

## Islam and Cultural Acculturation in Aceh: A Study of the *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* Rituals at the Tomb of Habib Seunagan

Cut Aja Mulia<sup>1</sup>, Darlin Rizki<sup>2</sup>, Aviecenna Almaududy, Ahrijon<sup>4</sup>

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh, Indonesia<sup>1,2</sup>

Universitas Islam Al-Aziziyah, Indonesia<sup>3</sup>

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Simeulue, Indonesia<sup>4</sup>

Corresponding author: [ajamuliacut@gmail.com](mailto:ajamuliacut@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* rituals at the tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan in Nagan Raya, Aceh, as a manifestation of cultural and religious acculturation between Islam and local traditions. The research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach through library research and field observation. Data were collected from books, journals, local articles, and interviews with the caretakers and community members around the tomb. The findings indicate that the *Rah Ulee* ritual, which involves symbolic washing of the head with sanctified water, and *Peulheuh Kaoy*, the act of releasing vows (*nazar*), are understood by the local community as forms of *tawassul*—seeking blessings through righteous figures. These practices are not merely cultural but have been integrated into the spiritual and social fabric of Acehnese Islam. While some religious groups perceive these rituals as deviations from Islamic orthodoxy, many locals consider them expressions of reverence and continuity of spiritual heritage rooted in Sufism, particularly the *Syattariyah* order introduced by Habib Muda Seunagan. Thus, these rituals exemplify how Islamic teachings and Acehnese culture coexist harmoniously through a process of acculturation that strengthens community identity and religious devotion.

**Keyword:** Islam, Cultural Acculturation, *Tawassul*, Local Tradition.

### Introduction

The Acehnese society is widely recognized for its profound adherence to Islamic principles and its high regard for cultural traditions and local customs (Astuti, 2017; Idris & Amalia, 2022; Sari, 2016). Historically, Aceh has played a pivotal role as the center of Islamic dissemination in the Indonesian Archipelago.



Within the socio-cultural framework of daily life, the Acehnese community integrates cultural practices with Islamic values, thereby constructing a holistic foundation for social, political, and spiritual existence (Hariadi et al., 2025). Islamic norms have significantly influenced the formation of social character, serving as guiding principles from birth until the end of life. (A.Hasjmy, 1983) Religion, for the Acehnese, functions not only as a spiritual compass but also as a binding system of belief that shapes moral conduct and social behavior. Meanwhile, culture constitutes a set of inherited practices and values that foster communal identity and regulate patterns of interaction within society. Consequently, the interplay between religion and culture emerges as a central pillar in shaping the identity, worldview, and way of life of Acehnese society. (Maran, 2000)

Despite this strong integration between Islam and culture, empirical realities in Acehnese society indicate the persistence of religious-cultural practices that generate theological and juridical debate. In several regions of Aceh, including Seunagan, practices such as Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy remain actively performed by segments of the community. These practices are believed to function as intermediaries for obtaining blessings, fulfilling vows, or resolving personal difficulties. However, their continued observance has also raised social and religious problems, particularly concerning allegations of syncretism, deviations from the principle of tawhid, and contestation between popular religious beliefs and normative Islamic teachings. This situation reflects a concrete social problem in which religious devotion, cultural inheritance, and Islamic legal norms intersect and, at times, conflict in everyday religious life.

Islam has historically accommodated cultural elements, as it provides a comprehensive set of norms and regulations concerning various aspects of life, more extensively than many other religions (Fajar & Sabdo, 2018). In examining the relationship between Islam and culture, two important distinctions must be clarified. Islam as a conceptual framework of culture is often referred to by scholars as the “Great Tradition,” representing the universal and normative dimensions of Islamic teachings. In contrast, Islam as a lived cultural reality is commonly described as the “Little Tradition” or “Local Tradition,” which reflects the contextual adaptation of Islamic values within particular societies (Mulia et al., 2024). These localized expressions demonstrate how Islamic principles influence diverse cultural fields, shaping practices, symbols, and social structures in ways that maintain Islamic identity while also accommodating local customs (Muhammad AR, 2010). As a normative system as well as in the entirety of social activities, Islamic teachings have become the guiding framework for the Acehnese community. Within this context, Islam functions not only as a religion but also as an integral part of Acehnese culture. On the other hand, local cultural traditions did not simply disappear with the advent of Islam; rather, they continued to evolve while being infused with Islamic values. This dynamic

process eventually gave rise to a cultural acculturation between Islamic traditions and indigenous Acehnese practices. Among the cultural expressions that emerged from this synthesis are Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy, which exemplify the harmonious integration of Islamic principles with local traditions in Aceh.

Previous studies on Islam and local culture in Aceh have largely focused on acculturation, adat institutions, and the sociological dimensions of religious traditions. While these studies contribute valuable insights into Acehnese Islamic culture, they generally approach the subject from anthropological or descriptive perspectives. Research that specifically examines Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy tends to emphasize cultural continuity or symbolic meaning, without providing a systematic analysis of their legal status within Islamic jurisprudence. Consequently, there remains a research gap concerning the evaluation of these practices from the perspective of fiqh, particularly in relation to worship practices, nazar, and the boundaries between permissible cultural expression and prohibited religious innovation. This study positions itself differently by integrating empirical field data with normative Islamic legal analysis, thereby offering a distinct contribution to existing scholarship.

Rah Ulee is a ritual practice performed by some members of the Acehnese community by washing their heads at the tombs of figures regarded as sacred or spiritually significant (Anismar et al., 2021). The practice is commonly associated with the belief in seeking blessings, spiritual comfort, or the resolution of personal difficulties. Alongside this ritual, Peulheuh Kaoy refers to the practice of fulfilling vows that are expressed in connection with particular sacred sites. Both practices are closely linked to places considered religiously meaningful and continue to be observed at the tomb of Habib Seunagan, which occupies an important position in the religious and cultural landscape of the local community. Islamic values are negotiated and expressed within local cultural practices.

Based on these considerations, the primary objective of this research is to analyze the practices of Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy in the Seunagan community by assessing their meanings, motivations, and legal implications within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence. This research is urgent because unresolved ambiguities surrounding these practices may perpetuate problematic religious understandings and hinder efforts toward Islamic legal clarification. By providing a balanced analysis that respects local religious experience while applying normative Islamic principles, this study is expected to contribute both academically and practically to the discourse on Islam, culture, and law in Aceh.

## Method

This study is a descriptive research employing the library research method. The data were collected from secondary sources, including books, e-

books, scholarly journals, research articles, and opinions published in local print media in Indonesia, accessed through websites and other written documentation that could serve as sources of information and data for analysis. In addition, this study applied methods of data collection such as interviews and observations. Data analysis was conducted through a series of steps, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

## Results and Discussion

Habib Muda Seunagan was a prominent Islamic scholar who actively participated in the resistance movement against Dutch colonialism. In the book authored by Sehat Ihsan Shadiqin et al., entitled *“Habib Muda Seunagan: Republikan Sejati dari Aceh”* (Habib Muda Seunagan: A True Republican from Aceh), it is explained that during that period he frequently moved from one village to another before finally settling in Tadu Raya, a forested area relatively inaccessible to the Dutch authorities. There, he grew and developed as a young man, acquiring both intellectual and practical skills. At the same time, he studied various aspects of politics and warfare under the guidance of his parents. These lessons were not merely conveyed orally but were also practiced through his direct involvement in guerrilla warfare against the Dutch.

Habib Muda Seunagan never received formal education in schools as commonly known. From an early age, he gained knowledge directly from his parents, particularly in the fields of religion, social leadership, and military strategy. This was closely related to the role of his father, who was a highly influential ulama in the Seunagan region. His father carefully guided all his children by teaching them religious values, ethics, and life skills. However, among his siblings, Habib Muda Seunagan stood out with his intelligence, perseverance, and charisma, qualities that later made him widely recognized. For Habib Muda Seunagan, education should not be confined within the boundaries that separate religious and worldly sciences. He firmly believed that all forms of knowledge ultimately come from Allah SWT, and therefore both religious and worldly knowledge hold significant importance in shaping human character. This perspective enabled him to integrate spiritual values with social insights and strategic skills. Such a combination became a valuable foundation for his role as an ulama, a community leader, and a freedom fighter who played a significant part in the struggle of the Acehnese people against Dutch colonial rule.

Abu Habib Muda Seunagan, as he was commonly known, was a prominent figure who developed the Syattariyah order (*ṭarīqah*) in Nagan Raya Regency. Scholars describe a *ṭarīqah* as a spiritual path aimed at attaining a deeper knowledge of God and internalizing worship so profoundly that it leaves a lasting impression on the heart. Thus, the *ṭarīqah* is regarded as an essential dimension of Sufism, inseparable from its spiritual practices. The term itself derives from *ṭarīq* or *ṭarīqah*, meaning “path,” “way,” “school of thought,” “method,” or

“system.” The people of Nagan Raya demonstrated deep obedience to his teachings, encompassing not only religious matters but also cultural traditions, customary practices, and social life. As a result, the influence of Habib Muda Seunagan extended widely, not only within the local community but also throughout Aceh. The Acehnese recognize him as a charismatic scholar who served as a role model and provided exemplary guidance to his followers. His presence as one of the most influential ulama of his time profoundly shaped and reinforced the local traditions of Nagan Raya, enriching the cultural fabric of the community. Consequently, many people practiced rituals such as Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy, perceiving him as a sacred (*keramat*) figure, owing to his status as a distinguished Islamic.

### **Tradisi *Rhah Ulee* and *Peuleh Kaoy***

Islam is a religion that brings mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*) therefore, it is able to embrace local cultures and traditions. The coming of Islam did not necessarily destroy or completely replace indigenous cultural practices with those introduced by Islamic teachings. Rather, Islam sought to refine and enhance the existing cultural values of a society. Consequently, not all local traditions had to be abolished. When Islam entered a community, it generated the development of new cultural forms rooted in Islamic principles—forms that embody noble values, elevate civilization, and uphold human dignity. However, this does not imply that Islam uncritically accepts every aspect of local custom and tradition. Instead, it selectively integrates cultural elements that align with its ethical and spiritual framework, while reforming or discarding practices that contradict Islamic values.

Before the arrival and development of Islam in Aceh, historical accounts indicate that the region had long been influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as both religions had established themselves in Aceh earlier, particularly in the coastal areas located between major continental routes. In contrast, the inland regions were still strongly shaped by animistic and dynamistic beliefs, which prevailed during that period. (Zakaria Ahmad, 1991) The arrival of Islam in Aceh occurred through peaceful means rather than conquest. In general, it can be said that Islam did not seek to replace or destroy the long-standing cultural traditions, particularly those influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism. Instead, Islam integrated and harmonized with the existing traditions, giving rise to new cultural expressions that reflected both local heritage and Islamic values (Erni Budiwanti, 2000) When Islam entered the Nusantara, it encountered a variety of pre-existing cultural practices that had long been observed by local communities. In the case of Aceh, the process of cultural formation had been ongoing for centuries. The presence of these established traditions required Islam, as a newly introduced religion, to align and harmonize with the cultural practices already embedded in society. As a result, a

process of mutual adaptation and integration took place, giving rise to what is often referred to as traditional Islam—a form of Islam that had adjusted to local customs and indigenous beliefs (Hammis Syafaq, 2009).

Islam entered the region through a soft and persuasive method of *da'wah* (peaceful propagation). It is therefore not surprising that local communities at the time embraced Islam without feeling detached from their own traditions. This form of *da'wah* was carried out through a process of cultural Islamization, in which local traditions were preserved, but their normative aspects were reinterpreted and aligned with Islamic principles. Among the cultural practices that were maintained and continue to exist in Aceh today are Rah Ulee and Peulheuh Kaoy. Within this framework, Islam applied the philosophy of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), represented in various *ṭarīqah* (universal spiritual paths), as a means of bringing human beings closer to Allah SWT. This pursuit of spiritual proximity to God is itself a universal imperative within Islam, reflecting its integration of normative religious values with cultural expression. (Fakhrurrazi, 2012) Islam allows local wisdom and cultural products that are constructive and do not compromise or corrupt Islamic creed (*'aqīdah*) to continue to exist. However, when there are fundamental differences that contradict the core principles of Islam, such elements are subject to reconsideration or reform in light of Islamic teachings.

This phenomenon of Islamization has led to an inseparable—though distinguishable relationship between Islamic law and Acehnese culture. The Acehnese community is deeply devoted to their cultural traditions, as reflected in local proverbs. One well-known saying declares, “*Udep dan adat, lagei kapal tan nakhoda*” or “*Udep tan adat, lagei beulekat dan srikaya*”. Similarly, another expression states: “*Umong meutang, ureung meu peutua, rumoh meu adat, pukat meuraja, dan nanggroë meuraja*.” These sayings carry profound meaning, binding the community to the understanding that in life and behavior, every individual is guided and constrained by both law and religion. (Pha, 2000) The cultural values of Acehnese society are not limited to their substantive aspects but also encompass the underlying intentions of culture itself. A wise expression found in *Hadih Maja* states: “*Mate aneuk meupat jeurat, gadoh adat hana meupat tamita*”—which means, “When a child dies, we know the grave; but when customs and culture disappear, we do not know where they have gone.” This expression is not merely proverbial, but rather a firm declaration of the importance of preserving culture and tradition as a social institution in community life. Therefore, the normative dimension of Acehnese culture is grounded in Islamic teachings. For this reason, Acehnese culture is often referred to as Islamic culture.

The encounters and resistances with local cultural traditions compelled Islam to adopt symbols that aligned with the cultural capacity of the local

community, thereby facilitating its acceptance even at the grassroots level of society. As a result, Islamic culture became deeply influenced by agrarian traditions and the cultural practices of rural communities. On the other hand, Acehese traditions and customs did not merely add color to Islamic practice but also significantly shaped certain religious beliefs and practices. Acehese society continues to retain many traditions influenced by Hindu and Buddhist teachings, even though the community later embraced different faiths, such as Islam and Christianity. The process of acculturation between Islam and Acehese culture took place over a long and gradual period. It is undeniable that tensions and conflicts occasionally emerged in this process; however, such dynamics were an integral part of the journey toward cultural integration. The main factors supporting this acculturation were the principles of equality and the flexibility of both the contributing and receiving cultures.

Referring to Acehese culture, there are several practices that persist within the community, among which are *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy*. *Rah Ulee* refers to the act of washing one's face with water mixed with soil taken from the grave of an individual regarded as sacred by the local people. Meanwhile, *Peulheuh Kaoy* refers to the fulfillment of a vow (*nazar*) at the tomb of a revered figure, with the intention of seeking blessings in both worldly and spiritual matters, as well as the hope that personal wishes will be granted. When such wishes are fulfilled, this ritual is also performed as an expression of gratitude. In theological discourse, these practices are associated with the concept of *tawassul*. *Tawassul* has long been a subject of debate within the Muslim community. While it is often regarded as a controversial issue, its practitioners justify it on the grounds of Islamic creed (*ʿaqīdah*) supported by references to the Qur'an and Hadith. The controversial aspect lies in the act of supplicating to Allah SWT for the fulfillment of one's needs by means of seeking intercession through pious scholars (*ʿulama*) or saints (*awliyāʾ Allāh al-ṣāliḥīn*).

The local community frequently performs the rituals of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* at the tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan, making these practices a common occurrence in the region. These rituals have sparked ongoing debates, with both proponents and opponents voicing their perspectives. Nevertheless, the essence of these practices ultimately lies in the intention of those who perform them. For the participants, the rituals serve as a means of seeking blessings (*barakah*) or engaging in *tawassul*. The rituals of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* at the tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan are regarded as part of the cultural practices closely tied to the religious life of the local community. For many people, these rituals are not considered contradictory to Islamic creed, as they are understood as forms of *tawassul* to seek blessings. Nevertheless, there are also groups who reject such practices, arguing that they deviate from the pure principles of Islamic faith. This phenomenon reflects the dynamics of religiosity in Acehese society, which is well known for its strong adherence to Islam. Islam

has long been deeply rooted and established as the core identity of Acehnese culture and social life. However, not all members of the community fully practice Islam in its purest form. In many cases, Islamic identity is inherited by birth, as individuals follow the religion of their parents and the environment in which they are raised. At the same time, culture itself is essentially the product of human creativity, thought, and will. In the Acehnese context, Islamic culture has been shaped through the intellectual and spiritual efforts of *ulama* in interpreting, internalizing, and teaching the Qur'an and Hadith so that they can be practiced in daily life. Consequently, Islamic culture in Aceh emerges as the result of an acculturation process between Islamic values and local wisdom, allowing practices such as *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* to persist until today, despite ongoing debates and contestations.

The Acehnese community generally believes in the sanctity of the spirits of deceased *ulama* who are regarded as holy figures (*keramat*). It is widely perceived that the spirits of these scholars may serve as intermediaries through which prayers, *dhikr*, or vows are more readily accepted by Allah SWT, particularly when performed at sacred sites such as the tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan. The rituals of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* represent longstanding practices embedded in the daily religious life of local Muslims, primarily aimed at seeking blessings at the sacred tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan. One particularly notable element of the *Peulheuh Kaoy* tradition in Aceh lies in its diverse forms of expression. This ritual may involve performing *dhikr*, offering two units (*raka'at*) of prayer at the mosque adjacent to Habib Muda Seunagan's tomb, and in some cases organizing communal feasts (*khanduri*). Such feasts often include the slaughtering of livestock such as goats or buffalo, as a symbolic act of gratitude for prayers that have been fulfilled by Allah SWT. The concept of *Kaoy* itself signifies a vow or solemn pledge intended to be fulfilled through specific acts of devotion or charitable offerings. It functions both as a spiritual practice and as a means of drawing closer to Allah SWT. Importantly, within the theological framework, a vow that is neglected or broken obliges the individual to either fulfill the promise or provide *kafarat* (expiation). In this sense, the tradition of *Peulheuh Kaoy* is not merely a cultural expression, but also reflects an integration of Islamic legal and spiritual dimensions within Acehnese religious life.

In the context of the *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* rituals practiced in Aceh, the concept of nazar (vow) occupies a central place. Within Islamic theology, a vow is regarded as a binding commitment that must be fulfilled once it has been made. The local community believes that failing to carry out a vow, whether in the form of prayers, acts of charity, or rituals of gratitude such as *Peulheuh Kaoy*, constitutes a serious moral and religious breach. The Qur'an itself emphasizes the seriousness of unfulfilled vows and provides clear guidance regarding the consequences. Allah SWT says:



“you who believe! Do not forbid the good things which Allah has made lawful for you, and do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like the transgressors. And eat of the lawful and good things which Allah has provided for you, and fear Allah in whom you believe. Allah will not call you to account for what is meaningless in your oaths, but He will call you to account for the oaths which you deliberately bind yourselves with. The expiation for breaking such an oath is the feeding of ten needy people from what you normally feed your families, or clothing them, or freeing a slave. But whoever cannot afford that—then fasting for three days. That is the expiation for the oaths you have sworn. And guard your oaths. Thus does Allah make clear to you His commandments, that you may be grateful.” (Q.S Al-Maidah 87-89) (11)

## The Ritual Process of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* at the Tomb of Habib Muda Seunagan

### 1. *Rah Ulee*

The ritual of *Rah Ulee* is performed on the basis of submitting supplications to Allah SWT through the venerated grave of Habib Muda Seunagan. The procedure begins with performing *wudu* (ablution) before entering the cemetery area, followed by offering greetings (*salam*) to the souls of those buried there. Thereafter, clean water prepared in a vessel is taken, and the ritual proceeds with the recitation of the phrase of *tasbih* seven times. Finally, the supplication is read: “Allahumma aj‘alnā nūran wa raḥmatan wa ni‘matan wa hibatan raḥmatika yā Raḥmān Raḥīmīn”. The ritual of *Rah Ulee* is carried out as a form of supplication to Allah SWT through the venerated grave of Habib Muda Seunagan. The sequence begins with performing *wudu* (ablution) before entering the cemetery area, followed by offering greetings (*salam*) to the deceased. Then, clean water that has been prepared in a vessel is taken, after which the participant recites the phrase of *tasbih* three times. Afterward, the water is poured seven times along the grave, from the headstone to the footstone. At the final stage, the participant of the *Rah Ulee* ritual washes his or her head on the headstone while inwardly presenting personal prayers or wishes (*doa hajat*) to Allah SWT. (13)

### 2. *Peulheh Kaoy*

Regarding the implementation system of *nazar* or *Peulheuh Kaoy*, those who intend to fulfill their vow customarily bring the vowed objects or offerings and meet with the *Teungku* or a descendant of the family of Habib Muda Seunagan who has been entrusted with the responsibility of preserving, maintaining, and continuing the teachings of Habib Muda Seunagan during his lifetime. The *Teungku* in charge of the ritual will first ask about the intention of the vow. Afterward, the ritual begins with the burning of incense, followed by the recitation of prayers led by the *Teungku*

and joined by the person making the vow. In most cases, members of the community vow to slaughter livestock such as goats, buffaloes, or other animals. The ritual slaughter is typically carried out in the vicinity of *Masjid Peuleukung*, as it has long been the local tradition. The mosque caretakers of Peuleukung, or the caretakers of the Habib Muda Seunagan Mosque, generally prepare the necessary utensils and facilities for the cooking process. The fulfillment of the *nazar* varies depending on the vow made, and it is ultimately adjusted to the financial capacity of the individual making the vow.

### Pros and Cons (Community Interpretation)

The phenomenon of the *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* rituals in Aceh inevitably generates both support and opposition within society. These differing perspectives emerge due to the diversity of interpretations regarding the relationship between local culture and Islamic teachings. For those who support these rituals, they are viewed as a form of cultural and religious acculturation that has become deeply rooted in Acehnese tradition. The rituals are not considered contradictory to Islam, since the primary intention of the practitioners is to supplicate and seek blessings from Allah SWT, while using the graves of revered scholars as a medium of *tawassul*. From this perspective, *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* are understood as efforts to strengthen spirituality, preserve local wisdom, and maintain religious traditions inherited from past scholars.

On the other hand, critics reject these rituals on the grounds that they may potentially deviate from Islamic creed (*aqidah*). They argue that practices such as washing one's head with water from a grave or fulfilling a vow at the tomb of a scholar could incline toward acts of *shirk* (associating partners with God), as they may shift the focus of worship, which should be directed solely to Allah SWT. From this standpoint, such traditions are seen as remnants of earlier Hindu-Buddhist or animist influences that have merged with Islam, and therefore must be corrected to safeguard the purity of Islamic teachings. Thus, the pros and cons surrounding *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* reflect the broader dynamics of religion and culture within Acehnese society. On one hand, these practices are regarded as Islamic cultural heritage that enriches communal identity; on the other, they represent a theological debate that requires careful scholarly examination to prevent misunderstanding in religious practice.

Pros and cons also emerge in relation to these two traditions. One of the critical voices comes from Said Junaidi, who holds a strong opposing stance toward the practices of *Peulheuh Kaoy* and *Rah Ulee*. According to him, such practices constitute *bid'ah* (religious innovation) because they are not explicitly supported by any textual evidence in the Qur'an nor are they practices exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). From his perspective, acts of worship should be firmly rooted in the scriptural foundations

of Islam, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and any ritual or custom that falls outside of these sources is considered invalid in terms of religious legitimacy. Said Junaidi further explains that, once he came to the understanding that these rituals fall under the category of *bid'ah*, he chose to refrain from practicing them altogether. For him, continuing such traditions may pose a risk of diverting people's devotion away from pure monotheism (*tawhid*) and instead placing undue emphasis on sacred sites or the intercession of deceased religious figures. He emphasizes that, as Muslims, believers must direct their hopes, prayers, and reliance solely upon Allah, without intermediaries. Thus, he concludes that it is only to Allah that humans should turn for protection, guidance, and the fulfillment of their needs. This critical perspective represents one side of the broader discourse among Acehnese society, in which traditional practices are continuously negotiated against scripturalist interpretations of Islam. While many view *Peulheuh Kaoy* and *Rah Ulee* as cultural-religious traditions that carry social and spiritual significance, others, like Said Junaidi, reject them as innovations that contradict the foundational teachings of Islam.

In contrast to Said Junaidi's opposing stance, Said Muntazar expresses a *pro* perspective on the practices of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy*. According to him, these traditions represent a form of *tawassul* to Allah SWT through the venerated scholar Habib Muda Seunagan, who is regarded as one of the saints (*awliya' Allah*). From Muntazar's viewpoint, such practices should not be hastily dismissed as deviations, but rather understood as spiritual efforts to draw closer to Allah by seeking blessings from a righteous figure whose life was devoted to piety and good deeds.

He further emphasizes that the validity of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* is ultimately determined by the intention (*niyyah*) of those who perform them. If the rituals are carried out solely as a means to supplicate to Allah SWT, using the saint as a *wasilah* (intermediary), then they do not contradict Islamic teachings. However, if they are performed with misguided beliefs, such as directly requesting from other than Allah, they may indeed raise theological concerns. Thus, for Muntazar, the central matter lies in maintaining a sincere and upright intention directed only to Allah SWT. Moreover, Muntazar identifies a deeper spiritual and educational dimension within these traditions. He argues that *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* are not merely about seeking blessings or fulfilling vows, but also function as a reminder of mortality. Visiting the grave of Habib Muda Seunagan and engaging in the associated rituals instill the awareness that worldly life is temporary and that every human being will ultimately return to Allah. In this sense, the practices provide an opportunity for self-reflection, gratitude, and spiritual growth.

Regardless of the ongoing debates between *pro* and *contra* perspectives, the practices of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* at the tomb of Habib Muda

Seunagan have long been performed by the local community as well as by followers of the Syattariyah Order throughout Aceh. Every year, large numbers of pilgrims visit the shrine of Habib Muda Seunagan, and during such visits it is common for them to perform the ritual of *Rah Ulee*. This continuity demonstrates the deep-rooted cultural and spiritual significance of these traditions within Acehnese society. An analogy often used to explain this practice is the case of seeking medical treatment. When a patient believes that the medicine prescribed by a doctor is the ultimate cause of healing, such belief may fall into *shirk* (associating partners with God). However, if one regards the medicine merely as a means or intermediary, while firmly believing that it is Allah SWT alone who grants recovery, then the act cannot be considered *shirk*. In the same way, the rituals of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* are perceived not as worship directed to other than Allah, but as a medium or channel of supplication, whereby the ultimate source of blessing and fulfillment of prayers remains solely in the hands of Allah SWT.

## Conclusion

The rituals of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* at the grave of Habib Muda Seunagan are cultural practices that, for many Acehnese people, are considered part of religious devotion. For those who support these practices, they are not seen as contradictory to Islamic creed but rather understood as a form of *tawassul*, a means of seeking blessings and drawing closer to Allah SWT through the intercession of a revered scholar regarded as a wali (saint). However, other groups within the community view these rituals as deviating from Islamic creed, arguing that they lack a clear foundation in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and therefore may fall into the category of *bid'ah* (innovation). The presence of both support and opposition reflects differences in interpretation among Acehnese society, which is known for its strong adherence to Islam.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the traditions of *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* have been practiced for generations and have become an integral part of the religious and cultural life of the community, particularly among followers of the Syattariyah order throughout Aceh. Each year, the grave of Habib Muda Seunagan attracts numerous pilgrims, and during these visits, the performance of *Rah Ulee* remains a common practice among the visitors as an expression of their faith. Overall, the *Rah Ulee* and *Peulheuh Kaoy* rituals demonstrate a clear process of cultural acculturation between Islamic teachings and local Acehnese traditions. These practices reflect how Islamic devotion is interpreted and expressed through culturally embedded rituals, resulting in a form of lived Islam that is socially meaningful, historically rooted, and continuously negotiated within the religious life of the Acehnese community.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and the interpretations and conclusions presented are solely those of the author.

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