

# The *Upa Mangalakkai* Marriage Tradition among the Tapanuli Community: A Maslahah Perspective

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## Abstract

The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is a customary marriage practice among the Tapanuli community, performed when a younger sibling marries before an older sibling. This tradition requires the younger sibling to seek permission and provide a symbolic fine in the form of one gram of gold as a sign of respect toward the elder sibling. Along with social change and modernization, the continuity of this tradition faces challenges, making it necessary to examine its values and benefits from the perspective of Islamic law. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition and to assess its maslahah (public benefit) based on Maslahah theory. The research employs a qualitative method using a case study approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, practitioners of the tradition, and community members, as well as documentation. Data analysis was conducted using deductive, inductive, and comparative methods. The findings reveal that the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition functions to maintain family harmony, strengthen social bonds, and cultivate respect for elder family members. From a Maslahah perspective, this tradition falls under the category of *maslahah hajiyah*, as it facilitates social balance, promotes harmony, and does not contradict Islamic teachings. This study concludes that the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition remains relevant as a form of local wisdom aligned with Islamic legal values and plays a significant role in preserving family integrity and cultural identity within the Tapanuli community.

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## INTRODUCTION

Society lives side by side with diverse rules and guidelines across different groups, taking the form of written laws or unwritten customary norms that function as mechanisms of supervision and protection (Masyhar et al., 2025). Customary law represents behavioral rules rooted in moral values derived from conscience, religious values based on the Quran and Hadith, and principles of propriety (Syafira & Habibi, 2023; Turyani et al., 2024). Marriage, as a crucial aspect of human life, often involves distinctive customary practices of Indonesian ethnic groups, which serve as markers of national identity and enrich cultural diversity (Pugra et al., 2025).

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In Tapanuli, traditional marriage practices include several stages conducted at the bride's residence, such as *mangaririt boru* (observing the prospective bride) and *menyapai boru* (inquiring about consent) (Ariani, 2025), as well as symbolically rich rituals such as *mangalehen mangan* (feeding the couple), *pabuat boru* (escorting the bride), and *mangolat* (a symbolic obstruction by the *namboru*) (Sitompul et al., 2022; Usop & Perdana, 2021). Meanwhile, ceremonies held at the groom's residence include *mangalo-alo boru* (welcoming the bride), *tapien raya bangun* (symbolic bathing), *menabalkan gorar* (conferring a title), and *mangupa* (a ceremonial feast) (Danil, 2019; Kizi & Kakhramonovich, 2021).

A unique tradition known as *Upa Mangalakkai* emerges when a younger sibling marries before an older biological sibling. This tradition requires the payment of a fine as a form of respect to maintain family harmony, grounded in a philosophy aimed at preventing conflict and ensuring the prosperity of future generations.

The *Upa Mangalakkai* phenomenon within Tapanuli customary marriages in Nagari Panti Utara demonstrates that a younger sibling who marries before an elder sibling is required to pay a fine of one gram of gold (or one *mayam* of gold) prior to the marriage contract as a sign of respect and as a preventive measure against family disputes (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Kalsum et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2025). This tradition applies to cases where a younger sister marries before an elder sister, a younger brother before an elder sister, or a younger brother before an elder brother; however, when a younger sister marries before an elder brother, only permission is required without the imposition of a fine. Field data record three cases in 2022, two cases in 2023, and none in 2024, with flexibility in reducing the fine when the younger sibling is financially unable, thereby preserving the philosophical essence of family harmony and welfare.

The urgency of this study arises from the potential erosion of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition due to modernization, as evidenced by the sharp decline in cases from three in 2022 to zero in 2024, despite the continued preservation of its core processes. This tradition plays a crucial role in maintaining Tapanuli family values, preventing conflicts historically associated with marriages conducted without the consent of elder siblings believed to result in difficulties for descendants or challenges in finding suitable partners and strengthening cultural identity amid globalization. Without comprehensive documentation, *maslahah* values such as harmony and respect risk being lost, making this research essential for preserving customary practices as part of Islamic law and societal morality (Htay et al., 2025; Okenova et al., 2025).

Although existing literature discusses Tapanuli traditional marriage practices in general, such as *mangaririt boru* or *mangupa* (Sitompul et al., 2022), studies specifically addressing *Upa Mangalakkai* remain limited, particularly regarding its implementation in Nagari Panti Utara, its *maslahah* benefits, and the adaptation of fines in the modern era. Previous research has largely focused on the broader evolution of Batak customs without in-depth analysis of the philosophical significance of fines in fostering family harmony or presenting up-to-date case data, thereby leaving a gap from a qualitative field-based perspective.

The novelty of this study lies in its position as the first qualitative analysis of the implementation of *Upa Mangalakkai* in Nagari Panti Utara, incorporating primary data from interviews with traditional leaders and Islamic scholars (2025), as well as examining its *maslahah* benefits such as the prevention of family conflict and the flexibility of fines in contemporary contexts which have not yet been explored in existing literature (Informant). Employing a descriptive inductive comparative approach supported by field data (observation, interviews, and documentation), this study offers a fresh perspective that complements general studies on Tapanuli customs and contributes as a reference for contemporary Islamic customary law.

Based on the background outlined above, this research seeks to address how the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is implemented in the marriage practices of the Tapanuli community in Nagari Panti Utara, Kampung Sukadamai, Panti District, and how the tradition is reviewed through a maslahah perspective within Islamic law.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a case study approach. Primary data were obtained directly from informants at the research site, namely Nagari Panti Utara. The qualitative approach emphasizes the description of data in the form of words and verbal expressions rather than numerical data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the meanings embedded in the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition within Tapanuli customary marriage practices. This approach is particularly appropriate for the study of customary traditions, as it facilitates natural interaction with research subjects within their original social setting (Busral et al., 2025; Imanina, 2020; Mayring, 2014).

The study utilizes two types of data sources: primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from key informants, including traditional leaders, Islamic scholars (*alim ulama*), and village officials who are directly involved in the implementation of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition. Secondary data were obtained from members of the Kampung Sukadamai community who are familiar with the issue, as well as from relevant literature, such as books on Tapanuli customary law, to strengthen the analytical framework.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques to ensure the completeness and validity of the information. Observation involved direct examination of the *Upa Mangalakkai* process, as well as the perspectives of traditional leaders and Islamic scholars regarding the tradition, using both participant and non-participant observation methods (Khoiri et al., 2022). In-depth interviews were carried out through structured and semi-structured question-and-answer sessions with traditional leaders, religious figures, and community members concerning the implementation of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition in Nagari Panti Utara. Documentation was used to collect written records, transcripts, books, and audio or visual materials related to the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition within Tapanuli marriage practices.

Data analysis integrated descriptive, deductive, and comparative methods applied to both primary and secondary data. Descriptive analysis was used to present the data in detail to provide a clear depiction of the phenomenon. Deductive analysis involved drawing conclusions from general theoretical concepts to the specific case of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition. Comparative analysis was employed to examine similarities, differences, and patterns between this tradition and comparable customary practices (Engkizar et al., 2023, 2025).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Practice of the *Upa Mangalakkai* Tradition in Tapanuli Marriage

According to the *Angkola Mandailing–Indonesian Dictionary*, *Upa Mangalakkai* or *Upalakka* refers to stepping over or preceding someone in marriage. The term *lakka* means “step,” while *upa* derives from the word *au*, meaning “I,” so *Upalakka* or *Mangalakkai* can be interpreted as “I step over.” Within this tradition, the concept of “stepping” carries three meanings: *melangkahi*, which refers to marrying ahead of an older sibling; *pelangkab*, which denotes the object or fine given to the sibling who is stepped over; and *pelangkahan*, which refers to the process or procedural rules governing the act of stepping over in marriage.

The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is a customary practice performed by a younger sibling who wishes to marry before an older sibling. The primary purpose of this

tradition is to seek forgiveness and request blessings from the older sibling who is symbolically stepped over (Nasution et al., 2025). This tradition continues to be practiced in Nagari Panti Utara, particularly in Kampung Sukadamai, and has been passed down from generation to generation among the Batak community since ancestral times (Informant).

The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition has long been implemented in Nagari Panti Utara. According to informant, a traditional leader, in earlier times there were many cases of marriage conducted without the knowledge of parents or older siblings, which was considered improper according to customary norms. Today, such practices no longer occur; instead, younger siblings who wish to marry before their elders are required to request permission in a respectful manner. In this tradition, the younger sibling must provide an *upah pelangkab* (stepping compensation) as a symbol of respect and apology. The purpose of this offering is to ensure that the older sibling feels honored and sincerely accepts the situation. If the fine is not given, it is believed that adverse effects may arise for both parties, such as difficulties in having offspring for the younger sibling or obstacles to marriage for the older sibling who is stepped over.

The people of Nagari Panti Utara have long upheld this tradition, considering it an integral part of Tapanuli cultural identity. The tradition aims to preserve a high level of respect toward elders, which is a defining characteristic of Tapanuli society. Therefore, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is applied among the entire Tapanuli community, including in Nagari Panti Utara. According to informant, a traditional leader, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is mandatory as a form of respect and propriety toward elders. Its implementation does not require a special ceremony; however, it must adhere to a specific rule, namely the payment of a fine prior to the marriage ceremony. Initially, this fine consisted of a complete set of clothing, but it has since evolved into one gram of gold in any form, depending on the request of the older sibling. If the younger sibling is unable to pay the fine as stipulated, tolerance is granted by reducing the amount of the fine.

The implementation process of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition in Nagari Panti Utara involves several stages: the younger sibling prepares the fine, requests permission and forgiveness from the older sibling, submits the fine as a symbol of apology and respect, and the older sibling accepts the fine as a sign of granting blessings. After the process is completed, family members and relatives gather to offer prayers and blessings to the couple who will marry. The purpose of this process is to maintain harmony and propriety within the family, as well as to provide blessings and prayers for the prospective married couple. Once all procedures have been carried out in accordance with customary rules, the younger sibling is permitted to proceed with the marriage. According to Mr. Kumpul Sihombing, an Islamic scholar, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition aims to honor elders and restore *Mulak Tondi* (the return of the body), which signifies restoring respect and alleviating the emotional hurt of the older sibling who is stepped over. This tradition is obligatory, and the stepping fine must be paid in full prior to the marriage contract, as marriages conducted in violation of customary law are believed to result in negative consequences if the prescribed rules are not followed.

According to informant, an Islamic scholar, the stepping fine should be requested reasonably and not excessively, as the primary objective of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition is to demonstrate respect and seek permission from the older sibling. Prior to determining the fine, the older and younger siblings may engage in discussion to agree on an appropriate amount. The implementation of the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition in Nagari Panti Utara generally involves preparing a fine of one gram of gold, requesting permission and forgiveness, submitting the fine as a symbol of apology and respect, and the acceptance of the fine by the older sibling as a sign

of granting blessings. After the process is completed, family members and relatives gather to offer prayers and blessings to the couple. This tradition continues to be practiced in Panti Utara as part of Tapanuli customary law.

A married couple, stated that they decided to marry because they had found a suitable partner and were prepared materially, emotionally, and spiritually. They also sought to avoid negative situations that could lead to slander or social problems (Informant). Similarly, informant, another married couple, explained that their decision to marry was based on two considerations: first, personal readiness to enter marriage despite the younger age of one spouse; and second, having found the right partner and believing that the appropriate time to marry was the present, regardless of birth order within the family.

Based on interviews with traditional leaders, Islamic scholars, and community members, it can be concluded that the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition has long been an integral part of Tapanuli customary law in Nagari Panti Utara. The tradition aims to demonstrate respect and propriety toward elders, as well as to seek permission and blessings from the older sibling who is stepped over. The fine may take the form of one gram of gold or a complete set of clothing, depending on mutual agreement. The implementation process involves several stages, including preparation of the fine, requesting permission, submission of the fine, and the granting of blessings. This tradition plays an important role in maintaining family harmony, preventing adverse consequences, and providing blessings to married couples. The people of Nagari Panti Utara continue to highly value this tradition as an essential part of their cultural and customary heritage.

### **A Maslahah Review of the *Upa Mangalakkai* Tradition in Tapanuli Marriage Practices**

Islamic law is a set of regulations established by Allah through the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as guidance for Muslim life. It encompasses teachings related to belief and conduct and serves as a framework for worship and social interaction. Its primary objective is to achieve human welfare (*maslahah*), both spiritually and physically, in worldly life and the hereafter (Alias et al., 2024). Within Islamic law, *maslahah* occupies a central position. Scholars emphasize that the fundamental purpose of Islamic law is to bring benefit and goodness to humanity while preventing harm. *Maslahah* serves as a benchmark in legal determination, and Islamic law functions as a means to realize these objectives. Moreover, *maslahah* forms the foundation of Islamic legal formulation, aiming to remove hardship, ensure public welfare, and uphold justice (Rahmawati & Satrio, 2024). According to Al-Khawarizmi, *maslahah* in Islamic law seeks to protect human beings from disasters or harmful consequences. Islam recognizes five essential elements that must be safeguarded: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. When legal rules are designed to protect these five elements, they are considered a form of *maslahah* or human benefit (Suprayogi, 2023).

The community of Nagari Panti Utara practices the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition as a means of attaining *maslahah* by preventing harm or potential social disruption. The purpose of this tradition is to avoid problems or misfortunes in family life after marriage, as well as to express propriety and respect toward elders. From a *maslahah* perspective, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition must be assessed based on tangible and observable benefits rather than mere assumptions. This means that the tradition should provide clear and real advantages while preventing negative impacts experienced by many people. Furthermore, the *maslahah* embodied in the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition must meet several criteria: it should be public in nature rather than limited to individuals or specific groups, and it must align with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith so as not to contradict religious values. Thus, the *Upa*

*Mangalakkai* tradition can be regarded as an effort to achieve genuine *maslahah* and to generate benefits for the wider community (Darliana et al., 2022).

The practice of *pelangkahan*, including *Upa Mangalakkai*, constitutes an effort to realize tangible *maslahah* rather than one based solely on presumption (Harahap, 2016). Through this tradition, the Tapanuli community seeks to preserve family harmony, continuity of lineage, and social cohesion, while preventing difficulties or conflicts in post-marital family life. The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition falls under the category of secondary *maslahah* (*maslahah hajiyah*), in which prosperity and well-being are achieved when basic human needs are fulfilled, thereby facilitating life and alleviating hardship. This tradition plays a significant role in maintaining social balance and harmony within the Tapanuli community by preserving essential values such as religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Consequently, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition contributes to achieving *maslahah* and improving the quality of life of the Tapanuli people (Sitorus et al., 2024).

Religion is a natural disposition (*fitrah*) of human beings, and the state is obliged to protect the right of every citizen to practice their religion. Islam encourages tolerance toward followers of other religions as long as they do not interfere with one another's affairs. In this way, religious diversity can coexist harmoniously and peacefully (Rosyadi, 2022).

Islamic law seeks to protect human life from injustice so that life may be safeguarded from various threats. This principle is reflected in QS. Al-Isra: 33:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيهِ سُلْطٰنًا فَلَا يُسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا

Meaning: *Do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly, We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in retaliation. Indeed, he is supported [by the law]* (QS. Al-Isra: 33).

Islamic law also aims to protect human intellect so that it remains sound and functions properly. Therefore, anything that impairs the mind, such as the abuse of intoxicants or alcoholic beverages, must be avoided and eliminated. This principle is stated in QS. Al-Maidah: 91:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطٰنُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلٰوةِ فَهَلْ أَنتُمْ مُنتَبِهُونَ

Meaning: *Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you through intoxicants and gambling and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?* (QS. Al-Maidah: 91).

Islamic law protects human dignity, as humans are a noble creation of Allah. Sharia safeguards human honor from all forms of humiliation and degradation, as stated in QS. Al-Isra: 70:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الرِّبِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا

Meaning: *Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, provided them with good provisions, and favored them greatly over many of those We created* (QS. Al-Isra: 70).

Islamic law also protects property by regulating lawful transactions and prohibiting actions that cause harm or injustice. Islam permits lawful economic transactions (*mu'amalah*) so that wealth is protected and not wrongfully transferred. This principle is emphasized in QS. An-Nisa: 29:

يٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُم بَيْنَكُم بِالْبَاطِلِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْكُمْ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

Meaning: *O you who believe, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly, but only [in lawful] trade by mutual consent. And do not harm yourselves or others. Indeed, Allah is Most Merciful to you* (QS. An-Nisa: 29).

*Maslahah hajiyah* represents a secondary level of welfare that is essential for achieving balance and harmony in life. The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition falls within this category because it aims to preserve family unity and harmony while alleviating difficulties in

daily life. Within this tradition, positive values such as respect for elders, propriety, ethical conduct, and conflict avoidance are highly emphasized. Thus, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition contributes to maintaining family integrity, reducing hardship, and strengthening kinship relationships. By safeguarding essential aspects of human life religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property this tradition supports the realization of *maslahah* and promotes a more balanced and dignified life.

## CONCLUSION

The *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition constitutes an important procession in Tapanuli customary marriage practices, carrying profound meaning in maintaining harmony and balance within family and community life. This procession is performed when a younger sibling marries before an older sibling and involves formally requesting permission and forgiveness, accompanied by the payment of a customary fine as a form of respect for family hierarchy. The fine typically consists of one gram of gold, symbolizing propriety, courtesy, and appreciation. Following the completion of this procession, family members and relatives gather to offer prayers and blessings to the prospective couple, with the hope that the marriage will proceed smoothly and lead to a harmonious and prosperous life.

Beyond its function as a customary practice, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition embodies significant *maslahah* values, particularly *maslahah hajiyyah*, which serves to facilitate and balance human life by safeguarding essential elements such as religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. The absence of this tradition is believed to potentially create difficulties in preserving these five fundamental elements, thereby disrupting harmony and balance in family life. Therefore, the *Upa Mangalakkai* tradition remains relevant and essential to preserve as a form of cultural heritage and as a reflection of the noble values upheld by the Tapanuli community.

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