

## Gender Dynamics in Minangkabau Customs: Women's Role in Safeguarding and Preserving High Heirlooms

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### Abstract

This study explores the gender dynamics within Minangkabau customs, focusing on the pivotal role of women in safeguarding and preserving high heirlooms (harta pusaka tinggi). As a matrilineal society, Minangkabau places women at the center of inheritance and cultural preservation, with high heirlooms serving as symbols of familial and communal identity. Using a qualitative approach, this research examines the responsibilities, challenges, and strategies employed by women in maintaining these assets. Data were collected through interviews with customary leaders, women inheritors, and community members, along with observations. The data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns in women's roles in the Minangkabau adat system. The findings reveal that Minangkabau women hold a dual responsibility as custodians of both physical heirlooms, such as land and traditional objects, and intangible heritage, including customs and values. This role ensures the continuity of Minangkabau identity across generations. However, modernization, urbanization, and shifts in gender roles pose significant challenges to this tradition. Women often navigate complex negotiations between preserving traditional values and adapting to contemporary economic and social realities. The study highlights the adaptive strategies employed by women to balance these demands while safeguarding communal harmony. This research underscores the importance of empowering women as cultural custodians and the need for community-based initiatives to support preserving Minangkabau heritage. This study highlights the gap between women's theoretical rights in the Minangkabau matrilineal adat system and their limited practical role in decision-making, revealing structural dependencies that perpetuate inequality.

**Keywords:** Women Role, High Heirlooms, Gender Dynamics.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika gender dalam adat Minangkabau, dengan fokus pada peran penting perempuan dalam menjaga dan melestarikan harta pusaka tinggi. Sebagai masyarakat matrilineal, Minangkabau menempatkan perempuan di pusat warisan dan pelestarian budaya, dengan harta pusaka tinggi sebagai simbol identitas keluarga dan komunitas. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengkaji tanggung jawab, tantangan, dan strategi yang diterapkan oleh perempuan dalam memelihara aset-aset ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan pemimpin adat, pewaris perempuan, dan anggota komunitas, serta observasi. Data dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola utama dalam peran perempuan dalam sistem adat Minangkabau. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa perempuan Minangkabau memegang tanggung jawab ganda sebagai penjaga harta pusaka fisik, seperti tanah dan objek tradisional, serta warisan tak berwujud, termasuk adat dan nilai-nilai. Peran ini memastikan kelangsungan identitas Minangkabau antar generasi. Namun, modernisasi, urbanisasi, dan perubahan peran gender memberikan tantangan signifikan terhadap tradisi ini. Perempuan sering kali harus menavigasi negosiasi

*kompleks antara melestarikan nilai-nilai tradisional dan beradaptasi dengan realitas sosial dan ekonomi kontemporer. Penelitian ini menyoroti strategi adaptasi yang diterapkan oleh perempuan untuk menyeimbangkan tuntutan ini sambil menjaga keharmonisan komunitas. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pemberdayaan perempuan sebagai penjaga budaya dan perlunya inisiatif berbasis komunitas untuk mendukung pelestarian warisan Minangkabau. Penelitian ini juga menggarisbawahi kesenjangan antara hak teoretis perempuan dalam sistem adat matrilineal Minangkabau dan peran praktis mereka yang terbatas dalam pengambilan keputusan, yang mengungkapkan ketergantungan struktural yang memperpetuasi ketidaksetaraan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Peran Perempuan, Pusaka Tinggi, Dinamika Gender.

## Introduction

Minangkabau is renowned as a society practicing a matrilineal system,<sup>1</sup> where lineage and high heirlooms are passed down through women. This system places women in a crucial role as primary custodians of family heritage, including land and other assets regarded as symbols of ancestral continuity.<sup>2</sup> Women hold a central position in preserving cultural heritage and traditional values. However, despite their pivotal role in managing high heirlooms, women often lack full access or authority in decision-making within the realm of customary leadership. Minangkabau's customary structure remains predominantly male-dominated, particularly in the role of *mamak* (uncle), who acts as the customary guardian and key decision-maker within families. This disparity reveals a paradox between the respect given to women in the inheritance system and their limited influence within formal customary structures. The essential yet constrained role of women

underscores the complexity of gender dynamics in Minangkabau society.

The rapid processes of modernization and urbanization have created new challenges for Minangkabau society.<sup>3</sup> Traditional matrilineal values are increasingly eroded by the rise of individualism,<sup>4</sup> particularly among the younger generation exposed to contemporary social and economic changes.<sup>5</sup> This tension creates a dilemma for Minangkabau women, who, on one hand, bear the responsibility of safeguarding high heirlooms and ancestral traditions, yet, on the other hand, face pressures to adapt to modern economic demands.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the stark gap between women's roles as cultural guardians and their limited involvement in customary decision-making perpetuates structural inequality.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the growing advocacy for gender equality has sparked broader discussions about women's roles in customary leadership.<sup>8</sup> Support for empowering women in preserving and upholding Minangkabau culture has

<sup>1</sup> Asrinaldi Asrinaldi and Yoserizal Yoserizal, "Problems with the Implementation of Adat Basandi Syarak Syarak Basandi Kitabullah Philosophy," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik* 33, no. 2 (June 24, 2020): 162, <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V33I22020.162-173>.

<sup>2</sup> Yuhelna Yuhelna, Sri Rahmadani, and Waza Karia Akbar, "PENGUATAN PERAN PEREMPUAN DALAM PENGELOLAAN HARTA PUSAKA TINGGI DI MINANGKABAU," *Ekasakti Jurnal Penelitian & Pengabdian* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 2021): 292–97, <https://doi.org/10.31933/ejpp.v1i2.354>.

<sup>3</sup> Eficandra Eficandra, "The Reconstruction of High-Inherited Wealth in Minangkabau through Cash Waqf Movement," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 21, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 121, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v21i1.5850>.

<sup>4</sup> Mahtab Ahmad, Moazma Batool, and Sophia F. Dziegielewski, "State of Inheritance Rights: Women in a Rural District in Pakistan," *Journal of Social Service Research* 42, no. 5 (October 19, 2016): 622–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2016.1177633>.

<sup>5</sup> Sule Toktas and Mary Lou O'Neil, "Competing Frameworks of Islamic Law and Secular Civil Law in Turkey: A Case Study on Women's Property and Inheritance Practices," *Women's Studies International Forum* 48 (January 2015): 29–38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.10.011>.

<sup>6</sup> Sulagna Mookerjee, "Gender-Neutral Inheritance Laws, Family Structure, and Women's Status in India," *The World Bank Economic Review*, July 19, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhx004>.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Andrew Birchok, "Women, Genealogical Inheritance and Sufi Authority: The Female Saints of Seunagan, Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 4 (October 7, 2016): 583–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1224999>.

<sup>8</sup> Issa Khan et al., "The Right of Women in Property Sharing in Bangladesh: Can the Islamic Inheritance System Eliminate Discrimination?," *SpringerPlus* 5, no. 1 (December 3, 2016): 1695, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-3347-2>.

become a critical issue, especially in balancing traditional values with contemporary demands.<sup>9</sup>

The Minangkabau matrilineal system, renowned as a hallmark of cultural identity, places women at the core of inheritance and preservation of high heirlooms. Despite this, the interplay between women's vital roles as guardians of family heritage and their restricted participation in adat leadership structures remains underexplored. Traditionally, women in Minangkabau society are entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding high heirlooms and ensuring the continuity of cultural values, a role that underscores their centrality in maintaining the social fabric. However, the authority in decision-making within adat institutions predominantly lies in the hands of men, particularly the mamak (maternal uncles), who exert significant influence over customary policies.<sup>10</sup> This gender-based division of roles creates a dichotomy:<sup>11</sup> while women are seen as cultural custodians,<sup>12</sup> they are excluded from strategic leadership.<sup>13</sup> The challenge is compounded by modern socio-economic transformations,<sup>14</sup> including urbanization, the rise of individualism, and evolving economic pressures, all of which threaten the traditional equilibrium. These shifts often lead to conflicts between upholding cultural values and adapting to contemporary demands, necessitating a deeper examination of the mechanisms through which women can assert their agency within a transforming customary framework.

This research seeks to critically analyze the gender dynamics within Minangkabau customs, focusing on the roles and challenges faced by

women as guardians and preservers of high heirlooms. Specifically, it aims to assess how modernization and socio-economic changes impact their ability to fulfill these traditional responsibilities while navigating the limitations imposed by patriarchal adat structures. The study will further explore strategies to empower women in decision-making roles without undermining the values integral to Minangkabau traditions. Proposed solutions may include leadership development programs tailored to adat principles, community dialogues that encourage the inclusion of women in customary decision-making, and educational initiatives that bridge the gap between tradition and progressive values. By promoting collaboration between adat leaders, women's organizations, and academic institutions, this research envisions a harmonized adat system that accommodates both cultural preservation and gender equality. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Minangkabau women can maintain their cultural legacy while engaging more actively in shaping their society's future.

## Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at exploring the gender dynamics within Minangkabau customs, with a particular focus on the role of women in the preservation and protection of high heirlooms. A case study design is employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, and economic contexts that shape the Minangkabau community. Data collection combines multiple methods to capture a thorough picture of gender dynamics in the context of Minangkabau traditions. Semi-structured interviews will be

<sup>9</sup> Aleena Sebastian, "Matrilineal Practices among Muslims: An Ethnographic Study of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra," *Ethnography*, December 27, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381221147137>.

<sup>10</sup> Nofaldi Nofaldi and Siska Rianti, "The Distribution of Pusako Randah Property in Minangkabau Society: Between Cultural Tradition and Islamic Law Provision," *Mazabib* 23, no. 1 (June 25, 2024): 271–304, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v23i1.7257>.

<sup>11</sup> Duman Bahrami-Rad, "Keeping It in the Family: Female Inheritance, Inmarriage, and the Status of Women," *Journal of Development Economics* 153 (November 2021): 102714, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102714>.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Rosenblum, "Unintended Consequences of Women's Inheritance Rights on Female Mortality in India," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 63, no. 2 (January 2015): 223–48, <https://doi.org/10.1086/679059>.

<sup>13</sup> Mariaflavia Harari, "Women's Inheritance Rights and Bargaining Power: Evidence from Kenya," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 68, no. 1 (October 2019): 189–238, <https://doi.org/10.1086/700630>.

<sup>14</sup> Sanchari Roy, "Empowering Women? Inheritance Rights, Female Education and Dowry Payments in India," *Journal of Development Economics* 114 (May 2015): 233–51, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2014.12.010>.

conducted with 15 to 20 participants, including adat leaders, female inheritors, and community members. These interviews, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, will delve into women's roles in inheritance, cultural preservation, and the challenges they face. Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be organized with 6 to 8 participants in each group, lasting 90 minutes, to gather insights from the community on women's involvement in adat practices and potential empowerment strategies. Participatory observations will take place during adat ceremonies, family gatherings, and community events, each lasting 2 to 4 hours, to observe women's participation in decision-making related to inheritance. Furthermore, document analysis of adat regulations, legal records, and historical texts will provide a deeper understanding of the formal and informal rules governing inheritance and women's roles in the Minangkabau society. These combined methods will ensure a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

Data analysis will follow a thematic approach, where information from interviews, FGDs, and documents will be coded to identify key patterns and themes. The findings will be synthesized to provide a thorough understanding of the relationship between women's roles in preserving high heirlooms and the challenges they encounter within customary frameworks. Data validity will be ensured through triangulation, comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents to verify consistency and accuracy. Additionally, preliminary findings will be validated through a member-checking process, involving participants to confirm that the interpretation aligns with their experiences. Ethical considerations will be observed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting local cultural values throughout the research. This methodology is designed to offer an in-depth understanding of women's roles in Minangkabau customs, while also proposing

strategies to harmonize traditional values with modern gender equality concerns.

## Results and Discussion

### Discrimination of Women as Guardians and Managers of Highly Valued Heirlooms

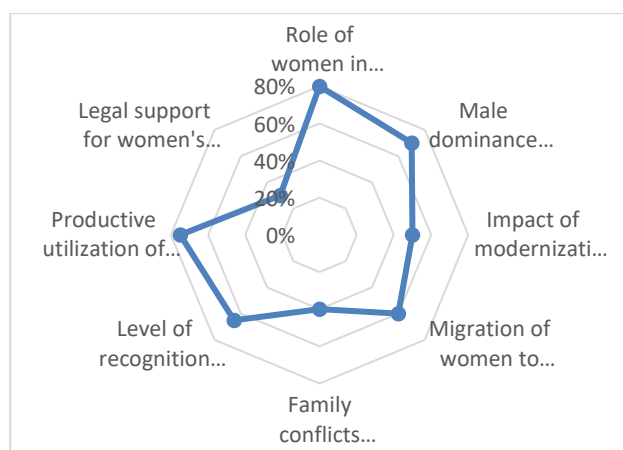
Protecting the *harta pusaka tinggi* (high ancestral heritage) from being repurposed or transferred to external parties is one of the main responsibilities of women in Minangkabau society,<sup>15</sup> which follows a matrilineal system. As guardians and managers of *harta pusaka tinggi*, women are tasked with ensuring that lands, traditional houses, and other ancestral items do not fall into the hands of outsiders who might alter their intended purpose.<sup>16</sup> *Harta pusaka tinggi* holds immense historical and symbolic value in Minangkabau society, as it is inherited from ancestors and must be preserved. In this context, women actively protect and manage these assets to prevent them from being sold or transferred to those without familial ties. This process involves not only administrative roles in recording and managing legal ownership but also a deep understanding of the cultural values embedded in these ancestral items.<sup>17</sup> Women must perform this role wisely and decisively, as any decision related to *harta pusaka tinggi* can impact the continuity of traditions and social stability within the community. In protecting *harta pusaka tinggi*, women in Minangkabau often serve as mediators in resolving disputes related to the division or management of the heritage, playing a crucial role in maintaining family harmony and preventing conflicts that could harm interfamily relationships.

<sup>15</sup> Nofaldi and Rianti, "The Distribution of Pusako Randah Property in Minangkabau Society: Between Cultural Tradition and Islamic Law Provision."

<sup>16</sup> Erwati Aziz, Mohammad Dzofir, and Aris Widodo, "The Acculturation of Islam and Customary Law:

An Experience of Minangkabau, Indonesia," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2020): 131, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v8i1.7197>.

<sup>17</sup> YS, "Interview," n.d.



**Figure 1.** The Role of Minangkabau Women in the Management of High Heirlooms

Women play an essential role in managing assets such as land and traditional houses to ensure they remain productive and function in accordance with the prevailing customs. *Harta pusaka tinggi* is not just a material asset, but also holds significant social value as it serves as the residence and venue for daily life activities. Therefore, managing these assets productively and sustainably is a major responsibility. Women not only act as managers but also as cultural stewards who understand how to optimize these resources without violating established customs. In managing traditional houses, for example, women ensure that these homes are maintained, cared for, and used appropriately, preserving their traditional function while avoiding the encroachment of modern influences. Moreover, women are tasked with maintaining the ongoing social function of *harta pusaka tinggi* within the community,<sup>18</sup> ensuring that these assets continue to be integral to Minangkabau social and cultural life. Through fostering strong kinship relationships and engaging in constructive dialogues with family members, women can ensure that *harta pusaka tinggi* retains not only material value but also the social and cultural significance that is cherished by future generations.

The matrilineal philosophy in Minangkabau society serves as a profound foundation for the management of *harta pusaka tinggi* (high ancestral property), placing women as the primary holders of inheritance and family wealth. In this matrilineal

structure, lineage is passed down through the mother, making women the principal guardians and managers of *harta pusaka tinggi*. This philosophy positions women in a crucial role in preserving family legacies, both materially and culturally. Women in Minangkabau are not only responsible for managing land or wealth but also for safeguarding the customs and traditions closely tied to the inheritance. *Harta pusaka tinggi* is not merely a material asset but a symbol of social identity, culture, and kinship that links the past with the future. Therefore, the matrilineal philosophy gives women significant authority in determining the direction of the use and distribution of this ancestral property, while also ensuring the harmony of social relationships within the family. In practice, women are responsible for ensuring that this property remains within the family, is not transferred to outsiders, and continues to function in line with customary norms. They preserve a broader social value that goes beyond the economic worth of the property, ensuring that *harta pusaka tinggi* continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening familial and communal bonds.<sup>19</sup>

The role of women in maintaining social balance within the family in Minangkabau is deeply connected to the preservation of kinship relations and the continuity of traditions. In Minangkabau society, women are not only managers of *harta pusaka tinggi* but also hold the key role in maintaining social equilibrium within the family.<sup>20</sup> As mothers or grandmothers, women direct the implementation of customary values in everyday life, ensuring that younger generations understand the importance of preserving harmony among family members. Their responsibilities extend to ensuring that kinship ties remain intact and that no conflicts arise concerning inheritance or the management of family property. This balance is also reflected in the role of women as "limpapeh rumah nan gadang" or the pillars of the family house, serving as the stabilizers in the broader family social structure.<sup>21</sup> As custodians of *harta pusaka tinggi*, women wisely regulate the distribution and use of family assets, ensuring that each family member's rights are respected

<sup>18</sup> Liazzat J.K. Bonate, "Islam and Matriliney along the Indian Ocean Rim: Revisiting the Old 'Paradox' by Comparing the Minangkabau, Kerala and Coastal Northern Mozambique," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48, no. 3

(October 6, 2017): 436–51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463417000571>.

<sup>19</sup> AM, "Interview," n.d.

<sup>20</sup> RA, "Interview," n.d.

<sup>21</sup> AJ, "Interview," n.d.

according to principles of justice and equity. *Harta pusaka tinggi* becomes a symbol of Minangkabau cultural identity, closely tied to the concepts of *adat* religious and *adat salingka nagari*, which govern the collective management of assets and inheritance. Women play a central role in preserving the continuity of the cultural values that underpin the management of *harta pusaka tinggi*, ensuring that the family remains connected to the traditions and customs that have existed for generations. Without the strong role of women in managing *harta pusaka tinggi*, not only would the property itself be lost, but also a significant part of the identity and history of Minangkabau that has shaped their social structure.

The gender imbalance in decision-making related to *adat* (customary law) in Minangkabau often stems from the traditional dominance of men in key areas such as the distribution and management of *harta pusaka tinggi* (high ancestral property). While women hold crucial roles in managing and preserving family property, the decision-making process regarding its usage or transfer frequently remains under the control of male elders or male figures within the family or community. This imbalance in power perpetuates a system where women's voices are marginalized in the key areas that directly affect their rights and responsibilities, even though the matrilineal system technically grants them ownership and custodianship of the *harta pusaka tinggi*. The continued dominance of male authority in these spaces creates a significant barrier to achieving gender equity in Minangkabau society, especially when women's roles as guardians and managers of cultural heritage are restricted in practice by patriarchal decision-making structures. This phenomenon is a reflection of the tension between traditional *adat* practices and evolving gender norms, leading to systemic inequalities in both family and community structures.

The influence of modernization, as well as urbanization, has also played a role in diminishing the respect for *adat* values, further exacerbating gender inequality. In many areas, particularly urban centers, traditional customs related to inheritance and the role of women in managing *harta pusaka tinggi* have been weakened by exposure to more progressive or individualistic values. This erosion

of *adat* customs reduces the recognition and enforcement of women's rights over family property, as modern legal systems or more liberal interpretations of gender roles become dominant. The urbanization process also leads to a separation of women from the rural and familial environments where the management of *harta pusaka tinggi* is most vital, further displacing women from their traditional responsibilities as custodians of family heritage. As a result, women may find themselves cut off from the communal knowledge and responsibilities that have traditionally empowered them. This migration to urban areas can also lead to a breakdown in family cohesion, as the central role of women in upholding *adat* is often lost or neglected. In addition, the lack of legal support to protect women's rights to *harta pusaka tinggi* exacerbates these challenges. Without robust legal frameworks to safeguard women's rights within the context of modern law, there is often little recourse for women who seek to assert their ownership over ancestral property, making them more vulnerable to exploitation or displacement by male family members or outsiders. Furthermore, economic pressures in an increasingly market-driven society can lead to the sale of *harta pusaka tinggi*, undermining its cultural significance and causing internal family conflicts, as disagreements arise over the future of family assets in the face of financial hardships. These complex issues highlight the need for greater integration of gender equality in both the legal and customary frameworks to ensure that women's roles in managing *harta pusaka tinggi* are respected and upheld in a modern context.<sup>22</sup>

### **Tensions between Tradition and Modernity in Minangkabau Gender Construction**

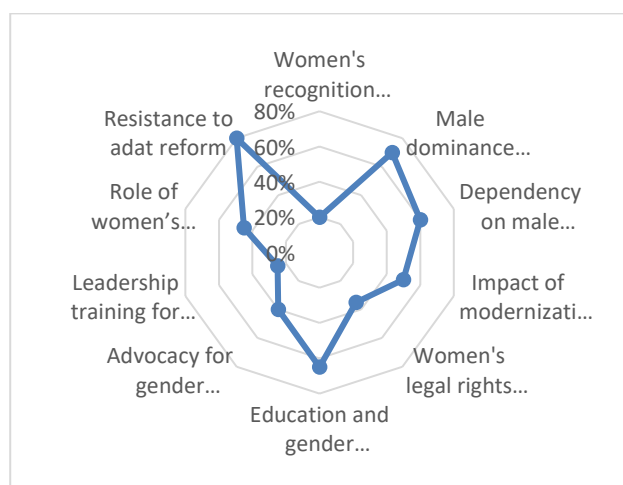
In Minangkabau society, there is a sharp division between the domestic and public spheres, with women's roles being confined to the domestic sphere and men dominating the public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Women in Minangkabau are often seen as the caretakers of the household and the managers of *harta pusaka tinggi* (high ancestral property) within the home, responsible for maintaining kinship ties and ensuring the continuity of family heritage. However, despite holding significant

<sup>22</sup> MNA, "Interview," n.d.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian, "Matrilineal Practices among Muslims: An Ethnographic Study of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra."



responsibilities in preserving cultural values, women are often excluded from major decision-making processes that involve broader family or community interests.<sup>24</sup> Men, particularly within the adat structure, are more often the ones making decisions related to the management of resources and ancestral property, which serves as a symbol of social and economic status within the family. This division not only limits women's agency in decision-making but also reinforces patriarchal thinking that places women primarily within the household, while men are seen as the rightful leaders in public matters. This situation deepens the gender gap in Minangkabau society, where women are often positioned as followers rather than leaders in the context of adat and larger family decisions.



**Figure 2.** Gender Dynamics in Minangkabau Adat Practices

A deeper gap is reflected in the recognition of women's leadership within the Minangkabau adat structure, which is heavily patriarchal. Although the matrilineal system grants women rights over *barta pusaka tinggi*, in practice, women are rarely acknowledged as leaders in the broader adat structure.<sup>25</sup> Adat leadership is still dominated by men, who act as *wali adat* (customary guardians) or

family heads with the final say in decisions regarding the distribution of property and the exercise of power within the family. In many cases,<sup>26</sup> women are dependent on *mamak* (uncles) or male family members to make important decisions regarding ancestral property and other aspects of family life, creating a deep structural dependency. This dependency limits women's freedom to make decisions that affect their own lives and wealth. Moreover, rigid adat norms often suppress women's aspirations to step outside traditional roles, such as becoming leaders within the family or in managing property. The role of men as *wali adat* frequently imposes stricter boundaries on women's autonomy, reinforcing existing inequalities and perpetuating patriarchal values that are deeply embedded in conservative adat narratives. Therefore, even though women theoretically have rights to family inheritance, in practice, they are often marginalized and restricted by a social structure that does not fully support their participation in key decision-making processes related to adat and Minangkabau family life.<sup>27</sup>

The transition from an agrarian lifestyle to an urbanized society has led to a significant shift in how traditional customs,<sup>28</sup> particularly adat, are practiced and perceived in Minangkabau society. In rural areas, adat played a central role in shaping daily life,<sup>29</sup> as it governed everything from land use to family structure. However, with the rapid urbanization that has accompanied economic development, many of the social functions that adat once provided have diminished or been replaced by more individualistic or market-driven practices. Urban life often requires greater mobility, flexibility, and a focus on individual success, which conflicts with the communal values embedded in adat. This shift has made it increasingly difficult for the younger generation,

<sup>24</sup> KA, "Interview," n.d.

<sup>25</sup> Beni Rahmad, Endri Yenti, and Hanif Aidhil Alwana, "The Existence of High Heirloom Assets in Nagari Muaro Paiti and Their Relevance to Contemporary Islamic Inheritance," *Al Hurriyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 7, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 141, <https://doi.org/10.30983/alhurriyah.v7i2.5404>.

<sup>26</sup> Ramadhani Ramadhani, Irvan Refliandi, and Syafriadi B, "The Transfer of Use of High Heirloom Property in Solok District in Maqashid Al-Syariah Review," *Hakamain: Journal of Sharia and Law Studies* 2, no. 2 (October 2024): 207–20, <https://doi.org/10.57255/hakamain.v2i2.328>.

<sup>27</sup> BF, "Interview," n.d.

<sup>28</sup> Ulfiani Rahman et al., "Men and Women in The Distribution of Inheritance in Mandar, West Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (June 27, 2022): 156, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i1.9094>.

<sup>29</sup> Halimah Basri et al., "Inheritance Rights of Women in Makassar Society: A Study of Living Qur'an and Its Implications for Islamic Law," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (October 3, 2022): 537, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v6i2.13882>.

who are exposed to modern, urban ways of thinking, to understand and appreciate the traditions of their ancestors. As a result, many young people, especially those in urban centers, have lost touch with the rich cultural heritage that once defined their communities. The diminished role of adat in everyday life has led to a generational gap, where the traditional practices surrounding *harta pusaka tinggi*, family roles, and inheritance are increasingly viewed as outdated or irrelevant in the context of contemporary life.

Moreover, the rise of individualism, fueled by the forces of modernization,<sup>30</sup> has created a stark contrast with the communal values that once underpinned Minangkabau society. The younger generation, exposed to global influences, is more inclined to prioritize personal achievements and individual freedom over the collective well-being of the family or community. This individualism has challenged traditional notions of family and gender roles, especially in terms of inheritance and the management of family assets. The increasing focus on personal success and material wealth often undermines the sense of shared responsibility for preserving *harta pusaka tinggi* and other cultural practices. At the same time, modernization in education has played a crucial role in increasing gender awareness, particularly among women. As women become more educated and aware of their rights, they are increasingly challenging the traditional gender norms that once restricted their roles within the family and community.<sup>31</sup> This shift, however, often clashes with the values of adat, which has long been patriarchal in nature.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the advent of social media has accelerated the spread of progressive ideas,<sup>33</sup> including gender equality, which has led to a rethinking of traditional roles. As these new values gain traction,<sup>34</sup> they create a

tension between the traditional customs of Minangkabau and the modern needs of its people, highlighting the need for a more inclusive interpretation of adat that can accommodate both cultural heritage and modern societal changes.<sup>35</sup>

The resistance to reforming adat (traditional customs) in Minangkabau society stems from a deep-rooted belief that such changes would undermine the cultural values that have been passed down through generations. Many adat leaders view these reforms as a threat to the integrity and stability of the community, believing that altering traditional customs, especially regarding gender roles and property rights, would erode the cultural foundations of their society. This fear of cultural disintegration has led to significant opposition to any attempts at modernizing or adapting adat practices to be more inclusive, particularly in relation to the role of women in both family and public spheres. These leaders, who are often male elders, argue that maintaining the purity of adat is essential for preserving the social fabric of the community. They perceive the inclusion of more progressive gender roles or changes in property distribution, especially those that empower women, as disruptive forces that could unravel the established order. Consequently, any proposals to challenge the patriarchal structures within adat are often met with resistance, particularly from those in positions of power who have the most to lose if the status quo is altered.

This resistance is compounded by the reluctance of some adat leaders to recognize women as legitimate leaders within the adat structure. Despite the fact that women in Minangkabau have important roles in managing family assets and upholding cultural traditions, their authority is often not acknowledged in the

<sup>30</sup> Archana Mishra, "Hinduisation of Tribal Women for Grant of Inheritance Rights in India: A Way Forward or a Conundrum?," *Jindal Global Law Review* 15, no. 2 (December 20, 2024): 537–61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41020-024-00241-3>.

<sup>31</sup> Salih Yasun, "Does Education Enable Underprivileged Women to Achieve Real Equality in Property Rights? A Case Study of Inheritance Rights of Women in Turkey," *Women's Studies International Forum* 69 (July 2018): 100–114, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.05.013>.

<sup>32</sup> Joyce Das, "Good Laws, Bad Outcomes: Land Rights and Inheritance Practices for Christian Women in Bangladesh," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*

48, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 159–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2016.1197512>.

<sup>33</sup> Iram Rubab and Ahmed Usman, "Women's Right of Inheritance: Choices and Challenges in Punjab," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 08, no. 02 (December 2018): 95–109, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.82.06>.

<sup>34</sup> Jamil Ddamulira Mujuzi, "The Conundrum of Intestate Succession for Muslims in Uganda: Qadhis Court, Women's Rights, and Islamic Inheritance Law Issues," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 16, no. 1 (April 23, 2023): 43–68, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2023.16103>.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph B. Ajefu et al., "Women's Inheritance Rights and Child Health Outcomes in India," *The Journal of Development Studies* 58, no. 4 (April 3, 2022): 752–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2021.2003333>.



same way as that of male leaders. This gender-based inequality is evident in the way that adat leadership positions are typically reserved for men, sidelining the contributions and leadership potential of women in matters of public and family governance. The struggle for recognition of women as leaders within adat is further complicated by the tension between traditional adat and national laws, which increasingly support gender equality and women's rights. The disconnect between these two legal systems creates a difficult dilemma for women, especially those who aspire to professional careers or leadership roles outside the home. They find themselves torn between honoring traditional expectations and pursuing personal aspirations in the modern world, which often requires challenging the gender norms upheld by adat. This dilemma is where the role of women's organizations becomes critical, as they advocate for change and engage in dialogues about the evolving role of women in Minangkabau society. These organizations have become essential in pushing for reforms that balance respect for tradition with the need for gender equality, striving to create a space where women can actively participate in both the preservation of adat and the modernization of their roles within the community.

Leadership training for women within the adat system is a critical step in empowering them to take on more significant roles in decision-making and the preservation of cultural heritage. By providing women with the necessary skills and knowledge, such as conflict resolution, negotiation, and leadership, they can become more influential figures in adat forums and community gatherings, ensuring that their voices are heard and respected. This training helps bridge the gender gap in adat structures, where historically, leadership roles have been dominated by men, enabling women to actively contribute to the preservation and evolution of their traditions. Additionally, offering legal support for women's rights over *harta pusaka tinggi* (high ancestral heritage) ensures that they have the necessary tools to safeguard their inheritance and property rights. Legal counseling and advocacy play a key role in protecting women from the challenges posed by patriarchal interpretations of adat law,

empowering them to assert their legal rights within their communities and beyond. Alongside this, the development of community-based economic programs aimed at empowering women is essential for providing women with the financial independence needed to protect their economic interests, particularly in managing ancestral property. These programs, tailored to the unique needs of each community, help women develop sustainable livelihoods while enhancing their social standing and decision-making power within the community. Furthermore, improving women's access to both traditional and formal education ensures that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of both the cultural and legal landscapes, strengthening their role in shaping the future of adat.

Advocacy for gender equality at the community level is paramount in ensuring that the structural changes needed for women's empowerment are supported by the broader community.<sup>36</sup> Through awareness campaigns, discussions, and community meetings, the importance of gender equality can be promoted, challenging deeply ingrained gender biases and encouraging more inclusive practices in adat governance. This grassroots-level advocacy allows for the promotion of policies and practices that align with the values of both gender equality and cultural preservation. The strengthening of networks for Minangkabau women's organizations is a powerful tool in advocating for women's rights and fostering solidarity among women who share common struggles. These networks can serve as platforms for mutual support, exchange of ideas, and collective action, enabling women to more effectively challenge discriminatory practices and work towards reforming the adat system to be more inclusive and equitable. Additionally, these organizations can play a vital role in lobbying for policy changes at higher levels, working in tandem with legal and educational institutions to ensure that women's rights are upheld within the broader context of both traditional and modern legal frameworks. Through these efforts, women can be empowered not only to protect their rights but also to lead their communities in a way that respects both their cultural heritage and their aspirations for gender equality.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Linkow, "Inheritance Practices, Investment Incentives and Women's Control Over Land in

Rural Kenya," *Journal of African Economies* 28, no. 3 (June 1, 2019): 304–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejy025>.

## Reconstructing Gender Roles in Minangkabau Customs to Realise Gender Equality

Reforming adat to align with modern laws is crucial for ensuring that traditional customs continue to serve the evolving needs of society while adhering to national standards of equality and justice.<sup>37</sup> The current challenge lies in identifying specific adat rules and practices that inhibit gender equality,<sup>38</sup> often embedded in patriarchal norms that limit women's participation in decision-making and leadership roles within both family and community structures.<sup>39</sup> While adat plays a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and providing a framework for social cohesion, its existing gendered dynamics often undermine the principles of equality outlined in modern legal systems. Reforming adat practices to promote gender equality does not mean abandoning tradition; rather, it involves critically revisiting and adjusting those aspects of adat that perpetuate discriminatory practices. This can include revising inheritance laws that disproportionately favor male heirs or restructuring leadership roles in the community to ensure women can exercise their rightful place as custodians and decision-makers. The goal is to harmonize adat with the modern legal and social context, ensuring that the inherent values of mutual respect, justice, and community well-being are preserved while enhancing the role of women in the traditional framework.

Achieving a balance between traditional adat values and the progressive ideals of gender equality requires a thoughtful approach to reform that recognizes the significance of both. Women's roles in adat must be adjusted to reflect the changing social landscape without undermining the cultural integrity of Minangkabau society. One crucial strategy in this process is ensuring that educational institutions, particularly those that teach adat, play an active role in fostering a new generation of

leaders who understand and embrace gender-inclusive practices. In this context, institutions of adat education become instrumental in shaping the next generation's understanding of gender equality, teaching students not only about traditional customs but also about how these customs can evolve to better reflect contemporary values of fairness and justice. It is essential for these institutions to incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives in their curricula, emphasizing the importance of women's leadership in the community and encouraging dialogue on how adat can adapt to contemporary needs. Furthermore, the integration of gender perspectives into adat decision-making processes is pivotal. This could mean involving women more prominently in the decision-making bodies that govern communal and family matters or rethinking the way ancestral property is managed and passed down. By incorporating both traditional values and progressive gender norms, it is possible to create a more inclusive and just framework that empowers women while respecting the cultural heritage of the Minangkabau people. This process will require ongoing dialogue, education, and the active participation of both men and women, as well as a strong commitment from all levels of society to ensure that the reform of adat practices aligns with the principles of equality and justice.

Gender awareness campaigns through adat forums and academic platforms play a crucial role in promoting dialogue and fostering understanding about gender equality within traditional communities.<sup>40</sup> By leveraging the established authority of adat forums, leaders can engage both men and women in meaningful discussions about the evolving role of women in society,<sup>41</sup> ensuring that traditional norms are revisited in light of contemporary gender values.

<sup>37</sup> Abdullah A Afifi and Afifi Fauzi Abbas, "Future Challenge of Knowledge Transfer in Shariah Compliance Business Institutions," in *International Colloquium on Research Innovation & Social Entrepreneurship (Ic-RISE) 2019* (UKM Graduate School of Business, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.58764/conf.icrise2019.4>.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad Salahuddin et al., "Between Adat Law and National Law: The Resistance of Sasak Women to Their Inheritance Rights in Lombok Indonesia," *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government* 21, no. 4 (November 1, 2023): 923–36, [https://doi.org/10.4335/21.4.923-936\(2023\)](https://doi.org/10.4335/21.4.923-936(2023)).

<sup>39</sup> Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, "Rethinking Women and Customary Inheritance in Nigeria," *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 47, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 706–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050718.2020.1818596>.

<sup>40</sup> Roy, "Empowering Women? Inheritance Rights, Female Education and Dowry Payments in India."

<sup>41</sup> Fatya Pramesta Cahyani and Muhammad Ya'kub Aiyub Kadir, "Guardianship Supervisory in Indonesia: A Comparative Analyzes of Baitul Mal Aceh and the Heirloom Board," *Al-Ahkam* 33, no. 2 (October 31, 2023): 231–54, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2023.33.2.17080>.

These forums,<sup>42</sup> often seen as guardians of cultural heritage,<sup>43</sup> can serve as powerful platforms to initiate discussions that challenge outdated gender norms and promote a more inclusive approach to leadership and inheritance.<sup>44</sup> On the academic side, universities and research institutions can conduct studies that highlight the intersection between adat and gender equality, providing evidence-based arguments that inform policy changes and help shift societal perceptions. This academic engagement is pivotal in educating both the younger generation and influential community leaders about the need for reform, bridging the gap between tradition and progress. Furthermore, the involvement of community leaders, such as tokoh adat (adat figures), as change agents is essential in ensuring the success of such campaigns. These leaders, who often hold considerable influence within their communities, can act as ambassadors of reform, using their platform to advocate for gender-inclusive practices and to encourage the reimagining of adat traditions in a way that fosters equality without losing the essence of cultural identity.

Collaboration between academics and indigenous communities is key to developing progressive solutions that resonate with both the values of adat and the principles of gender equality.<sup>45</sup> Academics can provide the theoretical and empirical framework for understanding the social dynamics at play,<sup>46</sup> while indigenous communities offer the cultural and historical

perspectives that are necessary for meaningful reform. This collaborative process can result in the creation of practical and culturally appropriate strategies for gender-inclusive adat practices, ensuring that reforms are not imposed from the outside but are shaped in partnership with the community. Additionally, empowering youth as agents of transformation is vital for sustaining the momentum of adat reform. By engaging young people in discussions about the future of their culture and the role of women in that future, the community can foster a generation that values gender equality alongside the preservation of tradition. Participatory research, involving women directly in evaluating adat practices, is another crucial step in ensuring that reforms are grounded in the lived experiences of those most affected by gender inequities. Through this participatory process, women can contribute their perspectives and help identify areas where adat practices may be exclusionary or unjust. Finally, documenting traditions that are relevant to the reform process is essential to preserving the positive aspects of adat while allowing for meaningful change.<sup>47</sup> By capturing the cultural and historical context of adat practices,<sup>48</sup> communities can ensure that reforms are not seen as erasing tradition but as evolving it to meet the needs of modern society,<sup>49</sup> ultimately leading to a more inclusive and equitable social structure.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Elfia et al., "Patterns for Settlement of Punah Inheritance Disputes In the Community of Nagari Salareh Aia from the Perspective of Islamic Law," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 17, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 480–505, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v17i2.6246>.

<sup>43</sup> Febrian Martha, Febri Yulika, and Endrizal, "Conflict Resolution of Inheritance Disputes in The Koto Nan Ampek Village of Payakumbuh City," *Journal of Scientific Research, Education, and Technology (JSRET)* 2, no. 3 (August 12, 2023): 1296–1306, <https://doi.org/10.58526/jsret.v2i3.226>.

<sup>44</sup> Isnarmi Moeis et al., "Intercultural Values in Local Wisdom: A Global Treasure of Minangkabau Ethnic in Indonesia," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 9, no. 1 (December 31, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2022.2116841>.

<sup>45</sup> Martine Segalen, "Gender and Inheritance Patterns in Rural Europe: Women as Wives, Widows, Daughters and Sisters," *History and Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (March 15, 2021): 171–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1905239>.

<sup>46</sup> Abdulmajeed Hassan Bello, "Islamic Law of Inheritance: Ultimate Solution to Social Inequality against

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<sup>47</sup> Alin Dermanto, "Aspects of Bundo Kandung Minangkabau Cultural Studies," *Enigma in Cultural* 1, no. 1 (November 9, 2023): 9–12, <https://doi.org/10.61996/cultural.v1i1.18>.

<sup>48</sup> Imam Mahardinata, Nawir Yuslem, and Asmuni Asmuni, "Factors Supporting The Position And Role Of Minangkabau Women In Resolving Heritage Conflicts In West Sumatra," *Pena Justisia: Media Komunikasi Dan Kajian Hukum* 22, no. 2 (January 11, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.31941/pj.v22i2.3334>.

<sup>49</sup> Yuhelna, Sri Rahmadani, and Waza Karia Akbar, "PENGUATAN PERAN PEREMPUAN DALAM PENGELOLAAN HARTA PUSAKA TINGGI DI MINANGKABAU."

<sup>50</sup> Mohammad Takdir et al., "The Takharrūj Method as an Islamic Legal Solution for Customary Inheritance Practices among Muslim Communities in Pakamban Laok, Sumenep, Indonesia," *JIL: Journal of Islamic Law* 4, no. 1 (February 28, 2023): 104–22, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v4i1.1044>.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the research emphasizes the complex intersection of gender dynamics and cultural preservation within Minangkabau customs, particularly in the context of high heirlooms. Women, as key figures in maintaining the integrity of ancestral wealth and family heritage, hold a vital role within the matrilineal system. Despite this, they face significant barriers in gaining equal recognition within the leadership structures of adat. The study demonstrates that while the matrilineal system places women at the center of cultural stewardship, their ability to influence decisions within the adat hierarchy remains limited, largely due to entrenched patriarchal norms and the tension between traditional roles and modern gender equality movements. These structural challenges are further compounded by the social and economic transformations brought about by modernization and urbanization, which have placed additional pressures on women, limiting their ability to fully exercise their responsibilities in safeguarding and managing high heirlooms. The research also uncovers the gaps in support systems that fail to provide women with the necessary platforms and resources to assert their leadership in both the family and community contexts.

Based on these insights, several recommendations are proposed to foster a more inclusive and equitable approach to gender roles within Minangkabau society. First, a concerted effort should be made to empower women by providing them with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities to participate more actively in the decision-making processes related to adat. This can be achieved through targeted leadership training and educational initiatives aimed at enhancing women's capacity to manage and preserve high heirlooms while respecting traditional values. Furthermore, legal reforms should be considered to ensure women's rights over family property are protected, particularly in the context of inheritance and asset management. Finally, it is crucial to create platforms for dialogue and collaboration between traditional adat leaders, community members, and gender equality advocates to develop a more flexible and progressive adat system. Such reforms should aim to preserve the cultural significance of high heirlooms while promoting gender equality and empowerment. By addressing these issues,

Minangkabau society can better adapt to contemporary challenges while preserving its rich cultural heritage and ensuring that women play an active and recognized role in both cultural preservation and leadership.

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### ***Interview***

AJ. "Interview," n.d.

AM. "Interview," n.d.

BF. "Interview," n.d.

KA. "Interview," n.d.

MNA. "Interview," n.d.

RA. "Interview," n.d.

YS. "Interview," n.d.