

## ACHEHNESE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS\*

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This paper is a descriptive account of Acehnese marriage customs, i.e., the sequence of events extending from betrothal to the establishment of a household. The data derives from fieldwork in the *kecamatan* (subdistrict) of Indrapuri, in the *kabupatèn* (district) of Aceh Besar.<sup>1</sup>

Customs concerning marriage differ from area to area and may vary in detail from village to village. Moreover, ceremonies may be abbreviated, combined, or even changed in order to accommodate particular exigencies and circumstances. However, the description presented here applies in general terms to the *kabupatèn* of Aceh Besar and Aceh Pidie. It may differ in crucial aspects from what occurs in other districts where the custom of uxori-local residence does not prevail.

Customs are integral components of social relations. They are the idiom through which individuals formulate, interpret, and symbolize their role expectations. The social relations most directly related to marriage customs concern household, family, and kinship. These institutions, in turn, depend on economic and demographic conditions which again partly determine the prevalence and persistence of customs. A preliminary outline of demographic and economic conditions is, therefore, a useful setting for understanding Acehnese marriage customs. Kinship, family, and jural aspects of marriage will, naturally, be closely intertwined with the description of customs.<sup>2</sup>

The quantitative data presented in this outline are drawn from marriage registers maintained by the Indrapuri branch of the Kantor Urusan Agama (Office for Religious Affairs) for the period 1961-72. During this time, 516 *nikah* marriages were registered.<sup>3</sup> The over-

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\*Acehnese terms are spelled in accordance with H. Djajadiningrat, *Atjehsch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1934).

<sup>1</sup>The province of Aceh is divided into seven *kabupatèn*. The *kabupatèn* of Aceh Besar, with a population of about 177,000, is divided into fourteen *kecamatan*. The *kecamatan* of Indrapuri, with a population of about 14,000, consists of about seventy *kampung* (villages), which are grouped into four *mukim*--Rheukieh, Empeara, Glee Jeung, and Lam Leut. The capital of Aceh, Banda Aceh, has a population of 49,000. Due to the difficulty of deciding whether some localities were a part of the municipality or of the neighboring *kecamatan*, I have included the (not many) marriages contracted with persons from Banda Aceh under the *kabupatèn* of Aceh Besar in the statistics presented here.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed account of the data discussed in this paper see James T. Siegel, *The Rope of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), and C. Jayawardena, "Women and Kinship in Aceh Besar," *Ethnology*, 16 (1977), forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup>I have counted the 1,032 spouses of these 516 marriages as if they were distinct individuals, although a period of twelve years is sufficient for a divorced or

whelming majority of marriages were registered in the woman's home area. However, according to an official of the Kantor Urusan Agama, only about 60-70 percent of the marriages are registered, because not everyone who is qualified to officiate at marriages registers them at the office.<sup>4</sup>

Further, the marriages recorded in the registers do not appear to be representative of all villages in the kecamatan. Of the four mukim that comprise it, two (Rheukieh and Empeara) are overrepresented proportionate to their population by comparison to the others (Glee Jeung and Lam Leuot). A probable reason is that the first two mukim are located nearer the hub of the economic, political, and social life of the kecamatan than are the others: the complex of *pasar* (market), *mesjid* (mosque), and *stasiun* (administrative offices) at Indrapuri.<sup>5</sup> In the more remote villages the *keutji'* (village head) and *teungku meunasah* (official responsible for religious affairs) maintain a more traditional pattern of village autonomy which is less responsive to bureaucratic pressures and modern practices.

The 516 marriages examined here, therefore, do not include all marriages and could be unrepresentative in ways difficult to decipher. Conclusions drawn from their analysis should be tempered by awareness of these limitations.

### Village Economy

The village economy is based on the cultivation of rice (the staple crop), vegetables, and fruit, and the raising of livestock (cattle, water buffalo, goats, and poultry). Petty trade in local markets, within and outside the kecamatan, is an important source of income for a considerable number of persons. They make the circuit of the markets of the area, each of which has a special day. Except on Fridays, there is a market within reasonable access of most villages. Some traders frequent markets farther afield and in due course may set up permanent shops in the larger towns; a fair number gravitate to the big commercial centers of Sumatra and Java. Visiting markets to chat with friends in coffeehouses or to stroll around with no particular purpose is a common pastime.

Rice cultivation, which is largely the responsibility of women, is the basis of subsistence. Women do not usually engage in trade. Men tend the fruit and vegetable gardens and the cattle and water buffalo, women the goats and poultry. These are the main sources of cash,

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widowed person to remarry. However, the small increase in accuracy if this point were checked would not justify the time involved.

<sup>4</sup>It appears that marriages are registered if the *teungku meunasah* and *imam* (religious leaders who may perform marriages) consider themselves delegates of the officials of the Ministry for Religious Affairs (Departemen Agama). According to both Islamic and Achehnese tradition, this requirement conflicts with the rights of the *wali*; in the past, the *ulèëbalang* (traditional chieftain) had sole authority to validate a marriage. See *Undang-undang Pentjatatatan Nikah, Talak dan Rudjuk* (Jakarta: Penerbitan Kementerian Agama, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup>There are two markets and eleven mosques in the kecamatan, but those at Indrapuri are the largest.

though when money is short--which is often--many sell their rice to the local mills. Men sell the surplus produce of their gardens at the local market and their cattle and buffalo to traveling buyers or at the weekly cattle market about twenty kilometers away. A rough distinction may be made between women's work, i.e., domestic and subsistence activities, and men's, i.e., providing cash, tending livestock, and working gardens, of which much of the produce, especially the fruit, is grown for sale.

The men are not permanently resident in the kampung. For shorter or longer periods they travel from place to place--to collect jungle produce, to pasture their cattle, to trade, to seek employment, and to attend centers of religious teaching. Before the collapse of the pepper industry in the 1930s, men spent extended periods of time on distant plantations. The *rantau*--a sojourn away from the village--was a developed institution in the past. It remains an ideal today, although the opportunities for going on the *rantau* are limited for those without capital or education. Yet there is a considerable mobility in the lives of men which is reflected in their marriage patterns; they often marry out of their natal area.

In contrast, women are confined to their houses and ricefields in the kampung. By the custom of uxorilocal residence they do not, except under special circumstances, move out on marriage. Women may be regarded as the fixed points of reference in the social organization of village life, while men are mobile. Their presence is not essential for the everyday running of a household.

The local economy also influences marriage customs, in that weddings tend to occur more frequently at certain periods of the year, particularly between May and August, after the rice harvest and before plowing for the next season. The Muslim calendar is also relevant, because people tend to avoid holding weddings during the fasting month of Ramadhan. In the period 1961-72, for reasons I cannot fully explain, the months of Muharram, Rabi al-Awal, and Rabi al-Achir were especially popular months. Said states that the months of Rabi al-Awal, Rabi al-Achir, and Sja'ban are considered auspicious.<sup>6</sup>

### Marriage and the Local Community

In village society marriage is a near universal condition. The custom of uxorilocal residence and the inheritance of houses by daughters makes marriage a greater necessity for men than for women, for unless a man is married he has no satisfactory place to live. Almost all men and women have been through wedding rites. Marriages are normally arranged by parents; the parents' role is given credence by the fact that the *wali* (guardian or representative; see below) are in most cases fathers, and by the ages of those marrying. According to data obtained from the survey, the usual age of first marriage is 16-20 years (about 78 percent) for women and 21-30 years (about 73 percent) for men. About 7 percent of the women and 18 percent of the men are over 30 years old; these are all marriages subsequent to the death or divorce of the spouse, or marriages of men taking a second wife. The

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<sup>6</sup>M. Said, *Adat Atjeh* (Daerah Atjeh: Dinas Pendidikan, 1970), p. 20.

typical marriage is a first one (82 percent for females, 74 percent for males) between a woman usually aged 16-20 and a man usually aged 21-30.

It is said that in the past marriages were largely within the village. Writing of conditions in the 1890s, Snouck Hurgronje stated that the village head usually permitted the women of the village to marry men from outside because the population of the village was thereby augmented.<sup>7</sup> But he was reluctant to lose population by allowing men to marry out. People today relate that in the past there was a chronic enmity between villages, sufficient to persuade them to seek spouses within their own villages. There also was a belief--which still persists today--that the customs and conduct of people of other areas were not known and probably incompatible with one's own. This general tendency was continually reinforced by a preference for marrying kinfolk. Kin-marriage preserved property within the family. Fellow-villagers were considered more reliable than someone from another village, and kindred were accustomed to each other's behavior as well. Such preferences were validated by a traditional saying which may be roughly translated as, "It is better to protect one's own salt rather than protect the salt of another."<sup>8</sup>

The marriage registers show that conditions today have somewhat changed. Only about a third of the marriages are confined within a village, though the territorial range is still limited to Indrapuri and the neighboring kecamatan of Seulimum, Montasik, and Suka Makmur. Of the 516 marriages under consideration here, only two were of local men with women resident outside the kabupaten, and only six of local women with men resident outside. It should be noted, however, that the former figure could be misleading since the statistics do not take into account men who left the kecamatan to marry women resident elsewhere. Table 1 illustrates the situation, within the limitations of this bias. The tendency to marry within a limited territorial range is also related to the combination of uxori-local residence and Islamic inheritance. Most peasants live in their wives' homes and help to cultivate their wives' fields; but they also own their own fields which, provided they are not too far away, are cultivated with the assistance of domestic labor.

Most marriages (78 percent) are still between persons of the same kecamatan, i.e., within the range of regular contact in economic, political, and religious activities. However, a fifth of the marriages are with persons residing outside the kecamatan; these outsiders, because of the custom of uxori-local marriage, are incoming husbands.

Marriage within the circle of kindred persists today, but whether its frequency has diminished or not cannot be gleaned from the data presented here.<sup>9</sup> People still quote familiarity, the retention of property, or (among aristocrats) status honor as reasons for marrying kin. On the other hand, some argue that a deeper commitment to Islam

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<sup>7</sup>Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* (Leiden: Brill, 1906), I, pp. 69-70, 115, 299-300.

<sup>8</sup>Nibak tapeutje sira gob,  
Leubeh get tapeutjeue sira dron.

<sup>9</sup>I hope to examine this matter in a later publication.

Table 1  
Comparison of Places of Residence--Grooms and Brides  
Percentage Distribution, 1961-72 (N = 516)

	Same Village	Same Mukim-- Different Villages	Same Kecamatan-- Different Mukim	Same Kabupatèn-- Different Kecamatan	Same Province-- Different Kabupatèn	Total
1961-63	34.1	35.1	7.7	20.9	2.2	100.0
1964-66	32.0	32.9	11.8	22.7	0.8	100.0
1967-69	31.5	35.8	11.8	20.3	0.6	100.0
1970-72	40.0	32.5	7.4	17.8	2.2	100.0

results in disapproving of marriage with close relatives and leads people beyond kindred to a consciousness of the larger Muslim community.

In the 516 registered marriages, 17.7 percent of the women and 25.5 percent of the men were marrying for the second or more time. Table 2<sup>10</sup> shows the different types of marital condition at the time of the registered marriage. It shows that once a woman is widowed or divorced she usually marries a man who is also widowed or divorced or who takes her as a second wife. Of the thirty-two women who married as second wives, twenty-five had been divorced or widowed. Only seven marriages were between a woman who had been widowed or divorced and a man who had never married before. In contrast, a greater proportion of men (46) who were widowed, divorced, or marrying a second wife, married girls who had never been married before. This could be partly

Table 2  
Marital Status at Marriage--Grooms and Brides, 1961-72

Grooms	Brides				Total Brides
	Unmarried	Widowed	Divorced	Already Married	
Unmarried	379	11	28	7	425
Widowed	2	12	6	8	28
Divorced	5	13	28	17	63
Total Grooms	386	36	62	32	516

<sup>10</sup>In an earlier publication (Jayawardena, "Women and Kinship") I mistakenly stated that divorce was infrequent and polygamy was rare. I came to these conclusions through a survey of six villages as well as discussions with informants. However, I did not specifically ask questions about marital history, considering them to be indiscreet. Men with two wives--I met only three--were the object of some teasing. Since then, analysis of the data of the marriage registers has caused me to withdraw those conclusions.

a reflection of "male dominance," but partly it also reflects the greater need of men to have satisfactory shelter, and conversely the greater ability of women, once married and owning their own property, to maintain themselves without a husband--something Snouck Hurgronje also remarked on in the 1890s.<sup>11</sup>

There is no disapproval of women remarrying. Indeed, in many cases the keutji', teungku meunasah, and the village elders (*ureuëng tua*) seek to find her another husband. But after a first marriage a woman has a far greater say in choosing her husband and can dispense with their services. Yet there is a traditional quatrain that grades women whose first marriage has terminated. These grades are, in order of increasing worth: (1) a woman divorced by her husband through repudiation (*talaq*), (2) a woman deserted by her husband but not formally divorced, (3) a woman who has obtained a divorce by applying to the Muslim court (*pasah*), (4) a widow.<sup>12</sup>

### Marriage Ceremonies

Marriage ceremonies consist of two parts: the nikah (Muslim marriage contract) and the *adat* ceremonies (generically referred to as *upacara*). The distinction between the two corresponds to the distinction between *hukum* (religious law) and *adat* (custom). Some modes of behavior are, of course, prescribed by both rites.

#### The Nikah

The nikah always precedes the main *adat* ceremonies, and the latter are never held without the former. The interval between the two, however, varies widely; the nikah may be held immediately before the *adat* wedding, but months, even a year or two, may sometimes intervene. Betrothal (*meulakëë*) always precedes the nikah, and again the interval between them varies.<sup>13</sup> The nikah is the essential component of a valid marriage; the *adat* ceremonies are dispensable. Yet the nikah is an inconspicuous and relatively private event compared to the public celebration of the *adat* ceremonies.

The nikah is essentially a contract between a man and a woman, the latter being represented by her wali. A woman's wali is her closest agnate, usually her father. If her father is dead, his brothers, sons, brothers' sons, etc., assume the position in order of agnatic distance. If a woman has no wali, the *qadi*, now an official of the Kantor Urusan Agama, can fill the role.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, pp. 355-56.

<sup>12</sup>Inong getaleuek harga sigupang,  
Inong getambang harga sikai sira,  
Inong gepasach djum sikato,  
Inong mate lako djum sibara.

<sup>13</sup>Because the betrothal is a part of the *adat* ceremonies it seems preferable to consider them together.

<sup>14</sup>Achehnese practices follow orthodox prescriptions closely. For a more detailed account of these prescriptions see the entry under *nikah* in H. A. R. Gibb and

The bride is not present at the signing of this contract, but the law requires that her wali obtain her permission. Some wali, especially the father or paternal grandfather, may ignore the need for her consent and force her into the marriage on the grounds that she does not know her own best interests. However, in later life, provided that her wali was someone other than her father or her father's father, the wife can end the marriage on the grounds of compulsion. She can also resist compulsion by declaring that she is not a virgin, for in such cases a woman cannot be married without her explicit content.

The nikah is essentially an offer made by the wali (or his agent) and accepted by the groom.<sup>15</sup> After a brief sermon, the wali (or his agent) asks the groom whether he is willing to accept the woman in return for a specified sum of gold (*maskawin*); the groom, having been coached to agree briefly in Arabic, replies that he is willing. He now has the right of sexual access to her; this right is the formal subject of the contract. He also agrees to maintain her in accordance with the standard of life to which she is accustomed.

The contract is attested to by two witnesses who are usually the *keutji'*, *teungku meunasah*, or other elders from the bride's village. In Aceh (though this is not part of *hukum*), the bride's father serves a meal of *keutan* (a specially sweetened rice, considered a delicacy). Traditionally, before the institution of the Kantor Urusan Agama, the nikah was held in the *meunasah* (men's house) of the bride's village, and the contracting parties brought special mats for each other to sit on.<sup>16</sup>

In recent times an innovation has been introduced into the marriage contract--the stipulation of a conditional divorce. According to Muslim law, a husband can divorce his wife at will by *talaq*--repeating the appropriate formula of repudiation three times before witnesses. A woman has no such right; she can void a marriage by appealing to a court (*pasah*), but the grounds for such action are limited. Through the process of *taliq*, or conditional divorce, this discrimination can now be eliminated. The bride specifies to the groom those conditions she will not tolerate, and he introduces into the contract the stipulation that were he to commit such acts divorce will be automatic. In this way she does not need to produce the elaborate proof required by the *pasah*. It is interesting that Snouck Hurgronje noted that while the *taliq* was very widespread elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago it was virtually absent in Aceh and Minangkabau. He suggested that in these areas the strong position of the woman, especially in economic matters, rendered such a procedure unnecessary.<sup>17</sup>

However, the use of *taliq* is gradually becoming more common in Aceh. On the marriage certificates issued by the Kantor Urusan Agama

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J. H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).

<sup>15</sup>Most wali do not have confidence in their ability to pronounce correctly the Arabic marriage sermon and the formulae of offering and acceptance. Since the validity of a marriage depends on correctness of expression, the wali engages the services of a *teungku meunasah* or imam to act as his agent (*wakil*) in the matter.

<sup>16</sup>Said, *Adat Atjeh*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, pp. 348-56.

in Jakarta, special provision is made for recording taliq.<sup>18</sup> From 1966 on, such conditions have been increasingly recorded for marriages in Aceh, especially in the case of grooms from outside the area. Out of 341 marriages in 1966-72, taliq were recorded for nearly 10 percent. Several informants believed that the practice was still gaining popularity.

Although the nikah confers on the man sexual access to the woman, the marriage is not consummated at this time unless there is to be no adat ceremony. Only if people are too poor, or if the marriage has been performed in the face of local disapproval, does the nikah lead to cohabitation. Under normal circumstances, despite the legality of the matter, sexual relations must wait until the adat ceremonies are completed. The nikah has to do with sexual rights, but the adat ceremonies define relations between social groups.

### Maskawin

The maskawin (brideprice) may be paid at the time of the nikah or later, in full or in installments. Specified as a sum of gold, it may actually be paid either in gold or in cash (*rupiah*). The sum to be paid is subject to negotiation, but unlike in Java, where the sum is nominal, it usually represents a considerable outlay of wealth--about one-third to one-half of an average peasant's annual cash income. When the amount is paid in gold, usually gold jewelry, it is measured in terms of a weight termed *manjam* which, I was told, is  $3\frac{1}{3}$  grams. When cash is paid instead, the amount is calculated according to the current price of gold.

Traditionally, the maskawin was fixed according to social rank, but in recent years wealth has also been a factor. The amount demanded for a woman is said to be the same as was received for her mother, but men of wealth or high status demand more than the average (which is about eight manjam) for the sake of prestige, lest it be said that they "sold" their daughter cheap. A sum higher than that actually paid will be announced at the nikah.

In Aceh the word for maskawin is *djinamèë*, a word which, Snouck Hurgronje observed, derives from the word *djamèë*, meaning guest. He points out, ". . . it can only be construed to mean, in its original sense, the gift or recompense given by a guest to him to extend his hospitality towards him. In spite of the great change wrought by Islam in the Achehnese conception of marriage, there still remains, as we have seen, much that is based upon the idea of a husband as a guest in the house of his wife."<sup>19</sup>

The records of the register show that the amount of maskawin paid in rupiah varies considerably, sometimes by as much as a factor of a hundred between the highest and the lowest. This is only partly a function of differences of wealth. For the most part, the lowest sums paid are for women who have been previously married. The amounts paid for previously unmarried women may vary by a factor as great as one to

<sup>18</sup>See the *Buku Nikah* (Jakarta: Departemen Agama, [?]), sec. 7 and 8.

<sup>19</sup>Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, p. 339 n. 1.

Table 3  
Maskawin, 1961-72

	Rupiah			Gold (manjam)		
	Highest	Lowest	Average	Highest	Lowest	Average
1961-63	51,000	1,000	16,777	12	6	8.8
1964-66	2,500,000	10,000	231,926	20	2	7.9
1967-69	32,000	120	8,934	20	2	7.5
1970-72	35,000	500	16,211	25	2	9.5

twenty. Table 3 indicates the sums paid in 1961-72. The column of averages indicates the extent to which differences of wealth operate.

The most interesting feature of the table is the fluctuation in the amount of rupiah paid during this period. The average amount paid in 1961-63 was Rp. 16,777; it rose suddenly to Rp. 231,926 in 1964-66, fell to Rp. 8,934 in 1967-69 and rose again to Rp. 16,211 in 1970-72. The cause of these variations was inflation, for the amount of maskawin is pegged to the current price of gold. In the mid-sixties, when the rate of inflation in Indonesia was extremely high, the amount payable rose ten- and fifteenfold. In the first half of 1966, maskawin of over a million rupiah were common. In the second half of 1966 the government devalued the currency, reducing its value a thousandfold. When the new currency reached the district by the end of the year, the amount of maskawin payable in cash dropped sharply. The subsequent doubling of the amount paid during the last period tabulated reflects the renewal of inflation.

In contrast, where the maskawin is paid in gold, the amount has usually been steady. Whereas people usually tended to pay maskawin in cash, they reverted to gold during the height of the inflation, for as early as 1964 there were rumors about the impending devaluation of the currency.

Payment of the maskawin is an important obligation in an Achehnese marriage, and the amount, as has been shown, means a serious and considered expenditure of wealth. As the following section will show, the maskawin is the hinge that links the nikah, prescribed by religious law, to the adat ceremonies, prescribed by custom. The maskawin is the basis from which traditional exchanges concerning marriage are calculated. It provides the conceptual basis for the weighing of social obligations and therefore remains relatively substantial aside from any connection with the stability of a particular marriage.

#### Adat Ceremonies

##### Betrothal (Meulakëë)

A betrothal is the culmination of a period of indirect and circum-spect negotiation. The marriage proposal is always made by the man's

family, never by the woman's. As the Achehnese saying goes, "the well never seeks the bucket."<sup>20</sup>

Traditionally, the good offices of a specialist matchmaker (*seulangké*) were used. The *seulangké*'s duties were onerous. He had to select a suitable spouse, especially one who did not have slave ancestry, arrange for the betrothal, and guide the agreement through to a wedding. He had to see that the customary gifts were exchanged, advise on the finer points of adat and smooth out misunderstandings that might arise between the negotiating parties. According to Snouck Hurgronje, if the groom reneged on his agreement at the last moment, the *seulangké*, rather like the matchmaker in Gogol's play, had to substitute for him. He was recompensed for his efforts with 10 percent of the *maskawin*.<sup>21</sup> Today, few people, if any, specialize as *seulangké*. A variety of persons may be used to approach the girl's family. The *keutji*' is very often used to make the formal approach, though by the time his good offices are secured prior inquiries have already been made. Nevertheless, the *keutji*' collects the traditional fee of the *seulangké*, which he contributes to *kampóng* funds set aside for communal purposes.

In the initial informal probes, discretion is the rule. A relative, neighbor, or friend of the woman's family is used to approach the woman's father, and perhaps a similar female to approach the woman herself. This practice is followed even if the parties are kin, to avoid the possibility of placing the woman's family in the awkward position of having to refuse a direct offer. The parents, in turn, do not approach their daughter themselves but use a friend of the family to broach the matter with her. Today, young couples who have reached their own agreements still depend on these traditional mechanisms; the young man usually relies on this mother to begin the negotiations.

Once it is ascertained that the proposal will be favorably received, the man's family pays a formal visit to the woman's. The prospective groom does not himself join the visiting party, which is composed of his father, the *keutji*', and other village elders, perhaps joined by the *teungku meunasah* and the imam. They are greeted at the woman's house by a similar group from her village. The ceremony is essentially a transaction between the officials of the two villages, with the fathers playing a quite subsidiary role. The ceremony, like all Achehnese ceremonies, begins with some form of invocation of God by the leading visitor--the *keutji*', imam, or *teungku meunasah*. The actual proposal is couched metaphorically, e.g., "We have heard that in this village there is a betel vine; we have come here to provide this vine with a trunk." There are a number of variations, such as, "You have a fruit tree, we have brought protection for the fruit." The leading figure of the home group, after some small talk and claiming ignorance of what they are discussing, eventually accepts the generosity of the offer. The visitors then present the engagement gift for the bride (*tanda kònghaba*). The gift consists of three parts: gold, in the form of jewelry; clothing, in the form of a length of *batik* and a sarong, as well as toilet articles; and food, such as fruit

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<sup>20</sup>Hantom mon mita timah.

<sup>21</sup>Hurgronje and Said refer to a lesser figure of 4 percent. Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, pp. 297-98; Said, *Adat Atjeh*, p. 13.

and sweetmeats. The component items are referred to metaphorically, the gold as "betel" and the rest as *bungoh djarðë* ("flower of the hand").

The gold is returned if the bride's family backs out of the marriage, and it is forfeited if the groom's family does so. Though custom varies, this gold is generally included as a part of the maskawin. In some kampung the whole value of the gold jewelry is included in the maskawin; in some only a part of its value. After the acceptance of the gift, preparations for the marriage are discussed.

The next stage of the marriage is the nikah. Even though some time may elapse between the two stages, the relationship is regarded as having been formalized. It is characterized by complete avoidance. Neither the prospective son-in-law nor his father may enter the house of the woman unless there is a funeral. At the time of the wedding the young man enters her house, but not the father. The two fathers come to be related in a special relationship referred to as *besan*, which also includes the mothers of the two families; indeed Said uses the word to signify primarily the relationship between the females of intermarrying families, not the males.<sup>22</sup>

### The Wedding

The main features of this stage are the arrival of the groom and his escort (*penganten*) at the woman's home, their welcome by the dignitaries of the woman's kampung (*mamplouë*), followed by the feast and a sitting in state (*bersanding*). These procedures are meant to demonstrate that the groom (*lintò*) and the bride (*darabarò*) belong to different kampung. But even if they are from one kampung, the same procedure applies; a part of the villagers act as guests, the rest as hosts. Often the keutji' heads the visitors and the teungku meunasah the wellcomers.

If the bride's father intends to hold a feast, he calls a meeting of relatives, particularly his siblings and his wife's siblings, to decide on the scale of the celebration. The relatives all make substantial contributions. Once the size has been decided, the matter is handed over to the keutji' who, together with the helpers he recruits, manages the whole affair. The father informs the keutji' how much rice and meat he can provide and how many guests he expects from the groom's family.<sup>23</sup> The organization of the reception and the feast, the cooking, seating arrangements, and decorations are entirely in the hands of the keutji' and the kampung helpers; if for some reason the celebration is not satisfactory, it is the keutji' who is criticized, not the father.

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<sup>22</sup>Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, p. 302; Said, *Adat Atjeh*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup>Traditionally, these numbers were calculated precisely. For every manjam of gold paid in the maskawin, the groom's side could bring ten guests; every forty guests were entitled to one *idang* (a very large tray piled up with rice and meat). It is said that in the past the keutji' of the groom's visiting party checked the number of *idang* before they sat down to eat.

A well-to-do father invites the whole of his village or a designated part of it. The pressure to invite residents of the kampung is strong and, in the case of a poor man who cannot afford a large feast, fellow villagers are preferred over any but the closest relatives and friends living elsewhere. There are two categories of invitees: those who are invited as a household and those who are invited as individuals. The former bring gifts, the latter as a rule do not. The average gift consists of some rice, a bamboo container of keutan (see above), a few coconuts and fruit; and perhaps a small bottle of cooking oil and some money (in 1972 Rp. 100-300). The gifts are noted in a book and a comparable amount is reciprocated at a return invitation. The guests who bring gifts are entitled to a parcel of food when they return home (*takei*) and I was told that this is a jealously guarded right. Snouck Hurgronje makes the interesting observation that husband and wife bring separate gifts. I did not inquire into the matter, but the one time I had occasion to notice, husband and wife did arrive separately.

Preparations for the wedding begin the night before, if not a couple of days earlier, with the shaving (*andam*) of the bride, a ceremony at which the short hairs at the peripheries of her forehead are shaved and her hands are dyed red with henna. Sheds are erected in the courtyard, and here the men of the village prepare the rice and meat in large cauldrons, usually a beef or water buffalo curry cooked with *nangka* (breadfruit). In the kitchen of the house women prepare the sidedishes, sweetmeats, and other special delicacies served to the groom and his close companions (*peungandjō*). The local guests arrive about midday and are welcomed by close relatives and friends--the males by males and the females by females. The parents of the bride are never among the welcomers. In general, the women are accommodated inside the house and the males outside; if there are several houses in the compound all these may be used and, if these are not enough, the houses of neighbors may be borrowed. The guests are fed in shifts. As they seat themselves, they are invited to eat with a speech of invitation and apology for whatever shortcomings there may be. When they have finished they are again thanked; this speech is a sign of dismissal and those who have not finished eating are also obliged to leave. The room is now available for the next shift. The consumption of the feast is characterized by a pragmatic lack of conversation. Thus the hosts can process many guests, who often number in the hundreds. By early afternoon, everyone is ready for the welcoming and feasting of the visiting groom's party, which arrives late in the evening.

Throughout most of the day female relatives and expert friends dress the bride, an elaborate process that may take six to ten hours. They also decorate a couch on which the bride and groom are to sit. This is regarded as a task for females, and the males of the family may not even have a glimpse of these activities.

In the meantime, the keutji' of the groom's kampung, informed of the number of guests expected, arranges a visiting party (*penganten*), the key members of which are regarded as the companions (*peungandjō*) of the groom. In the past they were composed of friends and elder women of the village. If the distance is too far to walk, one or more buses will be hired. In Indrapuri, as a result of the influence of a famous religious reformer, Teungku Hasballah, many villages have adopted the rule that women are not included in these processions; in such cases there are no female *peungandjō*. The male companions flank the

groom in the procession and stay by him throughout the ceremonies. The parents of the groom never join the procession. He takes leave of them and is given their blessing before the escort departs.

The visitors are greeted at the bride's *kampōng* by a group of persons who are usually selected by the *keutji'*. The parents of the bride are not among them. Traditionally, this welcome was marked by a degree of animosity. In the elaborate oratorical exchanges recorded by Snouck Hurgronje, there is a recurrent theme of concealing the groom and of pretending that he is not there. The *peungandjō* crowd round the groom like bodyguards to shield him from the taunts, even missiles, that may be thrown at him. The visiting party is immediately ushered to a meal, accompanied by speeches as described above, after which the groom is taken to the inner chamber of the house (*djurèë*) where the bride is seated on a decorated couch.

The groom is now welcomed by elderly women, the *peungandjō* of the bride. He repays them with gifts of money and approaches the bride, who bows to him. He gives her a gift of money (*uang seunemah*; in 1972 ca. Rp. 1,000), and then sits down on the couch to her right. The couple sit quiet and immobile for some time while the women and children, who now fill the room, gaze at them in whispered admiration. This phase is known as the *bersanding* and is the climax of the wedding ceremony. The men do not participate in it. After the *bersanding* the groom departs for his home with his escort.

#### The First Return of the Groom

The groom (now husband) returns to his wife's home the following evening, dressed in his marriage regalia and accompanied by his *peungandjō*. He stays there three nights;<sup>24</sup> it is probably during these nights that the marriage is consummated. When women were included among the *penganten*, the female *peungandjō* acted as liaison between the groom and the local women. The male *peungandjō*, staying close by him, gave him confidence to face the men of the local *meunasah*.

Towards dusk on each of these three nights, women from the husband's *kampōng* bring his wife a bundle of gifts.<sup>25</sup> There is a variety of opinion as to what these bundles actually contain, but it is generally agreed that they contain clothes, cosmetics and other toilet articles, as well as fruit, flowers, sweetmeats, and colored boiled eggs. The bundle of the first night contains clothes and toilet articles and, perhaps, some money (*uang seunemah*), which is calculated to be half the sum of money given by the groom when his bride first greeted him. On the second and third nights the bundles consist of boiled eggs, sweetmeats, fruits, and flowers. The gifts are known collectively as *alat peukan*, i.e., goods obtained in the market.

The notion that what the groom gives the bride is *alat peukan*, goods bought in the market, is of some theoretical significance in

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<sup>24</sup>Snouck reported seven, though even in his time the stay was being abbreviated to three. Hurgronje, *The Achehese*, I, p. 326.

<sup>25</sup>There is some variation in how this custom is observed. The bundles may be sent on one day rather than on three separate days.

understanding the domestic life of the Achehnese. In the complex web of reciprocal gift exchange that characterizes the Achehnese wedding, and in the definition of domestic roles in the household that is about to be created as well, the notion that the husband provides cash and market goods while the wife provides the home and subsistence goods is fundamental. That this exchange is conceptualized as a relation between guest (husband) and host (wife) is a feature which Hurgronje observed nearly a hundred years ago and which remains true today.

On the morning after the first night the husband, accompanied by his male peungandjō, visit the meunasah to make the acquaintance of the local males. He is expected to demonstrate modesty and generosity, which he does by offering everyone betel and cigarettes. The latent hostility between the incoming groom and the local males is reflected in the carping watchfulness with which the local males look for signs of arrogance. Stories are related of how the stairway of the groom's residence may be daubed with excrement to express local opinion of him; in one instance the stairway itself was removed so that when the groom went out to relieve himself he had to negotiate a drop of nearly eight to ten feet. During the *taraweh* in the month of Ramadhan, when people would gather at the meunasah to recite the Quran and stomp and jump in time with the rhythm of key phrases, the new groom (*peugrōb lintō*) would be bullied; in the enthusiastically leaping crowd he would be elbowed, tripped, and pushed from one person to another.

Traditionally, the peungandjō stay the night at the kampōng to give the new husband steady support and solace. Today, with the diminishing importance of customs reflecting intervillage hostility, they usually go home to their own kampōng at night and return the next day.

On the morning of the fourth day the groom returns to his village. Before he leaves, he meets his wife's mother and father for the first time in his new role as their son-in-law. Accompanied by close relatives, the parents-in-law greet him, and his mother-in-law gives him a gift of money (*rah djarðë*, washing the hand). The gift is said to amount to 10 percent of the maskawin; other relative who are present add to the sum. Some say that the *rah djarðë* is equivalent to the value of the three gifts brought to the bride on the three preceding evenings. The groom then goes back to his wife, gives her a part of the money, and returns home.

### The Reception of the Bride

A few days later the only ceremony that is held in the home of the groom occurs: the reception of the bride (*prèh darabarō*). A feast almost as large as the mampleuë is held. Local friends and kin are invited, and they bring gifts and return home with a takei. The bride arrives, accompanied by women of her kampōng carrying decorated trays of food (*idang*). The bride's mother does not accompany this procession and the groom is nowhere to be seen. In general this is a women's affair in which the men do not participate.

The procession is welcomed by the women of the groom's kampōng, who usher the guests to a meal, after which the groom's mother enters for the first time, greets the bride, and gives her a gift of money which is said to be half the *rah djarðë*. The bride may stay at the groom's house for a few days before returning home.

### The Second Return of the Groom

After his second departure, the groom continues to live in his own home for some time--weeks, months, even a year or more. During this period he visits and stays overnight with his wife for a few days at a time, always providing her with gifts (*biyaya*).<sup>26</sup> At about this time he gives her a gift of jewelry consisting of a gold or silver belt, a bracelet, and a ring. Hurgronje and Said state that this is the only jewelry given to a wife by her husband which she may keep in the event of his death or divorce; all else returns to his family. According to my informants, these articles had to be returned too, though no self-respecting person would demand them back.

Eventually, when the husband comes to live with his wife permanently (*tinggal tetap*), he brings along a few bags of rice which he presents to his wife's father. His wife's father (*meutua*) is obliged by custom to support him for an ensuing period.<sup>27</sup> This custom is not now followed, and even the practice of the wife's father supporting his daughter's husband is only nominally maintained.

When the groom departs from his home, his father gives him a rice-field and some livestock, or his wife's father may lend him some. For a while he remains idle and does not work. When he does begin to work, the produce of his labor is stored and cannot be consumed by his wife's father's household, which actually supports him. The situation is regarded as one in which the wife's father is obligated to support his daughter and her husband. He may borrow from the stores of his son-in-law (for instance, to consume paddy which might spoil if stored too long), but he must return these loans. It is said in Aceh Pidie that during this period the groom works not only his land but that of his wife's father as well.

If the wife's father is well-to-do he will build a house for his daughter during this period, or use the new one himself and offer the old one to her. If he cannot afford such a project, he adds an additional room for himself and his wife or builds a shed (*balai*) or, failing both, sleeps with his wife in the kitchen. His main duty is to provide his daughter with a house and, since normally he does not have one, this gift is actually the house owned by his wife, who obtained hers under the same circumstances. There is room for wondering whether the local opinion that the father provides the daughter with a house is not a male interpretation of the fact that he gives her the house owned by his wife. The groom lives in the house provided by his *meutua*, and his main obligation during this period, apart from providing his wife with occasional *biyaya*, is to provide his father-in-law with gifts of meat at *hari meugang*, when the great sacrifice of cattle and buffalo is made for Idul Adha. In return, at the conclusion of Ramadhan, the *meutua* presents the groom with a gift of clothes.

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<sup>26</sup>These gifts are referred to as *barang mentah*, uncooked food which is available in the market, such as meat, fish, fruit, etc.

<sup>27</sup>According to Hurgronje, the period is calculated according to the amount of the maskawin (*djandji djinamèë*).

### Pregnancy and Childbirth

The duration of the groom's sojourn at the expense of his wife's parents is a year or two; customarily it ends with the birth of a child. When the wife is two or three months pregnant, her mother sends the husband's mother a gift of keutan as a sign that she is pregnant; his mother has the right to be informed first. Sometime between the third and seventh month the mother of the husband and the women of her kampung visit the wife with an idang or two of food which they cook specially for her. This gift is known as *meuminum*. After the birth of the child the mother of the husband again visits, bringing a gift (*seulimpeh*) consisting of a cradle, bedclothes, jewelry, and perhaps some money; these are reciprocated with a gift of money from the wife's mother. The costs of confinement are paid by the wife's mother. Men have nothing to do with all this.

### Separation

The birth of a child leads to the formal establishment of a new household through a ceremony of separation (*peukléh*). The wife's father invites the keutji', teungku meunasah, close friends, and relatives to a meal. He announces that the new household is formally separate. He specifies what he gives the new household for its support: house, ricefields, gardens, livestock, and domestic equipment. He is thereafter no longer responsible for their upkeep, and the cycle of marriage ceremonies is finally over.

### Conclusions

The most remarkable feature of Achehnese marriage customs is the emphasis on the role of the group. Snouck Hurgronje remarked that "Marriage is by no means a mere family matter, but at least as much an affair of the whole *gampông*."<sup>28</sup> The groups that enter into relations with each other in marriage ceremonies are not defined or recruited on the basis of kinship but in terms of authority in local organization: the keutji', the imam, the teungku meunasah, and fellow kampung dwellers. The parents and siblings of bride and groom are never given any formal roles. A marriage is essentially the offer of a woman, the basic resource of a village, to a man who is to join the kampung. It is a set of ceremonies, not without awareness of a degree of antagonism, which manages to spell out the terms of incorporation of the male in ways consonant with the local economy.

The local economy, developed over centuries, is one in which the village is not a self-sustaining unit. The man represents the market and commodities, the woman home and subsistence. Marriage, representing a finely calibrated system of gift exchanges, draws together this union of the market with the village. It is not men and women as members of kingroups that marriage unites, but men and women cooperating in a viable economy, bringing together the produce of the market and the produce of the fields and kitchen.

<sup>28</sup>Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, I, p. 299; see also Said, *Adat Atjeh*, p. 15.

The dichotomy between hukum and adat mirrors this distinction between market and home, commodities and fixed assets. It is the women who organize the marriage ceremonies, though it is the men who front for them, not as kinsmen but as the guardians of the village assets.

