

Original Article

Local Wisdom and Cultural Traditions in Aceh: Navigating Development through the Philosophy of Amanah and Customary Institutions

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Abstract:

Aceh offers a profound philosophical reflection on sustainable development through its local wisdom, which acts as a civilization blueprint that inherently rejects greed. This study explores the role of customary institutions, such as *Panglima Laot* and *Keujruen Blang*, in managing natural resources through the lens of the *Amanah* (trust) philosophy. The research uses a qualitative approach to analyze how traditional practices, like *Hukom Adat Laot* and *Meuseuraya*, provide a community-based resource management system that is more effective than rigid bureaucracies. The results indicate that indigenous wisdom in Aceh is not merely a collection of artifacts but a navigation system tested by seasons and disasters, promoting environmental sustainability and social harmony. The study concludes that integrating this spiritual and ecological infrastructure into modern policy is essential for achieving inclusive and high-value development.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Cultural Tradition, Philosophy

Introduction

In the midst of rapid and often destructive development promises an extractive economic model that narrowly measures prosperity through cold Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures the Special Region of Aceh offers a crucial philosophical pause. Aceh's local wisdom is not merely a collection of traditions or cultural artifacts. It is a navigation system tested by thousands of seasons and natural disasters, a civilization blueprint that inherently rejects greed. This philosophy of life binds humans, communities, and nature in a sacred social and ecological contract. Furthermore, the resilience of this wisdom lies in the principle of "*Adat bak Poteumeureuhom, Hukôm bak Syiah Kuala*" which implicitly unites obedience to religious law, custom, and government. The most vital concept is *Amanah*. The Acehnese people view natural resources forests, rice fields, and the sea not as objects of exploitation, but as a trust (*Amanah*) that must be passed down to the next

generation in prime condition.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach. Data collection was conducted through literature reviews of existing research on Acehnese customs, focusing on the structures of *Gampong* (village) leadership and the implementation of *Peusijuek*, *Meuseuraya*, and *Hukom Adat Laot*. The analysis evaluates how these traditional systems serve as a mechanism for social justice and ecological sustainability.

Results and Discussion

1. Customary Institutions as Ecological Regulators

The institution of *Panglima Laot* has for centuries practiced resource management that is arguably more advanced than modern "zoning" concepts by integrating local ecological knowledge with social enforcement. One of their primary methods is the implementation of *pantang melaut* (fishing prohibitions) on specific days, which serves as a vital biological break to allow marine species to reproduce and recover. Beyond the sea, the *Keujruen Blang* functions as a collective authority that coordinates irrigation and manages the planting calendar to ensure agricultural productivity and water equity. These systems, known as *Hukm Adat Laot*, are designed to prevent over-exploitation of marine resources through customary laws that prioritize long-term sustainability over immediate economic gain. This spiritual and ecological infrastructure represents a "civilization blueprint" that inherently rejects greed, proving that indigenous wisdom acts as a navigation system tested by seasons and disasters to maintain environmental integrity.

Table 1. Summary of Acehnese Local Wisdom and Its Functions

| No | Local Wisdom / Institution | Core Value | Main Function |
|----|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 1 | Panglima Laot | Ecological Trust (Amanah) | Regulating fishing zones, implementing "fishing bans," and resolving maritime disputes. |
| 2 | Keujruen Blang | Collective Responsibility | Coordinating irrigation for rice fields and managing the planting calendar. |
| 3 | Meuseuraya | Social Solidarity | Communal cooperation for public infrastructure or social welfare. |
| 4 | Peusijuek | Peace & Gratitude | Ritual for reconciliation, starting new ventures, or showing gratitude. |
| 5 | Hukôm Adat Laot | Sustainability | Preventing over-exploitation of marine resources through customary law. |



Figure 1. The traditional architecture and social gatherings represent the communal strength of Acehnese society.

2. Social Principles: Meuseuraya and Musyawarah

Social life in Aceh is deeply rooted in the foundations of *Meuseuraya* (communal cooperation) and *Meutapeureude* or *Musyawarah* (deliberation). *Meuseuraya* ensures that social or ecological projects, such as building public infrastructure or maintaining irrigation, are carried out with full community participation and solidarity. This collective responsibility is complemented by the philosophy of *Amanah*, where the community views their social and natural environment as a trust that must be preserved for future generations. Furthermore, when conflicts arise within these communal activities, they are resolved through *Peumat Jaroe* (shaking hands), a practice of restorative justice that emphasizes peace and gratitude rather than punitive measures. By integrating Islamic values with ancestral customs, these principles create a unique "social contract" that binds humans and nature in a sacred bond, ensuring that development remains rooted in cultural identity and social harmony

3. The Philosophy of Amanah as an Ecological Paradigm

The philosophy of *Amanah* (trust) serves as a vital ethical foundation for resource management in Aceh, shifting the perception of nature from a commodity to a sacred responsibility. Unlike extractive economic models that prioritize immediate GDP growth, *Amanah* dictates that forests, rice fields, and the sea are not objects for exploitation but are trusts that must be passed down to future generations in prime condition. This spiritual contract ensures that development remains inclusive and high-value, rather than merely destructive or greed-driven. By viewing natural resources through this lens, the Acehnese people maintain a civilization blueprint that inherently rejects over-exploitation.

4. Synergy of Religion, Custom, and Social Cohesion

The resilience of Acehnese traditions is rooted in the principle of "*Adat bak Poteumeureuhom, Hukm bak Syiah Kuala*," which harmonizes religious law, customary practice, and government authority. Rituals like *Peusijuek* go beyond mere ceremony; they function as essential tools for reconciliation and gratitude, ensuring social harmony before starting new community ventures. Furthermore, the practice of *Meuseuraya* (communal cooperation) guarantees that social and ecological projects are implemented through full community participation rather than rigid, top-down mandates. This is further supported by *Peumat Jaroe* (shaking hands), a conflict resolution mechanism that emphasizes restorative justice and maintains the sacred social contract between the community and nature

5. Effectiveness of Customary Institutions in Resource Management

The study finds that customary institutions, such as *Panglima Laot* and *Keujruen Blang*, provide a navigation system for development that is more responsive to local conditions than modern administrative frameworks. For instance, *Panglima Laot* implements "pantang melaut" (fishing prohibitions), which acts as a biological break to allow fish species to reproduce a management strategy more advanced than modern zoning concepts. Similarly, *Keujruen Blang* coordinates irrigation and planting calendars through collective responsibility. These traditional systems are not merely relics of the past but are active, sophisticated frameworks that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term economic gain.

Conclusion

The local wisdom of the Acehnese people, as manifested through institutions such as *Panglima Laot* and the philosophy of *Amanah*, serves as a vital compass for navigating the complexities of modern development. This study concludes that these traditional systems are not merely relics of the past but are active, sophisticated frameworks for resource management and social harmony that prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term economic gain. By integrating Islamic values with ancestral customs, Aceh has created a unique "social contract" that protects the environment while maintaining community cohesion. Ultimately, recognizing and empowering these local institutions is essential for ensuring that development in Aceh remains rooted in its cultural identity and ecological integrity, proving that indigenous knowledge is a high-value asset in the face of global environmental challenges.

Suggestion

To ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of these cultural traditions, it is strongly suggested that the regional government of Aceh formally integrates customary laws into the official legal framework of provincial development planning. This policy alignment would provide a stronger legal basis for customary leaders to manage natural resources without bureaucratic interference. Furthermore, there is a critical need for the younger generation to be reconnected with these values through an educational curriculum that emphasizes the practical application of *Meuseuraya* and *Amanah* in everyday life. It is also recommended that scholars and practitioners collaborate to document and modernize these traditions such as utilizing technology to support the maritime monitoring tasks of *Panglima Laot* so that Aceh's local wisdom can evolve into a globally recognized model for sustainable, community-based governance.

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