

Local Wisdom in the Edet Mungerje Wedding Tradition of the Gayo Ethnic Group in Southeast Aceh

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the *Edet Mungerje* tradition, a customary wedding ceremony practiced by the Gayo ethnic community in Southeast Aceh Regency, to document its procedures and uncover the embedded values of local wisdom. Despite the rapid influence of modernization and technological advancement, this tradition remains a meaningful and practiced cultural heritage among the Gayo people. Employing a qualitative research approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five bridal couples and two traditional leaders. The findings reveal that while several procedural aspects of the ceremony have been simplified or adjusted to fit contemporary lifestyles, the core stages—*munginte* (marriage proposal), *betelah* (negotiation of dowry and terms), *mujule mas* (advice and acceptance), *berguru* (marital guidance), and *mah kero opat ingi* (post-wedding family visit)—are still preserved. These stages fulfill ceremonial purposes and transmit local values such as cooperation, deliberation, respect, moral education, and social responsibility. The novelty of this research lies in its contribution to preserving the cultural identity of an ethnic tradition that is at risk of being forgotten. This study offers a framework for cultural preservation amidst globalization. However, the study's scope is limited to one district and may not fully reflect variations in other Gayo regions. Future comparative studies are recommended to explore inter-ethnic and inter-regional differences in wedding traditions across Aceh. Ultimately, *Edet Mungerje* serves as a cultural ritual and a vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of noble values.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Southeast Aceh, located in the highlands of the Aceh Province of Indonesia, is distinguished by its geographical landscapes and cultural richness. With Kutacane as its administrative center, the regency is home to several ethnic communities, among which the

Gayo people represent a significant cultural force. Predominantly Muslim, the Gayo community preserves a distinct linguistic and cultural identity shaped by centuries of religious and social traditions. Central to this cultural tapestry is the *Edet Mungerje*, the traditional Gayo wedding ceremony, which embodies the community's values, beliefs, and collective memory [1], [2], [3].

Edet Mungerje is more than a marital ritual; it is a comprehensive life-cycle event that affirms social solidarity, religious commitment, and generational continuity. Rooted in Islamic teachings but framed within the unique customs of the Gayo people, the ceremony is systematically divided into four major stages: the Initial Stage (kusik, sisu, pakok, and peden), the Preparation Stage (risik, rese, kono, and kinte), the Execution Stage (berguru, nyerah, bejege, and mah bai), and the Completion Stage (mah беру, serit benang, kero selpah, tanagkul, and entong ralik). Each stage contains symbolic gestures and communal acts that reflect deep philosophical meanings and reinforce family and societal cohesion. The rituals are performed not merely as formal obligations, but as expressions of collective identity and spiritual alignment [4], [5], [6].

Within the Gayo worldview, marriage is not just a union between two individuals, but a transition into a new social phase that integrates families, reinforces kinship, and sustains cultural values. The *Edet Mungerje* is a cultural text, rich in symbols, metaphors, and moral codes. It offers insights into how the Gayo community interprets human relationships, religious devotion, and communal responsibilities [7], [8], [9].

However, the continuity of this tradition is increasingly challenged by the dynamic currents of modernity. The rapid spread of digital media, increasing mobility, urban influence, religious reinterpretation, and generational shifts in values are reshaping how traditions are understood, practiced, and even questioned. Younger generations, often educated outside their villages or influenced by global culture, may view some ceremonial practices as outdated or financially burdensome. Meanwhile, new interpretations of Islamic teachings—especially through transnational religious networks—have also influenced how rituals are perceived in their conformity to Islamic law. As a result, many traditional elements of *Edet Mungerje* have either been simplified, altered, or even omitted in contemporary ceremonies [10], [11].

Despite the evident changes, current academic literature has not adequately documented or analyzed how *Edet Mungerje* has been transformed in this evolving socio-religious landscape. Much of the scholarship on Indonesian marriage traditions has focused on more widely known ethnic groups such as the Minangkabau, Batak, or Javanese. Studies that do address Aceh often generalize the region's practices or focus on coastal communities, thereby overlooking the cultural complexities of highland ethnicities like the Gayo [10], [11], [12].

For instance, Nasrullah [13] examined the matrilineal traditions in Minangkabau marriage ceremonies, highlighting their symbolic and social functions. Sianturi et al. [14] analyzed the intricate symbolism in Batak Toba wedding customs, while Azis [15] explored how Bugis wedding practices adapt in urban settings. Muthalib et al. [16] documented the coastal Acehese wedding rituals, paying attention to their religious elements. However, none of these studies engage with *Edet Mungerje* or the sociocultural

transformations occurring in Gayo society. This research seeks to fill that gap by focusing on the Gayo community in Southeast Aceh and its dynamic negotiation between tradition and modernity.

The core problem addressed in this study is the lack of a comprehensive understanding regarding how *Edet Mungerje* is preserved, adapted, or altered in response to modern influences. This gap poses significant challenges to academic scholarship and efforts in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. There is a need to explore how the Gayo community interprets, negotiates, and responds to change while maintaining the symbolic and religious integrity of their traditions [17], [18], [19].

The researcher adopts an ethnographic approach to address this issue, employing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis within selected Gayo communities. This methodological framework allows for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of the people who practice and transmit *Edet Mungerje*. Through close engagement with ritual performers, elders, community leaders, and younger generations, the study aims to uncover how tradition is maintained, adapted, or contested.

Several theoretical frameworks guide the research. Symbolic Interactionism is a foundation for understanding how shared meanings are created and reinterpreted through social rituals. Cultural Resilience Theory Berkes and Ross [20], explores how communities maintain core traditions in the face of external pressures and change. Additionally, Local Wisdom Theory Wibowo et al. [21], helps analyze how traditional practices reflect ecological and sociocultural adaptations developed over generations. Finally, the study is informed by Islamic Anthropology, Graham, which examines how Islamic values are localized and expressed through specific cultural forms [22], [23], [24].

The objectives of this study are fourfold. First, to document and describe the stages, structure, and meanings of *Edet Mungerje* in its contemporary form. Second, to analyze the factors that influence changes in the ritual, including religious, economic, and generational dynamics. Third, to investigate the role of community narratives, beliefs, and practices in preserving cultural identity through this tradition. Fourth, to contribute to broader academic discourses on tradition, resilience, and Islamic cultural expression in Indonesia.

It is hoped that this study will yield both academic and practical benefits. Academically, the findings will contribute to the literature on indigenous knowledge systems, Islamic ethnography, and cultural transformation. Practically, the research may inform cultural preservation initiatives, particularly in formulating local educational content or heritage tourism programs. It may also offer valuable insights for religious leaders, cultural practitioners, and policymakers who seek to balance religious orthodoxy with cultural authenticity [9], [10], [25].

Edet Mungerje is a testament to the Gayo people's cultural richness and spiritual depth. Nevertheless, its future depends on how well it can respond to the demands of modernity without losing its essence. Therefore, this study serves as an academic inquiry and a cultural preservation effort—an attempt to ensure that the songs, prayers, symbols, and philosophies embedded in this tradition are not forgotten but continue to inspire and guide the next generation.

2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to explore the rich traditions and cultural values embedded in the marriage practices of the Gayo community in Aceh. Ethnography was chosen as the primary research design because it allows for a deep and holistic understanding of the cultural patterns practiced, preserved, and transmitted through generations. Ethnographic research is particularly well-suited to this study, as it focuses on understanding cultural phenomena from the point of view of the community members themselves (emic perspective), thereby offering an authentic account of the lived experiences of individuals within a particular cultural context [26], [27].

Ethnography emphasizes long-term immersion in the field, where the researcher directly participates in the daily lives and ritual practices of the community being studied. In this context, the researcher seeks to observe and experience firsthand the social interactions, language use, symbolic representations, and belief systems that are part of the traditional Gayo wedding procession. This includes the various stages of the marriage cycle, beginning with the *merisik* (proposal phase), *bertunang* (engagement), continuing with the *pernikahan adat* (traditional wedding ceremony), and culminating in the *resepsi* (reception).

The study was conducted in Kecamatan Ketambe, located in Southeast Aceh Regency, from March to May 2025. The location was selected based on its strong preservation of Gayo cultural identity and its community's active engagement in traditional marriage practices. This setting provided a fertile ground for investigating how these traditions function as both social rites and cultural artifacts that reflect the values and identity of the Gayo people.

The researcher employed several data collection techniques to gain comprehensive insights, including participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and local literature study. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner, in which the researcher participated in cultural rituals and interacted with participants during marriage events. This involvement facilitated the collection of detailed field notes and recording non-verbal cultural expressions such as gestures, attire, music, and spatial arrangements. Visual documentation in photographs and videos was also used, while maintaining strict adherence to ethical research guidelines, especially concerning cultural sensitivity and informed consent.

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, based on their roles and involvement in traditional Gayo wedding ceremonies. Participants included traditional leaders (*reje adat*), elders, shamans (*pawang*), the bride and groom, family members, and villagers who contribute to or oversee the execution of marriage customs. Their positions as custodians of tradition and as actors in ritual performance made their perspectives particularly valuable to the research.

In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for both focused inquiry and open-ended exploration of the rituals' meanings, beliefs, and values. Questions were designed to elicit explanations of the symbolic meanings of traditional clothing (*baju adat*), ritual dances (*saman*), ceremonial items (*perabot adat*), traditional

music (*canang*), and the narrative structures of oral literature used during the ceremonies. Interviews were conducted in both Bahasa Indonesia and local Gayo dialects, with the assistance of cultural translators where necessary, to ensure linguistic and contextual accuracy.

Additionally, cultural artifacts such as ritual objects, wedding garments, traditional musical instruments, and texts used during ceremonies were collected and analyzed. Local documents, including traditional manuscripts (*naskah adat*), genealogical records, and historical archives related to Gayo customs, were examined to contextualize the current practices within a broader historical and cultural framework.

For data analysis, this research used Spradley's ethnographic data analysis method, especially his domain and taxonomic analysis, to identify and categorize cultural themes, symbolic systems, and relational patterns found in the rituals. This method allows for the systematic coding and interpretation of data, making it possible to uncover the implicit knowledge and cultural logic that inform Gayo marriage traditions.

Through this study, the researcher aims to contribute to documenting and preserving Gayo cultural heritage, particularly in the face of modernization, social change, and religious influences that are gradually transforming traditional practices. The research seeks to understand what is done during the wedding rituals and why and how these rituals continue to hold meaning for the community in contemporary times. The study will explore the interplay between tradition and modernity and how Gayo negotiate their cultural identity in a changing social landscape.

It is expected that the results of this study will provide a rich ethnographic account of Gayo wedding traditions, contributing to the fields of anthropology, ethnolinguistics, cultural studies, and Indonesian local wisdom (*kearifan lokal*). Moreover, the findings may inform policy-making on cultural preservation, educational curricula focused on ethnic diversity, and community-based tourism that respects and promotes indigenous heritage.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This research employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach to examine the marriage traditions and culture of the Gayo community. Ethnography was selected because it allows the researcher to deeply understand and comprehensively document the cultural practices that exist within the community, including the values and meanings they carry. Ethnographic methods describe and interpret patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language shared and learned within a cultural group. Therefore, ethnographic research typically involves participant observation, in which the researcher actively engages in the group's daily activities.

This study focuses on the cultural practices observed in the traditional Gayo wedding procession. These include the pre-wedding stages such as proposal (*merisik*) and engagement (*bertunang*), followed by the traditional wedding ceremony and reception. The research seeks to uncover the symbolic meanings, social values, and the role that marriage traditions play in maintaining the cultural identity of the Gayo people, including how these

traditions are affected by modern influences and how the community responds through efforts of preservation and adaptation.

The field research was conducted in Ketambe District, Southeast Aceh Regency, from March to May 2025. Data collection involved several primary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and local literature review. During participatory observation, the researcher was directly involved in social and cultural activities related to the traditional wedding processions, allowing for a firsthand understanding of the events from an emic (insider's) perspective. Various interactions, cultural symbols, and social contexts were recorded in field notes and supported with visual documentation such as photographs and video recordings, while maintaining strict adherence to research ethics.

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected key informants, including traditional leaders, brides and grooms, family members, and local community participants directly involved in the wedding ceremonies. These interviews aimed to explore the cultural meanings, traditional values, and symbolic significance embedded in each stage of the ceremony. In addition, researchers collected cultural artifacts such as traditional Gayo wedding attire, musical instruments, ritual texts, and other items associated with the ceremonies. Local documents and historical records, such as traditional manuscripts and oral histories, were also reviewed to enrich the understanding of the traditions from both a contemporary and historical perspective.

Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance and roles in the traditional ceremonies, such as elders, performers, or ceremonial leaders who possess in-depth cultural knowledge and experience. The collected data were then analyzed using Spradley's domain analysis, which involves identifying key cultural domains, organizing themes, and interpreting the symbolic structures of the community's practices. This method was chosen because it allows for a systematic breakdown of cultural knowledge expressed and enacted in social life, particularly in marriage ceremonies.

Through this approach, the research aims to contribute to documenting and revitalizing Gayo cultural heritage, especially in preserving intangible cultural traditions amid ongoing social and cultural transformation.

3.2. Discussion

Interviews with five respondents from Ketambe District revealed that the community still practices implementing traditional Gayo wedding ceremonies, although it has undergone several modifications in response to technological advancements and external cultural influences. Core elements such as the proposal process (*munginte*), the determination of the dowry, family deliberations, *berguru* (offering advice and blessings), the marriage contract, and communal meals with extended family remain integral to the ceremonial sequence.

Respondent U stated that "people in his area still carry out traditional weddings," although certain aspects of the tradition—such as the *telangke* or intermediaries—are now rarely observed. This sentiment was also echoed by respondent H, who noted that "the *telangke* process, which should involve introductions through guardians and relatives, is

now rarely practiced, or in some cases, no longer exists.” This reflects a shift in customary practices once considered indispensable in matchmaking.

The influence of technology has significantly altered the way potential couples meet. Respondent J mentioned, “Technology is very advanced now; you can easily meet people through mobile phones,” indicating a diminishing role of family involvement during the early stages of courtship. Furthermore, the length of the wedding ceremony has also been adapted to modern lifestyles. While traditional ceremonies used to span an entire week, contemporary celebrations typically last three to four days. Respondent I emphasized this change, stating, “Many stages are now condensed into a single event to save time and energy,” acknowledging modern life's increasing pace and demands.

Culturally, there has been a fusion between Gayo traditions and those of other ethnic groups, particularly in interethnic marriages. Respondent, I explained that “a combination of traditions often occurs during wedding ceremonies” as a form of mutual respect between the bride and groom's families. Additionally, elements of entertainment and fashion have evolved. As respondent S stated, “The styles and designs of wedding attire today are more modern.” Traditional performing arts such as *Didong* and *Canang* are no longer the primary forms of entertainment, though they have not been completely abandoned.

From the data collected, researchers concluded that the changes observed in Gayo wedding customs are more technical than substantive. The Gayo community still maintains key traditional values rooted in Islamic teachings, such as honoring parents, the importance of family deliberation, and conducting the marriage contract lawfully and solemnly. This demonstrates that Gayo customs continue to live and evolve, adapting to modernity without losing their core identity.

Further insights from respondents IY and BS reinforced these findings. According to respondent IY, several sacred traditions have faded, including the once-important procession known as *bercucup*, which involved mutual visits between families to seek consent and blessings before marriage. This tradition, which symbolized familial respect and agreement, is rarely practiced due to increasingly busy lifestyles and changing family values.

Respondent BS also described how traditional vetting processes, such as *imal tidur nipi jege* (investigation through dreams) and the role of *telangke sange* (key intermediaries), have shifted. Previously, the guardians would directly investigate the family background of the potential spouse. Today, this is often done via mobile phones and social media, demonstrating how digital communication has reshaped traditional procedures.

Nonetheless, most stages of the Gayo wedding ceremony are still performed, albeit with certain adjustments. These include *Munginte* (marriage proposal), *Betelah* (dowry agreement), *Mujule Mas* (symbolic asset delivery), *Pakat Sara Ine* (negotiation and formal proposal), and the actual wedding ceremony. This includes the mother's meeting (*Musapat Ine*, according to BS) and *Berguru* (imparting spiritual advice to the bride). The ceremony continues with *Mujule Bai* (marriage contract ceremony) and *Mujule Beru* (the bride's procession to the groom's house). Finally, the tradition of *Mah Kero Opat Ingi*—bringing

rice to the groom's house four days after the wedding—symbolizes familial bonding and continued social connection between both families [28], [29].

These findings are consistent with previous research. Fitriani, in her ethnographic study of traditional Gayo ceremonies, found that while modern influences have led to the simplification of rituals, the essence of Gayo marriage customs—particularly those that emphasize social harmony and religious values—remain intact. Similarly, Nasution and Murni observed that local wedding traditions in Aceh Tenggara are still resilient, with communities adapting traditional norms to suit changing times without abandoning their cultural identity. Moreover, Iskandar concluded that technological shifts have influenced matchmaking patterns, but cultural values continue to influence decisions around marriage, especially in rural areas.[30], [31], [32]

In conclusion, the Gayo traditional wedding ceremony is undergoing a process of cultural negotiation. It is not a story of disappearance but of adaptation. Communities continue to uphold the philosophical essence of their customs—honoring family, seeking mutual consent, and religious solemnity—while adjusting the format and processes to meet the realities of contemporary life. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on cultural sustainability, showing how tradition and modernity can coexist within evolving social frameworks.

4. CONCLUSION

The Edet Mungerje tradition in Gayo traditional weddings in Southeast Aceh Regency continues to be practiced today, although it has experienced several adaptations due to the influence of modernization and technological development. The core stages of the traditional wedding—munginte (proposal), betelah (negotiation), mujule mas (giving the bride wealth), berguru (receiving moral and ethical guidance), akad nikah (marriage contract), and mah kero opat ingi (return visit)—are still maintained and recognized as integral components of the marriage procession. These stages are ceremonial acts and serve as vessels for transmitting the Gayo people's local wisdom, including values of cooperation, collective decision-making (musyawarah), etiquette and manners, social responsibility, and moral education in building a family.

Through this research, the Edet Mungerje tradition is understood as a cultural practice and a mechanism for instilling noble values across generations in the Gayo community. Thus, the tradition plays a vital role in maintaining cultural identity and strengthening social cohesion within the community. This study offers a framework for cultural preservation efforts amidst globalization, highlighting how traditional practices can adapt yet retain their core values.

However, this study has several limitations. The research scope was restricted to Ketambe District in Southeast Aceh Regency, which may not fully reflect the variations of Edet Mungerje practices across other regions inhabited by Gayo communities, such as Central Aceh or Gayo Lues. The specific sociocultural context of Ketambe might influence certain aspects of the tradition that may differ elsewhere. Further comparative studies are recommended to explore inter-ethnic or inter-regional differences in wedding traditions

across Aceh. Such research could broaden the understanding of how various ethnic groups within Aceh preserve and adapt their cultural heritage in the face of modern challenges.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of documenting and analyzing traditional practices like Edet Mungerje for academic purposes and as a cultural preservation strategy. The findings contribute to ongoing conversations about heritage sustainability, identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission in a rapidly changing world by situating these traditions within a broader sociocultural and historical context.

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