



GENDER ROLES IN THE PRACTICE OF PAULAKHON WITHIN THE BATAK TOBA PATRILINEAL SYSTEM

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Keywords	Abstract
Women's Inequality, Patrilineal System, Paulakhon Practice, Batak Toba.	<i>The Batak Toba patrilineal system in North Sumatra still maintains the practice of paulakhon (returning) or the term traditional divorce lawsuit, where women as wives are considered to have failed to provide sons to continue the clan for the family and fail to be good housewives will be returned to the woman's family. This research aims to analyze women's inequality in the Batak Toba patrilineal system with the practice of paulakhon (returning). According to Connel (1987) explains that gender relations are not only shaped by individuals, but are shaped by broader social structures, including the concept of hegemonic masculinity which maintains male dominance which shows that gender norms are controlled by the patriarchal system. The research method used is a qualitative method with data collection techniques in the form of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and data analysis. The results showed that paulakhon places women in a subordinate position and limits their rights. However, social change is starting to provide space for women to gain more equal rights in the family and society.</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

The Batak Toba community has a strong patrilineal system, where lineage, inheritance rights and social roles are inherited through the male line. In this system, descent is drawn based on the father's line, so men have a higher position in the family. Therefore, sons are more expected than daughters. Men also have more rights and privileges in the family. (Adryamarthanino et al, 2022). According to Siregar (2024) In Batak Toba culture, sons are considered the successors of the family lineage. If someone does not have a son, then his lineage is considered not to continue and is not recorded in the family tree. Therefore, sons have the main rights as successors to clans in the Batak Toba kinship system. In this system, women often face inequality in various aspects of life, especially in terms of inheritance, family decision-making, and rights to clans and customary land. According to Siburian (2021), one practice that reflects gender inequality in this system is *paulakhon*

(returning), which refers to actions taken by the male family. *Paulakhon* (returning), also known as *dipaulak*, is a divorce tradition in Batak society, where the husband's family has the right to divorce the wife.

Divorce in Batak culture is often based on reasons that are considered serious, such as the wife's inability to provide offspring. However, this reason reflects an unfair concept of divorce, as it puts women in a vulnerable position without considering other factors. Furthermore, this system does not give women equal rights to divorce their husbands, which demonstrates the gender inequality in Batak culture. This lack of space for women in the divorce process further confirms that the practice of *Paulakhon* (returning) can adversely affect the welfare of women in society. In Connell's (1987) research *Gender, Sexuality, and Power Structures in Society*, explains that gender relations are shaped by broader social structures, including the concept of hegemonic masculinity that maintains male dominance. In this context, women are considered failures if they do not give birth to sons, showing how gender norms are controlled by the patriarchal system. The practice of *paulakhon* becomes a tool of social control that places women in a subordinate position within a larger power structure. Thus, the practice of *Paulakhon* (returning) shows male dominance in the marriage relationship and places women in a vulnerable position. This inequality is further deepened by the social stigma that is often attached to divorced women, making them even more marginalized in society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Gender, Sexuality and Power Structures in Society

Connell in his theory of gender and sexuality emphasizes that gender relations are not only shaped by individual factors, but also by broader power structures in society. Connell developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to the dominance of socially and culturally accepted masculinity in society, which shapes gender norms and roles. He also explains that sexuality is tied to systems of power and hierarchy, where heterosexual dominance is often maintained through larger social structures, such as the institution of family and the state (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This suggests that gender and sexuality are products of interactions between individuals and larger power structures, which are constantly changing with social dynamics.

2. Gender as Structure, Sexual Politics, and Power Dynamics

Connell in his theory states that gender is a broader social structure shaped through social interactions and cultural practices, which serves to organize and structure power relations in society (Connell, 2009). In addition, sexual politics also play an important role in determining who can access and express their sexuality freely, while others are inhibited by existing norms (Connell, 2002). These power dynamics affect gender roles in society, maintaining hierarchical structures that often disadvantage certain groups, both men and women, who are under hegemonic domination (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The patriarchal system in Toba society, which places men as family leaders and authority holders in the social structure, is closely related to the concept of hegemonic masculinity developed by Connell. In Toba society, the values of hegemonic masculinity influence the way gender roles are perceived, where men are considered the main decision-makers, while women are more often marginalized in terms of power and social influence. The concept of emphasized femininity can also be seen in women's roles that tend to support

male dominance by conforming to social norms that support male power (Connell, 2002). In this context, sexual politics and power dynamics play a role in reinforcing the patriarchal system, where women are positioned in traditionally inferior roles, while hegemonic masculinity continues to reinforce patriarchal dominance in various aspects of life, such as family, customs, and the economy.

3. Social norms, cultural practices, and gender roles

Social norms, cultural practices and gender roles are interrelated elements in shaping and maintaining gender structures in society. Social norms determine what is considered appropriate or not for individuals based on their gender, while cultural practices refer to the ways in which culture shapes and reinforces gender roles, for example through certain rituals or traditions that reinforce gender differences (Connell, 2002). Gender roles formed through social norms and cultural practices often lead to the regulation of men's and women's roles in family, work and society, where masculine roles are often more valued and dominant compared to feminine roles (Connell, 1995). In addition, Connell also emphasizes that gender roles are not fixed, but can change along with changes in power structures and social dynamics that exist in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses qualitative methods with data collection techniques in the form of participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and data analysis. Researchers will be directly involved in the lives of the Batak Toba community to observe the practice of *Paulakhon*, women's roles, as well as existing social norms. Interviews were conducted with key informants such as women who have experienced *Paulakhon*, traditional leaders and cultural experts to explore their experiences of women's inequality. Documentary data in the form of field notes, photographs, videos and documents related to *Paulakhon* practices and the patrilineal system will also be collected. All data collected is then analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns, themes and meanings related to women's inequality in this context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that women in the Batak Toba patrilineal system experience significant inequalities, especially in inheritance rights, family decision-making and social status. This practice prevents women from gaining equal rights in resource ownership and access to education. *Paulakhon* has a far-reaching impact on the lives of Batak Toba women, both socially and legally. Many women feel pressured and have no choice but to follow this practice in order to maintain family honor. Despite a change in thinking in some urban areas, the practice still persists in rural areas. In addition, there are unclear legal implications regarding the status of women involved in this practice, especially in terms of inheritance rights and land rights.

4. 1 Gender Role Formation in the Toba Batak Patrilineal System

Paulakhon is a tradition in the Batak Toba where women must join their husband's family after marriage. Women have to adjust to the new rules and customs in their husband's family. They learn how to speak, work and behave according to custom. Sometimes this is difficult, but many women adapt well. They have the support of their families and communities so that they can live their new lives well.

In Batak Toba society, men and women have different roles. The Batak Toba use a patrilineal system, which means the family line follows the father. Men usually inherit and are the leaders in the family. They also make important decisions. Women mostly take care of the home and family. This rule has been around for a long time and is still practiced in Batak Toba customs and traditions. The Batak Toba patrilineal system places men as the main inheritors in the family, especially in the practice of *paulakhon* that govern inheritance and social status. In these interviews, we explored how Batak Toba women adapt to or resist this system and the extent to which they succeed in gaining equality in society.

According to Informant 1, *paulakhon* in the Batak Toba patrilineal system has an important concept in the distribution of inheritance law. This can be seen from the conversation conveyed by the two informants during the discussion as follows:

Data 1:

"Di adat Batak, baa do na dirajumi penerus ni marga jala pewaris utama di arta keluarga. Umumna boru ndang manean tano manang arta keluarga ala dianggap mangihuthon goar keluarga ni tunggane dolina." (Informan 1, 2025)

"In Batak custom, men are considered the successors of the clan and the main heirs of family property. Girls generally do not inherit land or family property because they are considered to follow their husband's clan."

This quote clearly illustrates how social norms, cultural practices and gender roles play a role in shaping inequality in society Batak Toba, especially in terms of inheritance and social status. When related to Connell's approach, social norms in Batak Toba society dictate that men are the successors of the clan and the main heirs of family property, while women are not considered entitled to inherit land or family property because they are considered to follow their husband's clan. This shows how social norms and cultural practices support each other in maintaining a patriarchal system, where men dominate inheritance rights and important roles in the social structure (Connell, 1995; Connell, 2002).

This cultural practice involving inheritance only to men creates a clear distinction in gender roles, where men have a higher social status, while women are marginalized in terms of property rights and power. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity explains that these masculine roles are considered an expected form of dominance in society, which reinforces men's position as family leaders and primary heirs (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As such, this system not only limits women's roles, but also ensures that they are governed by social norms that favor men and disregard women's rights in the context of inheriting property and social status.

From the results of other interviews, Batak Toba women also face the same consequences in gender inequality as a result of the *paulakhon* system. This can be seen from the results of the discussion with informant 2 as follows:

Data 2:

"Boru ingkon menyesuaikan diri tu jabu na imbaru dung marhasohotan. Lam moru do status nasida di keluarga asalna, jala ingkon pajongjongonna do jabatan na imbaru di keluarga ni sinondukna. Molo sukses jala dipasangang nasida, tongtong do nasida diargai di tongatonga ni masyarakat." (Informan 2, 2025)

"Boru (girl) have to adjust to a new home after marriage. Their status in the family of origin decreases, and they have to establish a new position in the husband's family. If they are successful and respected, they remain valued in the community."

This quote illustrates how social norms and cultural practices in Batak Toba society shape the role of women (*boru*) in the context of marriage and family. According to Connell's theory, social norms in the community place women in a subordinate position after marriage, where their status in their family of origin declines and they must adjust to their husband's family. This shows how women's roles are strongly influenced by the existing patriarchal power structure, where women are not only seen as members of the family of origin, but must accept new roles that tend to be more marginalized in the husband's family. In this case, Connell's concept of emphasized femininity explains that women are forced to conform to norms that support male dominance, namely by submitting to the hierarchy and authority of the husband's family (Connell, 2002).

The cultural practice of separating women's status after marriage, as well as their obligation to establish a new position in their husband's family, also shows how gender structures are governed by long-established social norms. In the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, men continue to benefit because they hold the dominant position in the family and society, while women must constantly adjust to gain recognition and respect in the community. This reinforces the inequality between men and women, where women are only valued if they manage to "fit in" to established roles, while men remain valued based on their more stable dominant position in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In contemporary Toba cultural practices, women are not always in a subordinate position. Changes in the role of women in inheritance in Toba society show a shift in cultural values that previously considered women not entitled to inherit family property. Along with the growing awareness of gender equality, there has been a shift in inheritance practices that provide more equal rights for women in obtaining family inheritance. This is in line with the following quote from an interview with informant 3:

Data 3:

"Saonari on, lam godang do keluarga na mulai lam ungkap mangalehon warisan tu boru, tarlumobi songon hibah. Angka sundut na umposo pe nunga lam manjalo do tu konsep setara di gender di paradaton."

"Today, more and more families are starting to be more open about giving inheritance to daughters, especially in the form of grants. The younger generation is also more accepting of the concept of gender equality in adat". (informant 3, 2025)

This quote reflects the change in gender role consciousness occurring in Batak Toba society, where the younger generation is beginning to adopt a more equal view of women in the context of inheritance. According to Raewyn Connell, this change represents a shift in gender structure that favors equality and reduces power imbalances between men and women. The concept of hegemonic masculinity that once dominated Batak Toba social values and customs, which regarded men as the main inheritors of family property, is now beginning to be tested by the granting of inheritance to daughters, albeit in the form of grants. This reflects a more inclusive gender consciousness, where younger generations see the importance of empowering women and respecting their rights in inheritance, as part of a change in power dynamics that is more just and equal (Connell, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Based on these interviews, it can be concluded that Batak Toba women face challenges in the system of *paulakhon*, but they continue to adapt through various strategies. Although inequalities still exist, social awareness and legal changes are slowly opening up opportunities for women to gain more equitable rights. These changes require support from

families, communities and more progressive policies for gender equality in Batak Toba society to be fully realized.

4.2 Toba Batak Women's Adaptation to the Practice of Paulakhon

Batak Toba women adjust to a subordinate role in the family after marriage. Which means that these women prioritize the family from the male side, and Batak Toba women must adapt to the patrilineal system which prioritizes men as heirs to family property. In addition, Batak Toba women also have great responsibilities in the household, such as taking care of husbands, children, and domestic work. However, in the patrilineal system, they do not have many rights in the family, especially in terms of inheritance, because family property is prioritized for men. Women also have to follow long-established customary rules, where they are expected to obey and conform to their husband's family. This makes their position in the family and society often subordinate to men, with limitations in decision-making and property ownership.

Data 4:

"Angka parompuan naung marhasohotan ingkon menyesuaikan diri tu praktek paulakhon, ima menyesuaikan diri tu keluarga ni sinondukna jala patuduhon hormat. Nang pe di mulana maol, alai dapotan upa do angka na marhasil mambahen parsauran na denggan jala denggan mangajari ianakhonna. Saonari on, lam godang do keluarga na mangantusi ringkot ni kesetaraan di parsaripeon. Molo dijaga nilai saling menghormati di masyarakat Batak Toba on".

"Married women must adapt to the practice of *paulakhon*, that is, fitting in with the husband's family and showing respect. Although challenging at first, those who manage to build good relationships and educate the children well will be rewarded. Today, more and more families understand the importance of equality in marriage. As long as the value of mutual respect is maintained, in Batak Toba society". (informant 4, 2025)

This quote reflects that women must adapt to rules that prioritize the position of men. According to Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) Gender roles are not fixed or absolute, but can change along with changes in power structures and social dynamics in society. As well as social systems that continue to evolve, so that what is considered the role of men and women can shift depending on changes in culture, policies, and existing social interactions. This shows that gender is not something rigid, but is influenced by various factors in social life.

Based on these interviews, it can be concluded that gender roles in Batak Toba society can change over time. Women are now starting to live more independently and adapt to the patrilineal system, not only playing a role in the household but also contributing economically and socially. Although customs are still practiced, the changing times make women have more room to develop. In addition, Batak Toba women need to adapt to a patrilineal system that places men as the main heirs of family property. Where Batak Toba women have to adjust to the patrilineal system because in their custom, only men are considered the main heirs of family property. This happens because the lineage in Batak Toba culture follows the father's side, so sons are responsible for continuing the clan and maintaining the family inheritance. As a result, women play more of a role in taking care of the household and supporting the husband's family. However, over time, many Batak Toba

women have begun to be independent and try to get more equal rights, especially in terms of education and economy, while still respecting the prevailing customs.

Data 5:

"Boru Batak Toba do ingkon menyesuaikan diri tu adat naung adong. Di sistem patrilineal, baoa do na manean arta ni keluarga ala ibana do na manguaduti marga. Dung marhasohotan, dietong do angka parompuan i gabe bagian ni keluarga ni sinondukna, alani i dipatujolo do warisan tu anak baoa. Nunga gabe aturan tradisional on, gabe somalna angka parompuan fokus mangurus rumah tangga dohot mangurupi keluarga ni tunggane dolina".

"Batak Toba women do have to adjust to existing customs. In the patrilineal system, it is the man who inherits the family property because he continues the clan. Women after marriage are considered part of the husband's family, so inheritance is prioritized for sons. That is the customary rule, so women usually focus on taking care of the household and supporting the husband's family". (informant 5, 2025).

This quote reflects that Batak Toba women need to adapt to the patrilineal system where men will be considered as the main heir to the family property and throne. According to Connell (1987), the roles of men and women in society are not only determined by individual factors, but also by larger social systems. In this context, Batak Toba women must conform to norms that limit their rights to inheritance. The patrilineal system in Batak Toba society places men as the main inheritors of family property, while women are expected to adapt to a role that focuses more on the husband's family. This shows that the power structure in Batak Toba customs is still dominated by patriarchal values, where inheritance rights and social status favor men.

Based on these interviews, it can be concluded that along with the times, more and more Batak Toba women are starting to adapt by becoming more independent, educated and contributing to the economy, although they still have to face challenges in a system that is still patriarchal. Ongoing social change opens up opportunities for women to negotiate their roles in the family and society. While adat is still upheld, there is room for women to gain more opportunities in education, employment and decision-making.

5. CONCLUSION

The strong patrilineal system in Batak Toba society, manifested through the practice of *paulakhon*, creates significant gender inequality. Batak Toba women face limitations in inheritance rights, family decision-making and social status, which reinforce male dominance. Nonetheless, there is a shift in cultural values that shows an increased awareness of gender equality, especially among the younger generation. Batak Toba women show high adaptability to the patrilineal system, while working to negotiate their roles in the family and society. Social change and legal awareness open up opportunities for women to gain more equitable rights, although challenges remain. There needs to be support from the family, community and more progressive policies so that gender equality in Batak Toba society can be fully realized.

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