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\*Corresponding author: Abdul Manan,  
Department of Islamic History and  
Culture, Adab and Humanities  
Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-  
Raniry, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia  
E-mail: [abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id)

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Sandro Serpa, Sociology, University  
of the Azores, Ponta Delgada  
Portugal

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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Paddy cultivation rituals in South Acèh, Indonesia: An ethnographic study in West Labuhan Haji

Abdul Manan<sup>1\*</sup>, Cut Intan Salasyiah<sup>2</sup>, Syukri Rizki<sup>3</sup> and Chairunnisak Chairunnisak<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract:** Paddy serves as a staple food that sometimes receives special, unique appreciation from its consumers and producers. This study discusses cultivation rituals practiced as *adat* in Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh villages in West Labuhan Haji, South Acèh district. In these villages, the farmers still feel an urge to treat paddy as instructed by the *adat*, which is now on the brink of extinction over unstoppable modernity. The data forms are paddy-related myths and all rituals held until harvest. The findings reveal that since farmers believe paddy is of the exact origin as humans, it is metaphorically regarded as a human child. The belief is based on the myth of the Prophet Adam sacrificing his daughter's soul to gain the first paddy seeds. This belief has become a constituent part of Aneuk Jamee agrarians in the sites of this study. A series of rituals to boost harvest outputs can curb pest attacks. Some taboos have to be taken into account, from paddy planting to its storing in the granary to keep its *seumangat* (life spirit), thus making it full of *beureukat* (blessing) that can satisfy hunger and reduce consumption.

**Subjects:** South East Asian Studies; Islam - Religion; Cultural Studies; Subcultures

**Keywords:** *adat*; *beureukat*; cultivation ritual; *seumangat*; South Acèh

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Abdul Manan is an associate professor at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. His research interests are anthropology, cultural studies, and ethnography.

Cut Intan Salasyiah is a senior lecturer at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. Her research interests are mathematics, educational management, and Islamic studies.

Syukri Rizki is a junior lecturer at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry. His research interests are philology, cultural studies, and communication.

Chairunnisak Chairunnisak is a junior lecturer at Politeknik Pertanian Negeri Payakumbuh. Her research interests are agronomy and horticulture. Our article is expected to contribute to the cultural studies and agriculture as the paddy cultivation paddy rituals we revealed to serve as a means to sustain a tradition, togetherness, and farming technique.

## PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

As a staple food, paddy has an essential position for its communities, whose cultivation frequently involves particular rituals. The ritual practice is inseparable from the communities' culture, religion, and social aspects. Recently, modernity has been gradually threatening the practice as many paddy farmers tend to collect their yields automatically and instantly using the machine. Admittedly, the preserved paddy cultivation method so far could boost the communities' togetherness and strengthen the tradition. With this in mind, the authors attempted to investigate the still existing agricultural rituals. The results showed that paddy bears a resemblance to human children that requires attentive treatment for its growth, generating emotional connection with the communities. Other social implications have been presented in this article.

## 1. Introduction

The paddy ritual is seen as an integration of ancient animist elements and Islamic teachings (Magiman et al., 2020). It still exists in the modern Acèh, although some purist movements, worried about its uncertain Islamic basis, attempt to discourage its practice. Various paddy rituals among Muslim agricultural societies indicate older forms of practices that have been transformed, substituted, and overlaid with Islamic mythology and tradition, especially the myths of the paddy creation in Indonesia. Those myths have been standing the test of time and transmitted freely across generations.

The myths were, and are, responsible for the people's beliefs about the origin of paddy. In Acèh, Indonesia, farmers generally believe that the light of the Prophet Muḥammad or *Nūr Muḥammad* is from which paddy found its form. Even all complex universe components have one origin: his *rūh* (soul) collectively (Hoskins, 1989). Thus, being created intentionally from divine sources, none of the creatures exists in veins.

Another myth that made paddy planting a sacred act is the belief that Prophet Adam was once given paddy seeds to plant. As the supply ran out, Allāh commanded him to sacrifice his daughter—some farmers believe it was a son—to get a collection of new seeds. Such a belief might plausibly be traced to an Acèhnese literary text dubbed *Hikayat Asay Padé* (Story of the Origin of Rice). In the *hikayat*, the paddy names are mentioned, only they are names of one single son of Prophet Adam, not a daughter or daughters. Such different names believed by the people indicate various sources being referred to, clouding our judgment of the actual names of the daughters. This belief explains why paddy cultivation was considered a “devout” work (Kreemer, 1922). It is a practice not innovated by humans but taught by Allāh.

Rosmawati, a farmer in Blang Poroh, argued Prophet Adam discovered paddy. Over Allāh's command, he sacrificed his daughter and received paddy seeds from her body. Allāh then revealed to him the steps to grow the source. The stages of cultivation rituals in Acèh today are inextricably related to the story of Adam and Eve's farming experience. First, Adam invoked Allāh for guidance for cultivation steps; Allāh subsequently taught him some procedural steps of planting, harvesting, and threshing the paddy before cooking it. He also guided him in performing rituals to heal the crop and protect it against pests. It so happened that Adam forgot his first guided cultivation experience, and he then prayed to Allāh to direct him. We can note that in Acèh, the *adat* practiced by the paddy ritual specialists in Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh today is believed to mirror the divinely guided steps exemplified by Prophet Adam. *Adat* is frequently translated as a mere customary law across the Indonesian archipelago. Yet, for Acèhnese, it has to be in conjunction with Islamic sharia, though Snouck Hurgronje insisted on separating the two (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2007). Generally perceived, as long as the sharia does not overtly prohibit an *adat* practice, it is religiously not mistaken to preserve its existence. Contrarily, at some points, the Acèhnese people even reckon the law failed to integrate the Islamic tenets within the communities and signify their Muslim dignity (Manan, 2020; A. Manan & Salasiyah, 2021), which makes it less power to shift the strong *adat* implemented.

Up to the present, we can still find paddy farming communities in Acèh that perform specific treatments to cherish paddy. For instance, traditionally, the paddy cultivation season has to fit its period as stipulated in the seasonal calendar of Acèh (Manan, 2014). Should the cultivation fall on dates of other events, the farmers would suffer from crop failure (Daud & Cut Adek, 2010). Farmers would draw boundary lines on the ground enclosing the paddy field and recite incantations to curb pests (Kreemer, 1981). The lines of *uréh lakseumana* (magical lines to protect something from misfortune) can be made by simply scratching the ground surface or laying certain tree branches. Thus, paddy cultivation has significance beyond the basic need for daily consumed staple food (Asyura Manan & Ruhamah, 2020), and it is an *adat* inseparable from Acèhnese agricultural life.

The *adat* of cultivation in the sites of this study- Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh village-and other Acèhese villages are identical (Hanum, 2011), although sometimes terms used to refer to one single thing are different. For example, a rectangular paddy field in Blang Poroh is called *pirieng*, while it is generally known in Acèh-precisely areas of Acèhese language speakers-as *yôk umong*. Usually, a paddy field can accommodate the cultivation of eight liters of unhusked paddy. The field invariably has the same shape and is surrounded by banks called *ateueng*. Acèhese people generally know two different types of agricultural land: rainwater-fed areas and irrigated paddy fields. For the first type of farming, all activities are dependent entirely upon the seasons. All events, from seed sowing in the seedbeds to the planting into the field, ought to be in harmony with the seasonal calendar to avoid undesirable disturbances such as pests.

Although the paddy field depends primarily on rain seasons, cultivation is also doable in the dry season. In Blang Poroh, most paddy fields are of the first type due to prolonged unsolved problems with the irrigation system. Stated another way, the farmers synchronizing their farming activities with the seasonal changes is urgent.

A notable issue is that two types of land for paddy fields are known to the Acèhese. If the place is dry, it is called *ladang*, whereas it is wet, it is a *sawah*. Both types are also known in West Labuhan Haji. Explained further, *sawah* usually sits on flat, low-lying areas, whereas *ladang* is perched on hillsides. *Ladang*, a patch cleared from potentially secondary growth, has high fertility in its thick soil layers. What distinguishes *ladang* from *sawah* is the variety of seeds planted. In *ladang* is produced a dry-land variety that is more pest-resistant and stronger. The planting method herein is called *teumajôk* or *tajôk*; it is the way people scatter the seeds on the ground considered proper for planting. Before scattering, several holes are usually already prepared so that the seed can be thrown into them. During the *teumajôk*, male and female farmers usually do different tasks but work hand in hand. The men first dig some holes using a wooden stick called *dugay*. The women then insert the paddy seeds into the holes, which have already been soaked for roughly one day. Lastly, the holes are covered with soil to deter predation, especially by birds. The planting of peanuts also adapts this method; only it skips the soaking step before insertion into holes.

The number of *yôk* usually measures the size of paddy fields. One *yôk* is a patch that requires one *naléh* (32 kg) of paddy seeds. One wet paddy field usually makes up a half *yôk*, dubbed *siblah yôk umong*. A smaller size commonly found is a quarter of the *yôk*, called *sisukée umong*. Based on the cultivating methods employed, the people categorized paddy fields into three types. The first one is called *umong ie peneuék*, an irrigated area sitting adjacent to, or on the bank of, a water stream, thus making use of the water from it. Plowing is required for this type before cultivation. The second type is a muddy field located on flat, low-lying land that barely requires rainfall. The area can be prepared with plowing or hoeing. Another type is a swampy field where the mud layer is thicker than the second type. Hoeing is the most frequent method to clear out the weeds in this field. Occasionally, buffaloes are penned in the area to trample the muddy ground repeatedly, thus making it ready to cultivate; this phase is called *publôh* (Nyak Pha, 1989). Although using tractors is more practical to save time, some farmers still use environmentally friendly buffaloes and cause no pollution.

In plowing land, farmers need to get through at least three phases. The first phase is growing seeds in seedbeds (*seuneulông*). For this, two weeks are required. The plowed patch is then left for some days to let the mud cover the weeds. After that, farmers have to plow for the second time to overturn soil clods; this phase is called *balék cak*. The soil clods have yet to be broken into smaller pieces, while the remaining weeds have to be yanked out. The finishing step is to plow the land to prepare it entirely for planting. In the next stage, the flooded muddy ground still needs flattening. A wooden implement is repeatedly pulled across the land surface; an iron harrow is finally used to finish the flattening.

Unique rituals of paddy planting can be found in agricultural communities throughout Indonesia. Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh villages in South Acèh are no different. A ritual is deemed a routine performed following specific patterns (Rothenbuhler, 2006). It is subject to spiritual belief and has much to do with symbolic communications via verbal and non-verbal media. Rituals can be defined as voluntarily performed routines based on appropriate patterns (Iskandar & Iskandar, 2017). However, the degree of appropriateness is entirely subjective and may change over time.

The rituals in the two villages are believed to uphold Islamic teachings that are seriously worth preserving. Given the significance of cherishing local wisdom in Acèh, this paper will discuss the rituals surrounding paddy planting, and the routines carried out before paddy seeds, during the growth period, and when harvesting.

## 2. Literature review

Deference towards paddy is apparent in communities where it is their staple food. Linking the paddy with immateriality reflects how the people trust their lives on it. It is essential to look at the relationship between paddy and humans in agricultural communities in and outside Indonesia.

Studying religious practices on Iriomote island, Guerreiro (1995) highlighted that the community life there had been concerned much over agricultural practices since the fourteenth century. A cultivation cycle of grain crops (e.g., paddy and millet) results in the calendar listing yearly rituals in the community. The time frame formed because of agricultural activities determines when major festivals should occur, especially during the first and second harvest periods (Pūri and Shici) within a year. In the second harvest period, in particular, people gather to perform the *Sonai* ritual in which they make a raft of banana stems loaded with various offerings. The priestesses from the highest-ranking of the shrine—the most vital element at the community level—then bless the raft with prayers before people may send it off to the sea. The released raft is believed to have carried away negative influences, one of which is the pests of the paddy. An ancient eco-cultural ritual in Kerala, *Mundiyāṅkalasam*, which has been somewhat futilized due to socio-cultural and ecological changes, is briefly discussed by Jossie and Sudhir (2012). It is a ritual performed as worship of a deity called *Mundiyān*. He is believed to be the deity of cattle. His ire is something the people attempt to avoid through the recital of hymns extolling him in the ritual. Owners of the cattle usually act as priests leading the entire process. It is said that the worshipped deity would descend and consume the offerings being presented. By propitiating him that way, people may feel optimistic about getting their cattle protected and increasing crop yields. Agricultural activities will then start a few days after the ritual.

The belief in such an invisible force determining the quality of farming results is also present in Ayutthaya (Yoo-In, 2011). The rice growers there believe that both living and unliving entities carry a life force called *khwan*. And the entity that grants protection to their crop is the Rice Goddess known as Mother Phosop. The ritual for her is called “the calling of *khwan* of the Rice Goddess. It is performed twice; first, as the crop begins to produce grain, and secondly when the harvested grain is prepared to be stored in the granary. A good harvest suggests the ritual’s success in that the Goddess is already well-treated. Nevertheless, the machinery used nowadays offering the practicality of satisfying results has deprived the people of the practice. It retains currency because the people are aware of the limit of agricultural technology, which cannot ensure the crop is safe from unpredictable threats such as natural catastrophes and unanticipated pests.

Studying an agricultural community in Negeri Sembilan-Malaysia, Kato (1988) highlighted an *adat* (a body of social etiquettes) that regards the paddy field as one of the most crucial components of ancestral property. The planting season is marked by the ritual of *minta doa di hulu sungai* “to pray at the headwaters,” led by a *pawang*, a magician appointed by the highest authority. This ritual takes place before the paddy fields are prepared. The seeds are blessed with incense smoke, *tepung tawar* (magical rice water), and charms during this ritual. People would march down the village for three nights at the next stage while chanting “*lā ’ilāha ’illā Allāh*,” hoping that all evil spirits could be expelled from the paddy and the people. The already blessed

seeds are ready for sowing and transplanting. During the entire cultivation process, until harvest time, incantations recited mostly sound like conversations to the spirits disclaiming intention not to harm. The harvest time is marked by some women cutting seven stalks of paddy, taking them back to the granary, and resting them in a woven bag for seven days. Those actions are meant to invite the soul of the paddy (*semangat padi*) to return home. After this, the rest of the paddy stalks could finally be cut off. This ritual is now losing its meaning, especially after the farmers are introduced to new paddy varieties not handed down from earlier generations.

Rice is the most consumed staple food in Indonesia, making the traditions concerning paddy vary greatly. In West Java, Budiharta (2019) noticed a paddy-based community called Kessepuhan Ciptagelar that is still working to cherish an ancient agricultural ritual to shun its extinction. The main idea is that the cultural landscape is constructed through the existence of a natural landscape where a cultural group resides. The community regards the paddy is created inseparable from its pests. This way, the ritual by no means functions to banish them from existence. Instead, it serves as a harmonizer, which guarantees a controlled co-existence between the pests (e.g., wild animals and microorganisms) and the crop.

In Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Saharudin (2021) observed the peasants' ritual of cultivating local paddy species. The practice goes along with the whole cultivation steps, from preparing seeds to harvesting. The most dominant feature to see during the process is the recital of incantations that indicate the paddy's human-like life. For example, after 30 days of growth, it is pregnant. The peasants regularly come to chant the charms until it is "ready to give their birth." In such a community, the need for the ritual is conditioned by the limited ability to fathom natural phenomena. Given that, the people should attempt to gain the human-nature synergy through careful treatment of non-human entities in the surroundings.

*Meratus* ethnic group in South Kalimantan insists on maintaining paddy cultivation despite exposure to alternative staple food (Rahmadani et al., 2021). The production of *lemang* (a cuisine made of glutinous rice steamed with coconut milk in the cavity of a bamboo joint), for example, is always attempted. However, recipes for other non-traditional meals are widely mastered. Unlike most agricultural communities that prefer permanent lands for planting, paddy cultivation of this ethnic group member (locally termed *manugal*) only takes place in the field whose fertility is already checked. This way, the chosen planting land may change over the years.

Consequently, they have to do forest clearing multiple times (*panabasan*, cutting down trees). Hence, a particular ritual needs to be conducted to curb the wrath of the spirits dwelling on some giant trees so that they are not upset with the activity and are pleased to evacuate to other trees. Remarkably, there are plants known as *tanaman kebun langit* (heavenly garden plants) grown together with the paddy, such as *Curcuma* and *cordyline*, to protect the paddy from its pests. The yields obtained after harvest and stored in the granary are purified through *aruh bawanang*; only after that is the paddy ready for consumption.

The paddy-based communities share a similarity in that they associate the crop with the immaterial, natural force beyond the reach of the advanced agricultural industry. The more practical cultivation method enabled by the technology is welcomed to some extent and attempted not to infringe upon the already established traditions. Be it as it may, an unfulfilled gap may concern the question of the origin of the people's belief in such a non-physical realm. The current study paper serves to fill the gap by proving that Islam provides virtually all bases on which an agricultural community is committed to sustaining paddy cultivation rituals up to this moment.

### 3. Methods

This study employs descriptive-qualitative methods. Primary data were collected in Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh, two villages in West Labuhan Haji, South Acèh. Most villagers there depend on farming as their main livelihood. We employed three techniques to collect the data: observation,



interview, and in-depth discussion. The first technique was conducted on each ritual related to paddy planting in the two villages. We recorded essential data of the ritual steps manually for practicality and convenience. The second one, the interview, was carried out with ritual specialists, who, according to the locals' testimony, are deeply experienced in presiding over the rituals. These persons are appointed traditional *adat* positions and are sufficiently informed about the details of the practice. There are *imām* who are referred to when it comes to religious prescribed laws. *Mukim* is a unit consisting of several villages as sub-units; for both are heads appointed. And *keujruen blang* is a title given to those mandated to care for agriculture-related activities. The informants were aged between 50 to 70 during the data collection. We consulted them because of their extensive exposure to the rituals, as confirmed by their fellow villagers. As we obtained the informants' permission to publish their data, we could list their names and social status, as shown in Table 1.

An in-depth discussion was carried out with farmers to garner supporting data. Interviews and discussions were in the Acèhnese and Jamèe languages. We quoted from them some frequently recited prayers, charms, and incantations. We provide the English translation as close as possible for non-English terms and excerpts throughout this paper. The interviews and discussions investigated how the farmers conceive the rituals, i.e., how the traditions express their worldviews (*Weltanschauung*). A triangulation technique was used; this step entails data reduction, presentation, and verification. Of no less importance is the involvement of a philological approach, which necessitates knowledge of ancient communities in a broad sense (Ziolkowski, 1990) to support the paddy cultivation rituals' origins obtained from the written records of the agricultural community.

#### 4. Results

Islamic values strongly influence all aspects of people's lives in West Labuhan Haji. Their livelihood is mainly secured by traditional farming, whose agricultural procedures typically consist of four stages: seeding, planting, harvesting, and post-harvesting. The majority of male and female farmers we consulted believe paddy originated from a daughter of Prophet Adam. Her life was sacrificed so that she could turn into a source of her parents' livelihood. The farmers know the

**Table 1. Informants consulted for the study**

Traditional authority units		Informants	Sex	Age	Social position
Villages	Blang Poroh	Teungku Hasbi	M	70	<i>Imām</i> (religious clerk)
		Ibnu Hayan	M	55	Village head
		Suma	M	64	<i>Keujruen blang</i>
		Asmi	F	67	<i>Keujruen blang</i>
		Gempa Alam Sudin	M	60	<i>Keujruen blang</i>
		Marzuki	M	61	<i>Keujruen Blang</i>
		Ansari	M	64	Farmer
	Kuta Ibôh	Teungku Amir Daud	M	68	<i>Imām</i> (religious clerk)
		Hamdan	M	52	Village head
		Muhammad Pudin	M	60	<i>Keujruen blang</i>
		Rusli	M	63	<i>Keujruen blang</i>
		Halimah	F	69	Farmer
Mukim	Blang Keujruen	Muajir	M	70	<i>Mukim</i> Head
	Blang Baru	Mukhtar	M	67	<i>Mukim</i> Head
	Kuta Trieng	Ali Zamzami	M	67	<i>Mukim</i> Head

daughter's name variously. One farmer calls her Sinur Qadim Cinta Raḥmān, while another farmer calls her Nurmani. Other farmers address her Pho Kujamadah and Simeulue. Still, there is a farmer who believes her name is Nurhayati. All the mentioned names are female names. However, the daughters' names, as acknowledged by Acèhnese people in general, might differ from one another.

The myth responsible for the various names of paddy also provides instructions on how paddy should be treated before and after cultivation season. However, based on the findings, this section is devoted to zooming in on the *adat* practiced during paddy planting, growth, and harvesting in the two study sites mentioned earlier.

#### The *adat* of paddy planting

Three weeks after the paddy has been planted in the field, people gather for a porridge feast called *khanduri kanji*. At this stage, all wild weeds around their stems have already been removed from the seedbed.

“For now, the paddy requires kanji porridge, just like a small child who can only eat porridge. That’s why we don’t serve rice to the paddy but porridge,” said an informant in Kuta Ibôh.

To clarify, here is the description of how the porridge feast was structured in Kuta Ibôh annually up to the present. The feast took place on a *matang*, an area of higher ground in the middle of a paddy field that looks like an island. The main ingredient of the porridge is rice, mixed with coconut milk, sugar, salt, pandan leaf, and water. This composition is more modest than that of porridge served on ‘*Asyūrā*’ (the tenth day of Muḥarram month), which should be made of various grains and nuts. A type of porridge quite similar to this planting paddy porridge is served in the feast on tree blossoms. The difference is that every farmer makes the paddy planting porridge in their houses.

One week before the feast, the paddy specialist in Kuta Ibôh instructs all farmers to bring porridge and cash of IDR 2000 on the day. To schedule the *khanduri* time, the chief and the *imām* of Kuta Ibôh, and other village elders must first reach a consensus. Once agreed, the invitation to the porridge feast would be disclosed after *Jum’at* (Friday) prayer, where all village men gather. On the *khanduri* day, all farmers cook porridge in their houses. The porridge is then poured into *rantang* (a set of stacked containers carrying ready-to-eat food). Usually, two sets of stacked containers should be prepared. One is filled with unsweetened porridge, while the other might contain porridge cooked with sugar and salt. The farmers then carry both *rantang* and the money to a *matang* in the middle of the paddy field. The *rantang* and money would be handed to the paddy specialist assistant. All unsweetened porridges brought by the farmers would be collected into one big lidless tin and positioned in front of the Qur’ān reciters. The reciters’ sitting position forms a circle, and the tin is put in its center. Those farmers’ sweetened porridges are also poured into another big lidless container, awaiting the Qur’ān recitation to finish.

After that, to mark the start of the *khanduri*, the *imām* burns incense. The rising smoke of the incense is followed by the *imām* commencing the recitation of *sūrah Yā Sīn* (QS 36:1–183), and other reciters follow him finishing the whole 183 verses of the *sūrah*. This *sūrah* is so particular that it is regarded as “the heart of the Qur’ān” (Ali, 2001). Its recitation is believed to supply the porridge with a special force to protect the paddy against diseases. It is believed to be able to discomfort pests and make caterpillars that attack paddy leaves feel unbearable heat, inducing them to desert the field. These locals commonly recite the Islamic chants for particular purposes, including to keep away outbreaks (Manan et al., 2021). *Sūrah Yā Sīn* seems to fit almost all occasions, given the frequency of the *sūrah* reciting, either individually or in groups.



The following Qur'ānic verses recited are *sūrah al-Fātiḥah* (QS 1: 1–7) once before they repeat the *tahlīl* utterance (*lā ilāha illā Allāh* “there is no god but Allāh”) fifty times. The *imām* finally reads aloud a prayer that closes the series of recitations of the sacred texts. The prayer ought to be structured sequentially into four parts:

- (1) Reciting *hamdalah* (Praise of Allāh) and sending *salāh* and *salām* (salutation) to Prophet Muḥammad and his household
- (2) Imploring Allāh for good destiny in the current and future, protection from catastrophes, and eternal blessing
- (3) Asking Allāh to forgive their teachers, parents, grandparents, neighbors, friends, and all Muslims in the world, both the living and the dead ones
- (4) Entreating Allāh to listen and answer the prayer

After reciting each utterance of the *du'a* (prayer), the *imām* pauses to let all attendants respond by saying *āmīn* (O Allāh, accept our invocation). After the *du'a* recitation is over, they read aloud *sūrah al-Fātiḥah* together.

After that, the paddy specialist delivers a short speech. Opening the address, he praises Allāh and recites *shalawat* and *salam* to Prophet Muḥammad. He then conveys gratitude to the committee that has organized the meeting and all attendants who have come to partake. Next, he explains some precautions that the villagers need to carry out. He warns that cattle have to be detained from free-roaming during paddy planting. Their owners are responsible for guarding them. If a goat or a sheep penetrates the farm, the cattle should be caught, and its owner has to hand out IDR 100,000 (around USD 7) as compensation. And if a buffalo does so, the amount paid would be IDR 500,000. He then touches upon several tabooed acts (*pantang*) that must be avoided:

- (1) Defecating in the stream junction is strictly prohibited to avoid “the ire of paddy.” It is said that previously paddy was as big as a coconut. Since the child offended or injured the paddy by defecating its water, the paddy turned small, punishing itself
- (2) Bringing fishing traps and fishing nets is not permitted since it might invite rats to attack the paddy
- (3) Eating and drinking while heading to the paddy field are not allowed for the farmers

The *imām* closes the sermon by warning that there are still some other taboos to avoid when the paddy is in the growth process. However, further information about the taboos will be disclosed on the day of *khanduri apam* (feast of steamed rice cake)—a feast in the middle of the paddy growth period—and on the day of *khanduri leumang* (feast of roasted glutinous rice cake)—a dinner held when the paddy is ready to harvest.

The unsweetened porridge is poured into each farmer's bucket when the speech is over. Meanwhile, the sweetened porridge is divided among all attendants. The *imām* and the Qur'ān reciters receive it first. When everyone is about to finish eating, the paddy specialist's assistant immediately hands out the money to the Qur'ān reciters. After eating, the farmers carry the unsweetened porridge in their buckets and go to their fields. It usually is already afternoon when the farmers proceed to this step. Then, certain “healing” leaves have been picked and tied together in a bunch used to sprinkle porridge onto the paddy plant. The leaves preferred for this are the leaves of the areca nut, a stalk of the leaves of mountain knotgrass (*Aerva lanata*), the leaves of patharchatta (*Bryophyllum pinnatum*), a branch of coarse grass with its roots, the leaves of spiny amaranth (*Amaranthus spinosus*), the medicinal leaves of crêpe ginger (*Cheilocostus speciosus*) and the leaves of henna (*Lawsonia inermis*). By saying *basmalah* (*bismillāhirrahīmānirrahīm*, in the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful), the porridge is

then sprinkled over the paddy as if it functions to cool down a human child. This ritual is intended to “freshen” and “feed” the paddy and drive out caterpillars from the young paddy plants (Ahmad, 1992). The wishes made through this ritual may differ from one farmer to another, depending on the paddy fields’ conditions.

Some porridge is poured into the water stream intersection from which the water flows towards the farmers’ fields. The blessing carried by the porridge would be absorbed by the growing paddy roots and circulated to its stems and leaves. The Qur’ānic verses and *tahlīl* (the chanting of *lā ‘illāha ‘illā Allāh*), which have been recited over the porridge, are believed to have the power to expel the caterpillars. The farmers in Kuta Ibôh refer to this power as *beurekat*, a word from the Arabic *barakāh*, “blessing.” In Acèhnese society, the term is usually used to describe the state of something having great usefulness and satisfaction. If the crop yields are high, but it runs out very quickly, leaving the farmers unsatiated, the *beureukah* is absent from it.

Another informant commented on the porridge pouring ritual, “The poured porridge serves as a talisman for the paddy plants. The caterpillars would not attack the paddy leaves, allowing the plant to grow well.” Some follow-up rituals will be performed should caterpillars still attack after the *khanduri kanji* is held.

If the caterpillars are still there, one farmer would pick and place them on the wild weeds growing nearby and speak to them, “your realm is here, while the paddy field is the human realm; it is the realm of Allāh.” Such a refraining from the abrupt slaying of pests also applies to animals like rats that attack paddy. Farmers would not immediately slay them but urge them to return to their realms, to the hills or the mountains. This practice is discovered in a famed manual on traditional charms called *Tāj al-Mulūk* (Al-Asyi, n.d.). It prescribes that to boot out rice ear bugs, one needs to fetch seven pieces of cucumber and wax-gourd leaves, then place seven rice ear bugs on them, and recite the incantation “*bismillāhi khairi al-asmā’i bismillāhi rabb al-‘arḍi wa al-samā’i bismillāhi al-laḥi lā yaḍurru ma’a ismihī syai’un fī al-samā’i wa huwa al-samī al-‘alīm*” (in the name of Allah, the best name, in the name of Allah, the Lord of the earth and the heaven, in the name of Allah, with whose name everything in the heaven would not become harmful, and He is the All-Hearing and the All-Knowing).

A farmer might respond differently to the caterpillars that devour the leaves of his paddy. He would take seven of them and place them on a large caladium leaf. The leaf is then floated away on the irrigation stream nearby, instructing other attacking caterpillars to leave for different places.

Another strategy is that a farmer would search for a boy whose older and younger brother had already died. The boy is known as *aneuk diapék bangké* (a child flanked by corpses). He is directed to walk on the field edgings several times. The farmer believes that if Allāh wills, the caterpillars will disappear after this ritual.

These three traditional rituals should finally be followed using modern pesticides, dubbed *ubat ulat*, which the farmers spray above the growing paddy. Nevertheless, the farmers notice that the pesticide does not kill the caterpillars but only poisons them for a while. As the pesticide smell fades away, they can move even more aggressively. This condition would mean that the caterpillars are partially resistant to the pesticide. In the case of a fall armyworm attack, some products containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* or *profenofos* are worth trying. Further uses of scientific discoveries are subject to consultation from the agricultural extension officers.

#### The *adat* of paddy’s growth monitoring

During the growing period, the farmers often visit the paddy field. It is believed that the more the farmers come, the more fertile the paddy will grow. The visit should occur after mid-day. This

*adat* mirrors the state of a human baby who still sleeps in the morning and wakes up after mid-day (Abdullah, 1993). Therefore, the paddy is surmised to be still sleeping and not yet visited in the morning. Among whom were our informants, Ansari and Halimah, female farmers will more often do the recurring visits up until harvest time. As they arrived at the paddy field, they would recite a prayer for the paddy as follows.

As she wanders on the paddy field edges, she recites this prayer multiple times, wishing the paddy to thrive and its grains to multiply on stalks. For her, it is better to visit every day because the paddy would be happy if “its mother” came.

“I can see that they look happy and wave their stems, not because of the blowing breeze but because of the visit and praise,” said she. One male farmer says, “As you walk through a field of mature paddy plants, you can feel their ‘*seumangat*’ (spirit of life).”

People believe the *seumangat* of paddy is just like a human soul. It needs gentle treatment and must not be displeased; otherwise, the harvest could be unsatisfying (Hamid, 2010).

The previous informant added, “it is no wonder that when the field is full with growing paddy, none is afraid of traveling at night.”

Another female farmer recites a slightly similar prayer as she visits her paddy field:

Her husband would do the same way when she could not come. The husband once said that since the paddy originated from the same sources as we are, it can clearly understand what we say. It also, he added, has the power to nourish us after it has been harvested. Both the productivity and nourishment of paddy come from its inner productive strength, its *berkat*, thanks to the sacrifice performed by Adam and Eve (Bowen, 1993). Since the paddy is believed to be created from the sacrificed human substance, people who consume rice would be nourished by the nourishing power made from the vital force (*seumangat*) and is now harbored inside the rice.

#### The *adat* of paddy harvesting

The paddy can be harvested when the nourishing power has reached maturity. The authority has to hold although the farmers cut the paddy stalks. For this purpose, the female farmers who come to the field must not be in their menstrual period, and they ought to primp and preen themselves before going out. To cut the paddy stalks from stems, a sharp thin knife whose blade is attached to a dry, slim, light wooden hilt (*glém*) is used. The edge should be strong enough to cut the stalks without breaking them quickly. This knife is also needed to separate the infant from the placenta when cutting the umbilical cord. In addition, a medium-sized stone is brought so that the paddy grain does not easily break. Worth considering is that the harvest time should coincide with the high tide because such a period could increase the farmers’ livelihood. The ritual of speaking to the paddy also takes place before one proceeds to cut the paddy, as practiced by a female farmer:

Right before she starts cutting, she adds, “now you are ready to harvest,” and “today mother picks seven stalks of you. She wants to harvest all of you but cannot carry you all together at the same time. Mother calls all your *seumangat* to return home following the seven stalks”.

The ritual of cutting seven paddy stalks (*mangantieh*) could commence by first cutting paddy stalks from the right side of the field. The harvested seven stalks are then wrapped in a cloth attached to her waist. She carries them home like she did when bringing the young paddy to the field for planting several months ago. A female farmer talks about the taboo of greeting women who carry the seven stalks on their way home because the paddy has not yet been “cooled.” That is why the seven stalks’ carriers would generally take the seldom-used ways to avoid people’s greetings. When asked why the ones who pick the seven stalks must be women, not men, the

paddy specialist said that because the paddy is like a child, its *seumangat* would follow its mother. And because she is closer to the child, she can best love it. The woman who takes the seven paddy stalks is regarded as the paddy's mother picking them up and carrying them home.

Arriving on the doorstep of her house, she greets the people inside by saying *assalāmualaikum* (peace be upon you), and the people would respond by saying *wa alaikumsalām* (and peace be upon you too). Again, she speaks to the paddy, saying that the house is its house now:

A cooling ceremony is then held to welcome the seven stalks. In this case, the tradition is equated with someone returning from a distant place (*ranto*). In Indonesian society, *ranto* is a term for foreign lands promising a better quality of life, usually gained after having a profession better than that in the native land. The same ceremony is also served for a family member who has left the house for a pretty long time for work. He is welcomed with the cooling ceremony to get him close again to his family. The ceremony is meant to “reunite” the paddy with its “sister,” the already stored paddy in the granary. Next, incense will be burnt. As the incense releases its smoke, she summons the paddy's *seumangat* by saying, “*krue seumangat*, please come back!” just like she calls back the *seumangat* of a child. After that, they are fastened together as a bunch. Half of the bunch is wrapped with a white cloth, while the other half is left open. A rope is then used to tie the bunch. She then gets a rounded half of a coconut shell that has its flesh eaten up or cleaned already and makes a hole on its pointed end. The rope ends of the bunch are then pulled through the hole. The coconut shell now looks like an umbrella for the paddy stalks. The bunch is finally hung on the top vertical line of the door frame. Only then does she blesses the paddy by saying:

The purpose of hanging the bunch of the seven paddy stalks is to allow the paddy to call the *seumangat* of other paddy stalks in the field before the time to harvest them is due. The hanging must wait for the rest of the paddy to be gathered. One family member has to watch the paddy, regarded as a child needing protection. If someone steals the bunch, he will be severely punished. To finish harvesting the rest of the paddy is not necessarily done by the paddy field owners. They may do it themselves for their fields or work hand-in-hand with their fellow farmers. To hire helpers—usually, other farmers or widows—in the village to do the work is also an option. Be it as it may, the hanged bunch of the seven paddy stalks has to remain undisturbed until the harvest work is finished. It can only be taken off after all the paddy harvested in the field has been brought home.

During the harvest period, from cutting the seven paddy stalks to the moment all paddy stalks are being cut and brought home, it is not allowed to call other people with a loud voice. Because it would invite a grain-eating spirit called *langkèsœ* to come and steal the paddy's *seumangat*; also, other farmers stated that any improper acts during the harvest period would expel the paddy's *seumangat*. Consequently, the rice supply would run out much earlier, which typically suffices for one year's consumption. The loss of *seumangat* will result in the absence of *beureukat* (blessing). Further, the head of the paddy specialists emphasized that the *beureukat*-less paddy is uncomfortable to stay with its owner and lacks nourishing power when consumed. Henceforth, the *seumangat* of paddy ought to be summoned appropriately when the paddy seeds are sown and well treated until the paddy grains are stored in the granary to enhance *beureukat*.

## 5. Discussions

Based on the findings described above, the farmers in the two research sites greatly appreciate paddy like a human child. The results suggest that the belief in its myth-based origin still holds sway now. Natsir (1983) has also reported this precise belief. Researching a paddy farming society in Samalanga (now in the Bireuen district), she too noted that paddy naming with the names of Prophet Adam's child was still extant. She noted the names: Umbah Mani, Nurami, Enceuki, and Seuseubani. However, there was no information about the child's gender referred to by the people. Simply put, the belief that paddy was created from the sacrificed daughter of Prophet Adam has

become a constituent part of the *adat* of Aneuk Jamee in Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh villages and the Acèhnese in general.

Worth mentioning here is a written record that confirms the existence of the myth in the agricultural community. A manuscript in Pedir Museum Banda Acèh (Figure 1), for example, devotes some pages to narrating the story of the paddy names. The tale gently persuades the farmers not to forget to call the names when they prepare the paddy seeds, cultivate them, and harvest the grain to expel misfortune.

The planted seeds need 44 days to grow in seedbeds before being transplanted into the paddy field. If the growth within 44 days reaches 30–40 cm, they are ready to move (Hoessein, 1970). Upon close inspection of the Acèhnese society, one will notice the ubiquity of the number 44. This practice is similar to the locals' ritual of pregnancy and childbearing (Manan, 2021). A 44-day growing process applies to developing human body formation in the womb; a mother and her baby would move from their initial room to another one 44 days after giving birth. Also, on day 44, a ritual called *tron tanoh* (stepping foot on the earth) is conducted to let the newborn baby set foot on the ground for the first time (Marianthi et al., 2017). The mother will take a unique bath, that is a whole-body purification from *nifās* (post-partum bleeding) (Zuhra et al., 2018).

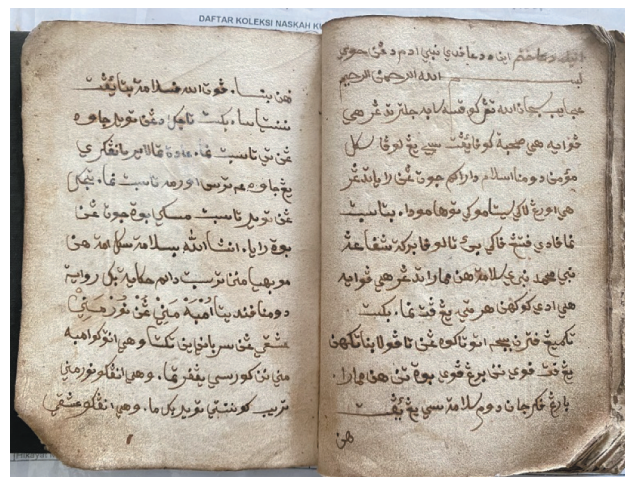
Moreover, the period is the brief hiatus after someone's burial before a tombstone can be erected. The family would gather his clothes for the deceased and insert them into a folded mat placed in the living room. Incense is then burnt alongside. This ritual is meant to welcome the soul of the deceased that returns home until day 44.

In the paddy cultivation process, it is immediately noticed that it mirrors the human life cycle, from pregnancy, infancy, and growth, to adulthood, as Manan (2017) coins. The seeds harvested replace the seeds sown, just as children—particularly the daughters—replace the mother. Nonetheless, for the paddy lifecycle, it is preferable to regard that the “birth” of the would-be harvested paddy could bring about the “death” and the “rotting” of the already sown and grown paddy seeds (Platenkamp, 1988). Suffice it to say that the period of planting until post-harvesting resembles the human life phase that starts in the mother's womb.

Growing paddy is a process that barely requires significant human intervention. A part that constitutes the essence of all the rituals mentioned above is the human-like nature of paddy and its power that could satisfy human hunger, thus reducing consumption. This appreciation of paddy can be understood by knowing its significance as a staple food and the myth about its previous human form that was later made non-human through a sacrifice.

**Figure 1. A double-page spread of the manuscript MS. PM. 001/2014.**

In Pedir Museum Banda Acèh, Acèh, where the paddy myth is mentioned





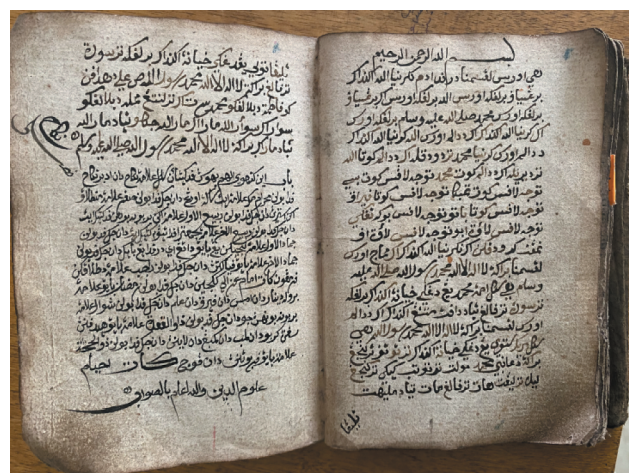
For some farmers who cannot manage to visit the paddy field very often, the ritual of drawing *uréh lakseumana* boundary lines can be an option to let the crops grow under unseen protection. The manuscript MS. PM. 001/2014 as shown in Figure 2, provides an example of enchantment to be read when scratching the ground or laying logs to close off all sides of the field. Performing this particular ritual is not binding to all farmers, and those who consider its effectiveness may accomplish it individually (Asyura Manan & Ruhamah, 2020). Additionally, *uréh lakseumana* is also drawn by some to protect villages from pandemics and enemies, to safeguard homes from witchcraft and thieves, and to expel demons from women who have just given birth (Ibrahim, 1977). Certain incantations need reciting to supply the boundary lines with the protective power.

The term *lakseumana* is somewhat reminiscent of an episode in *Ramayana* story. Narratively, Sita Dewi was worried about her husband, Rama, who chased a golden deer for her in a jungle (Yusof, 2015). Suddenly hearing her husband calling for help, she forcefully asked Laksamana (Rama's brother) to go after him. Laksamana then left her protected inside a magical circle he drew. Since the belief in the boundary lines' extraordinary power resonates with this Hindu story scene, it is very likely that the Acèhnese people were ever exposed to it and then Islamized it while still trusting its protective trait. The Rama story was once known in Acèh as *Hikayat Seri Rama*. Remarkably, Nūruddīn Al-Rānīrī, the mufti serving the 13th sulṭān of Acèh, Sulṭān Iskandar Sānī (r. 1637–1647), in his work on Islamic jurisprudence, *Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaṭqīm*, precisely when discussing cleanliness and purification, stated that it is permissible to use the papers of the *hikayat* text to clean the body from dirt unless the name of Allāh is written on them (Hashim et al., 2014). Indeed, he was renowned for his orthodoxy in warning people about dangers that could lead to the unforgivable sin in Islam, *syirk* (polytheism). The *hikayat*'s attribute of a non-Islamic element, Hinduism, might be the reason for his approval for such use of its papers.

The juxtaposition of the human life cycle and the life cycle of paddy brought an interesting perspective. It was apparent that the people living in the research sites regarded paddy as a unique entity as if the plant belonged physically and emotionally to their society. Such an appreciation is crystallized as an obligation to perform rituals besides the necessary technical acts of the cultivation process. Ritual practice is not meant to oppose the technical acts, but it is on a continuum of action from the purely technical to the strictly symbolic ones (La Fontaine, 1985). The religious values within society also support such an idea. Islamic teaching points out that the paddy is a part of God's creation that can be used for human prosperity, which must be respected as God's creature. The value of respecting paddy as they respect their relatives became a key to its so-called "sustainable cultivation."

**Figure 2. Instance of *Uréh Lakseumana* incantation in the manuscript.**

MS. PM.0011/2014 in Pedir Museum Banda Acèh, Acèh





Sustainable cultivation is becoming an increasingly urgent issue in agricultural science. For it is agrarian societies—besides sedentary and horticultural ones with a need for hunting and gathering within their close surroundings—that have been observed for a long time to sustain resources and conserve biodiversity (Gadgil et al., 1993). In the era of global environmental problems, climate change, and degrading natural resources, sustainable cultivation for food production has become one of many challenges modern farmers frequently face (Singh & Singh, 2017). They need to be skeptical about the harmful effects of pesticides and fertilizers since the devastation of the environment results from excessive, uninformed use of them, which adversely affects soil fertility. Another problem is soil erosion. As the population rises, resulting in more occupied lands, farmers might benefit from remaining erosion-prone hillsides. Sufficient knowledge of such an environmental condition is necessary to avoid crop failure.

As practiced by the people of Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh, traditional rice cultivation proffers an indulgent alternative to soil cultivation. The way people controlled the pest, as described before, was a fascinating instance of how local wisdom protects the paddy without harming the environment. This local wisdom resulted from the intertwining of native beliefs with Islamic tenets, which advises that every creature must be duly respected and informs those religious beliefs had an essential impact on sustainable cultivation. Here, the traditional values associated with the religious dogma encourage the perseverance of the environment as people were taught that all of God's creatures count and deserve proper treatment.

When interrogated more profoundly, both agricultural technology and the rituals agree on the same aims, to obtain good harvests and prevent the destruction of the crop. With this in mind, farmers performing rituals in the two villages should not be seen as evidence of a lack of agricultural knowledge. Instead, the tradition operates in conformity with natural norms to avoid agricultural hazards beyond the farmers' anticipation, e.g., floods and pests. Therefore, to use pesticides after the rituals does not nullify the urgency of the latter, nor does it show better effectiveness of the former. Instead, when it comes to gaining maximum harvest, the farmers are aware enough to make the best of all possible techniques, including pleasing nature, besides utilizing scientific breakthroughs.

Another issue related to sustainable cultivation is biodiversity conservation. Modern cultivation has to some degree, exploited nature for greater production output. Then, to gain a more significant yield at a lower cost, modern agricultural scientists develop genetically modified paddy seeds. This genetic technology has been widely introduced in Asia since the '90s (Xu & Jeffrey, 1988). This breakthrough seemed to be a significant advance to boost the crop's quality and quantity for a short time. With rising competition from the global market, even traditional farmers who want to stay competitive would consider the adoption of newer technologies (Sassenrath et al., 2008). In this respect, the Convention on Biological Diversity was held in 1992 to address issues on food security, which is allegedly threatened by losses of biodiversity. Among the agreements reached in the convention is a call to consider the urgent preservation of plant genetic resources and traditional cultivating knowledge (Ammann, 2007). As part of the traditional knowledge of cultivation still preserved in Blang Poroh and Kuta Iboh, the people only cultivated the local strain of paddy as they knew it was the most suitable grain for their area.

Inevitably, traditional farming has gained more attention in agricultural science in recent years. Within the paddy cultivation area, it was revealed that the production output is not the only factor to consider. Health, nutritional value, and taste must also be regarded as cultivating certain paddy strains (Kumari, 2016). Furthermore, the suitability of local climate and soil conditions should not escape the consideration. Awareness of these notions is mirrored in Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh, where the local farmers persist in cultivating their unique paddy strain and prefer local cultivation techniques.

These facts suggest by no means the farmers' ignorance of agricultural innovations. Thus far, their indigenous knowledge, especially as it pertains to rituals, is preserved not to work against

technological advancements. We can notice them utilizing tractors to speed up the plow and chemicals to control pests. However, such technology adoption proceeds quite gradually due to financial constraints. The newly fashionable trend toward traditional cultivation methods and techniques provides further opportunities for conventional farmers and agricultural researchers to study the benefit of the usual cultivating methods based on local culture. Such farming brought a critical advantage for developing sustainable cultivation (Ba et al., 2018). It was evident that the local cultivation method got an environment-friendly alternative for sustainable cultivation.

The series of paddy cultivation *adat* practiced in Blang Poroh, and Kuta Ibôh aims to obtain a satisfying harvest. During the growth process, all paddy stages ought to be secured by rituals, expecting that they can grow in pests-free fields and produce much grain to be stored in the granary. The final result is rice as the staple food with the nourishing power to sustain life. For these agricultural societies, paddy cultivation *adat* expresses the farmers' appreciation for the paddy as food and something with immaterial elements. The *seumangat* (life spirit) of paddy should be sustained until consumed for the *beureukat* to hold out, thus quelling hunger for a longer time. All-in-all, these agrarian societies still preserve the paddy cultivation rituals should necessarily be viewed as a phenomenon of their long observations of surrounding ecological systems, on which myth and Islamic belief have significant influences.

## 6. Conclusion

The native myths of the paddy origin in the studied areas constitute the basis of sustained cultivation rituals so far. As long as it is negotiable with-even confirmed by-Islam, the people in the agricultural communities do not see any reasons why they have to discontinue the practice. Although some previous studies suggest a non-Islamic influence on the paddy myth, we still lack evidence explicitly mentioning it. Instead, some ancient records in Acèh Acèhemphasize that the legend is fundamentally Islamic-based, especially concerning the genesis of the universe from the Light of Prophet Muḥammad and the origin of paddy seeds from the sacrificed daughter of Prophet Adam. While we cannot be categorical that everyone in the community is aware of the myths surrounding the cultivation seasons. We can be sure that it never becomes the main factor for the rituals to have retained currency. Nowadays, the practices seem more like a binding collective tradition each time paddy planting is about to start. Yet they are carefully guided through the procedures prescribed by ancestors. Perhaps, not many farmers or locals were sufficiently informed about the mythical background or lessons of the ritual. The selected ones for this study were hierarchically the crucial figures in the two villages (Blang Poroh and Kuta Ibôh) who played pivotal roles in organizing the ritual and fortunately still could narrate the orally transmitted story they heard from their predecessors. This condition is the most pertinent part of the information finding because most of the details in the rituals-e.g., charms and prayer utterances-have not been well-documented.

Further, the use of advanced agricultural machinery that offers simplicity could prevail quite rapidly at the expense of the tradition. That the paddy could lose its life spirit (*seumangat*) owing to unmanaged use of agricultural technology is something to avoid. Otherwise, the paddy would turn unblessed and not suffice the demanded consumption level. Therefore, the adopted improvement is conscientiously watched out by the communities so that local values can last and be passed down to the generation to come. And more importantly, this comes from collective awareness that some advancements—besides being uneasy for the locals to adapt—are not compatible with specific environmental conditions.

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## Author details

Abdul Manan<sup>1</sup>  
E-mail: [abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:abdul.manan@ar-raniry.ac.id)  
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3299-0662>  
Cut Intan Salasiyah<sup>2</sup>  
E-mail: [cutintan@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:cutintan@ar-raniry.ac.id)  
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7677-9362>  
Syukri Rizki<sup>3</sup>  
E-mail: [syukri.rizki@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:syukri.rizki@ar-raniry.ac.id)  
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9233-9866>

Chairunnisak Chairunnisak<sup>4</sup>

E-mail: [chairunnisak@politaniptk.ac.id](mailto:chairunnisak@politaniptk.ac.id)

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8585-7166>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Islamic History and Culture, Adab and Humanities Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Islamic History and Culture, the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Horticultural Crops Cultivation, Politeknik Pertanian Negeri Payakumbuh, Indonesia.

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