

# CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN DEATH RITUALS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF PIDIE, ACEH, INDONESIA

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**Abstrak: Tradisi Kultural Kenduri Kematian dalam Masyarakat Pidie Aceh, Indonesia.** Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk melihat akulturasi budaya dan agama dalam ritual kematian di Aceh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji konsep tasawuf yang terkait dengan tradisi ini. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian lapangan dan datanya diperoleh melalui pengamatan yang cermat dari tindakan ritual dan diskusi mendalam dengan protagonis utama dari kinerja ritual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ritual setelah kematian di Aceh masih mengandung jejak warisan pra-Islam yang telah dibiakkan dengan ajaran Islam sehingga tidak melanggar aturan Islam. Dalam ritual kematian ini, unsur-unsur pra-Islam, yang bertentangan dengan ajaran Islam, telah diganti dengan doa yang direkomendasikan dalam Islam. Akulturasi ini bermanfaat bagi kedua belah pihak. Masyarakat Aceh dapat terus menerapkan budaya warisan mereka, sementara Islam dapat berkembang tanpa ada kontradiksi dalam budaya lokal.

**Abstract:** This study was conducted to look into the cultural and religious acculturation in the rituals of death in Aceh. It aims to examine the concepts of Sufism related to these traditions. This research is a field research and its data was obtained through meticulous observation of the ritual action and in-depth discussion with the main protagonists of the ritual performance. The results of the research shows that the rituals following a death in Aceh still bear traces of their pre-Islamic legacy, which has been acculturated with the teachings of Islam, so it does not break the rules of Islam. In these rituals for death, the pre-Islamic elements, which conflict with the Islamic creed, have been replaced with prayers, which are recommended in Islam. This acculturation is beneficial to both sides, in one hand the Acehnese people may continue to implement their inherited cultures, while Islam can thrive without having any contradictions within the local cultures on the other.

**Keywords:** tradisi, ritual yang mengikuti kematian, akulturasi, Aceh, Indonesia

## Introduction

Acehnese societies are noted for their devotion to their religion and their customs. The integration of custom and religion within them has become their philosophy and way of life.<sup>1</sup> This is born out in a *hadih maja* (proverb), “*Hukom ngon adat lagei zat ngon sifeut*”, which means “That *hukom* (religion) and custom are like a substance with certain characteristics that cannot be separated”.<sup>2</sup> In addition to that proverb, the Acehnese people also have another saying, viz: “*Hukom munyo hana adat tabeu, adat munyo hana hukom batue*”, which means “Religion without custom feels bland, while custom without religion is pointless”.<sup>3</sup> This illustrates that the local culture and the local teachings of Islam have interacted and have been unified harmoniously by the Acehnese over many centuries. The concrete forms of Acehnese custom and culture are not just implemented in the social, economic and political fields but also in the field of law.<sup>4</sup> The customary law of Aceh also plays an important role in forming the character and social structure of the Acehnese. It also emphasizes the ethics and the inspiration of Islamic values in the social life of the community.

The customary law practiced now by the Acehnese is a sustainable continuity of the practices from their ancestors. The Acehnese claim that if they don't implement their (customary) law, they will be presumed guilty of abandoning the messages handed down from their *indatu* (ancestors), which could lead to misery and disasters in their life. Customary law is inherited and applied from their ancestors and should be passed down to each new generation to maintain their prosperity. They believe that by following the traditions of their ancestors they will stay happy and prosperous and stay at peace avoiding unexpected disasters. Sometimes, some of the Acehnese related some disasters which had happened to them when some of their traditional rituals were neglected.

The strong influence of pre-Islamic culture in Aceh is caused by the strong influence of those cultures on the Acehnese. Based on Chinese historical sources, Aceh was a Buddhist country in the 5<sup>th</sup> century prior to the arrival of Islam about the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>5</sup> Before the Indo-Malay Acehnese became Muslims, they followed Hinduism or Buddhism. Later, the religions were blended within the local communities.<sup>6</sup> The customs inherited by Indonesian

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<sup>1</sup>Abdul Manan, “Islamic Educational Values in Life-Cycle Rituals: An Ethnographic Study in Kluet Timur Community, Aceh, Indonesia,” in *Global Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Paths in Islamic Education* (Pennsylvania: IGI Global, 2020), pp. 118-134.

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Hoesein, *Adat Aceh* (Banda Aceh: Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Muhammad, *Peranan Budaya dalam Merajut Kedamaian dan Silaturahmi* (Banda Aceh: Unsyiah Press, 2011), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup>Abidin Nurdin, “Revitalisasi Kearifan Lokal Aceh: Peran Budaya dalam Menyelesaikan Konflik Masyarakat,” in *Jurnal Analisis*, Volume 13, No.1, 2013, p. 139.

<sup>5</sup>A. Hasjmy, *Kebudayaan Aceh dalam Sejarah* (Jakarta: Penerbit Benua, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>M. Naguib al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: UKM, 1972), p. 12.

people are deeply affected by particular beliefs. Without such beliefs, the customs cannot survive for long since they require significant support to persist. Therefore, these customs are associated with the practice of rituals.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ahmad, the Acehese culture is the result of the mixing between Islamic beliefs and the traditions of Hindu and other religions existing prior to the arrival of Islam.<sup>8</sup> The manifestations of culture are based on the pre-Islamic culture held by the Acehese, who respect their own local customs, cultures and beliefs, which still exist until the present day, since they have preserved the customs and cultures of their ancestors. Therefore, rituals related to Hindu and Buddhist traditions can still be found in the Acehese communities. One such set of rituals, which are strongly implemented in the socio-religious life of the Acehese, are the rituals of death, which are performed when someone dies. Thus, the death *kenduri* (feast) ritual<sup>9</sup> can be performed by anyone, whether they are ordinary poor people, or from high-ranking groups in the community, the ritual of death can be performed by anyone even though the families of the dead are poor and do not have any property.<sup>10</sup> They usually borrow some money for the needs of the ritual. This phenomenon is commonly seen in Aceh.<sup>11</sup> In Bireun, the ritual of death is implemented on the seventh, the fourteenth, the twenty-first, and the forty-fourth days after the death. On the last mentioned day, the host usually sacrifices an animal like a billy goat or a bull buffalo for the deceased.<sup>12</sup> The ritual of death is performed differently in each region. In the coastal regions like Pidie and North Aceh, it is conducted on the seventh, the fourteenth, the twenty-first, the thirtieth, the fortieth, and the hundredth day after the death. Meanwhile, the ritual of death in Aceh Singkil, West Aceh, and South Aceh is performed on the first to the seventh, the fourteenth,

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<sup>7</sup>Daniel L. Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Yogyakarta: Kalam, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad, *Acehnologi* (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2012).

<sup>9</sup>Religious ceremonies consisting of a series of action performed according to prescribed order, are the core of the social identity of all communities (Manan, 2015:2), for example; *the Ritual of Khanduri Laot in Lowland Aceh* (Manan, 2016), *The Ritual of Khanduri Bungong Kayee in West Labuhan Haji, South Aceh* (Manan, 2013), *The Ritual of Hunting Deer within the People of Kluet in South Aceh, Indonesia* (2017), and *Ritual Berburu Bato Geok pada Masyarakat di Pergunungan Singgah Mata: Penelitian Etnografi di Kecamatan Beutong Ateuh, Nagan Raya-Aceh* (2016).

<sup>10</sup>This ritual of feast of death is carried out by everyone even though the family left behind by the dead is poor and has no wealth at all. They are usually in debt to borrow the amount of money needed to hold the festivity. Things like this are already common in Aceh.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Tgk. Syukri on January 5th, 2019.

<sup>12</sup>The festivity of the Death Festival is done a little differently in each region. For coastal areas such as Pidie and North Aceh, this ritual is performed on the seventh, fourteen, twenty one, thirty, forty and hundredth day, while in other areas such as Aceh Singkil, Aceh Barat and Aceh Selatan, this ritual has been performed since the first day of death until the seventh day, then on the fourteenth day, the thirtieth day and the hundredth day. In the Banda Aceh City region which is the capital of the Aceh Province, only carried out three days after death, then ended on the seventh day. On that last day, this festivity of death was usually carried out on a larger scale than the previous festivity. For those who have the ability, on this last day there will be beef or buffalo slaughtering and all local people and their family experts will be invited.

the thirtieth, and the hundredth day after the death. In the capital city of Aceh, Banda Aceh, the ritual is only carried out on the third day till the seventh day after the death. On the last day, the ritual is normally performed on a bigger scale than before. For the rich, an animal like a bull or a young male buffalo can be sacrificed. Then, too, all the local neighbors and all the relatives from all around the world will be invited to the final rituals. The Acehnese people believe that the ritual of death is part of their religious culture that must be preserved for the common good. They will be considered negligent of their customs and traditions if they don't follow the rituals for death which have been performed hereditarily since the times before Islam arrived to Aceh.

While, a Hindu source, says that rituals for a death are held on the first, seventh, fortieth, hundredth, and the thousandth day after death,<sup>13</sup> Ida Bedande Adi Suripto has said that: "ceremonial rituals for a death in Java are done on the first, seventh, fortieth, hundredth, and the thousandth day after the death which clearly comes from the teachings of Hindu".<sup>14</sup> Moreover, a ritual called *genduri* (*kenduri* or *kenduren* meaning feast) is a Hindu ceremony. The ritual of death is also described in the Sama Weda Book, "*Sloka prastias mai pipisatewikwani widuse bahra aranggay maya jekmayipatsiyada duweni narah.*" (Send this offering to your God, the All-Knowing, to keep away misfortune!).<sup>15</sup>

Following below are the other statements related to *Yatna*, the ritual of death, which are contained in the Siwa Sasana Book:

- a. The Lord *Yatnya* (ritual); the holy sacrifice is sincerely dedicated to the Hyang Widhi by devoting, praising, and obeying all commands of Him (Tirta Yatra), *Metri Bopo Partiw*.
- b. *Pitra Yatnya*; a holy sacrifice is given to the ancestors (*pengeling-eling*) plus praising those who live in the hereafter to help those living in the present.
- c. The Human *Yatnya*; the holy sacrifices are devoted to the descendants, so those living can have a peaceful life.
- d. *Resi Yatnya*; the holy sacrifice is allocated to teachers according to what they have shared (*danyangan*).
- e. The Blind *Yatnya*; the holy sacrifice is assigned to all visible or invisible creatures for the sake of this world's glory (*unggahan*).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Nali Eka, "Upacara Kematian pada Masyarakat Dayak Tumon di Desa Guci Kabupaten Lamandau (Kajian Agama dan Budaya Hindu)," in *Bawi Ayah: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama dan Budaya Hindu* Vol. 8, No. 2, 2017.

<sup>14</sup>Ida Bedande Adi Suripto, *Nilai-nilai Hindu dalam Budaya Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup>Oka Netra Anak Agung Gede, *Tuntunan Dasar Agama Hindu* (Jakarta: Hanuman Sakti, 1997), p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, p. 22.

In Islamic literature, rituals following death are only found in Indonesia. Meanwhile, such rituals were not performed by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Therefore, these rituals for after death are strongly presumed to be a legacy from a pre-Islamic culture, which has blended with Islam. This study aims to re-affirm the belief concepts of the ritual. In addition, this study also intends to examine the acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist cultures and Islam.

## Methodology

This field research collected data and information based on empirical phenomena found in the field.<sup>17</sup> The primary data was obtained through interviews, observations, and study of documents related to this research issue, which were done in Pidie, Aceh, Indonesia. The interviews were done with people who understand the issues of acculturation and traditional beliefs. Moreover, the interviews involved figures who have important positions in society, such as: (1) the leaders of *pesantren* (traditional Islamic schools); (2) customary figures; (3) experts on Islamic law; (4) lecturers in related subjects; (5) the Head of the Aceh *Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama* (the Consultative Council of Religious Scholars in Aceh), and (6) people who have performed the rituals. As this is a specific field research technique, the interviews were held to find out specific data like: attitudes or activities that have been become customary plus beliefs and values followed by particular groups. Meanwhile, interviewees (1), (3), and (4) were selected because they fully acknowledged the perspectives of Islam towards the rituals being studied. While, interviewees (2) and (6) were selected because of their good comprehension of the rituals and because of their direct involvement with practicing the rituals.

Findings from the interviews were supported with data from related literature. This qualitative study also focused on the general principles which underlie the embodiment of symptomatic units in an individual.<sup>18</sup> This study used an anthropological approach<sup>19</sup> since the acculturation and assimilation between the earlier customs and the teachings of Islam, and the resultant community beliefs concerning the rituals and symbols are of anthropological interest. Besides that, this study also combined a sociological approach,<sup>20</sup> since such an approach offered the background of the ritual of death, which has been practiced for a long time by these Acehnese. This study is expected to bring together data found in the field through observations and interview with data already on record. Observations were made during performances of the rituals using anthropological methods. This was done to

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<sup>17</sup>Peter Connolly, *Aneka Pendekatan Studi Agama* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), p. 105.

<sup>18</sup>Burhan Asofa, *Metode Penelitian Hukum* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup>Jamhari Ma'ruf, "Pendekatan Antropologi Dalam Kajian Islam," in [www.ditperta.net](http://www.ditperta.net), 2012.

<sup>20</sup>Atho Mudzhar, "Pendekatan Sosiologi dalam Hukum Islam," in Amin Abdullah, *Mencari Islam dari Berbagai Pendekatan* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Yogya, 2000), p. 31; Cf. Mhd. Mhd. Syahnan, *Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse* (Medan: IAIN Press, 2010); Mhd. Syahnan, *Hukum Islam dalam Bingkai Transdisipliner* (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2018).

discover the basis for the rituals based on theories from anthropology and sociology. The utterances during the rituals were also interpreted and outlined. Results from the analysis within each theme found are discussed as follows.

## The Culture of the Acehnese People

Aceh is the northernmost and westernmost part of Sumatra Island and also of Indonesia. It lies between 2 and 6 degrees north latitude and 95 to 98 degrees of east longitude. Aceh ranges in height from sea level to 3,000 meters, averaging 125 meters. The total land area of Aceh is about 5.736,557 ha. It is flanked by the Indian Ocean to the West and South and by the Straits of Malacca to the North and the East. Also in the east it has a land border with North Sumatra Province.<sup>21</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Aceh was a strategic hub port with hundreds of sailing ships stopping there, after or before crossing the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean: now however ships are rare and sailing yachts even rarer still.

Thus for several centuries, Aceh's ports were rendezvous points for ships from many nations, which stopped at these ports to trade, bringing textiles and metal goods from India and countries to the West and returning with spices, gold, ivory and even elephants. The noted Australian historian, Anthony Reid, has said that Aceh's ports were very cosmopolitan places in the past. As a result Aceh's culture became very multicultural, blending cultures from the East with those from the West; absorbing waves of culture from the West. From India, first came Hinduism then Buddhism followed by Islam, whilst also from the West came Christianity: In particular, Hinduism and Islam came via traders. The cosmopolitanism of culture in Aceh was more blatant than in other areas in Indonesia: This shows its uniqueness in terms of language, culture, art, craft, and religion. In addition, it has linked religious and social customs harmoniously, which is in contrast with some other regions in Sumatra. Its strategic location made Aceh's ports hub points, the first places where new cultures, in particular Islam entered and started to influence the lands of Indonesia.

The cultural contacts between the Acehnese and the foreigners influenced the culture and behavior patterns straight away. The influence was associated with the spread of Hindu and later of Islam. In addition, the influence of Hindu can be seen to this day, specifically in the inland communities. In fact, an ancient mosque in Indrapuri was built on the site of a Hindu temple. This reality became evidence of the cultural integration in Aceh.<sup>22</sup>

From the literature, studies related to the relationship of religion and culture in South East Asia are of interest for this research. Many studies related to the relationship of religion and culture have been done in Aceh, either in terms of acculturation or of assimilation or

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<sup>21</sup>Badan Pusat Statistik, *Aceh Dalam Angka* (Banda Aceh: BPS, 2003).

<sup>22</sup>Muhammad Arifin, "Islam dan Akulturasi Budaya Lokal di Aceh," in *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, Vol. 15. No. 2, February 2016, p. 251.

syncretization. One of these studies entitled “*Integrasi Agama dan Budaya: Kajian tentang Tradisi Maulod dalam Masyarakat Aceh*” (The Integration of Religion and Culture: A Study of the *Maulod* Tradition amongst the Acehnese), was written by Abidin Nurdin and published in the journal *El-Harakah*, Vol. 18, No. 1 in 2016. His study concluded that the integration of religion and culture occurs in the *maulod* (the commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) traditions in Aceh. Islamic rituals, blended with Acehnese cultural traditions, can be found in almost all aspects of life of the Acehnese.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, a book written by Agus Budi Wibowo, *Akulturasinya Budaya Aceh pada Masyarakat Jawa di Kota Langsa* (The Acculturation of Acehnese Culture within the Javanese Community in Langsa City), describes the diversity of cultures, tribes, and other related aspects, concerning the Acehnese acculturation of Javanese descendents in Langsa in eastern Aceh. However, it does not cover the religious aspects.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, a book by Usman, entitled *Budaya Aceh* (The Culture of Aceh), issued by the Government of Aceh in 2009, summarizes various kinds of traditions and cultures from Aceh that would appeal to foreign researchers. The book, which was sponsored by the Government of Aceh, was published as an attempt to attract tourists and researchers to come to Aceh. To do so, the book introduces a variety of the rich traditions and cultures of Aceh. In addition, a study done by Marzuki, *Tradisi Peusijek dalam Masyarakat Aceh: Integrasi Nilai-nilai Agama dan Budaya* (The *Peusijek* Tradition within the Acehnese The Integration of Religious and Cultural Values), in 2012 describes the *peusijek* (blessing) traditions performed by local societies which are not purely derived from religious practices but are based on the relics of pre-Islamic cultural traditions which have been acculturated with Islamic values.

Meanwhile, a study done by Rusdi Sufi, *Adat Istiadat Masyarakat Aceh* (The Customs of the Acehnese), only describes the customs of the Acehnese without any connections with religion. This study, which was issued by Dinas Kebudayaan Provinsi Aceh (the Office of Cultural Affairs of Aceh Province) in 2002, describes various cultural communities and customs that survive within the social order of the Acehnese.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, a study done by Mulyadi Kurdi, entitled *Aceh di Mata Sejarawan: Rekonstruksi Sejarah Sosial Budaya* (Aceh in the Eyes of Historians: The Reconstruction of Social, and Cultural History), uncovers the history of the socio-cultural values of the Acehnese. This study, issued in 2009, also compares the Acehnese cultures and customs to other cultures. In addition, it describes the customs which have developed in Aceh— like the marriage customs, the farming traditional and the traditional costumes of the Acehnese.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Abidin Nurdin, “Revitalisasi Kearifan Lokal Aceh: Peran Budaya dalam Menyelesaikan Konflik Masyarakat,” in *Jurnal Analisis*, Vol. 13, No. 1 2013, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup>Agus Budi Wibowo, *Akulturasinya Budaya Aceh Pada Masyarakat Jawa di Kota Langsa*, (Banda Aceh: Balai Pelestarian Nilai Budaya, 2012).

<sup>25</sup>Rusdi Sufi, *Adat Istiadat Masyarakat Aceh* (Banda Aceh: Dinas Kebudayaan provinsi Aceh, 2002).

<sup>26</sup>Mulyadi Kurdi, *Aceh di Mata Sejarawan: Rekonstruksi Sejarah Sosial Budaya* (Banda Aceh: LKAS, 2009).

Similarly, *Adat Aceh* (The Customs of Aceh) a book by Moehammad Hoesin, also describes in detail the customs that exist in Aceh. This book presents the rich customs that exist in the lives and livelihoods of the Acehnese. The customs are maintained well and are combined with their observance of Islam. Almost all of the customs found in Aceh are described in this book.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, a book by M. Jakfar Puteh, *Sistem Sosial Budaya dan Adat Masyarakat Aceh* (The Socio-cultural and Customary Systems of the Acehnese) describes the social, cultural and customary systems prevailing within Acehnese societies. This book also describes the shifts in cultural values that have occurred in Aceh.<sup>28</sup> Jakfar Puteh also describes, realistically, the current culture of the Acehnese, which has shifted and changed over time.

Ridwan Hasan, who wrote *Kepercayaan Animisme dan Dinamisme dalam Masyarakat Aceh* (The Beliefs in Animism and Dynamism held by the Acehnese), published in the Journal *Miqot*, Vol. 36, 2001, which examined the rituals of communities living in the North Aceh District, which have originated with influence from animism and dynamism. This study showed that such influences are strongly blended into the cultures and beliefs of the local communities.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Amirul Hadi in his book, *Aceh, Sejarah, dan Tradisi* (Aceh: Its History and Traditions) examines academically the history and cultures of Aceh. This study, which was issued by Yayasan Obor Indonesia in 2010, also relates the customs and cultures of the Acehnese people with Islam. Moreover, the study attempts to stress the importance of the inherited customs and cultures of the Acehnese with Islam. In particular, the dimensions of Islam get more attention in that study.<sup>30</sup>

Differing from those studies, this study has its specific focus in the rituals of death. Therefore, the research into such rituals is extremely focused and has to be done in order to understand the acculturation that has occurred in the rituals performed following a death.

## The Rituals of Death for the Acehnese People

The Acehnese people are highly religious; their strong affinity for religion ties them closely to the teachings of Islam.<sup>31</sup> They will get very annoyed if someone dares to call them *kafir* (non-Muslim believers). Islam is part of the identity of the Acehnese. They love performing

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<sup>27</sup>Moehammad Hoesin, *Adat Aceh* (Banda Aceh: Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1970).

<sup>28</sup>M. Jakfar Puteh, *Sistem Sosial Budaya dan Adat Masyarakat Aceh* (Yogyakarta: Grafindo Litera Media, 2012).

<sup>29</sup>Ridwan Hasan, (2001), "Kepercayaan Animisme dan Dinamisme dalam Masyarakat Aceh," in *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 2001.

<sup>30</sup>Amirul Hadi *Aceh, Sejarah, dan Tradisi* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2010).

<sup>31</sup>Abdul Manan, "Islamic Educational Values in Life-Cycle Rituals: An Ethnographic Study in Kluet Timur Community, Aceh, Indonesia," in *Global Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Paths in Islamic Education* (IGI Global, 2020), pp. 118-134.



the Islamic religious ceremonies, either the feast rituals or the pure worshipping rituals, such as *tarawih* prayers and Maulid. The traditions of the death rituals are rituals performed with a happy yet sad atmosphere. These rituals have been done hereditarily by the Acehnese since before the arrival of Islam to Aceh.<sup>32</sup> They are called *kanduri* by the Acehnese.<sup>33</sup> While the Javanese call them *selamatan* or *kenduren*. According to Clifford Geertz, the *selamatan* for the Javanese people are the most important elements in almost all of the religious rites and ceremonies of the Indonesians. They symbolize their mystical and social unity by involving their relatives, neighbors, co-workers, local spiritual leaders, plus their ancestors who have died, and other parties. They all sit together surrounding a table or in a circle. Therefore, they are bound together into social groups that are required to help each other and work together.<sup>34</sup> The rituals of death practiced in Aceh have much in common with the aforementioned concepts. They have to be done to ensure the peace of the dead person's spirit in the grave. The ritual of death, it is believed, will ensure that rewards are delivered to the family of the deceased. They are not just performed for the bereaved family but most importantly to help release the *aruwah* of the deceased from its ties to the house and also the remaining family can stop mourning.<sup>35</sup> In addition, these rituals are also considered as social rituals that must be performed. Abandoning these rites means not following the customs handed down from their ancestral heritage, which may lead to social punishment or ostracism within the community. The Acehnese perform the rituals for death for everyone. They believe that the spirit of the dead will be stressed and tormented while their descendants do not perform these rituals.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, some people believe that the spirit of the deceased will return to his/her home to ask for food on certain days. Therefore, the families must provide food to be eaten by the dead.<sup>37</sup> Some people interviewed by the researcher admitted that, they believed that the spirit of the dead would wait for these rituals so that his/her spirit will not have trouble in the future.

Before Islam entered Java, the family and the neighbors of a person who had just died would gather at the dead person's home. However, the gathering was not for prayer but for rejoicing, while they played a variety of games, which included gambling plus many at the party would drink alcohol until they got drunk. The Wali Songo (Saints of Islam in Indonesia) did not immediately dissolve this tradition. On the contrary, the local communities

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with Abdul Rasyid on 7 January 7th, 2019.

<sup>33</sup>Mark R. Woodward, "The Salmetan: Textual Knowledge and Ritual Performance in the Central Javanese Islam," in *History of Religions*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1988, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup>Clifford Geertz, *Abangan, Santri, Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, translated by Aswab Mahasin (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>35</sup>Abdul Manan, "The Ritual of Death in Aceh: An Ethnographic Study in Blangporoh Village-West Labuhan Haji, South Aceh" in *Parts And Wholes: Cosmology & Exchange* (Germany: Lit Verlag, 2016).

<sup>36</sup>Interview with Tgk. Mahyeddin on January 6th, 2019.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Tgk. Marzuki on January 6th, 2019

were allowed to continue making these assemblies, but the games were replaced with praying for the deceased and water or syrup replaced the alcohol. Thus the ritual patterns of the *selametan* are updated versions from the previous Hindu and Buddhist celebrations. Due to the arrival of Islam, the invocations contained in the rituals were replaced with Islamic prayers. In other words, the principles of *selametan* were preserved. However, the ritual ordinances and invocations were changed or adapted to the principles of Islamic teachings after Islam arrived in Java.<sup>38</sup>

The bearers of Islam to Indonesia, first came to Aceh, where rituals for death, were already widespread in the community. They eliminated the elements that were contrary to the teachings of Islam, replacing the invocations of worship to multiple deities with prayers to one god, Allah, asking for forgiveness for the spirit of the deceased. In addition to these prayers, they also replaced the Hindu spells with verses from the Holy Quran like Surah Ahad and An-Nas so that the acculturation was free from polytheistic values, which are prohibited in Islam. On the other hand, the communities were allowed to perform the rituals of death, which had been widespread in their lives, beforehand. This local wisdom caused Islam, as the new religion, to be accepted by the people without the emergence of conflict. This cultural acculturation had also been practiced by the Prophet (PBUH) when he missionized Islam in Mecca and Medina. The Muslim missionaries made the right decisions when spreading Islam to avoid conflict between Islam and the local cultures. This pattern of acculturation successfully managed to spread Islam throughout many regions of Indonesia.

Islam, as taught to the indigenous peoples then had much in common with Hindu in their minds, which adhered to Hindu at that time so that, as a result, Islam was accepted by them. Hamzah Fanzuri, from Aceh, was one of the Sufi experts who taught the similarity between those religions, the pre-Islamic religion and Islam.<sup>39</sup>

The rituals for death performed by the Acehnese have been widespread since the time of their ancestors. It is not clear when these traditions began for the first time. The rituals for death involve many parties. The Acehnese believe that these rituals will bring good rewards. This is the same with the perspective from the existing *dayah* (traditional Islamic school) in Aceh. These institutions consider that the rituals for death contain many religious values and benefits. They can turn into *wasilah* (relationships) and reminders against death. People who are involved in the rituals of death will mentally be concerned with their own death. These rituals also give them benefits due to their committing good deeds.<sup>40</sup> The rituals of death also may establish *silaturahmi* (brotherhood) between the family members of the deceased. It may calm the family during this sad moment when one of them has passed away.

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<sup>38</sup>Ahmad Chadjim, *Mistik dan Makrifat Sunan Kalijaga* (Jakarta: PT. Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2003), p. 277.

<sup>39</sup>Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (Jakarta: Rajawali, 2010), p. 201.

<sup>40</sup>Interview with Tgk. Abu Bakar, on January 7th, 2019.

In the process of the death ritual, *samadiyah* and *tahlil* (a form of *dhikr* done repeatedly) are recited as rewards to the dead. According to Islamic scholars from the *dayah*, the recitation of the *samadiyah* and the *tahlil* are highly recommended. They can be categorized as salvation for the dead. They believe that there are many *dalil* (supporting views) related to this issue.<sup>41</sup>

Some Islamic scholars from the *dayah* are often directly involved in the rituals after death. They are often invited to lead the death rituals, to become the host and the prayer leaders. In addition, their position is considered important in the rituals after death. As role models for the community, these scholars are frequently asked to lead *samadiyah* and prayers in the rituals. According to *Observation Notes*, made at Sigli, Aceh on Monday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, they are considered as the most appropriate persons to perform such tasks. This is due to their proficiency in Islam. Because the rituals of death have cultural and religious values, hence, the Islamic scholars from the *dayah* are considered as the most appropriate individuals to lead these rituals. According to the people, this trust has been passed down hereditarily and is considered as a good deed, which is blessed by Allah, the Almighty, and His messenger.

On the other hand, some intellectuals represented by the Muhammadiyah association have a belief that the rituals of death are deeds of *bid'ah* (innovation in Islamic matters) which do not have supporting religious references. They argue that the rituals of death were not performed by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. These rituals were adapted from pre-Islamic culture and their implementation should be stopped. They say that wasting the treasures left by the deceased for the needs of the rituals is not recommended. They argue that these rituals of death, organized from the home of the deceased will not bring him/her any rewards. These intellectuals believe that when someone has passed away, his/her kindness and charity during his/her life cannot be represented by others. For instance, if (s) he ever gave alms, there will be rewards for Her/him in the hereafter. Contrarily, when the deceased's family member does charitable things with the property obtained from him/her, it will not earn any rewards for the deceased person, since the property no longer belongs to the deceased person anymore, but now belongs to the person who inherited it.

## **The Ritual of a Feast Following Death within the Perspective of Islam**

The meaning of Islam is peace, so it can exist anywhere. When it exists in an area, Islam will intertwine with the local traditions and culture. It is apparent that every religion, not only Islam, must relate to the local conditions and situation. The birth of Islam itself was not free from cultural interference. Islam and the local reality will always exist in a perpetual dynamic dialogue.<sup>42</sup> When Islam was first introduced and spread out amongst

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<sup>41</sup>Interview with Tgk. Zakaria on January 5th, 2019.

<sup>42</sup>Masnun Thahir, "Pergumulan Hukum Islam dan Budaya Sasak: Mengarifi FikihIslam Wetu Telu," in *ISTIQRO': Jurnal Penelitian Islam Indonesia*, Vol. 6, 2007.

the peoples of Indonesia, it could not be separated from the influence of the local cultures. Both Islam and the local cultures have a creative and dynamic dialogue, which has enabled people to accept and to convert to Islam without abandoning their local cultures and traditions. The existing local traditions and cultures will still be practiced by the people without omitting the Islamic tenets or principles, and people could also perform their Islamic tenets without abandoning their former cultures; the key here was adaptation.<sup>43</sup> The practice of *kenduri* upon the death of a person is a result of the acculturation between the Islamic tenets and the pre-Islamic traditions. In Aceh, it was Hinduism, which existed just prior to the introduction of Islam, which is considered to have been the influence behind such traditional rituals. When a local culture is acculturated within Islam, a unique and new ritual, which will be distinctive within different areas, will appear. There are three categories of acculturation between cultures ie, between Islam and a local culture. The first is where the local culture will be accepted without any adaptation. As an example, the concept of *Mudharabah* (giving capital), which had been in existence amongst the Arabic people long before the introduction of Islam, was accepted as an Islamic tenet. Such a concept also exists amongst the Acehnese; where it is known as the practice of *mawah*, viz: giving a mandate to another person to raise some cattle or goats where the off-spring are shared. The second is where the local culture will be accepted with several modifications to adapt to the Islamic tenet, particularly for a practice that is not acceptable to the tenets of Islam. As an instance, the concept of adopting children in the Arabic society was accepted after several adaptation were made on the aspects contradictory to Islamic tenets. And, thirdly, the local tenets will be rejected, as for example, the tradition of inheriting your father's wife other than your mother or your brother's wives. Referring to those categories, the existence of *kenduri* after death falls into the second category. It was previously practiced by the Acehnese, who were Hindus before they converted to Islam. When Islam came to Aceh, the Islamic scholars, who brought it, did not reject the local tenets, but they modified them omitting the values and practices that were contradictory to Islamic tenets, substituting Islamic practices and values in their place. Hence, the Acehnese, who really respected their inherited culture, also accepted Islam since Islam did not banish the local cultural traditions. Thus, Islam developed powerfully in Aceh, and even became the new identity of the Acehnese as proof of the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* i.e., that Islam is a gift for the entire universe which is one of the tenets of Islam.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be seen that the ritual of *kenduri* after death has been in existence and part of the culture of the Acehnese since the time before Islam

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<sup>43</sup>Nurhada Widiani, "Pergumulan Islam dengan Budaya Lokal: Studi Kasus Masyarakat Samin di Dusun Jepang Bojonegoro," in *Theologia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2015.

arrived in Aceh. When Islam came, the scholars who introduced it did not banish these rituals but they changed them in accordance with Islamic tenets: The contradictory practices were substituted with Islamic prayers and recital of verses from the Al Quran.

The ritual of *kenduri* after death is believed to contribute rewards to the bereaved family and is regarded as a social ritual that must be done. Not following this ritual is considered as neglecting to follow ones ancestral heritage or customs, which can lead to social ostracism. The acculturation process resulted in new and unique traditions. These traditions are a form of local genius, which is accepted by Islam and by the Acehnese people as the intertwining between both. Thus, such rituals only exist in Aceh and not in other Islamic areas such as Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries, which have no such traditions. The acculturation enabled Islam to develop within the Acehnese community. The Acehnese accepted Islam in part because they could still practice their traditional rituals.

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