

The Practice of High Dowries in Marriage among the Gunung Terang Community: A Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah Study of Social Status and Family Welfare

Rosita Ibrahim¹

^{1,2} Institut Agama Islam Tulang Bawang, Indonesia

* Correspondence e-mail; irosita08@gmail.com

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Abstract

The practice of setting high dowries in customary marriages is often debated publicly because it may burden the groom financially and delay marriage. This study analyzes high-mahr practices among the Lampung Pepadun customary community in Tiuh Gunung Terang through the perspective of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah. Using empirical legal research with a socio-legal approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of customary ceremonies, and documentary study. The findings show that the amount of mahr is influenced by women's educational attainment, social stratification, and the value of Piil Pesenggiri. Although prestige is a factor, the amount remains flexible through customary deliberation (*rasan tuho*). From the perspective of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, the practice can generate tangible welfare through the protection of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and dignity (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*), as the mahr is converted through the *sesan* tradition into initial capital for a new household's independence. The study recommends that the community and customary leaders continue to prioritize inclusive deliberation and develop proportionate customary guidelines so that tradition does not become a financial obstacle. Comparative research across *kebuayan* groups is also recommended to examine how customary values adapt in the digital era.

Keywords

customary mahr, Lampung Pepadun, Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, Piil Pesenggiri, family welfare.



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INTRODUCTION

In Islamic family law, the mahr (dowry) is understood as the wife's absolute right, serving as a symbol of respect (*niḥlah*) and an initial foundation for household welfare. The flexibility of Islamic teachings emphasizes that the mahr should not burden the prospective groom, but should instead be oriented toward the achievement of welfare. Sociological realities indicate that the meaning of mahr has shifted into an instrument of social stratification in various customary communities

(Asma et al., 2024). This phenomenon is evident among the Lampung Pepadun customary community in Tiuh Gunung Terang, West Tulang Bawang Regency, where the amount of mahr is determined by family status, social class, and the woman's level of formal education (Pahrudin & Anwar, 2024). This shift from a theological function to a representation of social status creates sociocultural dynamics that merit in-depth investigation.

A gap emerges when expectations of relatively high mahr amounts are considered potential financial obstacles (*masyaqqah*) to conducting an Islamic marriage. High mahr demands are often perceived publicly as a commodification of marriage that may lead to delayed weddings and tension between families. The involvement of extended families in negotiating customary mahr is often driven by concerns about the future economic security of their daughters, although it can also impose a significant financial burden on the groom's side (Malik et al., 2025). The Lampung Pepadun community addresses this issue through the customary deliberation mechanism known as *rasan tuho*, in which the parties agree on a rational and proportionate mahr amount (Efrinaldi et al., 2022). The dialectic between social prestige and the flexibility of customary negotiation reflects a strategic compromise that has not yet been fully explained.

Previous studies of customary mahr practices tend to be caught in a dichotomy that separates theological legal norms from empirical realities. Much of the literature rigidly treats high mahr solely as cultural consumerism or an obstacle to marriage, without examining the community's internal adaptation mechanisms. Normative studies generally criticize expensive mahr from the perspective of facilitation (*taysīr*), while sociological studies focus only on the commodification of educational status without linking it to the objectives of Islamic law (Ardli & Luayyin, 2026; Mahendra et al., 2026). Previous researchers have not explored in depth how the *sesan* tradition—the provision of household goods—converts the nominal value of mahr into initial physical capital for a new family. This limitation creates an academic gap concerning the meeting point between customary honor and the principle of property protection.

The novelty of this study lies in using an integrated Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah framework to examine the dialectic between prestige and welfare in the mahr practices of the Lampung Pepadun community. A systemic approach enables a holistic analysis of the transformation of mahr from an individual transaction into an instrument of socioeconomic protection for married couples. Jasser Auda's perspective on Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah views mahr and the conversion of goods through

sesan as mechanisms for wealth redistribution that support the protection of property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), and dignity (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*) (Ansari, 2026; Awalul et al., 2025). The main research question concerns how the integration of *Piil Pesenggiri* values and customary deliberation can generate functional welfare and strengthen family resilience in *Tiyuh Gunung Terang*. This theoretical perspective offers a new way to move beyond the impasse between customary law and Islamic law.

The urgency of this study stems from the pressing need to formulate a model integrating customary law and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* in the renewal of Islamic family law. Properly understanding the economic function of customary *mahr* is important to prevent negative stereotypes of local traditions while strengthening family resilience against poverty. Economic vulnerability is one of the major factors contributing to household breakdown and divorce in Indonesia, making financial protection from the beginning of marriage crucial. Revealing the functional value of *sesan* in the *Pepadun* tradition of *Tiyuh Gunung Terang* offers a contemporary academic contribution to constructing *mahr* around public welfare (*maṣlaḥah 'āmmah*). This study is expected to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for harmonizing Islamic law with local wisdom in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employs empirical legal research using a socio-legal approach that combines normative analysis with sociological phenomena. This approach was selected to examine the interaction between Islamic law, Lampung *Pepadun* customary norms, and the social realities surrounding the determination of high *mahr* in *Tiyuh Gunung Terang*, West Tulang Bawang Regency. The study is descriptive-analytical and explores in depth the dialectic between social prestige and welfare. Its analytical framework is extended through Jasser Auda's theory of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, which emphasizes an integrated, multidimensional, and public-welfare-oriented systems approach. This method allows the researchers to move beyond normative textuality and understand the ownership functions of *mahr* and *sesan* assets holistically. The data consist of primary and secondary sources collected through purposive sampling. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with customary leaders (*Penyimbang*), community figures, and married couples directly involved in determining *mahr* in *Tiyuh Gunung Terang*. Participant observation was carefully conducted during family deliberations (*rasan tuho*) to observe negotiation dynamics in their natural setting. Secondary data came from

classical fiqh literature, customary-law documents, and relevant reputable journal articles. Data credibility and validity were assessed through source and method triangulation. These varied data sources strengthen empirical confirmation of the sociocultural realities observed in the field.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously following a qualitative model (Gofur et al., 2025). The process began with data condensation to classify field findings concerning mahr amounts, educational status, and the sesan tradition. Data were then presented in systematic thematic narratives to show relationships among sociological categories. Conclusions were drawn through theoretical abstraction using Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah as the analytical lens. The principles of openness and multidimensionality were used to identify how mahr is converted into physical assets for a new family. This analytical approach produced comprehensive conclusions regarding the realization of property protection, lineage protection, and dignity within the resilience of Muslim families.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Practice of Setting High Dowries in Tiyuh Gunung Terang

The determination of mahr in Tiyuh Gunung Terang reflects distinctive sociocultural characteristics of the Lampung Pepadun community. It reflects a customary social structure that places family honor and dignity at its core. Field data indicate that mahr is not viewed merely as a ritual legal obligation in the marriage contract, but has also developed into a significant instrument of social stratification.

Field findings in Tiyuh Gunung Terang reveal that the amount of mahr and customary payments (sesan/dau) are directly associated with the woman's educational attainment and her family's social position. An in-depth interview with the customary leader of Tiyuh Gunung Terang, Mr. Raden Imba Kesuma (customary title Sutan Mangku Alam, aged 58), revealed a case involving a bride with a bachelor's degree in nursing who worked at a regional health facility. Her family set the mahr at 15 grams of precious metal and customary wedding money at IDR 65,000,000. This amount was agreed upon in a family deliberation forum (himpun adat) as a way of honoring the parents' efforts to educate their daughter through university and affirming the clan's dignity within the buay community.

These findings were reinforced by direct observation of the sebambangan and himpun begawi ceremonies and by reviewing local marriage records. A clear contrast emerged with marriages involving women whose education ended at senior high school or its equivalent in the same tiyuh. In those cases, the proposed amount ranged from IDR 20,000,000 to IDR 25,000,000, with a mahr of five grams of gold jewelry. According to customary bookkeeping records and statements from local Religious Affairs Office (KUA) personnel and community figure Mr. Hasan Basri (aged 49), the higher material requirements for highly educated

brides are not regarded as commercialization, but as evidence of the groom's economic readiness and moral responsibility, as well as a traditional means of maintaining the prestige of extended Lampung Pepadun families in Tiyuh Gunung Terang.

Despite high social expectations, the process of determining mahr in Tiyuh Gunung Terang is neither rigid nor unilateral. The principal mechanism is deliberation among the extended families, known in Pepadun tradition as *rasan tuho* (Chaerani et al., 2024). In this forum, both families, sometimes accompanied by customary leaders or *Penyimbang*, meet to reach consensus. If a gap emerges between the amount requested by the bride's family and the groom's financial capacity, dynamic negotiation follows. This demonstrates customary flexibility: further deliberation may adjust the amount to a mutually agreed, reasonable level so that customary demands do not become an obstacle to marriage.

Furthermore, the people of Gunung Terang attach a distinctive, dual meaning to high mahr:

- a. Symbolic dimension (prestige): Mahr represents family honor and recognition of the bride's personal qualities.
- b. Functional dimension (economic): Mahr is not understood merely as a consumptive gift, but as practical economic support for the new family. In many cases, the mahr becomes initial capital or an asset that the couple uses to meet household needs or invest for the future after marriage.

Thus, the high value of mahr in Tiyuh Gunung Terang is not simply blind materialism, but a social mechanism intended to promote welfare and economic stability from the beginning of marriage. The integration of Lampung customary values with an orientation toward well-being shows that mahr has become a strategic instrument for strengthening household resilience.

1. Sociopsychological and Cultural Factors

The findings in Tiyuh Gunung Terang show that mahr has shifted from being merely a condition of a valid marriage to a symbolic means of communicating family social status. This phenomenon reflects a broader sociological pattern in Indonesia, where customary values continually negotiate with modern economic realities.

a. Status Legitimization through the Capitalization of Education

Practices in Gunung Terang show a strong correlation between the bride's educational level and the mahr amount, which functions as a tool of social stratification. Empirical evidence indicates that the woman's formal education is directly related to the mahr and customary obligations agreed upon. Interviews and marriage documentation show that women with bachelor's or master's degrees—especially civil servants, educators, or health workers—generally receive mahr and customary payments ranging from tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah, often accompanied by land, substantial quantities of gold jewelry, or valuable household furnishings (*sesan*).

By contrast, brides whose education ends at junior or senior high school tend to have more affordable mahr expectations, ranging from tens of millions to lower amounts.

This disparity clearly shows how academic degrees and professional status are converted into symbolic capital that strengthens a family's bargaining position, while reinforcing mahr as an instrument of social stratification distinguishing classes and economic prestige within the Lampung Pepadun customary community.

Sociologically, a woman's higher education is viewed as a major family investment; high mahr demands therefore become a collective effort to preserve the family's position within the status hierarchy (Habiburrahman, 2025). Consequently, mahr can be commodified as a symbol of educational prestige, shifting away from its theological meaning of *niḥlah*—a sincere gift honoring a woman's dignity.

b. Family Authority as a Mechanism of Protection and Expectation

Parents' involvement in *rasan tuho* deliberations in Gunung Terang reflects their moral responsibility to secure their children's future economic stability. This involvement assumes that parents have substantial authority in determining the mahr because they regard their daughters as precious and deserving of financial protection. Such family participation has a pragmatic function: a high mahr is prepared as a form of social investment or reserve to equip the household, giving the new couple initial capital for independence. Although Islam normatively recognizes mahr as the wife's absolute right, Lampung's cultural reality shows that mahr is often negotiated among relatives to preserve family dignity (Piil Pesenggiri) and assess the prospective son-in-law's seriousness and financial stability (Yolanda, 2023).

c. The Dialectic between Prestige and Functional Agreement

Tension exists between materialistic aspirations and welfare-oriented values in the practice of high mahr (Han, He, & Kane, 2026). A distinctive feature of Gunung Terang, however, is its flexible deliberation mechanism for reaching consensus. Unlike situations in which rigid mahr demands may cause a marriage to fail, the community tends to apply the Islamic legal principle of choosing the lesser of two harms (*akhaḥfu al-ḍararain*) (Ramadhan, 2021, p. 40). In this context, the mahr amount can be renegotiated so that it remains respectful of custom without obstructing the marriage.

d. Synthesis: Mahr as Socioeconomic Capital

The analysis confirms that high mahr in Gunung Terang cannot be judged in black-and-white terms as mere materialism. Through the *sesan* system (goods brought by the bride), wealth is redistributed within the new family. Among the Lampung Pepadun, the value of *sesan* items such as household furniture, wardrobes, and kitchen equipment often exceeds the value of the mahr or money provided by the groom (Badarudin, 2024, p. 5). Thus, the mahr practice in Gunung Terang functions as a family economic-resilience strategy framed by customary tradition, transforming nominal monetary value into an initial foundation for the couple's independence and welfare.

2. Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah Analysis: Between Prestige and Welfare

From the perspective of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, mahr is not merely a formality in the marriage contract; it has the fundamental purpose of honoring women (*niḥlah*) and ensuring

family resilience (Khotimah & Nelli, 2026, p. 268). A deeper analysis of high mahr in Tiyuh Gunung Terang reveals a tension between the pursuit of social prestige and the realization of genuine welfare. Under Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, social practices should be assessed not only by their outward form, but also by their purposes, effects, and consequences for individuals and society. Therefore, high mahr in Tiyuh Gunung Terang cannot automatically be regarded either as a burdensome tradition or merely as a status symbol. A comprehensive assessment must determine whether the practice realizes the welfare sought by Islamic law or instead produces harm that may disadvantage the community.

a. Property Protection (Ḥifẓ al-Māl): Transforming Mahr into Productive Assets

Normatively, mahr is the wife's absolute right and should not be interfered with by any party, including her parents (Muhsin et al., 2025). In Gunung Terang, high mahr is often converted into *sesan*, or household goods such as furniture, kitchen equipment, and electronics that the bride brings to her husband's home. Within the Maqāṣid framework, this represents a functional form of property protection (ḥifẓ al-māl). Rather than being consumed by wedding celebrations, the mahr is transformed into physical capital that strengthens the woman's financial independence at the beginning of marriage. Ownership of assets through *sesan* provides economic security so that the wife does not begin married life in a state of deprivation.

On closer examination, this property-protection function reflects a long-term orientation toward family welfare. Goods obtained through the conversion of mahr have practical value and can be used continuously in household life. Mahr is therefore not merely a ceremonial symbol that ends with the marriage contract, but an economic instrument that provides tangible benefits after the wedding. This perspective shows that the Gunung Terang community has a practical understanding of the importance of establishing a family's economic foundation from the outset.

The transformation of mahr into productive assets can also be understood as cultural adaptation to the socioeconomic needs of modern society. In an increasingly complex economy, household assets are an important factor in maintaining family stability (Sadat, 2023). This practice can therefore be viewed as a local strategy that indirectly supports the objectives of Islamic law by preserving and developing wealth for sustained family benefit.

b. Lineage Protection (Ḥifẓ al-Nasl): Economic Stability as the Foundation of the Household

The purpose of marriage in Islam is to create a family characterized by *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, *wa raḥmah* (tranquility, affection, and mercy) (Shofa & Hafidzi, 2026). Economic factors are among the major causes of divorce in Indonesia (Khotimah & Nelli, 2026). Through high mahr and the provision of goods brought by the bride (*sesan*), the Gunung Terang community indirectly creates an economic buffer for newlyweds. Strong economic stability at the beginning of marriage contributes directly to household resilience and, in turn, protects the quality of children's growth and development (ḥifẓ al-nasl). When functional mahr helps meet basic household needs, the potential for conflict arising from financial pressure may be reduced, helping to prevent divorce.

The relationship between economic conditions and family resilience is widely recognized in studies of marriage and divorce. When basic household needs can be met from the beginning, couples have a greater opportunity to build harmonious and stable relationships. In Gunung Terang, *sesan*, as a result of mahr management, is one factor that helps newlyweds adjust to household life without facing excessive economic pressure during the early stages of marriage.

From the perspective of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, protecting lineage is not limited to biological continuity; it also includes creating a healthy, safe, and supportive family environment for children's education. Therefore, efforts that strengthen household resilience—including providing economic resources through functional mahr—can be considered part of realizing *ḥifz al-nasl*. The resulting welfare benefits not only the married couple but also the next generation born into the marriage.

c. Dignity Protection (*Ḥifz al-'Ird*): The Dialectic of Prestige and Customary Honor

High mahr in the Pepadun community is often regarded as an expression of *Piil Pesenggiri*, or family self-respect (Huda, 2023). In contemporary Maqāṣid perspectives, this relates to the protection of honor (*ḥifz al-'ird*). A mahr considered appropriate may reflect appreciation for the bride's education and social position. However, there is a fine line between respecting dignity and falling into burdensome materialism (*masyaqqah*). If mahr is set excessively high merely to preserve prestige and consequently prevents young people from marrying, it conflicts with Islam's principle of facilitation (*taysir*). In Gunung Terang, the safeguard against this risk is flexible family deliberation, which prioritizes the welfare of proceeding with marriage over rigid monetary demands.

The *Piil Pesenggiri* values upheld by the Lampung community contain a moral dimension emphasizing the importance of preserving the dignity of individuals, families, and the community. In determining mahr, these values are reflected in families' efforts to ensure that marriage proceeds honorably and in accordance with their social standing. The amount of mahr is therefore often understood as a symbol of appreciation for the woman and a representation of family dignity that must be maintained.

Nevertheless, Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah reminds us that every form of honor must remain within the bounds of welfare. When concern for dignity becomes excessive social competition, the objectives of Islamic law may shift from facilitating matters to creating hardship. In such circumstances, the tradition of deliberation in Gunung Terang serves as an important mechanism of social control. It allows negotiations to consider the prospective groom's financial capacity, so that the agreed mahr expresses respect without imposing a disproportionate burden.

d. Mahr as an Instrument of Public Welfare (*Maṣlaḥah 'Āmmah*)

Using Jasser Auda's systems approach, the mahr practice in Gunung Terang should be viewed holistically as a system for distributing welfare. Although it may outwardly appear to impose an economic burden on the groom, wealth is often redistributed, and the value of the bride's *sesan* goods may exceed the mahr provided by the groom. Mahr thus becomes

more than an individual transaction: it is a collective strategy through which the customary community seeks to ensure that each new family has an adequate economic foundation. This is consistent with *Maqāsid al-‘Āmmah*, which seeks to preserve kinship systems and social welfare through a dignified and beneficial institution of marriage (Muzainah et al., 2025).

Jasser Auda’s systems approach emphasizes that a legal phenomenon must be understood in relation to the social, cultural, economic, and value-based elements surrounding it. From this perspective, the mahr practice in Gunung Terang cannot be separated from the customary kinship structure, in which the extended family plays an important role in marriage. Mahr, sesan, and family involvement form an interconnected social mechanism that supports the welfare of newly married couples.

The resulting welfare is therefore both individual and collective. Extended families gain assurance that their members enter married life with adequate resources, while the community benefits from families that are more economically and socially stable. In this context, the mahr practice in Gunung Terang can be understood as a cultural strategy that sustains the community’s social system while realizing the universal objectives of Islamic law. As long as it remains reasonable and does not cause excessive hardship, the tradition of high mahr may be regarded as an instrument of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah ‘āmmah*) relevant to the local context.

Historically, mahr has served as a central legal instrument in the concept and practice of Islamic marriage (Dahlan, 2026). Since the early history of Islam, mahr has attracted public attention in relation to women’s rights, ideological significance, economic meaning, and moral value. In Muslim legal practice, the implementation of mahr is closely connected to social dynamics and structures (Syafitri et al., 2025). The historical construction and application of mahr reflect dynamic interactions among social, economic, political, and cultural elements rather than a static phenomenon. Unfortunately, studies of mahr have so far remained too focused on its normative dimension (Asma et al., 2024).

The determination and provision of mahr among the Lampung Pepadun Muslim community in Gunung Terang demonstrate a close relationship between religion, social order, economics, and local custom. Here, mahr is positioned not only as a religious obligation, but also as a tangible reflection of social status, economic class, and the honor or noble lineage of a family within the local customary structure. These findings confirm that mahr dynamics play a central sociocultural role in Gunung Terang and cannot be separated from the community’s social stratification. This is evident in the way the amount and form of mahr are often agreed upon with reference to social prestige and the prospective spouses’ position in the kinship hierarchy. Consequently, mahr transactions directly contribute to maintaining social layers and the standing of extended families within Gunung Terang’s customary order.

CONCLUSION

The practice of determining mahr in Tiyyuh Gunung Terang extends beyond its position as a component of marriage and functions as a social institution reflecting family status, the bride's educational achievements, and the traditions of the Lampung Pepadun community. High mahr amounts are rooted in sociopsychological and cultural motives: preserving family dignity, appreciating women's intellectual capacity, and maintaining interfamily deliberation. This deliberative approach keeps the process flexible, ensuring that customary expectations do not burden or obstruct the marriage contract.

From the perspective of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, high mahr contains tangible welfare dimensions, particularly the protection of wealth (ḥifẓ al-māl), the strengthening of lineage and family resilience (ḥifẓ al-nasl), and the preservation of social dignity (ḥifẓ al-'ird). The sesan tradition reinforces these functions because mahr is transformed into material capital that supports the independence of a new household. This reality demonstrates a harmonious combination of Islamic principles and local wisdom, resulting in domestic stability and collective welfare. Future research should explore intergenerational economic negotiation, particularly how younger generations of Lampung Pepadun respond to changes in sesan practices in the digital era. Comparative studies across different kebuayan or other customary regions of Lampung are also important to identify diverse patterns in adapting Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah to modernization and contemporary economic pressures.

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