



## **PATTERNS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN MARRIAGE AND FUNERAL CUSTOMS BETWEEN JAVANESE AND ACEHNESE ETHNIC GROUPS IN SUKADAMAI VILLAGE, ACEH BESAR**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the cultural adaptation patterns of the Javanese community in their interaction with the Acehnese community in Gampong Sukadamai, Lembah Seulawah District, Aceh Besar Regency, particularly within the context of marriage and death rituals. This research employs a qualitative approach using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation as data collection techniques. The findings reveal that cultural adaptation occurs gradually through social interaction, participation in communal and religious activities, and cooperation in economic practices. In the socio-cultural sphere, harmonious acculturation emerges, evidenced by the integration of Javanese and Acehnese elements in marriage rituals, communal feasts, and death ceremonies. The main challenges in adaptation involve differences in language, customs, and cultural values; however, these are overcome through effective communication, negotiation, and continuous interaction. In conclusion, the adaptation process forms a new multicultural identity that strengthens social cohesion, tolerance, and interethnic cooperation in Gampong Sukadamai.

**Keywords:** *Cultural adaptation; Javanese Acehnese; acculturation; marriage; death rituals*

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### **A. Introduction**

Indonesia is a multicultural country characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and traditional diversity spread across the archipelago (Liata & Fazal, 2021). This diversity has been shaped through long historical processes, including interethnic interactions, population migration, and development equalization policies that have encouraged social and geographical mobility across regions. One policy that has played a significant role in altering Indonesia's demographic structure is the transmigration program, which was designed to reduce population density on Java Island while promoting more equitable national development. This program has not only had economic impacts but has also created spaces for complex cultural encounters between migrant communities and local populations (Mawardi et al., 2024).

Aceh, as a region with a strong Islamic socio-cultural character, is one of the destinations of transmigration and is inhabited by various ethnic groups, including the Javanese (Fazal & Mawardi, 2021). The encounter between Acehnese and Javanese

communities has produced distinctive social dynamics, given that both groups possess different value systems, traditions, languages, and cultural practices. Acehese society is known for its customs that are deeply influenced by Islamic values and supported by strong traditional institutions. In contrast, the Javanese community brings traditions rooted in a combination of Islamic values, Javanese culture, and inherited ritual symbolism passed down through generations (Fazal & Saleh, 2022). These conditions make cultural adaptation a crucial element in fostering harmonious social relations.

Gampong Sukadamai in Saree, Lembah Seulawah Subdistrict, Aceh Besar, is one of the transmigration areas that has been inhabited by Javanese communities for several generations. Unlike most villages in Aceh, this area had no indigenous population at the time of its establishment; thus, all residents are migrants originating from various regions. This heterogeneous social structure creates opportunities for intensive interethnic interaction, fostering a dynamic social environment and enabling mutual influence in everyday cultural practices. In social life, Javanese and Acehese communities interact in economic, educational, religious, and other communal spheres.

Nevertheless, the process of cultural adaptation does not occur instantaneously. The Javanese community encounters significant differences in language, social norms, customs, and religious rituals. At the same time, the Acehese community, as the dominant group, holds social expectations regarding the cultural conformity of migrants to local values. This situation positions cultural adaptation as an ongoing negotiation process conducted through interpersonal communication, daily habituation, and active participation in social and religious activities (Mikraj et al., 2025). One of the most visible arenas of adaptation is customary ritual practices, particularly in marriage and death rites, as both rituals carry profound symbolic and social significance in each culture.

Acehese marriage ceremonies are marked by customary stages such as *peusijuek*, *meukawen*, and the determination of the dowry (*jeulame*), all of which are rich in religious and cultural meanings. Meanwhile, Javanese marriage traditions include symbolic elements such as *midodareni*, *panggih*, and the ritual of stepping on an egg (Fazal et al., 2022). Differences in the structure and meaning of these rituals make marriage a strong arena of cultural negotiation, especially in interethnic marriages or when Javanese communities adopt local traditions. Similarly, in death rituals, Acehese communities conduct *kenduri* on specific days, such as the 7th, 14th, and 44th days after death, while Javanese communities observe *tahlilan* on the 1st, 3rd, 7th, 40th, 100th days, as well as after one year and two years (F. Nurdin & Fazal, 2022). These differences give rise to visible forms of acculturation in the practices of the Javanese community in Gampong Sukadamai.

In this context, the patterns of adaptation among the Javanese community demonstrate how interethnic interaction can generate new, more inclusive, and harmonious forms of cultural identity. Adaptation in marriage and death customs serves as an important indicator that cultural harmonization can be achieved through the acceptance of local values, effective communication, and active engagement in community life (Asmanidar, 2024). his study finds that the adaptation of the Javanese

community occurs through a flexible acculturation process, in which Acehese customary elements are accepted and integrated into Javanese cultural practices without erasing the original identity. In marriage ceremonies, Javanese communities have begun to adopt *peusijek* and comply with Acehese dowry regulations while maintaining Javanese ritual elements such as the symbolic act of stepping on an egg. In death rituals, Javanese communities combine the tradition of *tahlilan* with the structure of Acehese *kenduri*, resulting in distinctive patterns of adaptation that differ from practices in other regions (Asmanidar, 2022). This dynamic reflects mutual respect in social relations and illustrates harmonious mechanisms of cultural adaptation between the two ethnic groups.

## B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach (Sugiyono, 2013). This approach is used to understand the meanings of non-numerical data, such as interview results, observations, field notes, and relevant documents. The primary focus of qualitative research is to describe phenomena in depth based on the experiences, interpretations, and interactions of informants in the field. The data obtained are then analyzed in a way that preserves their original context (Black & Champion, 1999), enabling the research findings to be presented in narrative form and supported by direct quotations from informants. The research was conducted in Gampong Sukadamai, Lembah Seulawah Subdistrict, Aceh Besar Regency. This location was selected because it is inhabited by Javanese ethnic communities as transmigrants and Acehese communities as local residents. These conditions allow the researcher to directly observe patterns of cultural adaptation between the two ethnic groups.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly through observations and interviews with informants at the research site. The informants included village officials, namely the village head and the village secretary, as well as community members from both the Acehese and Javanese ethnic groups. The total number of informants in this study was approximately nine individuals (Khasanah & Davita, 2021). Secondary data were collected from relevant literature, such as academic journals, undergraduate theses, scientific articles, and official documents that support the research analysis. The object of this research is the Javanese and Acehese communities residing in Gampong Sukadamai. Data were collected to comprehensively address the research problems using three techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. These techniques were employed to ensure that the data obtained were accurate, in-depth, and complementary. Data analysis was conducted systematically on the interview results, field notes, and collected documents (Saifuddin Anwar, 2001). The researcher sorted, organized, and interpreted the data to produce clear and comprehensible findings. This analytical stage is crucial for presenting the research results in a comprehensive, coherent, and meaningful manner.

### C. Results and Discussion

#### 1. Patterns of Cultural Adaptation among Javanese and Acehnese Communities in Gampong Sukadamai, Lembah Seulawah Subdistrict, Aceh Besar Regency

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic country with an uneven population distribution. Approximately 60% of Indonesia's population resides on Java Island, which accounts for only 6.7% of the country's total land area. This high population density has encouraged the government to implement transmigration programs to various regions, including Aceh Province (Muhammad, 2020). Javanese transmigrants who settled in Aceh later became known as the Javanese migrant ethnic group. In Aceh, Javanese communities predominantly inhabit plantation areas, including Aceh Besar Regency. The Saree area has become one of the most important transmigration locations. According to the Geucik (village head) of Gampong Sukadamai, S, Saree did not originally have an indigenous population. This was because Saree was formerly a pine forest area and served only as a temporary stop for travelers passing through to other regions. S stated:

"Saree is an area in Aceh that has become a destination for migrants. There were no indigenous residents who had originally settled in Saree like in most other areas of Aceh. However, if we observe closely, the Javanese and Acehnese are the two ethnic groups that have settled most extensively in Sukadamai. In fact, in Gampong Sukadamai specifically, three out of five Geucik who have served were from the Javanese ethnic group."

Ethnic diversity in Gampong Sukadamai includes Acehnese, Javanese, Gayo, Batak, and Sundanese communities; however, the Javanese and Acehnese constitute the largest groups. The selection of Mukim Saree Damai as the research location was based on the dominance of Acehnese-Javanese populations and the high level of integration between them (Muhammad et al., 2025). The fact that three out of five village heads were Javanese also indicates strong social and political acceptance of migrant communities. Most Javanese residents in Sukadamai now belong to the third and fourth generations. They are no longer newcomers but individuals who were born and raised in Aceh. S explained:

"Many members of the Javanese ethnic community have settled here through the marriages of their ancestors, so they were not born on Java Island but were actually born in Aceh."

When they first arrived, the Javanese community brought strong cultural values from their place of origin. However, as social beings, they needed to adapt to their new environment. Differences in customs, language, and daily habits initially created barriers to interaction. Over time, the Javanese community began to establish communication and actively participate in communal activities such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), village clean-up programs, and religious events. These activities accelerated their acceptance by the Acehnese community. The response of the Acehnese community was also very positive. The village secretary, MH, stated:

“The Javanese and Acehnese ethnic groups here blend together, and there has never been any conflict. There is no longer such a thing as Acehnese people or Javanese people.” Similarly, S, a member of the Javanese community, added:

“For me, interacting with the environment and the local community here increases my knowledge of the rules that align with local values and norms, even though this is not an easy process.”

Continuous interaction has enabled the Javanese community to understand local rules and customs while fostering sympathy and social cohesion (Leppa, 2020). They actively participate in religious activities, wedding celebrations, funeral rituals, and communal labor. One of the strongest indicators of integration is the increasing number of interethnic marriages between the two groups.

Interethnic marriage has become a crucial point of cultural integration. Many Javanese families have gradually abandoned certain traditional Javanese wedding rituals and adopted Acehnese customs. S stated:

“In wedding ceremonies, many members of the Javanese ethnic community have already left behind their traditional rituals and begun to follow the customary practices of the local community...”

This phenomenon aligns with Gudykunst and Kim’s theory, which explains that migrants gradually adopt the culture of their new environment (. & Saragih, 2022). Aceh is widely known as a region that strongly implements Islamic law. Differences in religious practices between Javanese and Acehnese communities require certain adjustments. One example concerns the practice of wearing the hijab among women. S explained:

“When the Javanese first arrived, women only wore the hijab when they were away from home. To address this issue, we as village officials organized regular weekly religious study sessions.”

These regular study sessions serve as a space for religious-based cultural integration without coercion. Acculturation is also evident in death rituals. S stated:

“In our tradition, *takziah* is usually held on the first, third, seventh, fortieth, one-hundredth day, as well as after one year and two years. However, the local community holds rituals from the first to the seventh day, as well as on the fourteenth and forty-fourth days (F. Nurdin & Fazal, 2022). My family and I decided to observe both traditions.”

The decision to observe both traditions reflects a flexible and harmonious form of acculturation. The celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (*Maulid Nabi*) also represents a point of cultural difference. D stated:

“The Acehnese community in Gampong Sukadamai has a tradition of celebrating the Prophet’s birthday for up to three months. After settling in this village, I began to follow this local custom.”

In Aceh, the *Maulid* celebration is marked by large communal feasts (*khanduri maulod*), while in Java it is usually celebrated over a shorter period. Today, the Javanese community in Sukadamai actively participates in local traditions without completely abandoning their Javanese cultural practices.

Social and economic relations between the two ethnic groups have developed harmoniously. The Javanese community predominantly works in the agricultural sector, particularly in secondary crop farming, while the Acehnese community is more dominant in trade (Muhammad & Nurlaila, 2021). Agricultural products cultivated by the Javanese are often marketed by Acehnese traders, creating mutually beneficial economic relationships. Beyond economic activities, social practices such as *gotong royong*, religious study groups, and customary events function as strong bonds of social integration. The adaptation process of the Javanese community can be understood through four stages:

- a. the optimistic phase, marked by enthusiasm toward the new environment;
- b. culture shock, characterized by difficulties related to language, culture, and social interaction;
- c. recovery, in which individuals begin to understand and master local culture; and
- d. adaptation, where the environment is fully accepted.

The local philosophy “*Di mana bumi dipijak, di situ langit dijunjung*” (where one stands, there one upholds the sky) serves as a guiding principle in this process. Cultural adaptation between the Javanese and Acehnese communities in Gampong Sukadamai has occurred positively, gradually, and harmoniously. Daily interactions, interethnic marriages, economic cooperation, and participation in customary activities have produced strong acculturation (A. Nurdin, 2017). Cultural change has taken place slowly and without coercion, allowing both ethnic groups to preserve their identities while integrating into a shared social life.

## **2. Constraints Faced by Javanese and Acehnese Communities in Cultural Adaptation in Gampong Sukadamai, Lembah Seulawah Subdistrict, Aceh Besar Regency**

The process of adaptation of the Javanese community within the Acehnese community requires considerable time and effort. Changes in the social and cultural environment give rise to various challenges that must be addressed gradually. These constraints stem from differences in language, customs, daily practices, and cultural values deeply embedded in each ethnic group (Lubis & Lubis, 2020). Nevertheless, support from the surrounding social environment and everyday interactions help facilitate a smoother adaptation process.

### **a. Language Differences**

The most immediately felt obstacle is language difference. Javanese and Acehnese communities have distinct regional languages, which often hinder communication in the early stages of interaction. This was conveyed by S:

“At the beginning of migrating to Aceh, the main challenge was language, because it is indeed very different. Initially, the Acehnese community continued to speak Acehnese, while we as Javanese continued to use Javanese in daily life. However, when communicating across ethnic groups, we more often used Indonesian. Over



time, our language skills improved significantly as we interacted more frequently with one another. Personally, I can now speak and understand Acehnese.”

This reality shows that language constitutes an initial challenge for migrants. Indonesian serves as a bridge for interethnic communication, even though each group continues to maintain its mother tongue. As the intensity of interaction increases (Sabariman et al., 2020), some members of the Javanese community begin to understand and even master the Acehnese language, and vice versa. D, one of the residents, explained that the Javanese community highly respects the Acehnese language but was initially hesitant to use it for fear of making mistakes. However, continuous interaction has enabled some Javanese residents to become fluent in Acehnese, while Acehnese residents have also begun to understand several Javanese vocabulary items.

To strengthen interethnic communication, village authorities organize various joint activities such as *maulid*, *meugang*, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), deliberation meetings, and other religious activities (Effendi, 2016). These activities function as means of social bonding and as effective platforms for building intercultural communication.

#### **b. Differences in Customs and Cultural Values**

Differences in customs, particularly in wedding ceremonies, also pose challenges in the adaptation process. Javanese traditions are strongly influenced by Kejawen values and *selamatan* practices, whereas Acehnese customs emphasize Islamic values, including rituals such as *peusijek* and *mekrereuja rayeuk* (Efendi, 2018). Although the Javanese community initially experienced difficulties, over time they were able to adapt. This is reflected in an interview with FA:

“In carrying out wedding customs, the Javanese ethnic community follows the Acehnese wedding procedures here, starting from *peusijek* and other rituals. However, there are still some Javanese traditions that I maintain, such as the egg-stepping ritual, which is considered a symbol of a wife’s respect toward her husband.”

This statement indicates that the Javanese community does not lose its cultural identity but instead integrates elements of Javanese and Acehnese traditions in a harmonious manner.

#### **c. Differences in Daily Practices and Marriage Traditions**

Differences in dress, food, and social habits also constitute challenges that must be faced. One of the most significant challenges for the Javanese ethnic group in interethnic marriages is the difference in the concept of *mahar* (dowry) (M. R. et al., 2022). In Javanese tradition, the dowry tends to be simple and symbolic. In contrast, in Acehnese custom, the dowry (*jeulame*) is of higher value and is usually measured in *mayam*. This was expressed by Sumarno:

“I was quite surprised by the high dowry required to propose to an Acehnese woman compared to Java. However, I am still willing to follow this custom as a form of respect and adaptation to the local culture.”

I, a Javanese man married to an Acehnese woman, also shared the challenges he encountered:

“For me, besides the dowry, traditions and customs were also quite surprising. Acehnese traditions have many customary rules, especially those related to the roles of husband and wife within the household. Therefore, I needed time to understand some of these rules, such as the tradition of more frequent extended family visits in Aceh.”

Meanwhile, his wife, D, added:

“At first, my husband found it quite difficult to adapt due to language differences. He had difficulty communicating with my family, who more often use the Acehnese language. I often had to act as a translator between them. However, the key for us is communication. We are not hesitant to talk about our feelings regarding cultural differences. We also respect each other and strive to learn one another’s culture.”

These interviews indicate that challenges in interethnic marriages can be overcome through communication, willingness to learn from one another, and respect for each other’s cultural values. Cultural adaptation constraints between the Javanese and Acehnese communities in Gampong Sukadamai primarily relate to differences in language, customs, cultural values, and daily practices (Hadiniyati et al., 2023). However, through intensive social interaction, the use of Indonesian as a communication bridge, and joint activities involving all residents, these constraints can be addressed. The adaptation process occurs gradually and demonstrates that both ethnic groups are able to coexist harmoniously without losing their respective cultural identities.

### **3. The Impact of Adaptation Patterns on Javanese and Acehnese Ethnic Groups in Gampong Sukadamai, Lembah Seulawah Subdistrict, Aceh Besar Regency**

In the social and cultural sphere, adaptation patterns between the Javanese and Acehnese ethnic groups in Gampong Sukadamai have resulted in harmonious cultural acculturation. Javanese traditions such as *kenduri* and *gotong royong* have blended with Acehnese traditions such as *kenduri maulid* and *meugang*. This integration strengthens relationships among residents through shared habits of cooperation in various communal activities (Anakotta et al., 2019). As expressed by D in an interview:

“When there are major events, we now come together and work cooperatively. For example, when cooking food for a *kenduri*, there is no longer such a thing as Acehnese food or Javanese food. Even when an event is held at the home of a Javanese family, Acehnese dishes such as *kuah beulangong* are also served.”

This statement indicates that culinary identities are no longer separated, and both ethnic groups accept each other’s traditional foods. This is further reinforced by F, who stated:



“As residents of Gampong Sukadamai, we no longer differentiate between one ethnic group and another. Here we have blended together and cooperate in all matters, whether during personal events or activities organized by the village.”

From an economic perspective, adaptation patterns also generate positive impacts through interethnic cooperation. The Javanese ethnic group, with expertise in agriculture, shares skills with the Acehnese community, while the Acehnese, who are strong in trade, assist in marketing agricultural products. This is reflected in S’s statement:

“In economic matters, there is good cooperation between the Javanese and Acehnese ethnic groups. The Javanese are very skilled in agriculture, while the Acehnese are skilled in trade. As a result, agricultural products from the Javanese community are then marketed and sold by the Acehnese.”

In addition, the religious dimension serves as an important bond between the two ethnic groups, as both adhere to Islam. Religious activities, such as regular *pengajian* (Islamic study gatherings), strengthen social and spiritual relationships. This is consistent with H’s statement:

“In this village, *pengajian* is held every week at the hall that has been provided. This is one of the things that makes our bonds of *silaturahmi* even stronger.”

In the sphere of marriage customs, acculturation of values and rituals between Acehnese and Javanese traditions also occurs. In some cases, both traditions are combined, such as *peusijek* from Aceh with *midodareni* or *panggih* from Java. However, there are also families who choose to fully adopt Acehnese customs and abandon Javanese traditions. As stated by H:

“When marriages take place, sometimes members of the Javanese ethnic group combine the rituals of both ethnic groups, continuing to practice Acehnese and Javanese traditions. However, some do not do this. They purely follow Acehnese traditions and leave behind Javanese customs.”

This flexibility in choosing traditions reflects a dynamic process of cultural negotiation (Dwijayanto & Ulya Afif, 2023). Differences in values, such as dowry (*jeulame*), are resolved through deliberation to reach agreements that are fair to both parties. Overall, the adaptation carried out by the Javanese ethnic group as migrants has fostered harmonious multicultural relations through a willingness to understand and integrate local culture. Shared religious values accelerate the process of acceptance and strengthen social solidarity. Intensive interaction between the two ethnic groups gives rise to a new collective identity based on cooperation, togetherness, and tolerance in diversity. Based on the researcher’s analysis, the findings show that cultural adaptation patterns between the Javanese and Acehnese communities in Gampong Sukadamai occur through a gradual and dynamic process that involves multiple aspects of social life. Adaptation takes place through intensive social contact, cooperation in community activities, and active participation in local traditions. These continuous interactions enable the Javanese community, which initially constituted a transmigrant group, to understand and adjust to the values, norms, and customs of the Acehnese community as the local group.

Acceptance by the Acehnese community also becomes a key factor in accelerating cultural integration.

Acculturation is particularly evident in three main sectors: socio-cultural, economic, and religious (Kesuma, 2017). In the socio-cultural sector, culinary traditions, customary rituals, and the implementation of ceremonies such as *kenduri* and *Maulid* celebrations serve as meeting spaces for Javanese and Acehnese cultures. Members of both ethnic groups no longer separate culinary identities or patterns of cooperation in event preparation, indicating the formation of a new, more inclusive social identity. In the economic sector, the agricultural expertise of the Javanese ethnic group combines with the trading capabilities of the Acehnese, resulting in complementary and mutually beneficial economic networks.

In the religious sector, the shared Islamic faith constitutes the strongest integrative factor. Regular *pengajian*, cooperation in celebrating Islamic holy days, and shared religious values reinforce social solidarity and minimize minor cultural differences. Meanwhile, in marriage customs, a process of cultural negotiation occurs: some families choose to combine Javanese and Acehnese rituals, while others fully adopt Acehnese traditions. This phenomenon demonstrates cultural flexibility and the community's ability to navigate differences in values, such as dowry traditions, ceremonial structures, and customary symbols.

Initial adaptation challenges, such as language differences, variations in customary values, and daily practices, initially function as barriers. However, these obstacles can be overcome through communication, deliberation, and active involvement in joint activities. The ability of some Javanese community members to master the Acehnese language, and vice versa, serves as evidence that linguistic adaptation also supports social integration. The adaptation process experienced by the Javanese ethnic group can be explained through Oberg's theory, encompassing the stages of optimism, culture shock, recovery, and adaptation. Overall, this study demonstrates that cultural adaptation in Gampong Sukadamai is not merely a process of accepting a new culture, but also a process of forming a unique multicultural identity through acculturation, social integration, and interethnic cooperation.

#### D. Conclusion

The pattern of cultural adaptation between the Javanese and Acehnese communities in Gampong Sukadamai has developed harmoniously through intensive interaction and the willingness of both ethnic groups to engage in mutual understanding. This adaptation has resulted in acculturation that is evident in social traditions, religious activities, and customary rituals such as marriage and death ceremonies. Differences in customs and language, which initially posed challenges, have been overcome through communication, shared activities, and strong religious bonds, thereby accelerating the social integration of migrant communities with the local population. Complementary

economic relationships, cooperation in community activities, and the active involvement of both ethnic groups in customary celebrations have further strengthened social cohesion.

Interethnic marriage has emerged as one of the most tangible forms of integration, in which Javanese and Acehnese families are able to combine or negotiate traditional differences without erasing their respective cultural identities. The shared Islamic faith reinforces social ties and serves as the primary foundation for solidarity. Overall, cultural adaptation in Gampong Sukadamai has fostered a stable, tolerant, and cooperative multicultural life. This process demonstrates that cultural diversity can function as a social strength when nurtured through communication, respect for differences, and collective participation in community life.

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