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**Cultural Traditions of *Khanduri Blang* in Reubee Village Aceh, Indonesia**

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## CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF KHANDURI BLANG IN REUBEE VILLAGE ACEH, INDONESIA

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### Abstract

*Before Islam was introduced into Aceh, many people there still believed in animism or dynamism or Hinduism or Bhudhism. Some parts of those beliefs still affect the local Acehnese cultures even after most of the people have become Muslim. This study describes the ritual of Khanduri Blang, as an acculturation of the people from Reubee village and surrounding villages in Pidie District between their previous cultures with their new Islamic culture: The study also looks at the reasons why the people from Reubee still perform these rituals in recent times. A religious anthropological approach was used to get plenary data about the subject. The data was collected using observations, interviews, and study of related literature. The results showed that the people living in that area performed the rituals as they believed that they would prevent dangers and harm from ghosts and spirits that live around their rice fields. Even though the people have been acculturated to Islam they still perform these ceremonies since they have been handed down as part of their culture and they still do not have sufficient comprehension of the tenets of Islam. Furthermore, the involvement of their local religious figures in the ceremonies convinces the people that these rituals do not contradict their Islamic beliefs. Then too, the use of local traditions as a medium for introducing Islam brought the understanding that such rituals were part of the traditions of Islam.*

**Keywords:** Khanduri Blang; Tradition; Culture; Acculturation



## A. Introduction

People always long for security, peace, and welfare in their lives. In reaching those expectations, people have to face various constraints and challenges, which may appear suddenly without any warning or prior predictions. Thus, people have to be ready to find solutions for such problems. Disasters such as floods, earthquakes, crop failures, and diseases are some of the problems people have to learn to live with; accordingly they will try many ways to prevent and to tackle such problems. In this modern era, traditional cultures and rituals that are inherited from the ancestors for some reason are still being preserved and performed by the people. They believe that such traditions and rituals are still effective for preventing undesirable events. Then too, these rituals are also ways to achieve peace-of-mind as the people believe they will bring them welfare, free from disasters. One such ritual performed by people in Aceh is the *Khanduri Blang* which is done before starting to cultivate rice. The ritual is believed to prevent supernatural beings, such as ghosts and spirits, from harming the rice when it grows.

People living in Reubee village in Delima sub-district in Pidie District, Aceh, still perform such rituals. *Khanduri Blang* is considered by these people as a significant ritual to prevent disaster from affecting the growing rice. Furthermore, there is also a belief amongst the people that the supernatural beings around the rice field will be angry if this ritual is not performed. Ritual offerings, such as food will be left for these supernatural creatures. Such rituals have actually been performed in the area, since the Hindu era there. so animism and dynamism and Hinduism have become infused into the Islamic tenets, which are now professed by most Acehnese people. The acculturation is shown by the prayers recited at the ceremonies, which are Islamic prayers. This proves that *Khanduri Blang* is a ritual from a previous time that has been continued from centuries ago. This ritual is a symbolic activity of the people to express their relationship to these mythical supernatural creatures (Hasbullah, 2017:85). It is done before they start to cultivate their rice fields. The transition to Islam has not abolished these rituals. Nowadays, the rituals

are even guided by the Ulama, the religious leaders or the leaders of the *Dayah*, an Acehese traditional Islamic education institution.

Sociological and anthropological studies relating to local traditions and rituals raise interesting issues. Geertz, who has done many studies of traditional ritual and religion, found that they both had a reciprocal relationship; religion and tradition influence each other (Geertz, 1992:1). Such conditions give color to Islamic culture, as different areas will possess different unique and distinctive characters depending on the way that Islam was introduced to those areas. Geertz studied the influence of local culture and tradition within people's understanding and practice of Islam. He found distinctive differences between Islam in Morocco and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, Islam was transformed to a syncretic religion influenced by local cultures that were there before it was introduced. Meanwhile, in Morocco, Islam was aggressive and enthusiastic (Geertz, 1968). A study about the relationship between religion and culture was also conducted by Sumbulah. She also discovered a strong and reciprocal influence between religion and culture which was so strong that in some cases it established a syncretic religion, which in turn, created unique varieties of religious practices in some areas according to Umami based on her studies of people from some areas of Java (Sumbulah, 2012:1). Another study of *Ritual Tolak Bala* or rituals to prevent disasters was also done with the Melayu or Malay community from Pangkalan. The rituals, which still contained Hindu and Buddhist traditional influences, were still performed by those people, even though they had been Muslims for centuries. They did not understand the contradictions of performing those ritual in the context of Islamic tenets due to their lack of knowledge. They still performed the rituals expecting that they would protect them from any harm, danger, and/or disaster (Hasbullah, 2017). A study about integration between religion and culture was also done by Nurdin who studied the tradition of *Maulud* or Celebrations for the prophet's (pbuh) birthday by the Acehese. This tradition has grown due to the integration between religion and culture in Aceh. In addition, Hasan also conducted a study about acculturation of animism and dynamism in rituals of the



Acehnese who mostly believe in Islam. He discovered that many traditional rituals were influenced by those pre-Islamic beliefs, such as the *tepung tawar* (the blessing ritual), the newly born ritual, the hair shaving ritual, the marriage engagement ritual, the *mandi safar* (the purification ritual in the month of Safar, a month in the Islamic calendar), the rituals relating to sacred tombs and rituals relating to vows. He did research amongst the Acehnese living in the Lhokseumawe area in North Aceh where he found that the people in that area still practiced rituals which contradicted the tenets of Islam, thus, education would be needed and required to purify those beliefs (Hasan, 2012:284).

Those studies revealed the connections between Islam and many aspects of the local traditions. However, none of them discussed rituals relating to agriculture. Thus, it is important to conduct a study about that subject. Furthermore, such studies can be done in different areas of Aceh, which will expand the understanding of rituals performed by all the people in Aceh. *Khanduri Blang*, a ritual for agriculture, which is performed by people living in the area of Reubee village in Pidie, is considered to be a ritual that has been influenced by previous beliefs. Hence, this research probed the essence of this ritual, including the reasons that people still perform it despite the fact that there are many *Dayah* or Islamic educational institutions in the area.

## **B. Method**

This study was conducted as a field research study. Primary data and information for this research were collected based on empirical phenomena existing in real life (Connolly, 2012:105). Data was collected by observations, interviews, and studying documents. To complement the primary data from the field, other literature related to this topic was studied and checked out. This study was a qualitative study focusing on basic principles, which have become the foundation for many human activities (Asofa, 2004:20). An anthropological approach (Rosidah, 2011:1) combined with a sociological approach (Mudzhar, 2000:31) was used for this research.



### **C. Research Finding and Discussion**

The influence of pre-Islamic cultures and traditions within Acehnese society occurs for many reasons. Before Islam, animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, were previous beliefs held by the Acehnese. Hinduism and Buddhism developed in the coastal areas as the people living there were more easily influenced by merchants and priests visiting from other countries; meanwhile animism and dynamism were practiced by people living in more remote, inland areas (Ahmad, 1992:26). Hinduism and Buddhism have really influenced the Acehnese since they have existed there for a long time: Indeed there were several Hindu kingdoms during previous times in Aceh Besar District, namely Indra Patra, Indra Purwa, and Indra Puri. Those kingdoms were located in the coastal areas as the people living there believed in Hinduism (Hasjmy, 1995: 33).

Hinduism came to Aceh from India: It was introduced by merchants coming by sea, as Aceh during that time was a strategic location for international commerce, a hub for collecting and distributing goods between the kingdoms to the east and north and the cities in the Indian region. Thus, in actuality people from India and the Acehnese have had cultural and ethnic relationships for many centuries, maybe more than a thousand years. Throughout that period, Indian merchants who came to Aceh also introduced new cultures and arts that could be practiced by the peoples of Aceh. Many of those cultures and arts developed well and the people of Aceh adapted them in accordance with their local cultures. Thus, various cultures and traditions in Aceh originated from Hindu traditions (Rijal, 2011:90).

In Aceh, people use philosophical principles as social control mechanisms, viz: "*Adat bak po teu meureuhom, hukom bak syiah kuala*" (ie. Traditions are preserved by kings, and the law is enforced by Syiah Kuala). The king referred to by that principle was Sultan Iskandar Muda (died in 1637) while Syiah Kuala was Tengku Syiah Kuala, a famous Islamic scholar who also lived in Aceh during that time. The implication of this principle is that the law in Aceh refers to Islamic law, as Syiah Kuala, an Islamic scholar, was responsible for it. Thus, all behavior that was against the tenets of Islam was



liable to result in penalties. Moreover, Islamic law implemented in Aceh has been adapted to the local culture. Thus in some cases the local culture has a greater role than the religious law (Lebar, 1972:18). The principles also denote two inseparable elements in Aceh, viz: the first law relates to culture, and the king had authority to regulate the law.

The principle also denotes the background of why culture has such a great role within the life of the Acehnese. For the Acehnese, culture is similar to regulations in governing their daily life, which is under the organization of the king. Then, it also implies that the meaning of the law refers to Islamic law. Thus, the law in Aceh is the responsibility of the *Ulama* or Islamic scholars. There are also terms relating to law such as a *qanun*, which is an Islamic law or regulation; plus there are traditional rituals and regulations for female, as well as *reusam*, which are similar regulations for males (Amal, 2004:18).

For the Acehnese, culture refers to the traditions inherited, passed down and socialized through generations within society. Furthermore, their culture has also become a foundation for their behavior as well as guidance for life, which is passed down and preserved by cultural institutions. Therefore, contiguity between their religion and their culture is inevitable. Religion exists within society embedded within culture and traditions. Those two intertwine with each other.

The assimilation of culture and tradition with religion results in Acehnese traditions. The importance of culture is reflected in a *hadih maja* (proverb), "*Mate aneuk meupat jeurat, gadoh adat pat tamita* meaning-when our children die, we know where the graveyard is, when tradition and culture die, and we will not know where to find them". This proverb really emphasizes the significance of preserving and maintaining culture and traditions as social norms for the Acehnese. The commitment of the Acehnese to enforcing law and tradition was reflected by the execution done by Sultan Iskandar Muda of his own son for breaking the traditional laws. When executing his son, the king also said, "When our children die, we know where the graveyard is, when the traditions and cultures die, we will not know where to find them" (Arifin, 2016: 25).



The people living in Reubee village in Delima sub-district are Muslims. Their religion is a source of their identity and their pride. They will feel disgraced if they are told that they are *kafee* or unbelievers. However, several rituals and traditions practiced by those people are still infused by previous beliefs from animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and/or Buddhism. There is the ritual of *Takei*, where the people put out offerings to prevent them from being disturbed by supernatural creatures. Then there is also the ritual of *Rabu Abeh*, which is performed to prevent bad luck. *Rah Ulei*, or the ritual of washing the tombstones, is also performed regularly. Those rituals are influenced by traditions and cultures carried over from before Islam (Arifin, 2016: 270). *Khanduri Blang*, a ritual performed yearly before starting to cultivate the rice fields, is included amongst the rituals containing influences of beliefs and cultures from pre-Islamic times.

### 1. The Perspective of People Living in Reubee about *Khanduri Blang*

Most people living in Reubee are farmers, and the rest are small traders and government workers. Only a few of them have high school education; most of the people prefer Islamic traditional education in a *Dayah* ie, an Islamic traditional school. Despite the fact that Islam is the only religion of those people, they still practice rituals relating to beliefs about supernatural beings; which is actually contradictive to the tenets of Islam. The people of Reubee still place amulets on the doors of their houses to prevent harm from supernatural creatures as it is expected that the amulets will bring noble spirits to protect the house. Also the people still perform *Khanduri Blang*, a ritual done before they start cultivating their rice fields. The ritual is believed to attract spirit media to give protection from supernatural beings. People living there consider that the surrounding environment, including their rice fields, can be affected by supernatural powers. Thus, the offerings and rituals are needed to ensure that the people and their fields are not harmed by these supernatural creatures.

The understanding about power possessed by supernatural creatures is based on the consideration that they can bring fortune, as well as bad luck for people. Therefore, people try to maintain a good



relationship with the supernatural dimension. Hence, there are rituals, traditions, and taboos existing within the community concerned with relating well to these supernatural creatures (Efendi, 1995:45).

In this anthropological study, rituals performed by the people are known as rites. These serve many purposes eg for getting blessings, welfare, preventing harm, bringing healing, healthy life cycles, and so on (Norbeck, 1974:40). The people living in Reubee perform *Khanduri Blang* to anticipate and to prevent any possible harm from and dangers caused by supernatural creatures. These rites have been passed down from their ancestors; people in previous times have experienced crop failure and natural disasters, and they believe that those disasters were caused by supernatural creatures/forces. These beliefs have been passed down and have been developed through many generations, hence, the fear of natural disasters and of crop failures has become the reason for performing the *Khanduri Blang* rites.

## **2. *Khanduri Blang* within the People of Reubee**

*Khanduri Blang* has been performed since the era before Islam. Badruzzaman, one of the leaders in Reubee and Head of Traditional Affairs there, has stated that the ritual was inherited from the pre-Islamic era. This is indicated by the existence of the influences of animism and dynamism within the rituals. However, there is no admonishment from the Islamic scholars there, despite the fact that there are many *dayah* (traditional Acehese Islamic schools) in the areas nearby. Even the *Teungku* (Islamic scholars) from the *dayah* also participate in the rituals.

### **a. Preparations**

*Khanduri Blang* is prepared well in humble conditions. Before the rituals, the village head (Keucik) of Reubee will organize a meeting with the leading figures concerned with cultural aspects and with the MUSPIKA (the head of the local police precinct, the head of the local military post, and the Camat, ie. the head of the Delima sub-district). In this meeting, they will work as a committee to decide when the rites will



be held, who will buy the buffaloes or the bulls to be sacrificed, when they will clean the tomb of Tengku Chik Di Reubee as the place for the event and many other technical aspects related to holding the *Khanduri Blang*. Martunis the Camat, head of Delima sub-district, stated that *Khanduri Blang* is an important yearly occasion relating to the people. They consider the ritual as a heritage that must be preserved. Many people are involved within the rituals as 17 local villages come together for the feast. Usually, ten to fifteen buffaloes are slaughtered for this occasion and the villagers work happily together to make this occasion a great success.

#### **b. Time and Place**

The celebration of *Khanduri Blang* is held before the people start to cultivate their rice fields each year. The exact day is determined in the committee meeting. The ritual cannot be held while the villagers are cultivating their fields nor after the harvesting. This is a rule that has been settled by their ancestors. They are also afraid that the supernatural creatures will do harm if the ritual is performed after they have started cultivating their fields. According to Sabri, a farmer in Reubee, *Khanduri Blang* is an obligatory ritual to prevent supernatural creatures from harming them and to protect their fields from natural disasters. Sabri told the researcher that these supernatural creatures have the power to protect or to destroy their fields.

*Khanduri Blang* is started in the morning. On the appointed day, the villagers are forbidden to go to work; it is obligatory for all male farmers to attend the ritual. Each man and boy above 10 years old has to attend it while the ladies have to stay at home; the ritual is only for men.

There are two places for the ritual: the first is for preparing the food and feast; the second is for praying at the grave of Teungku Di Reubee. Teungku Di Reubee is a famous Islamic scholar from Reubee. People consider him as a very holy person also known as a *Waliyullah*. Rusli said that while Teungku Di Reubee was alive, this Islamic scholar could go for *Salat Jumat* (the weekly prayers for men on Fridays) from Aceh to Mecca in Arabia on foot; He could do it in one day.



Hence, the people see his grave as a sacred place and they often visit it. to ask for blessings and to ask for welfare. They hope that by visiting and praying at the grave, the spirit of Teungku Di Reubee will work for them or bless them. On certain days, especially on Mondays and Thursdays, people bring *Ketan* (glutinous rice) to fulfil their vows and to perform *Salat Hajat* (certain prayers for their vows). They believe that praying at that sacred grave will ensure that their prayers are granted by Allah.

As *Khanduri Blang* is performed at a sacred place, the villagers expect that their prayers will have a positive effect and will prevent harm and natural disasters from affecting them. According to Tengku Baihaki, the principal of the Islamic School, Dayah Darul Mutaalimin, in Reubee, before the era of Islam, the people performed the ritual under the big banyan tree near the rice field. People at that time believed that powerful, strong, supernatural creatures lived in the big banyan tree. Yet, after people converted to Islam, the ritual has been performed at the graveyard of the *Ulama*. According to our analysis, this is done as a way to purify the beliefs of the people as worshipping trees is forbidden in Islam. It is also a form of acculturation of the previous culture with the new religion.

At the ritual, the people will leave the heads of the buffaloes in the middle of their rice fields. They do this to make offerings for the supernatural creatures. They believe that the spirits will come and consume these offerings.

### c. Materials

The rituals require various materials as symbols for offerings. Without these materials, the rituals cannot be performed. According to Badruzzaman, the various materials required for the *Khanduri Blang* rites include buffaloes or bulls, *pulut kuning* (glutinous yellow rice, cooked with turmeric), eggs, and *Jeruk Purut* (*Cytrus hystrix*). The buffaloes and/or bulls will be slaughtered and the meat will be cooked whilst the heads, intestines, and spleens will be made into offerings for the spirits. Then too, the *Pulut Kuning*, the eggs, and the *Jeruk Pulut* will also become part of the

offerings to the spirits along with the organs and heads of the buffaloes and bulls.

#### d. The Ritual Procession

*Khanduri Blang* is performed by all the male villagers as part of their annual traditions associated with planting their rice crops. They all come together to prepare the materials and to cook the buffaloes and bulls. As they finish cooking the meat and the rice, the male villagers will sit in circles reciting verses from the Al-quran and praying. Usually, the principal of the *dayah* leads the prayers. He will pray, asking for the soil to be fertile for cultivating their rice as well as asking for prevention from disasters and harm. As they finish the prayers, the cooked food will be shared out amongst the men who will take it home and eat it with their families. Meanwhile, the leader of cultural affairs will take some of the cooked food as offerings and place it at certain places in the rice fields, usually under big trees. A sorcerer will cast a spell with a special (unknown) language. The spell contains requests for the supernatural creatures existing there to not disturb the fields. The sorcerer also asks the supernatural creatures to protect the fields from harm and disasters.

These rites associated with giving offerings are descended from animism and dynamism. The villagers of Reubee are committed to these beliefs, as they are afraid that if these rites are not performed, then disasters and bad luck will come upon them. From the perspective of Islam, such rites are actually not appropriate for Muslims. Islam teaches about *tauhid* namely the belief in one supreme God and that it is forbidden to worship anything but Allah. However, many forms of rituals and traditions in Aceh, including *Khanduri Blang*, are still relics of previous beliefs. Many Acehnese people still believe in the power of spiritual beings, known as *tahayul*, and they still perform rites which don't conform to Islam, known as *bid'ah* (Hasan, 2012:282; Manan, 2016).

In the rites of *Khanduri Blang*, as explained by Alibasyah, a villager from Reubee, in the era before Islam, people would give offerings to the supernatural beings that lived in the rice fields as well as reciting spells.



After people converted to Islam, the spells have been supplanted by recitations from the al-Qur`an and prayers to Allah. This is a form of acculturation of previous beliefs by the new ones. The substitution, using prayers instead of spells was done by *Ulama* since previous times, after Islam was first introduced to Aceh. The Ulama did it to make the Acehnese accept Islam more easily at that time. Now, however, the purification of the tenets of Islam in Aceh is required, as most of the Acehnese have become Muslims. Thus, Islamic scholars now have a significant role to perform, to purify Islamic tenets within the people.

### 3. The Need for *Khanduri Blang* for the Villagers from Reubee Village

People living in Reubee are enthusiast about performing the *Khanduri Blang* rites even though this tradition has come down from their prior beliefs in animism and dynamism; they still hold these rites before starting to cultivate their rice fields. The implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) in Aceh seems to have had no impact on this tradition.

It is inevitable that people have a tendency to depend on supernatural powers, particularly for things that they have no power to prevent. This fact makes people search for and admit the existence of a God or in some religions, Gods. The transcendent understanding, of power beyond the self, shows that people's orientation is not merely on this perishable, certain-to-end life. People will always seek out the great power beyond themselves, the supernatural and the great forces (Atosokhi Gea, 2004: 7).

This field study revealed several motives for villagers from Reubee and surrounding villages to perform the *Khanduri Blang* rites, namely:

#### a. Preventing disasters

Villagers from Reubee said that they were afraid that if they did not perform the rites of *Khanduri Blang*, some disaster will happen to them or their fields. This belief originated from their ancestors' beliefs that such rites will prevent disasters. As the villagers hope for a peaceful and secure life, they will follow traditional ways to reach it, one of which is

performing traditional rites like *Khanduri Blang*. Thus, these rites are considered an important aspect of society. The rites involve making offerings for the supernatural creatures with the expectation that they will get prosperity, welfare and security (Purwadi, 2007:93).

Subki Ali, a village farmer from Reubee, said that people living there believed in the myths related to the *Khanduri Blang* rites. He was told that in a previous time, when his ancestors did not perform the rites, disasters like floods and attacks by hoards of pests blighted them. This caused starvation during that time, and the people suffered because of it. Thus, this traditional belief motivates the villagers to perform the *Khanduri Blang* rites.

#### **b. Maintaining Traditions**

The Acehnese are proud of their traditions: According to them, Aceh will be great as long as the people are consistent in preserving and maintaining their heritage including their traditions. Their cultural heritage has become part of the prestige and the identity of the Acehnese. This principle is reflected by a proverb, "*Matee aneuk meupat jerat, gadoh martabat pat tamita* (we know the tomb of our children when they die, yet, when we lose our dignity, we cannot find it anywhere)". This proverb indicates the respect that the Acehnese people have towards their traditions. *Khanduri Blang*, is one of the traditions left by their ancestors, which is still performed, since the local people believe it still has a positive impact. Thus, Badruzzaman has stated that maintaining this ritual is an obligation for them as part of their responsibilities to their ancestors.

#### **c. Establishing Social Solidarity**

Robertson Smith has stated that even though people have accepted new beliefs, previous rituals and traditions will still be performed to maintain social solidarity. Also a 'Paradigm Change' in beliefs is rarely an all or nothing change but usually involves step by step changes. For the village people, performing rituals is not merely connected with worship of



God, but is also part of their social obligations (Agus, 2007: 140). According to Durkheim, a system of beliefs is established starting from rituals routinely performed by people that then become a tradition. People have the need of certain rituals that emphasize mutual relationships. Based on this understanding, it can be said that beliefs may be altered and be converted, ie Paradigm Change; yet, traditional rituals will endure due to their function within society (Arifin, 2017: 14). People expect to live a peaceful and secure life after performing these rituals (Purwadi, 2007: 93).

The rites of *Khanduri Blang* are performed collectively by the villagers from Reubee. All male villagers participate in them to make the rites successful. As they are convinced that the rites are for the sake of the community; all the village men freely provide the materials and work together to make the rites a success. The *Khanduri Blang* celebration is also an occasion to re-establish social communications. There is no social status that differentiates the men, one from another during the ritual. Poor and rich work together as they make preparations and also discuss their programs for growing rice when the rites are over. So *Khanduri Blang* also becomes a forum for the villagers to discuss their needs and intentions relating to cultivating their rice fields, as well as a medium to help them solve any problems that they face.

From the perspective of the villagers, performing *kenduri* (Indonesian) or *khanduri* (Acehnese) or *khauri* (an abbreviation used in Pidie & some places in Aceh) meaning a feast has certain benefits, and is supported by the local leaders of Islam (Manan, 2015:2). *Khauri* is a tradition of the Pidie Acehnese village people; men that never participate in this tradition will be considered as arrogant and mean. Furthermore, holding a *khauri* has also become a medium for Acehnese villagers to express their feelings (Manan, 2017: 63), thus, one may be held for various types of occasions eg. for happy occasions like return from Umroh (a minor pilgrimage) or for occasions requiring condolences eg. The anniversary of the death of a close family member.

#### 4. *Khanduri Blang* within the Perspective of the Villagers from Reubee

Villagers living in the Reubee area are really concerned about maintaining traditions: Performing traditional rituals is a source of pride and honor for them. Hence, the menfolk consider men who do not attend such occasions as arrogant and feel that such men have dishonored their family traditions.

Based on the explanations above, it is clear that several rituals practiced by Acehnese villagers are influenced by previous beliefs. This indicates the acculturation process between previous beliefs and Islam. These traditions reflect the condition of the society in which they are practiced and maintained. For the Acehnese villagers, their traditions have become part of their identity, which must be maintained and preserved. Since these cultures and traditions are considered as a matter of pride, breaking them and/or harming them is forbidden and may lead to social penalties (Arifin, 2017:264).

People living in and around Reubee believe that the various traditions and rituals that exist within their culture are not contradictory to their tenets of Islam. Marwan Yusuf, a farmer there, emphasized that every tradition and culture in Aceh was in accordance with Islam. Their understanding about this may be reflected by their proverb, "*Adat ngen hukom lagei zat ngeun sifeut*" Meaning: The relationship between culture and Islamic law is just a matter of its character". Syakubat, a farmer living in Reubee, also agreed that there was no prohibition to performing the traditional rituals such as *Khanduri Blang*. He also stated that Islamic scholars from the many *dayah* (Islamic schools) around there, namely: Dayah Darul Mutaalimi, Dayah Mutidi, Dayah Bustanul Maarif, and Dayah Ruhul Fatayat, have never prohibited any of the rituals like *Khanduri Blang*. He also added that many Islamic scholars from those *dayah* also attend the various rituals. Those factors support their continued observance of the rites of *Khanduri Blang*; besides, this also indicates the lack of plenary comprehension of the people about the plenary tenets of Islam.

This phenomenon resembles the condition of the Javanese, where the mysticism of Hinduism and Buddhism have been overlaid by the tenets of Islam; indeed, they have even developed new beliefs called Jawi



(Geertz, 2004:45). Such conditions have occurred due the fact that geographically Indonesia is far from the centers of Islamic education such as Mecca and Cairo. Furthermore, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam in Indonesia was isolated from the Middle-Eastern sources of Islamic education by the colonial occupation, which made the development of Islam here more complicated. During those centuries, Islam in Indonesia had to adapt to suit local concepts, which had past influences from Hinduism and Buddhism. Zoetmulder in his study about pantheism and monotheism in Java also added that the *pesantren* (the Islamic traditional educational institution, in Aceh known as *Dayah*), actually also preserved the cultures from before Islam, especially their literary aspects. Many works of literature during that time reflected the acculturation of doctrines, laws, and poetry of Islam towards theological concepts from Hinduism and Buddhism, especially concerning the principles of creation, death, and the relationship between humans and God (Zoetmulder, 1995:34).

In the case of Aceh, the acculturation process was also encouraged at the time that it was introduced; the first people to introduce Islam to Aceh were *Sufi* (an Islamic order of mysticism, or Sufism). Those people emphasized mental and esoteric aspects; they prefer to acculturate existing rituals to blend with the tenets of Islam to promote peace and to prevent rejection by the people. The role of Sufism was so obvious that many doctrines of Sufism were adopted as symbols by kingdoms in Sumatera, including those in Aceh, such as the existence of holy persons or saints (Mudzhar, 1990:120).

The local traditions and rituals were employed as a medium to introduce Islam; in fact adjustments were made to several aspects that were very contradictive to the tenets of Islam. Those rituals then became rituals with Islamic values included within them. As an example, the rituals involving offerings and worship toward ghosts and spirits were adjusted to Islamic values as the spells were mostly substituted by Islamic prayers. This acculturation, which was promoted by the Sufi, actually preserved and maintained the local traditions and cultures (Manan, 2016).

The Sufis tended to adjust the local traditions in accordance with Islamic tenets rather than omitting them in order to prevent conflict with the local people. Furthermore, these adjustments made those traditions and rituals to be considered as proper in Islam. In fact, there were several elements within those rituals that were still imbued with the previous beliefs, which were contradictory to the tenets of Islam.

#### **D. Conclusion**

*Khanduri Blang*, performed by people living in the Reubee village area, is a traditional ritual originating from the era before Islam in Aceh. Villagers there believe that the ritual may save them from danger and harm caused by supernatural creatures living around their paddy fields; they are afraid that those creatures will be angry if the ritual is not performed. Thus, *Khanduri Blang* are rites to create good relationships between the villagers and these mystical creatures.

The ritual itself is a form of acculturation between Islam and the local traditions. Before Islam came to Aceh, various beliefs such as animism, dynamism, Hinduism and Buddhism had been developed and were believed by the people. These beliefs still affect Acehnese traditions, such as the need to provide offerings for spirit creatures despite the fact that acculturation has also been done in the form of substituting the spells with reciting from the al-Qur`an and reciting Islamic prayers. The influence of previous beliefs is inevitable, thus, the purification of Islamic tenets in Aceh may be necessary, in the future.

The implementation of the tenets of Islam by the people living in Reubee village is not plenary yet; hence they still perform contradictory rituals such as *Khanduri Blang*. Meanwhile, the involvement of Islamic scholars within those rituals convinces the village people that the rituals are in accordance with Islamic tenets. Furthermore, those rituals were also used as a medium to introduce Islam to the villagers in previous times. Therefore, this lack of understanding about the real tenets of Islam by the people requires further education to prevent them from continuing their misunderstandings about the real tenets of Islam.



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