

Pitih Balanjo in Courtship: Minangkabau Traditions and their Compliance with Islamic Law

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Abstract

This study examines the tradition of *pitih balanjo*, in which a prospective groom provides a monetary gift to his prospective bride during the courtship period in Minangkabau society, and evaluates its compliance with Islamic law. This tradition has long been an integral part of the social system and is regarded as a symbol of a man's sincerity in proposing marriage. The value of *pitih balanjo* is determined not by the amount given but by the giver's sincerity. The study employs a qualitative method with an ethnographic approach, including interviews, participant observation, and documentation, to gain an in-depth understanding of the practice and its socially constructed meanings. Findings indicate that the community views *pitih balanjo* as a symbolic bond between prospective partners, preventing others from proposing to the woman after the gift is given. However, the traditional sanction requiring the gift to be returned double in case of a canceled engagement contradicts the Islamic principle of voluntary gifts (*hibah*), which cannot be withdrawn except in specific contexts, such as by a father to his child. The study concludes that the giving of *pitih balanjo* is permissible as long as it complies with Sharia, while the traditional sanction mechanism warrants reconsideration.

INTRODUCTION

Tradition is an integral part of cultural heritage that continues to live and develop within society. In the context of the Minangkabau community, marriage traditions are not merely customary practices but also carry strong social and religious values embedded in communal life (Kwok et al., 2023; Rochadiat et al., 2018; Syafi'i & Dzulkifli, 2024). Recent studies indicate that customary marriage traditions in Minangkabau continue to adapt within the frameworks of modernity and Islamic law, such as through the integration of local customs and Sharia principles in marriage practices, demonstrating how customary elements are maintained while aligned with Islamic principles (Alhkarni & Yuriska, 2024; Saputra, Dewi, & Hasrul, 2025). Traditions such as *maisì sasuduik*, *bajapuik*, or *mamanggia* illustrate the diversity of customs within the Minangkabau cultural cluster and how these practices are still upheld today (Wati, 2025; Yusnita & Gibtiah, 2024).

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These customary practices including gift exchanges, selection of prospective spouses, and engagement procedures reveal that custom and religion often intersect, particularly regarding social legitimacy and family law (Jafar et al., 2024). Therefore, local traditions cannot be understood solely as inherited habits without considering the *fiqh* (Islamic law) dimension and the social changes occurring in the community (Nadhifah & Rafli, 2023).

In the Islamic context, the term *urf*, derived from the Arabic root *arafa* (“to know” or “to recognize”), refers to social practices widely acknowledged and used as guidelines for behavior. *Urf* is often equated with custom, meaning repetitive habits in daily life that are generally accepted and play an important role in the study of *ushul fiqh* (Fadilah, 2025).

The engagement process, or *khibbah*, represents an initial stage recommended in Islam as preparation for marriage, carried out with awareness, careful consideration, and a sense of responsibility from both parties. This stage allows prospective spouses and their families to get to know each other, assess compatibility, and ensure moral and social readiness before proceeding to marriage (Lubis, 2023; Nurhasnah, 2024). In Islamic teaching, gifts from a man to a woman recognized under Sharia law are classified into three types: *mahr* given at the time of the marriage contract, *nafkah* provided after the marriage is valid, and *mut'ah* as compensation in the event of divorce (Hajar, 2023; Suwarno & Rachmawati, 2020). Beyond these provisions, the Minangkabau community has developed a social practice known as *pitih balanjo*, or allowance given to the prospective bride during the engagement period (Engkizar et al., 2023). This tradition is considered a symbol of the groom's sincerity and commitment to establishing a household and serves as a means for the woman and her family to evaluate the man's economic readiness and responsibility (Alhkarni & Yuriska, 2024; Saputra et al., 2025).

Pitih balanjo is delivered through the intermediary of the groom's family, with the amount varying according to his ability, and it is considered a gift (*hibah*) under Islamic law, making it the personal right of the prospective bride and non-recoverable by the groom. However, customary sanctions applied if the engagement is canceled particularly the obligation for the woman to return double the amount indicate tension between local practices and Sharia principles, which emphasize that voluntarily given gifts cannot be reclaimed (Wati, 2025; Yusnita & Gibtiyah, 2024).

Furthermore, the *pitih balanjo* tradition also has a broader cultural function, serving as a means of character building and reinforcing social norms within the community (Ali et al., 2020; Engkizar et al., 2024). Through this routine practice, prospective grooms are trained to act cautiously, responsibly, and consistently in facing household commitments, while prospective brides and their families gain the opportunity to assess the seriousness of the suitor (Jafar et al., 2024; Nurjannah & Nazif, 2025). This practice reflects an adaptive cultural dynamic, in which local traditions are maintained but adjusted to align with Islamic legal principles and modern social demands, ensuring the continuity of ancestral values while remaining relevant in contemporary life (Fadilah, 2025; Nadhifah et al., 2023).

These phenomena encourage further research to understand the socio-cultural and legal meanings of the *pitih balanjo* tradition in the Minangkabau community, particularly regarding its conformity with Sharia principles. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the practice of giving *pitih balanjo* during the engagement period, which serves as the main focus of this scholarly work.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with an ethnographic approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the *pitih balanjo* tradition given to women during the engagement period from the perspective of Islamic law in

Minangkabau (Jaafar et al., 2025; Okenova et al., 2025). The study is categorized as field research, with data collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with key informants such as prospective brides and grooms, parents, *ninik mamak*, *wali nagari*, Islamic scholars, and *bundo kanduang*, supplemented by relevant documentation (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Kalsum et al., 2025; Rahawarin et al., 2025). The research data consist of primary data obtained from observations and interviews, as well as secondary data derived from literature and related documents. Data analysis was conducted through stages of review, reduction, data grouping, categorization, and interpretation, following the qualitative analysis model developed by Lexy J. Moleong, with the aim of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the practices and meanings of the *pitih balanjo* tradition within the socio-cultural and Islamic legal context (Bainotti, 2022; Gorichanaz, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Monograph of Nagari Manggilang

Nagari Manggilang is located in Pangkalan Koto Baru District, Lima Puluh Kota Regency, with a long history preserved through *tambo* adat (traditional chronicles). Historically, the area consisted of three *koto*, namely Koto Tuo, Koto Muansih, and Koto Numang, inhabited by the Melayu, Domo, and Caniago ethnic groups, respectively. They later agreed to unite and form Nagari Manggilang. The name “Manggilang” originates from a story of a prince who lost a mangosteen-shaped ornament in the Sirah River; when it could not be found, the king said, “Manggi ilang.” Today, Nagari Manggilang consists of seven clans led by *ninik mamak*, maintaining a strong traditional structure. Geographically, the *nagari* is located in a hilly area covering 15,875 hectares, crossed by the Batang Manggilang and Talagiri rivers, with a population of 5,101 people distributed across four *orong*.

The majority of the population adheres to Islam and has adequate worship facilities, including two mosques and four prayer halls (*mushala*), alongside religious educational institutions such as Quran institutions in each *orong*. The local economy is dominated by agriculture, particularly rubber and gambier, while others work as traders, entrepreneurs, drivers, and civil servants. The *nagari* government is led by a democratically elected Wali Nagari, assisted by a secretary, department heads, staff, and *orong* leaders. The synergy between formal governance and customary structures strengthens social, economic, and cultural resilience in the community.

Implementation of the *Pitih Balanjo* Tradition

The tradition of giving *pitih balanjo* to women during the engagement period follows sequential stages. Based on interviews with informants, the stages are as follows:

Activity	Participants	Notes / Meaning
<i>Maresek</i> / Choosing a spouse	Family of the prospective bride/groom	Opening conversation, e.g., “Lah ado calon menantu?” (<i>Informant</i>)
<i>Adok-adokan</i> / Silaturrahmi	Prospective couple & parents	Only the immediate family attends (<i>Informant</i>)
<i>Mantaan Tando</i> / Engagement	Bringing gold rings, determining engagement duration & <i>pitih balanjo</i> amount	Both families & <i>datuak</i>
<i>Tombe</i>	Exchange of food baskets & <i>sasuduik</i>	Both families
<i>Manatak Hari</i>	Determining the end of engagement & wedding date	Both families
<i>Kampung Mamak</i> / <i>Baiyo-Iyo</i>	Discussion with <i>mamak</i>	Family & <i>mamak</i>
Akad Nikah & <i>Baralek</i>	Marriage contract & wedding celebration	Prospective couple & families

The process begins with *Maresek*, where the family seeks a suitable partner. This is followed by *Adok-adokan*, a familial *silaturrahmi*. *Mantaan Tando* marks the formal engagement ceremony, followed by *Tombe*, the exchange of baskets and *sasuduik* as a sign of respect and cooperation. *Manatak Hari* determines the end date of the engagement, and *Kampung Mamak* / *Baiyo-Iyo* involves deliberation with *ninik mamak* regarding *pitih balanjo*. The final stage is *Akad Nikah* and *Baralek*, marking the legal recognition of the marriage (*Informant*).

Community Perspectives

The results of interviews with informants indicate that the Minangkabau community views *pitih balanjo* as an indicator of the groom's sincerity and as an initial bond between the couple. The amount of *pitih balanjo* varies, usually ranging from IDR 50,000 to IDR 200,000 per week, adjusted according to the groom's financial capacity and delivered through the bride's family (*Informant*). This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Alhkarni & Yuriska (2024), which show that Minangkabau marriage customs integrate local traditions and Sharia principles to ensure social and religious harmony in marriage. Furthermore, Wati (2025) emphasizes that material gifts during the engagement period, such as *maisi sasuduik* or *pitih balanjo*, serve as a sign of the groom's commitment and are officially regulated by the *ninik mamak* to maintain the continuity of the tradition.

Ninik mamak and community leaders stress that *pitih balanjo* cannot be replaced with other items and must be officially delivered, either by the groom's parents or a legal guardian, to preserve the tradition (*Informant*). If the engagement is canceled by the bride, the amount already given must be returned double; if canceled by the groom, the *pitih balanjo* remains the bride's property and is not returned (*Informant*). This finding is consistent with the study by Saputra et al (2025), which shows that Minangkabau marriage customs include mechanisms to affirm the social and financial commitments of both parties. From the perspective of married couples, one couple provided IDR 100,000 per week during a five-month engagement, with the process conducted openly and witnessed by family members (*Informant*). Other informant couples reported that irregularities in weekly contributions were acceptable as long as the total amount met the agreement, and another couple confirmed that the tradition is a social obligation, even though no coercion is applied by the family (*Informant*).

Socially, *pitih balanjo* functions as a tool for the bride and her family to assess the groom's economic readiness, responsibility, and seriousness (*Informant*). This is in line with the findings of Nurjannah & Nazif (2025), who emphasize that Minangkabau marriage practices are not only symbolic but also contain evaluative value in assessing the character of prospective spouses. Darmawansyah et al (2024) add that material gifts in the *Bajapuiik* custom strengthen social relationships between families and affirm adherence to customary rules. Another study by Nadhifah et al (2025) shows that similar practices in Minangkabau customs can be categorized as '*urf shabih*', meaning habits that do not contradict Sharia and continue to bring benefits to society.

Meanwhile, Aini et al (2024) highlight that the cultural values embedded in this tradition serve as a medium for reinforcing social norms, moral awareness, and family stability within the Minangkabau community. Nofiardi (2023) also emphasizes that the supervision of the *ninik mamak* ensures that the *pitih balanjo* tradition is carried out according to customary principles without compromising compliance with Islamic law, while Darmawansyah et al (2024) stress the importance of regulating the nominal amount and mechanisms for returning funds if an engagement is canceled. Overall, the practice of *pitih balanjo* reflects a balance between local tradition, social evaluation, and adherence to Islamic law, making the tradition relevant and adaptive in the context of modern life (Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; Rofiq et al., 2023).

Islamic Legal Perspective

From a Sharia perspective, *pitih balanjo* is categorized as a *hibah*, a voluntary gift that becomes the recipient's rightful property and cannot be reclaimed. Practices such as reclaiming or doubling the amount in case of engagement cancellation, as per Minangkabau custom, contradict the principle of *hibah*. However, if understood as a voluntary gift or token of appreciation mutually agreed upon, this tradition qualifies as '*urf shabih*', a custom that does not conflict with Sharia and serves communal welfare. Therefore, *pitih balanjo* is acceptable under Islamic law as long as it is voluntary, imposes no obligation for compensation, and does not cause harm. The tradition reflects the groom's seriousness and respect for the bride while preserving local cultural continuity (*Informant*).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the tradition of giving *pitih balanjo* during the engagement period in Nagari Manggilang is an ancestral heritage that serves as a symbol of the groom's sincerity and the bond between the prospective husband and wife. This tradition is well accepted by the community, as it is considered to strengthen relationships and respect customary law. From the perspective of Islamic law, this tradition can be categorized as a *hibah* (gift), which is permissible as long as it is given voluntarily without any coercion and without penalties if the engagement is canceled. Therefore, the implementation of this tradition is valid as long as it does not violate Sharia principles, particularly regarding the prohibition of reclaiming gifts that have been given sincerely.

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