting the Groom)

In general, before escorting the groom to the house of the bride, the groom dressed in *kerawang* Gayo (traditional clothes), but now the forms of the groom's clothes had been adapted to the present. One of our informants explained that today the groom's attire consists of a long-sleeved shirt, often also a suit, trousers, a cap, and an *upuh ules ulen-ulen* (Gayo traditional large scarf) worn over his shoulders. The model and style show that there was a modernization process. A process of acculturation between traditional and modern culture in the Gayo ethnic wedding customs.<sup>45</sup>

In this *mujule bai*, as in the past, the village leaders or *sarak opat* (*reje, imem, petue and rakyat*) still play a central role when escorting the groom. Likewise, when the groom and his family arrive, they are greeted by the *sarak opat* (village leaders) from the bride's side. Traditionally, as depicted by all informants, the most authoritative figures in the process of handing over the

<sup>43</sup>For further description of *Didong Jalu*, see John R.Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900-1989* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 28 & 174-183.

<sup>44</sup>Melalatoa, *Budaya Malu...*, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup>Interview with Basaruddin, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh., September 25, 2021.

groom were the heads (*rejes*) of both villages by sitting face to face with short ritual by exchanging betel leaves and delivering respective speech using *melengkan* (Gayo adat speech). As ruled by Gayo tradition, these figures were not allowed to be replaced by other figures.<sup>46</sup> However today, as the writer's direct searches in some ceremonies of the handover of the groom to the village leaders (*sarak opat*) of the bride's village in Lut Tawar sub-district have been far changing. When the procession of formal handing over the groom to the authorities on the bride's side starts, the role and authority of both formal *rejes* is taken over by other persons as temporary *rejes* of the moment who are knowledgeable of Gayo tradition using *melengkan*.<sup>47</sup> This means that on this day the handover of the groom is generally no longer carried out directly by the groom's *reje* to the bride's *reje*. It is rather performed by their respective representatives *as the stunt men* while the two *rejes* just sit and listen. According to one of the informants, this change of status is due the fact that, if formerly in the traditional era, one of the requirements of *reje* is knowledgeable in all aspects of tradition including *melengkan*, but in this modern era, this requirement is not any more applied because the *reje* has a set of requirements which have been determined by the government, without placing that traditional requirement as important part of village head (*reje*) appointment.<sup>48</sup>

Another change which also can clearly be seen that if in traditional Gayo ethnic, the procession of handing over the groom by the two village leaders (*rejes*) sat face to face, after exchanging the betel leaves and followed by the adat speech (*melengkan*), which took a long time, today the procession is done by respective representative very much shorter while standing as if in the common speech. This great change of time duration in the process of handing over the groom to a great extent is due to the fact that the most crucial aspect of this phase is *ijab kabul* (marriage contract).

From the above contexts, we can draw a conclusion that there are two factors that bring about changing in the procedures of handing over the groom. First is the efficiency of time since there will be other processions which must be conducted. Second is the influence of Islamic religion since the groom and marriage guardian have been taking praying ablution to perform the marriage contract (*ijab kabul*) which is the most important aspect in the event.

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<sup>46</sup>Interview with Suhir, Village Leader in Central Aceh, August 29, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> For further description on *melengkan*, see John R.Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900-1989*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 151-168.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Basaruddin, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh,, September 25, 2021.

#### **h. *Sawah Ukum* (Marriage Contract)**

There has not been much change in the process of setting up the marriage contract (Arabic: *ijab qabul*) since this phase as in the past, is done in line with Islamic teaching. As explained by one informant, the actor who plays the most important role in *ijab qabul* is the imam. As for now, another actor has emerged: an officer of the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) representing the government in the processing of the marriage contract. Likewise, when entering the marriage sermon phase, it is now the government representative who delivers the marriage sermon. Although sometimes this task is still carried out by the village imam, it appears that the involvement of the imam is now only for respect. We can conclude that certain roles and duties of the traditional structure have been taken over by the government since as Indonesian rule, marriage contract must be noticed by the government. However, by this picture, there has changed the social structure of the Gayo ethnic tradition rule in which the influence of the formal government has reduced the authority of the local traditional ruler.

#### **i. *Semah Tungel* (Bride and Groom Meeting)**

Concerning the concept of *semah tungel*, some phases and patterns of the traditional procedure have been deliberately changed or adapted because they contradicted the teachings of Islam. One informant explained that the traditional and previous *semah tungel* of the bride showing her submission to the groom by bowing her head and touching the tip of the husband's right foot three times was not following Islamic teachings so the way of *semah tungel* was changed to only hand shaking although the bride still bowed her head to the groom's hands three times, but not to his foot.<sup>49</sup>

#### **j. The Abstinence (The Meeting Prohibition Between the Bride and The Groom)**

Another informant explained that the traditional phase of abstinence after the marriage contract, where the groom was not allowed to stay fully at the bride's house for one week and for this he had to stay with the bride's relatives in the village, has now disappear because it was not following Islamic teachings as Islam does not separate the bride and groom after the marriage contract is uttered.<sup>50</sup>

From the explanations related to *sawah ukum*, *semah tungel*, and abstinence, it can be concluded that the changes that occurred in these three aspects of marriage customs were triggered by Islamic teachings which have been the highest norm in the Gayo ethnic community.

<sup>49</sup>Interview with Anwar, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, October 31, 2021.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Kamaluddin, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 26, 2021.



## Factors Affecting Changes in Gayo Ethnic Marriage Traditions

### a. Internal Factors

The most prominent internal factor was the demand for change, in addition to other internal factors. One informant stated that the time led the society to a confusing transition period whether to maintain traditional marriage customs or innovate to find other alternatives that suit the occasion.<sup>51</sup> One of the most significant changes that occurred in Gayo traditional marriage proceedings – called *sinte mungêrje* – was influenced internally by several factors, namely a general degradation of understanding traditional Gayo customs; educational curricula that exclude the Gayo philosophical ethics; and the gradual decline of native Gayo leaders and speakers in the community.<sup>52</sup>

According to Arfiansyah, two factors caused the ulama to defend their cultural customs. First, the previous Gayo ulama failed to develop new cultural practices to replace the practiced customs at that time. The second was the breakdown of the regeneration of reforming scholars, who want to preserve traditional customs while also minimizing violation of Islamic teachings.<sup>53</sup> To this end, later scholars chose to seek justification from religious texts to support customary practices. This was important as a way for the Gayo community to practice Islamic teachings when the reformist ulama did not get a successor. Another figure that was supposed to contribute to traditional marriage preservation was the local leader, in this case, the village head (*reje*). According to Bakti, Nirzalin, and Abidin, the role of *reje* today has been shifted to that of bureaucrat or politician, influenced by a contorted process of democratization, rather than a local leader who could unite the villagers.<sup>54</sup>

There was resistance to these developments by the traditional Gayo ethnic group, which tried to maintain the existing customs. The emergence of this situation in Gayo society, with tensions between traditional and modern groups in the face of ongoing changes, was caused by a cultural gap between the generations. Social scientists call this cultural lag.<sup>55</sup> However, the term “modern

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<sup>51</sup>Interview with Salman, Academician & Traditional Expert Figure in Central Aceh, October 30, 2021.

<sup>52</sup>Indra Setia Bakti, et.al., “Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual Prosesi Adat Pernikahan Sintê Mungêrjê Pada Masyarakat Gayo Lôt,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik Malikussaleh (JSPM)* 1, No. 2 (2020), p. 184.

<sup>53</sup>A. Arfiansyah, “Contemporary Changes and Uses of Adat in Gayo Society, Indonesia,” *Heritage of Nusantara: International Journal of Religious Literature and Heritage* 10, No. 1 (2021), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup>Indra Setia Bakti, et.al., *Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual...*, p. 170.

<sup>55</sup>Interview with Joni, Academician and Traditional Writer Figure in Central Aceh, August 28, 2021.



Gayo” actually refers to the rejuvenation of traditional culture embedded in Islamic teaching. Those elements which are deviated from Islamic points of view were adapted to Islamic norms without eliminating the whole of pre-Islamic cultures and traditions. As in the case of Gayo ethnic marriage customs, for instance, various traditions practiced are the reflections of the previous community's habits and Islamic teaching which have been merged into one through acculturation. This view can clearly be seen in two Gayo well-known sayings in the Gayo ethnic society, *agama ibarat senuwen*, *edet ibarat peger* which literally means religion (Islam) is like the plant, tradition is like its fence; and *edet urum ukum*, *lagu zet urum sifet* which literally means tradition and law (Islamic law) are like substance and its trait). However, these two saying connotatively mean both religion (Islam) and tradition have been playing role in the Gayo ethnic community life. Both religion and tradition become ways of their life in all of their life domains. For instance, the system of marriage payment which was previously with the bride's father's power or social status has been replaced by the Islamic practice of *Mahr*;<sup>56</sup> and the marriage payment by the groom's parents to the bride's parent the so called '*unyuk*' has now been eliminated. Alyasa' (1976) mentioned that with different concept, today traditional *unyuk* had been replaced by *teniron*.<sup>57</sup>

Another interesting conclusion of a study by Bakti, Amin, and Fakhurrurazi is that sometimes the indifference to the sacredness of Gayo culture might be attributed to the lack of understanding of the meaning of the rituals and avoid maintaining the continuous rituals which have a long and complicated procession which eventually leaves them as just a common and efficient practice.<sup>58</sup>

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the modernist understanding was motivated by changes in attitudes in response to various external factors. These included the opening of access to Central Aceh Regency from other areas, resulting in an influx of various ethnics, technologies, and modernization into the Gayo highland. Hence, the moment has arrived for the younger Gayo generation to change and get various supports (process helpers) that come from a changing environment, so that the process of change will automatically suit the present era. One aspect which may be clearly seen in this regard is from the direction of change taking place in Gayo marriage system

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<sup>56</sup>John R.Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900-1989*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 111.

<sup>57</sup>Alyasa' Abubakar, *Pandangan Islam terhadap Hukum Waris Adat Gayo di Daerah Gayo Lut Kabupaten Daerah Tingkat II Aceh Tengah* (unpublished Thesis), IAIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 1976, 47.

<sup>58</sup>Bakti, et.al., *Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual...*, p. 184.

which shifted from traditional to modern way through acculturation.<sup>59</sup> This process of change occurs as the results of thinking and motivating of the young generation wanting to fit themselves to present environment and social interaction. Young people realize that it is impossible prevent their traditional ways and all successive rituals within all stages of traditional marriage processions. Four informants clearly mentioned that today young generation do not follow the whole patterns of marriage phases as in the past. Many phases have been merged and shortened as to keep efficiency of time and expenses.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the old traditional notions of marriage which took a long time and earned a lot of expenses are then adapted to this modern era by ways of combining some phases of marriage rituals and processions based on practical, efficiency of time, and economic expenses.

### b. External Factors

Changes in the marriage customs of the Gayo ethnic are an example of acculturation. This can be seen in all the changes of marriage customs that have taken place in today's Gayo society. Overall, although some parts have been abandoned or distorted, the phases and proceedings of today's marriage customs still follow most of the traditional marriage patterns of the previous Gayo ethnic. As explained by one informant, the phases and traditional procedures are still clearly visible now in every traditional wedding ceremony, especially marriages between spouses within the Gayo ethnics, even though they have been mixed with new cultural elements.<sup>61</sup> Acculturation in the Gayo community was influenced by an egalitarian attitude towards all newcomers from other ethnicities. By egalitarianism, we mean a view of equality towards humans regardless of race, gender, religion, and so on. This egalitarian doctrine maintains that all human beings are fundamentally equal in value or moral status.<sup>62</sup> The egalitarian attitude of the Gayo people towards the newcomers shows that the Gayo people were tolerant, and that this was part of their original culture. This attitude made it possible for outsiders to marry Gayo people, so that the new mixed culture emerged. This can be seen today that mixed marriage among the Gayo ethnic and other ethnics is a common picture in the Central Aceh.

<sup>59</sup>J. Hercovits, Melville, *Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 212.

<sup>60</sup>Interview with Abdussalam, Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 26, 2021

<sup>61</sup>Interview with Yusin, Former Head of Gayo Traditional Board in Central Aceh, November 27, 2021.

<sup>62</sup>Arneson Richard, "Egalitarianism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/egalitarianism/>.

Mixed marriage is an important cause of changes in Gayo ethnic customs in general and changes in the sequence of marriage customs in particular. This is explained by the majority of informants of this research. The fact shows that the social reality of mixed marriage customs will lead to the emergence of a new culture in society. One informant said that it is difficult to apply Gayo marriage customs properly in mixed marriages. The procedures carried out are usually mixed with the partner's customs, causing a gap either in language or speech.<sup>63</sup> In this regard, of course, the language which is part of the Gayo ethnic's customs can no longer be fully implemented. Consequently as Bowen clearly depicted that the selection of language use is basically based on ethnic identity of mixed parental identity.<sup>64</sup> The traditional Gayo marriage procession that used the Gayo language has begun to be abandoned. Consequently, the Gayo language as one of the most important parts of Gayo culture automatically faded because children born from mixed marriages will use Indonesian as their mother tongue.<sup>65</sup>

As for another factor, the increasing and decreasing presence of people who leave or arrive in the population impacted the customs. Newcomers who did not know Gayo customs and who socialized little with the local community caused them to carry out the customs that they were familiar with. This amounted to the entry of a new culture into a society which was then observed, accepted, and over time used in that society. The traditional sequence of marriage customs was considered complicated and long-winded by the Gayo generation themselves, made worse by a frequent lack of understanding of the meaning contained in each phase. Worse yet, the nature of modern society for fast and instant in everything caused rapid changes to the existing customs, even replacing them.<sup>66</sup>

### Gayo Marriage Traditions and Social Changes

Based on changes in the marriage customs of the Gayo ethnic and its influencing factors, it is related to Lauer's opinion that changes in the context of

<sup>63</sup>Interview with Suhir, Village leader in Central Aceh, August 29, 2021

<sup>64</sup>John R. Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900-1989* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, p. 18.

Bakti, et.al, "Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual...", p. 169.

<sup>65</sup>Interview with Joni, Academician & Traditional Expert Figure in Central Aceh, August 28, 2021

<sup>66</sup>Ridwan Benny et. al., "Islam Nusantara, Ulemas, and Social Media: Understanding the Pros and Cons of Islam Nusantara among Ulemas of West Sumatera," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, No. 2 (2019), p. 172. M. Noor Harisuddin, "The Formulation of Nusantara Fiqh in Indonesia," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 21, No. 1 (2021).



the procession of customs can be related to the theory of social action.<sup>67</sup> The description of the practices that exist in the traditional and modern Gayo ethnic, marriage practices are still being carried out in different versions. However, in general, each stage and procedure for its implementation has undergone various changes. Unlike *Aneuk Jamee*, an ethnic inhabiting South Aceh, they still preserve all phases of the marriage proceedings according to their ancestors' heritage including that the final decision on behalf of the woman is still in the hand of her parents.<sup>68</sup>

Changes that occur in the marriage procession of the Gayo community are part of the general influence of modernism and globalization. Modernization has become a global phenomenon in which every country and every individual participates, with the elimination of many barriers and boundaries between countries. The development of globalization is evidenced by people's behaviors, such as their universal fascination with high-tech equipment. In addition to the positive impacts of communication technology, globalization also harms endogenous social change in society when outside influences obliterate the original culture of a country.

Almeida and Chase-Dunn reveal that globalization has been known as one of the important spurs to social change as societies are more easily connected that sometimes social change contributes the conflict between one culture with another.<sup>69</sup> But in the case of Gayo, it seems this conflict of culture was avoidable through accommodation of traditional and modern cultures through a peaceful way or the so-called penetration *pacifique*. Moreover, globalization triggers social changes by changing people's values, including from togetherness to individualism from steadiness to instant gratification and from simple to luxurious.<sup>70</sup>

The experience of changes is part of every human being's life, changes both or slow and limited or unlimited. Changes in society can be in the form of social values, social norms, patterns of organizational behavior, the structure of social institutions, power and authority, social interaction, and so on.<sup>71</sup> Social

<sup>67</sup>Robert H. Lauer, *Perspektif Tentang Perubahan Sosial*, ed. 2, trans. Alimandan (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1993), p. 106-117.

<sup>68</sup>Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of Marriage: An Ethnographic Study in West Labuhan Haji-South Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 2, No. 2 (2014), p. 42. Abdul Manan, *The Ritual Calendar of South Aceh, Indonesia*, (Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WWU Muenster, Reihe X, Band 22, MV-Verlag-Germany, 2015), p. 70-93.

<sup>69</sup>Paul Almeida and Chris Chase-Dunn, "Globalization and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, No. 1 (July 30, 2018), p. 203.

<sup>70</sup>Benny et al., *Islam Nusantara, Ulemas, and Social Media...*, p. 178.

<sup>71</sup>Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi: Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001), p. 259.



change can be caused by a discovery or invention. Discoveries are new cultural elements, either tools or ideas created by an individual. Discovery only becomes an invention if the community has recognized, accepted, and applied it to their lives. Modernization, by introducing a multitude of discoveries and innovations from outside, is responsible for the degradation of traditional cultural practices that had been preserved for centuries. According to Bakti, et.al, the deeper meaning of the Gayo marriage proceedings reflected in symbols and social interaction amongst local people gradually has been replaced by the infiltration of modernization and globalization which tend to be rushed and lack of understanding.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, Sztompka suggests that changes that occur in the phases and proceedings of marriage are motivated by external influences (religion) as a trigger to change people's mind-sets. These influences include several factors, namely: population, social structure, social functions, social boundaries, family roles, and the acceptance of new rules indoctrinated by certain institutions.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Soekanto gives the view that the changes occur because of the community's efforts to adapt their interests and conditions to the changes in the community as behavior intended to protect the individual from the imagined effects of real change.<sup>74</sup>

In these societies, there is a kind of resistance from traditional groups to any change of previously established concepts in order to preserve their ancestral heritage. On the one hand, modern groups want new things, creating a conflict between the two. In addition, society is always moving, developing, and changing. These dynamics occur because of internal factors inherent in the community itself, although they can also happen due to outside influences.<sup>75</sup>

Marcuse says that if this condition that raises concerns from traditional actors continues, then the future of local culture becomes increasingly bleak. This happens when temptations that hit from outside induce many members of society to embrace global values that are one-dimensional.<sup>76</sup> In this stage, the development of education levels and advancement of technology and mass media that enter to traditional group have changed their traditional way of thinking into modern one. One of our informants acknowledges that social changes have often occurred in the community, but nevertheless the purity of Gayo customs was still maintained until the 1970s. However, by the 1980s new

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<sup>72</sup>Bakti, et.al., *Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual*..., p. 169.

<sup>73</sup>Piotr Sztompka, *Sosiologi Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Prenada, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup>Soekanto, *Sosiologi: Suatu Pengantar*, p. 311.

<sup>75</sup>J Dwi Narwoko and Bagong Suyanto, *Sosiologi: Teks Pengantar Dan Terapan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2004), p. 365.

<sup>76</sup>Herbert Marcuse and Douglas Kellner, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 34.

values originating from outside Gayo began to emerge. He added that the graph of social change increased in the community after the tsunami hit Aceh around the end of 2004.<sup>77</sup>

Raho explains that changes in culture and customs are a situation where the arrival of a new culture affects the customs that already exist in the community.<sup>78</sup> The change in customs is caused by the increasing and decreasing population, discoveries, community resistance, and outside influences.<sup>79</sup> In addition, commodification makes the youths' lifestyles change to the modern, inducing them to discard their own marriage concept in favor of another culture, especially western culture inspired by influencers and celebrities dwelling in metropolitan cities such as Jakarta.<sup>80</sup> This culture is in stark contrast with Gayo's original customs, which are liable to be considered "out of date" or even rejected. Consequently, the present ceremony is missing the hidden and traditional values that were previously embedded in such activity as part of village life. Additionally, Soemardjan reinforces that a general sense of dissatisfaction could be the cause of a change in society's customs. As a consequence, the community will subconsciously adapt to the presently existing environment.<sup>81</sup>

In the case of the Gayo people, cultural change is also influenced by the number of immigrants who migrated to Central Aceh. Gayo ethnicity can be classified as an ethnic group that has broadly accepting views of other ethnic groups in Aceh province. They can live side by side with immigrants, for example with Javanese, Minangkabau, Chinese, Batak/Mandailing, and several other ethnicities. Of all the immigrants, the most intimate relationship occurs with the Javanese because the Javanese character can adapt to the local community.<sup>82</sup> Their arrival has induced acculturation so that there is now a blend of foreign culture with indigenous culture. There is assimilation so that the authenticity of local culture is no longer visible but a new culture is formed in its place. One example of this assimilation is how *Canang*, as traditional entertainment held during the wedding, now has been replaced by the use of

<sup>77</sup>Interview with Zulkarnain, Academician Figure in Central Aceh, November 28, 2021.

<sup>78</sup>Bernardus Raho, *Sosiologi*, 4th ed. (Mamere: Ledalero, 2016).

<sup>79</sup>Soerjono Soekanto and Budi Sulistyowati, *Sosiologi: Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2017), p. 273.

<sup>80</sup>Bakti, et.al., *Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual...* p. 146.

<sup>81</sup>Selo Soemardjan, *Sosiologi Perubahan Sosial* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Grup, 2003), p. 45.

<sup>82</sup>Effiati Juliana Hasibuan and Indra Muda, "Komunikasi Antar Budaya Pada Etnis Gayo Dengan Etnis Jawa," *Jurnal Simbolika: Research and Learning in Communication Study* 3, No. 2 (2018), p. 107.

many kinds of modern musical instruments and performances which degrade the values of *sinte mungerje*.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, Pinan expresses that the proposal phase of marriage carried out by some Gayo ethnics is slightly different from what their ancestors did.<sup>84</sup> In the past, the basis for the first proposal was to deliver the materials of proposing that had been prepared and then wait for three days before a decision was made on whether it was accepted or rejected. But today, the decision on the proposal is made on the same day when materials were delivered together with *teniron* (request), and the determination of wedding date. Not all Gayo people obey the customs that have been passed down from generation to generation. This change of attitude is due to the fact that modern Gayo people use the time as efficiency as possible since the process of matchmaking has been more open and the consensus have been done by the parents' future groom and bride. Apart from that, they are also faced with the reality that the current Gayo generation is experiencing a crisis of understanding about the actual series of rituals and phases of marriage proposal according to Gayo *edet sedenge* (previous custom). In the end, the marriage custom which include series of successive phases and processions of the Gayo people has changed its traditional unique atmosphere so much.

Ibrahim and Hakim also explain the process of proposing according to Gayo custom took long time. First, the groom's main family held a meeting discussing the prospective bride regarding her religion, lineage, and ensuring that she is not being courted by someone else. After that, a small delegation (*telangke sange*) that brings a number of proposal materials which are called '*mujule peramalen*' goes to the desired bride's place to discuss with the girl's family that the boy's family wants her to be their girl-in-law. This process took a long time since the decision from the girl's main family needed to get together to get a consensus by *beramal tidur*, *bernipi jege* through three steps such as *risik*, *kono* and *kilo* which in the part of the groom's family was done before their decision to send a small delegation to the bride's family. If later one, the proposal was agreed, the small delegation revisits the bride's family as the step of *munusah nemah* which literally means giving a burden, but its semiotic meaning was some requirement of marriage that the bride's family offered such as number of *mahr* (dowry), *teniron* (girl's request) and *unyuk* (parents' request).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Bakti, et.al., "*Ruang Sakral Dan Ruang Ritual...*", p. 184.

<sup>84</sup>Hakim Aman Pinan, *Hakikat Nilai-Nilai Budaya Gayo* (Banda Aceh: Pemerintah Kabupaten Aceh Tengah, 2001), p. 76.

<sup>85</sup>Ibrahim and Hakim, *Syariat Dan Adat Istiadat*, p. 180.



A part of various aspects which have been discussed above, as far as the writer is concerned, in all formal speech or utterances of the Gayo ethnic marriage custom, Gayo ethnic used verbal language through *melengkan* (Gayo traditional speech). *Melengkan* was an important tradition of the Gayo traditional marriage which has been part of Gayo people's heritage. In all formal important series or phases of Gayo ethnic marriage, the *melengkan* (formal adat speech) is usually carried out by community leaders called *sarak opat*. *Sarak opat* in the social structure of the Gayo community consists of *reje* (village head), *petue* (adat adviser of village head), *imem* (imam), and *rayat* (community).<sup>86</sup> The *melengkan* context in the marriage customs of the Gayo community is similar to the reciprocal rhyme event in Malay culture at every celebration or wedding event. *Pantun* (poem) is oral literature that continues to be maintained, developed, and activated for mere ceremonial purposes but has taken root and has become something inseparable from the Malay community.<sup>87</sup> Symbolically, the Gayo ethnic marriage culture has similarities with the Malay culture in terms of the culture of reciprocating rhymes. This *melengkan* plays an important means in all formal speech throughout all phases and processions including in the phase of proposing in the Gayo ethnic marriage.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the marriage customs of the Gayo ethnic, which consist of several phases and processions, have undergone various changes starting from determining a mate to the wedding party. The procedure of marriage does not follow successive strict traditional phases and the traditional authoritative ones that were fully responsible for the marriage in a sense of Gayo traditional rule, in some cases, now have changed and shifted to other ones and institutions. Besides, the future groom and bride have more rights in making decisions about their mate in which parents and main family only support the marriage proceedings and therefore do not pay too much attention to the values of the pre-existing customs. The changes that occurred can be seen not only in the concept and phase of *kerje juelen* and *angkap* which now turned into a modern one, *kuso kini*, but also in phases and processions of Gayo ethnic marriage. Factors influencing changes in Gayo marriage customs, especially in the sub-district of Lut Tawar Central Aceh are first internal factors, namely the encouragement or motivation to change into a

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<sup>86</sup>Maya Apriana and Ikhwan, "Tradisi Melengkan Dalam Perkawinan Adat Masyarakat Gayo Di Kecamatan Bandar Kabupaten Bener Meriah," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic History and Culture* 1, No. 2 (2020), p. 172.

<sup>87</sup>Ecik Abdul Hajar, *Cerdas Cermat Pantun* (Pekanbaru: Universitas Riau Press, 2011), p. 11.

society with cultural, structural, and interactional dimensions through adaptation and accommodation that resulted in a new form of cultures and customs within the Gayo community expressing an open mindset through the process of diffusion and acculturation. Marriage customs and the ineffectiveness of the cultural intra-community diffusion process combined with the weakness of customary institutions cause a vacuum without guidance for carrying out social functions. Second, there are the external factors, namely channels and avenues of change that open to the interaction of the Gayo people with the emergence of agents of change who play an active role in society. These include the government, religious and educational institutions, variously planning social development, introducing advanced technologies and communication, becoming one of the main and attractive tourist destinations bringing various local, national, and international tourists into Central Aceh, thereby promoting the process of diffusion, acculturation and assimilation within the culture and customs of Gayo ethnic in Central Aceh in general, and in Lut Tawar sub-district in particular.

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### **Interviews**

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Interview with Anwar, Gayo Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, October 31, 2021.

Interview with Kamaluddin, Gayo Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 26, 2021.

Interview with Basaruddin, Gayo Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, September 25, 2021.

Interview with Safaruddin Gayo Traditional Figure in Central Aceh, November 28, 2021.

Interview with Nursiah, Female Gayo Traditional Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, October 31, 2021.

Interview with Salman, Academician & Gayo Traditional Expert in Takengon, Central Aceh, October 30, 2021.

Interview with Yusin, Former Head of Gayo Traditional Board in Takengon, Central Aceh, November 27, 2021.

Interview with Zulkarnain, Academician Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, November 28, 2021.

Interview with Suhir, village leader Figure in Takengon, August 29, 2021.

Interview with Joni, Academician and Writer and Traditional Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, August 28, 2021.

Interview with Selimah Female Gayo Traditional Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, October 30, 2021

Interview with Ibnu Hajar, Former Official Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, August 28, 2021.

Interview with Fathimah, Female Gayo Traditional Figure in Takengon, Central Aceh, August 29, 2021.



# Factors Changing the Gayo Ethnic's Traditional Marriage Procession in Lut Tawar Sub-District of Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia

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