

# **BEDEKEH RITUAL AND CULTURAL BELIEF OF SUKU AKIT IN RUPAT ISLAND, BENGKALIS, RIAU**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Bedekeh is a medical tradition passed down from generation to generation in the Akit tribe aiming at curing a person's illness. Bedekeh ritual contains cosmological and religious ideology regarding human relationship with Akit ancestors, God and human relationship with other forces beyond human ability. This ritual is dedicated to the ancestral gods as an aid in one's treatment. The ritual is led by Batin (Bomoh or big shaman). This study employs a qualitative technique with a cultural studies approach to explore Bedekeh in the Akit tribal community in relation to Islam. The study found that in the Bedekeh ritual, when someone enters a state of trance (possessed), various spirits such as the Islamic spirit (Hantu Islam), the Malay spirit (Malay ghost), and others appeared, and then helped and communicated according to the mantra that was chanted when entering the body. The original Malay community who embraced Islam rejected the local tradition of the Bedekeh ritual because it was considered to contain animistic teachings that were shirk, idolatrous, and heretical. The people of the Akit tribe are often positioned as the outermost area (periphery) and are placed in a low position and the lowest social status. The construction of such social structures still affects the Malay community and the Muslim Malay community until today.

**Keywords:** Akit tribe, bedekeh, belief, cultural studies, ritual

### **ABSTRAK**

*Bedekeh merupakan tradisi pengobatan yang diturunkan dari generasi ke generasi pada masyarakat suku Akit dengan tujuan untuk menyembuhkan penyakit pada diri seseorang. Ritual bedekkeh mengandung ideologi kosmologi dan ideologi religius mengenai hubungan manusia dengan leluhur Akit, Tuhan dan keselarasan manusia dengan kekuatan-kekuatan lain di luar kemampuan jangkauan pikiran manusia. Ritual ini dipersembahkan untuk dewa-dewa leluhur yang akan dipanggil sebagai penolong dalam pengobatan seseorang yang dipimpin oleh Batin (Bomoh atau dukun besar). Penelitian ini menggunakan teknik kualitatif dengan pendekatan cultural studies untuk mengungkap Bedekkeh pada masyarakat suku Akit dalam kaitannya dengan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dalam ritual Bedekkeh dan dalam keadaan trance (kerasukan), maka muncul berbagai roh seperti roh Islam (Hantu Islam), roh Melayu (hantu Melayu), dan lain-lain yang membantu dan berkomunikasi sesuai dengan mantra yang dilantunkan saat memasuki tubuh Batin. Masyarakat Melayu asli yang memeluk Islam menolak tradisi lokal ritual Bedekkeh karena dianggap mengandung ajaran animisme yang bersifat syirik, musrik, dan sesat. Masyarakat suku Akit sering diposisikan sebagai area terluar (periferi) dan menempatkan pada posisi yang rendah dan derajat sosial terendah. Konstruksi struktur sosial yang demikian masih memengaruhi masyarakat Melayu dan Masyarakat Melayu Muslim hingga sekarang.*

**Kata kunci:** *bedekkeh, kepercayaan, suku Akit, ritual*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The entrance of Islam to Nusantara gave significant influence to the culture and traditions in the society.<sup>1</sup> In history, Islam developed through acculturation of local cultures that have existed for a long time such as cultural patterns, traditions, values, norms with new cultures that are spread across the Nusantara.<sup>2</sup> Culture, on the other hand, is a vehicle for Islamization. Islam was brought to Indonesia by a beautiful culture and noble

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Qomaldiansyah Tungkag, "Varian Islam Nusantara: Jawa, Minangkabau Dan Gorontalo," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 15, no. 2 (2017): 217.

<sup>2</sup>Choirul Fuad Yusuf, "Kesultanan Nusantara Dan Faham Keagamaan Moderat Di Indonesia," *Lektur Keagamaan* 14, no. 2 (2016): 463.

civilization.<sup>3</sup> Culture is understood as a dynamic and developing social construction reality that exists in the minds of members of a social group.<sup>4</sup> Cultural and religious diversity are interrelated, especially in the context of culture and religion in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> Many local Islamic cultures or traditions that developed in the Muslim community in Nusantara gave a distinctive style of Islam in Indonesia.

The relationship between Islam and locality, including local wisdom and community culture is an illustration of how traditions in the community are influenced by the presence of religion. This is important considering that religion is the core of a culture which is theoretically very difficult to change. The presence of Islam in Malay society has an impact on the culture towards religious rational thought. Islam has an influence on the continuity of a tradition that has existed for a long time in people's lives. Rapid socio-religious changes can replace local cultural values that have existed for generations with Islamic cultural values in society brought by Islamic propagators as well as with cultural acculturation.<sup>6</sup> Every ethnicity has their rights to express their own culture<sup>7</sup>. This is like what happened to the Akit tribe with their traditional healing ritual called the Bedekeh ritual. This ritual is led by Batin (leader of the Akit tribe=

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<sup>3</sup>Amirul Ulum, *Al-Jawi Al-Makki: Kiprah Ulama Nusantara Di Haramain*, 2nd Ed (Yogyakarta: Global Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Patricia M. Hudelson, "Culture and Quality: An Anthropological Perspective," *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* 16, no. 5 (2004), h. 345.

<sup>5</sup>Agus Iswanto, "Keraton Yogyakarta dan Praktik Literasi Budaya Keagamaan melalui Media Digital," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 17, no. 2 (2020), h. 323.

<sup>6</sup>M. Kasim Abdurrahman, "Arsitektur Masjid Jami'Sultan Ayyub Sanggau," *Lektur Keagamaan* 12, no. 1 (2014): 237.

<sup>7</sup>Moh. Rivaldi Abdul, "Monginbalu Konbulan: Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisi Mandi Puasa secara Massal dalam Masyarakat Muslim B," *Lektur Keagamaan* 19, no. 1 (2021), h. 142.

bomoh=big shaman=shaman). The Bedekkeh ritual is a form of identity for the Akit tribe which is also their cultural expression.<sup>8</sup>

*Bedekeh* is a ritual for treating health disorders and diseases, a means of interaction between the supernatural and the real world, a form of respect for the gods, the spirits of the ancestors of Akit, antu (ghosts), and the universe as well as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty. *Bedekeh* means "to think" and "to ask for instructions" from ancestors to expel evil spirits that cause disease in the life of the Akit tribe.<sup>9</sup> The *bedekkeh* ritual is thought to have existed since the Akit tribe inhabited the Rupert area and is still practiced today in modern times. It is undeniable that hereditary traditions such as religious beliefs and practices contribute to the current state of society.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, actions and ideas that exist in modern times are rooted in the study of primitive societies.<sup>11</sup>

In the ritual practice of *bedekkeh* treatment, Batin will ask for help from his ancestors to ward off evil spirits. Batin's role is to give trust and confidence to the Akit tribe in performing treatment through the possessing spirit during a trance state. From the various languages spoken by bodies that are possessed, it is suspected that there are several types of spirits that enter, namely: Islamic spirits (Islamic ghosts), Malay spirits (Malay ghosts), and others. The Akit tribe believes in the help of jinn or ancestral spirits in healing through the *Bedekeh* ritual. This illustrates that

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<sup>8</sup>Suroyo, "Ringkasan Disertasi: Ritual *Bedekeh* Suku Akit di Pulau Rupert Kabupaten Bengkalis Provinsi Riau pada Era Global," *Masyarakat Indonesia Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia LIPI* 44, no. 2 (2019): 88–97.

<sup>9</sup>Suroyo, "*Bedekeh*" (Akit Tribal Ritual on Rupert Island in the Bengkalis Regency of Riau Province in the Global Era)," *Udayana Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (UJoSSH)* 2, no. 2 (2018), h. 109.

<sup>10</sup>Safa A. M. Al Husban, Ahmad A. S. Al Husban, and Yamen Al Betawi, "The Impact of the Cultural Beliefs on Forming and Designing Spatial Organizations, Spaces Hierarchy, and Privacy of Detached Houses and Apartments in Jordan." *Space and Culture* 24, no. 1 (2021), h. 69.

<sup>11</sup>Nurdien Harry Kistanto, "Tentang Konsep Kebudayaan," *Sabda : Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan* 10, no. 2 (2017), h. 5.

ritual traditions can function as ritual communication to ancestors and social communication.<sup>12</sup>

A study conducted by Roza stated that in the past, people used to go to shamans when someone was sick. This continues until the local community recognizes the existence of religions outside of their ancestral beliefs.<sup>13</sup> The ceremonial tradition has two purposes: ritual communion with ancestors and social communication. From the point of view of socioanthropology or social sciences in general, religion is associated with shared views (beliefs) and rituals (rituals) by a group of people. Something beyond human ability and logic such as ritual is something that can be found in Indonesian society. Ritual is an expression of a system of religious ceremonies that reflect the relationship between humans and the spiritual realm. Another thing is said that the implementation of the ritual has a purpose and meaning such as strengthening the ties of friendship, praying to God to be kept away from harm both individually and in society.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of Islam in Malay society has an impact on the culture towards religious rational thought. Islam influenced the continuity of a tradition that pre-existed in Indonesian society. This is related to the fact that religion is the core of a culture which is theoretically very difficult to change. A cultural studies approach is needed in religion (including in the writing of religious traditions), because religion is rooted in concrete situations that are often associated with the social conditions of society.<sup>15</sup> Deconstructing old views and elevating a culture that emphasizes the relevance of culture to social problems and daily life, belief or religion and the spread of religion is very important

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<sup>12</sup>Fitriyani, Muhammad Adil, and KA Bukhori, "Pola Komunikasi Ritual Kembar Mayang: Kajian Etnografi Komunikasi Pada Etnis Jawa," *Intizar* 26, no. 2 (2020), h. 81.

<sup>13</sup>Ellya Roza, —Ramuan Herbal Non Isntan dalam Naskah Kitab Tib sebagai Alternatif Pengobatan, *Sosial Budaya: Media Komunikasi Ilmu Sosial* 11, no. 1 (2014): 1.

<sup>14</sup>Ali Badri and Chelsy Yesicha, "Komunikasi Ritual Ziarah Kubur 'Atib Ko Ambai,'" *Medium* 7, no. 1 (2019): 40.

<sup>15</sup>Nyoman Kutha Ratna, *Metodologi Penelitian Kajian Budaya Dan Ilmu Sosial Humaniora Pada Umumnya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2017).

because cultural values that are still relevant can be utilized for the social life of the community.

In addition to the cultural studies approach, this research uses Molinowski's theory of functionalism. Cultural traditions are born in response to human requirements. In other words, these traditions are sextension of human needs. In addition, knowing the idea of cultural diffusion theory is very important in understanding the origin of the Bedekoh ritual in the Akit tribe community on Rupert Island, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. Cultural diffusion theorizes that a culture spreads as a result of the movement of people from one location to another. Humans who are in constant movement carry their culture, therefore there is always an exchange of culture when they meet other humans.

The Bedekoh ritual practiced by the Akit tribe accumulates many meaningful symbols, such as: religiosity, sacredness, harmony, care for nature, identity, social control, solidarity and gratitude to God and his ancestors. The Muslim Malay community considers this tradition as heresy, because the Prophet Muhammad did not teach or practice it. On the other hand, in Abdullah bin Mas'ud Ra's and Atsar's views, when there is something useful in the eyes of people, it can benefit mankind because of its values.

Various practices and views of the indigenous Malay community, especially the Akit ethnicity as adherents of the local religion, are considered "non-religious". This is reinforced by their view that Islam rejects and contradicts ritual practices that use shamans and offerings or ask for the help of spirits. The relationship between people who are already religious and the beliefs held by the Akit people is an illustration of how traditions in that society are influenced by the presence of religion. According to the Akit community, a person worships not because he/she asks forgiveness for sins he/she has committed, but because he/she expresses gratitude for the gifts that have been given to him/her. Offenses, according to the Akit community, will not be erased by asking for forgiveness because this sin often occurs among humans.

By the Malay community who have embraced Islam and by the native Malay community who do not know Islam, the

Bedekeh ritual is considered contradictory. The official religions of the Akit tribe are Christianity and Buddhism, but in practice, they perform rituals by worshiping various gods and still believe in supernatural powers beyond human reason and the practice of animism and dynamism. This is in accordance with what was stated by Geertz who argued that religion as part of the cultural system does not play an integrative role and creates social harmony in society and can play a divisive role.<sup>16</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are sourced from structured interviews with informants who live on Rupert Island, Riau Province. Informants included: bomoh, batin, traditional and religious leaders, government officials, community leaders, indigenous peoples, educators, NGOs, and people with knowledge of the Akit tribe. Secondary sources in the form of discussion results from previous research, as reinforcement of data obtained from informants.

### The origin of Akit tribe

The origin of the Akit tribe is obtained from many versions and from various sources, both literature studies, interviews, and field research with various figures such as tribal chiefs and scholars. The word Akit comes from the word berakit-raft, which refers to a group of people working on the Siak River transporting rafts. During the Siak Sri Indrapura kingdom, the Akit tribe was a laborer, tasked with transporting wood from the lower reaches of the Mandau River. The Akit are grouped into three occupational categories. The first is a group of path seekers in clearing the forest. The second group of Akit tribes is responsible for planting, cutting and transporting wood from the forest by gathering all the wood together and forming a large wooden raft. The third group is the group tasked with cleaning the river

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<sup>16</sup>Geertz, Clifford, “*Kebudayaan dan Agama*.” (1992). Yogyakarta: Kanisius. 232

bank, so that water flows downstream and facilitates the delivery of wood.<sup>171819</sup>

The Akit tribe lived on the left and right banks of the Mandau River, a tributary of the Siak river that flew through Mandau District, Bengkalis Regency. The Akit tribe could not stay long on the banks of the Mandau river due to disturbances from animals that damaged their crops, such as elephants, wild boars, and other creatures. They requested the Sultan of Siak to provide settlements and land for them to live. Their wish was granted by the Sultan of Siak and they set out on a raft to find a new place to live in the form of an island, namely Rupert Island. This island was previously occupied by a group of people from the island of Rempang, Riau.

The Akit tribe quickly met several groups of people from the island of Rempang who happened to be starving. People from the island of Rempang want to sell their island and move to another place. The Rempang people are willing to sell Rupert Island to Akit for a piece of sago stick, a basket of rice, a canoe and a paddle. The Rempang tribe's request could not be fulfilled by the Akit tribe so that the Akit tribe had not been able to occupy the Rupert island. Then, the Akit tribe went to Datuk Laksemana Sultan Siak Sri Indrapura to ask for help in fulfilling the requirements set by the Rempang people.

With the permission and conditions given by the sultan, the Akit tribe's wishes were granted. Then the sultan sent Akit tribe to deliver the conditions determined by the Rempang people and went to Rupert. From then on, Akit settled on Rupert Island until now. They were not moving anymore. In the process of handing over Rupert Island to the Akit tribe, there was a message and an

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<sup>17</sup>Suroyo, "Ringkasan Disertasi: Ritual *Bedekeh* Suku Akit di Pulau Rupert Kabupaten Bengkalis Provinsi Riau pada Era Global," *Masyarakat Indonesia Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia LIPI* 44, no. 2 (2019): 88–97.

<sup>18</sup>Julius Limbeng, *Suku Akit di Pulau Rupert*, Cetakan Pe (Jakarta: Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2011).

<sup>19</sup>Suroyo Suroyo, Gede Wirata, and Kamaruddin Kamaruddin, "Strategi Pengelolaan Pariwisata Budaya Ritual *Bedekeh* Suku Akit di Pulau Rupert Kabupaten Bengkalis Provinsi Riau," *Proceeding TEAM 2* (October 12, 2017): 33, <https://doi.org/10.23887/team.vol2.2017.153>.



oath from the Rempang people which read "Do not sell this island or transfer it to someone else." With this message, Akit tribe inhabit Rupal Island until now, keep their promise and always protect the island.

Another source states that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a group of people from Kalimantan came to the territory of the Siak kingdom and settled on the banks of the Siak River. Then, arguing that they were often harassed by wild creatures such as tigers and elephants, these people asked the Sultan for permission to stay in another area. Finally, His Majesty Sultan Siak granted the tribe's wish to find an island free from wild animals. Then they traveled down the river to the mouth of Siak. They landed on Padang Island after a long journey. They believe that wild creatures can still cross the strait because there is only a small distance between the two islands and if the tide is high, animals can pass. The tribal group set out again to traverse the vast ocean. They saw an island in the north after a long and tiring journey. There is a river on the west side. With joy the tribe passed through the river. They rested after anchoring their canoes in the middle of the river while relaxing. They talk to each other. Suddenly they were surprised by a human shadow from a distance who was on the left entering the river. One of them pulled the anchor of their canoe. Without wasting any more time they immediately rowed their canoe toward the shadow. After approaching the shadow, it turned out that the shadow was an old woman.

The tribe asked the old woman regarding who owned the island. The woman replied that the island was owned by Datuk Empang Kelapahan. Then the tribe said, "If it is true that the owner of this island is Datuk Empang Kelapahan, may we meet him? She replied, "If you want to meet Datuk Empang Kelapahan, first meet Datuk Kebeneh who is on the right side of this river. We are husband and wife", explained the old lady happily.

After receiving the explanation and permission from Datuk Kebeneh, the group escorted by Datuk Bintang Beheleh went down the river to meet Datuk Empang Kelapahan. Upon arrival, they immediately informed and expressed their sincere intentions to Datuk Empang Kelapahan. They begged to be allowed to live

on this island because they were often disturbed by wild creatures in their own area. Datuk Empang Kelapahan asked about their ancestors. They claimed to come from the Upper Siak River which was ruled by the Little King with the title Sultan.

After hearing the tribe's explanation, Datuk Empang Kelapahan did not object to their request. Datuk Empang Kelapahan allowed them to live on the island with one condition. As for the conditions, they must submit a piece of rice eye, a piece of sago tampin, and a golden oar. If the request can be fulfilled, they can stay on this island until their descendants. Given the extremely heavy requirements, the tribe seemed desperate. They told Datuk Empang Kelapahan that the request was too heavy for those who just had a hard time living. Datuk Empang Kelapahan replied, "If this island is destined for you and your children and grandchildren in the future, go and meet the Sultan at the Throne. He will definitely help you." Hearing these words, the tribe was happy. They asked Datuk Empang Kelapahan for two times seven days to meet the Sultan.

Field data indicates that after the Akit ancestors came under the protection of the Siak Sultanate, they were divided into three groups. Two of these three groups then immigrated to Rupert Island. In the service of the Sultan of Siak and on the journey to ask the sultan for help, Akit's ancestors did several jobs and divided them as loggers, transportation, and building palaces in Bukit Batu Village. To do this work, people are divided into three functional work groups, namely: (1) Suku Hutan (Forest Tribe) is a group who cut trees in the forest; (2) the Akit tribe, namely the group who traversed the forest on *rakit* (raft) on the Siak River; (3) The Hatas tribe is a group who built roads or rivers as a means of transportation. Although these three groups were involved in this work, their village was often disrupted by the presence of wild animals. They made a request to Sultan for giving them a new place to live ("tukar tempat"). The Sultan gave them Rupert Island, which is part of Bengkalis. The first group, namely the Suku Utan, immigrated to Bengkalis

Island. The others, Akit and Hatas, moved to Rupert Island. The name Rupert comes from “tukar tempat”.<sup>20</sup>

### **Deconstructing *Bedekeh* Ritual of Akit tribe**

In the Akit tribe's belief in the *Bedekeh* ritual, there was a place that is considered sacred to pray and offer offerings to spirits (*Datok*) along the beach overlooking the sea. This sacred place was where the spirits of *Datok Sakti* and *Datok Kebeneh*, a husband and wife who inhabited or oversee the Rupert island area and incarnated into spirits. To honor the spirit, ritual ceremonies are held by *Bomoh/Batin*.

Other source of oral traditions mention that<sup>21</sup> the emergence of *Bedekeh* ritual in Akit can be traced from several narratives as follows. First, the first *bomoh* was the eldest son of Adam with the name *Komantan*. On the seventh day of his birth, he was suddenly unconscious of unknown cause. *Komantan*'s parents were very panicked and nervous about the child's condition. After a while, the child who had a seizure suddenly lost consciousness and fainted again and again. Over time, the *Komantan* grew up in good health, but similar symptoms persisted throughout his childhood. When *Komantan* was seven years old, *Komantan* said to his father, Adam, "I want to live in the sky (above the world)." Adam smiled and asked him, "How did you go to the sky, there are more places to live here than in the sky." The boy replied, "In the sky, there is a world similar to here." His father asked another question, "How do you know that world?" He replied, "I know father, because I sometimes go to the sky." The commander asked his father to prepare seven drums, a pair of jars, and various accessories in a hut in a remote location. He was alone in the hut and forbade his parents to come at night. One night, there was a hurricane around the hut. The next day, Adam realized that the hut where the *Komantan* lived had disappeared in the wind and flew into the sky so that the incident left a trail of deep sadness. Years later, Adam felt guilty

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<sup>20</sup>Dodi Ahmad Kurtubi, “Mengenal Suku-Suku Asli (Komunitas Adat Terpencil) Provinsi Riau,” *Kantor Dinas Sosial Provinsi Riau*, (2017), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with *Batin Gelimbing*

and was so sad that he continued to be in critical physical condition. In his mind, he did not know what to do and how to know the fate of his eldest son Komantan who lived above the sky. Adam tried to be able to communicate with Komantan, the child who was then high in the sky.

Adam burned incense that he believes as a medium of communication with his son, Komantan. Adam burned the fragrance, hoping the smoke and fragrance would reach the sky. After a while, noises rang out from the sky, and light fell in front of him. Although invisible to the naked eye, Adam believed that it was Komantan who came as a spirit down to earth to treat his sick father who heavily thought of him. Komantan promised to his brothers to come back and help them with the other spirits from the sky whenever their family was sick. Then, he returned to the sky accompanied by a light like lightning. After this incident, people were told that they could summon and communicate with spirits from the sky to help with treatment as Adam experienced.

Second, another story says that once upon a time there was a *bomoh* named Satun. He claimed to be very strong and powerful and able to bring back someone from death through his magic. One day, a little girl suffered from a very serious illness and asked Satun to treat her. Satun held a healing ceremony for the child, accompanied by the use of seven drums (a kind of tambourine) to prove his supernatural powers. During the ritual ceremony, Satun summoned the spirits who were believed to be his assistants. To Satun's surprise, the girl who supposed to be healed, she died instead. This failure makes Satun very embarrassed and ends up hiding without being known his whereabouts.

From the two narratives above, there are some understanding that can be drawn. First, it is believed that there is another world above the sky and *bomboh* can connect the life on land and above the sky. Indeed, the world where Akit tribe lived is divided into two worlds, namely *dunia atas* (top world) where God Almighty and spirit assistants resides (the Akit ancestors), *dunia tengah* (middle world) where humans live, and *dunia bawah* (underworld, in the ground) where humans are buried. *Bomoh* has the ability to travel to another world in Bedekoh

ritual to communicate with spirits through the ritual. Second, the help of ancestral spirits who live in the upper realms or the sky helps humans if needed. During the healing ritual, *bomoh* is assisted by ancestral spirits from the sky with supernatural powers. In addition, spirits from the sky will descend if it is intended for treatment and helping human life. The expression above shows an expression of the belief of the Akit tribe that the spirits of the Akit ancestors, namely Adam and Komantan, passed down knowledge of the *bedekeh* ritual which is used to this day. Stories in the practice of *Bedekeh* for Akit as validation of the legitimacy of cultural institutions and supervision of community norms so that they are always obeyed. This statement reveals that the journey of spirits to seek healing is the basis for the practice of *Bedekeh*. In this story, *Bedekeh* is used as a guide to this day. The story of Komantan is not fiction for the Akit tribe. The story is brought to life in the ritual practice of *Bedekeh*. Adam's actions and activities are the personification of the ritual practices that must be performed in *Bedekeh*. The Akit tribe still believes in the spirits of their ancestors so that the practice of animism and dynamism are still carried out today.

According to cosmological thought among Akit, some diseases are caused by supernatural powers, and diseases are not caused by supernatural powers. Diseases of supernatural origin or caused by spirit disturbances or invisible things are very dangerous and must be treated with rituals involving *Bomoh*. On the other hand, physical ailments can be treated by general practitioners (GP) in the Akit tribe. Traditions originating from the ancestors of Akit are indeed difficult to abandon, this proves that remnants of old beliefs and cultures still exist in people's lives from generation to generation. In cosmology, the Akit tribe holds that nature is divided into two parts: the visible world and the unseen world. According to the Akit tribe, the forest is home to supernatural beings who can harm or help. The inhabitants of this group of supernatural beings who guard the forest. They have supernatural powers that can harm humans. Humans must submit to and respect the guardians of supernatural powers. The Akit tribe believes that these guards do not harm nature. The supernatural beings in the world are tasked with protecting

nature, not eating it, what consumes is humans. If one wishes to enter the forest, he must bring provisions in the form of betel nuts, cigarettes, and *sugi* (tobacco). Otherwise, he can fall into a serious disease that is difficult to cure.

Akit people believe that certain trees have supernatural powers that can inflict good and evil on humans. To avoid the bad or get the good, this tree is usually given tetau (offerings). Rituals performed by the Akit tribe to fulfill promises because God or Gods, ancestral spirits have helped them in achieving whatever they want. In addition to the plurality of vertical cosmology in the life of the Akit tribe, it is also known how to maintain horizontal relations, namely the balance between *dakhat* (land) and *laot* (sea) and the middle world. This is what is called the relationship with the environment, including the sea, rivers, straits, and other places that connect the life of the land where the Akit people live. For the Akit tribe, the forest gets a more special place so it is considered sacred and must be protected because it is inhabited by ghosts who will get angry at any time if the ritual is not carried out.

In Akit cosmology, sea and land describe free places, namely places inhabited by spirits or gods, while the middle world is a characteristic of Akit villages or places because it is a place inhabited by humans. While the sea and land are free worlds, their inhabitants can be classified into *antu dakhat* (land spirits) and *antu laot* (sea spirits) based on where they live. In treating these inhabitant gods or spirits, the offerings to land and sea spirits are also very different. When the Akit tribe makes appropriate offerings to the spirits, the spirits will provide protection and safety for the Akit tribe. If the offering is not made to the guardian spirit, it will bring disaster and calamity to the residents of the Akit tribe. Therefore, the Akit people always avoid giving inappropriate offerings and always maintain a balance between land and sea, even in their daily life.

For example, in catching fish in the sea, it is forbidden to use sharp objects and use bloody baits, because the sea god will be angry if the blood of land animals is served. Likewise, in caring for the soil, it is forbidden to cut trees with heavy equipment because the gods or spirits will be angry. If people make

offerings to the spirit of one party only, the spirit of the other party will be angry and can bring disaster. In general, when it comes to burning frankincense for the god of the sea, it is usually more than the offering of the god of the land. According to the Akit tribe, sea spirits are relatively stronger than land gods. From this it can be concluded that the burning of incense for ritual offerings to the sea god is more because the sea breeze is stronger than the wind on land. During the therapy process, *bomoh* will usually seek help from spirits, both land and sea spirits, one by one. After the spirit is encouraged to speak, the *bomoh* will usually provide support and guidance in searching for evil spirits associated with the patient's illness.

With the help of the spirits, *bomoh* can identify the evil spirit that disrupts the patient and finally to treat him/her. Although the ancestors and God Akit live in the upper world or the sky, they are also divided into land and are able to see spirits. The *bomohs* are required to prepare two palaces or mansions for land spirits and a *lancang* (boat) for sea spirits as offerings to them during the healing ceremony. Some spirits will usually help the *bomohs*. This can be seen from the *bomoh* who goes into a trance through their behavior, clothing, or drumming. The gods have influence over the spirits. The spirits appear in various ceremonial events include the so-called Islamic spirits, Malay spirits, Malay ghosts and others depending on the language spoken when the spirit enters the body of the *bomoh*. There are certain ghosts believed to be most powerful in assisting the rituals of the *bomohs* when they help the *bomohs* and possessing the *bomoh* in healing rituals, such as: crocodile spirit, the beautiful princess (usually when *bomoh* dances happily and freely dances) or the Hulubalang spirit (*bomoh* was in full force). This Hulubalang spirit has the most magical power in the healing ritual of the Akit tribe (as the spirit of the commander or war leader).

The story of Komantan and Satun became the basis and legitimacy of the practice of *bedekkeh*, as well as the origin of the first *bomoh*. Komantan is in the world 'above the sky' which imparts knowledge to humans. The story of the ancestor of the *bomoh* comes from the upper world that binds and controls

various human behavior. It indicates that what is included in the *Bedekeh* ritual practice is the reality of events that are passed down from generation to generation by the ancestors of the Akit tribe, which are determined by the way humans produce or use them. At the present time, the stories that exist in the Akit community in the origin of these ritual practices are called myths. Myth is a tradition that is carried out to cause havoc which can be in the form of stories and values in it.<sup>22</sup> Myths that exist in society show religious and spiritual behavior that connects oneself with God Almighty. This shows that what is included in the myth is historical reality, which is defined by the ways humans produce or use it.<sup>23</sup>

### **Religion, Culture and *Bedekeh* Practice in the View of Cultural Studies**

The beliefs of the Akit tribe say that the spirits of ancestors, namely Adam and Komantan, passed down the knowledge of the *bedekeh* ritual that is valid to this day. The practice of *bedekeh* for Akit is a validation of the legitimacy of cultural institutions and the supervision of community norms so that they are always obeyed. In the view of cultural studies, the origin story of the *bedekeh* practice was the result of Adam's mistake, a formulation for the implementation of the *bedekeh* practice was created which has been used as a guide to this day. The story of Komantan is not fiction for the Akit people. The story is brought to life in the ritual practice of *bedekeh*. Even though humans are replicas of the macrocosm and have the ability to create, they are also aware of the limitations of their abilities and never reject His will.<sup>24</sup>

External influences resulting from cultural interactions, namely cultural acculturation, modernization, and globalization,

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<sup>22</sup>Ika Cahyanti, S Sukatman, and Furoidatul Husniah, "Mitos dalam Ritual Ruwatan Masyarakat Madura di Kecamatan Gending Kabupaten Probolinggo," *Jurnal Edukasi* 4, no. 1 (2017), h. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, Roland. "*Mitologi*." Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana. 2009:208



and religious teachings, both directly and indirectly, will affect the lives of the Akit community so as to bring change to the Akit community. Another thing that shows the open attitude of the Akit community towards cultural influences outside of Akit is the existence of mixed marriages with other ethnic groups. In ancient times, the Akit tribe had to marry the same tribe. In addition, economic factors influence a person to change religion. There are those who want to change their religion because there is economic pressure, so there are those who are willing to leave their religion<sup>25</sup>.

*Bomoh* in the Akit tribe has authority in the form of power over the practice of medical rituals that exist in the Akit community in Hutan Panjang of Rupert Island, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province. This authority makes the *bomoh* as the central figure and agent of both change and preservation of a tradition. As such, the relationship between the *bomoh* and the Akit tribal community is a functional relationship and is dependent or *reciprocal*. This dependence appears on the Akit community regarding the ritual practice of treatment by *bomoh*.

### **Religious views on *Bedekeh* ritual**

The cultural diversity in Indonesia shows that Indonesia is a country rich in culture. Culture is a very important asset because it is a feature of a place and a representation of the personality of a nation or region. Culture is a wealth that must be maintained and preserved by every tribe.<sup>26</sup> The healing ritual of the Akit community through *Bedekeh* ritual involves a metaphysical relationship with supernatural entities and spirits. Philosophically, Akit tribe is taught to maintain harmonious relations with humans, the environment where the Akit tribe lives, creators and

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<sup>25</sup>Agoes Dariyo, "Conversion Of Religion In Muslim Marriage Lives," *Psikis : Jurnal Psikologi Islami* 7, no. 1 (2021): 86–94.

<sup>26</sup>Suroyo, Bima Maulana Putra, and Bedriati Ibrahim, "Cultural Belief of Petang Megang Ritual With Self Actualization on Malay Community Pekanbaru City Riau," *Udayana Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (UJoSSH)* 5, no. 2 (2021): 64–67, <https://doi.org/10.24843/UJoSSH.2021.v05.i02.p01>.

ancestors of the Akit tribe and their ancestral spirits who have extraordinary power for the beliefs of the Akit tribe.

Akit tribe has to continue to carry out the *Bedekeh* ritual from generation to generation. The *Bedekeh* ritual performed by *Batin* in the Akit tribe as an ancestral heritage is full of meanings and values in the life of the Akit community. Not only in the quest for healing and treatment of various ailments, but also firmly bound with extraordinary or mysterious powers stemming from an extraordinary frame of belief and belief in magic, mysterious energies, ancestral Akit disturbances, evil spirits, and many reasons for disturbances caused by the wrath of the universe and the lord of nature.

According to the view of the Akit people, a person worships a spirit not because of asking forgiveness for sins that have been committed, but as a sign of gratitude for the gift of authority to him. In Akit's belief, people who break the rules are not erased their sins only by seeking forgiveness from God or ancestors, because these sins are common among humans. According to research informants, when someone steals, they cannot ask God for forgiveness because the one who is harmed is not God, but someone whose property was stolen. Therefore, it was more appropriate for him to apologize to the owner of the stolen goods as a sign of remorse for the crime committed. For the Akit community, an expression of gratitude for something that cannot be seen directly by the human eye (God, ancestral spirits, spirits, jinn) needs to be conveyed when someone feels that his intentions have been granted by the almighty (gods, ancestral spirits).

The Akit people on Rupert Island have embraced official religions, particularly Christianity and Buddhism. The presence of religion and the awareness of each person in the Akit tribal community to embrace one of the existing religions brought by priests and kyai who entered the territory of the Akit community. Faith, belief and religion are components of national identity as Indonesians, namely: religious people, deliberately establish friendly tolerant relationships between followers of the same religion and between religious communities. Religious pluralism

is a gift from God Almighty that the Indonesian people must be grateful for in order to maintain unity and peace.

Clarification of religion in human life is so complex, because religion includes various perspectives on human life. To be a devout human being, correct information is needed about the point of view contained in religion. The term perspective is comparative to the term component. In this way, the perspective of a godly life can be compared with the components of a godly life. After all, the components can be recognized from the point of view, in terms of how they can be isolated and isolated from their solidarity. There are 5 (five) religious components, specifically: (1) pious feelings, (2) belief frameworks, (3) customs and ceremonies, (4) customs and ceremonies, and (5) pious individuals. In the perspective of pious life, it is clarified in the following settings: (1) aspects of unobtrusive inner belief, (2) sacred perspectives, (3) customary angles, (4) pious individuals, and (5) worldliness. This agrees with the theory of religious conversion which says that religious conversion is not only found in modern society, 'primitive culture', 'traditional society', is characterized by magic, superstition, and belief in something that is considered sacred. The diversity and innovations brought about by the times have resulted in the religions of these peoples often being the most changing feature of their culture, although there is little impact on social life.<sup>272829</sup>

Religion cannot be understood without extraordinary power, whatever its form. Godly people make this extraordinary control a means to lean on in life, a place to complain about all the problems they face. For them, there is no society without religion. If society wants to last long, there must be a God to

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<sup>27</sup>Jack Goody, "Relegion, Social Change and the Sociology of Conversion," in *Changing Social Structure in Ghana* (Routledge, 2018), 1–16.

<sup>28</sup>Robert P Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>29</sup>Trond O. Tollefsen & James M White, "Navigating an Orthodox Conversion: Community, Environment, and Religion on the Island of Ruhnu," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, 642–64, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2021.1921840>.

worship. The society's view of the Akit tribe is still condescending that the Akit tribe is considered negative by assuming they have supernatural powers that can use other people to inflict attacks on themselves, either through black magic.

Belief in a society towards religiosity is the essence of a religion. Belief in society is centered on God who is above this domain (supernatural power), or behind the physical domain (transcendentalism) which is accepted to be carried out as a guide in this domain which also directs the course of human life. With an emphasis on strong power, and accepted to influence human life, it appears in people who need this power to succeed in living life. This view reduces things that are racial and observational, so that individuals who are contrary to these beliefs do not believe.

The Akit community in Rupert firmly accepts the belief in the extraordinary power of the universe that can be found in objects, places, creatures, and so on. This power can bring a good life to the Akit tribe. This belief was obtained from their predecessors who still hold animism and dynamism. Although the Akit community in Rupert live mingle with other communities both new comers and those who embrace religion, they still do things related to myths. For them, the official religion is a complement to life and not as a philosophy for other individuals. Hence, religious change among Akit community is not a problem, and it is not uncommon to find a religious family member among other non-religious members. Various religious figures recognized by the government are trying to direct the target of their mission/da'wah to Akit Tribe or community groups who still adhere to their beliefs in everyday life but are called "non-religious".

### **Islamic view on *Bedekkeh* ritual**

Based on field data, it is known that before carrying out the ritual process, *bomoh* must know the type of illness by doing *tilik* or fortune-telling. As long as *bomoh* is possessed by ancestral spirits, *bomoh* experiences a trance, behavior, movement, sound, and so on experience changes when a trance occurs. According

to Levie Straus<sup>30</sup> in his book *Myths, Shaman and Magic*, condition of trance experienced by individuals when they lose consciousness can be caused by certain factors. This state is a state of psychic dissociation characterized by a lack of intentional movement and is often characterized by the occurrence of automatism in actions and thoughts. The state of unconsciousness in the present state can be exemplified in a hypnotized state.<sup>31</sup>

*Bomoh* will try to enter the patient's soul to summon spirits before he wanders off or falls into another world. *Bomoh* chants a mantra and brings water in a glass, holds a candle, as well as some betel leaves. The patient will drink a glass of water after the ritual. The rest of the water that is drunk is used to bathe the patient in the morning. The water concoction is used as medicine by patients who are believed to be efficacious to purify the patient's body. *Bomoh* will apply plain flour (rice flour) that has been given a spell on the patient's body. Mantras are an important part of the healing ritual for the patient to recover. *Bomoh* will repeatedly cast a spell on the patient's body.

This mantra is considered to give strength strength to the patient. In addition, spells are also used to strengthen the patient's body against evil spirits. During the process of reciting the mantra on the patient's body, the *bomoh* will whisper the mantra to the patient's head, left and right thumbs, and both toes. It aims to sever the souls of patients who are sick due to evil spirits. Several informants who were questioned said, such as the breath of God who created the first human in Akit mythology, the *bomoh* that gave life (breath) to the patient. After blowing the breath in the form of a spell, the *bomoh* will fly or experience a trance to another world unnoticed and not known or read by the people present.

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<sup>30</sup> Lévi-Strauss. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfold Nicolson.

<sup>31</sup>Suroyo, "Ritual *Bedekeh* Suku Akit Di Pulau Rupa Kabupaten Bengkalis Provinsi Riau Pada Era Global," *Masyarakat Indonesia Majalah Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Indonesia LIPI*, no. 2 (2019), h. 92.

Rituals are often performed two or three nights in a row. Guest families and *Bomohs* have to abide by some rules. Pork, crab meat and meat from four-legged animals are not allowed into the house. *Bomoh* is also prohibited from drinking alcoholic beverages. This is done because in the rituals that are carried out sometimes *Bomoh* will be assisted by Malay spirits who are Muslim, so that they can facilitate the course of the ritual. This will be done by not eating meat and alcoholic beverages which are considered haram by Muslims.

After completing a series of taboo rituals from morning until the ceremony is held, the main door will be closed with pandan leaves. The purpose of closing the door is to prevent people or guests who will witness the ceremony from entering and leaving the room. According to Akit, this is what is called a tabo (forbidden), or a taboo place that must be sterilized from negative intentions. According to the rituals and methods of treatment of the Akit tribe, the ritual of *Bedekeh* by *Bomoh* is found in two systems. The treatment management system is the first, and the healthcare system is the second. The first step includes (a) the therapeutic technique used, (b) detecting the cause of a disease (diagnosis), and (c) determining the method of treatment. Second, the healthcare system consists of (1) determining the origin of the disease and (2) therapeutic measures that emphasize what are the taboos that the sick person must follow.

In other words, the influence of Islam on the ritual of *Bedekeh* in general is not found, but the general influence on other forms of Islam and other religions (religion) which spreads indirectly which has contributed to the *Bedekeh* ritual of the Akit tribe today and in the future. Local ritual practices (customs) carried out by the Akit tribal community use the attributes and beliefs. Thus, this is also in line with the theory which states that the involvement of a religion in the rituals of the local community is comprehensive, but all forms of religion, even deviant

ones, are included in the influence of religion on the traditions of the local community.<sup>32,33,34.</sup>

In Straus's view, shamans and magic have experiences created by specific variables, and situations that people experience after losing consciousness. In the *Bedekeh* ritual, *bomoh* can be said to be a shaman, due to *bomoh's* expertise who lead a situation experienced by the individual to lose consciousness. Meanwhile, current conditions explain that the belief of the Akit tribe towards the *Bedekeh* ritual is still ongoing, the strength of cultural belief and the influence of Islam in this ritual. It makes some people of the Akit tribe believe that there is a relationship between the influence of Islam and this *Bedekeh* ritual. This is reinforced by the informant's testimony of one *Bedekeh* ritual, where there was a figure who is believed to be a ghost of Islam. Thus, the relationship between Straus' theory can be understood by the definition of *Bomoh* who is believed to be a shaman to the Islamic connection to this *Bedekeh* ritual.

One of the purposes of the revelation of the Qur'an is to be shifa, or medicine for humans. Al-Qur'an as shifa' describes how the entire contents of the Qur'an, including verses and chapters, can be used to treat illness in a more meaningful way.

*“O mankind, there has come to you instruction from your Lord and healing for what is in the heart and guidance and mercy for the believers.”* (Yunus: 57)

*“And We send down of the Qur’ān that which is healing and mercy for the believers, but it does not increase the wrongdoers except in loss.”* (Al-Isra: 82)

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<sup>32</sup>Volker Gottowik, “Heterodox Ritual Practices in the Context of the Islamic Veneration of Saints in Central Java,” *Journal of the Humanities and Social Science of Southeast Asia*, 2018.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Frishkopt, “Ritual as Strategic Action: The Social Logic of Musical Silence in Canadian Islam,” in *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theatre* (University of Texas Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7560/726819-006>.

<sup>34</sup>Ulugmurodov Elyor Saydulloevich, “Islamic Culture: The Essence and Ways To Improve It,” *Academicia Globe: Inderscience Research* 3, no. 3 (2022): 208–12.

People often fall into shirk when they use magical and supernatural means. Almost all shamans and psychics are against religious stipulations, so religious people believe and believe that only Allah can heal them. The shaman usually demands certain conditions in the form of a sacrifice, such as slaughtering a white or black chicken, holding chicken eggs, sprinkling flowers, wearing ring stones, and other things. There are also many taboos and advice from shamans whose rules are clearly haram. People who use the occult and astrology according to Ibn Abbas will be hated and disliked in the eyes of Allah. Some of these shamans, claiming to have permission from Allah, ordain themselves (verbally or actually) capable of curing all ailments believing themselves to be holy and powerful. This is in line with the holy verse of the Qur'an,

*“So do not claim yourselves to be pure; He is most knowing of who fears Him.”* (QS. An-Najm: 32).

Chanting, reading, incantations, and other mutterings are common treatments performed by shamans, while holding certain parts of the patient as well as remotely. incantations and readings of this kind are prohibited, especially when the meaning is not clear. This is different from the sunnah therapy, namely Ruqyah, which involves reading that can be understood. According to experts, the Shari'a allows the reading of a verse or incantation if three criteria are met. First, by mentioning Allah SWT; secondly in Arabic or another language with an understandable meaning; and third, with the idea that mantras have no effect i.e. lead to shirk. Islam forbids alternative medicine and supernatural consultation using amulets as a cure for disease, a bearer of blessings and protection, among other things, because it is shirk and is dependent on objects other than Allah.

*Bedekeh* ritual in the hereditary practice of the Akit tribe is considered contrary to Malay society. This is based on the premise that ancient Akit used shamans and magic with the help of spirits of their ancestors, and used materials such as incense (which is closely linked to magic). On the other hand, Islam and Malay are an inseparable unity. The Malays have been associated



with Islam, and what is done in the Bedekéh ritual is against Islam. In its development, the Akit community has been educated in schools. There is a subject called of Muatan Lokal Budaya Melayu which is expected to be a window for them to understand how the Malays view everything, including their ritual practices. Education through informal and non-formal school processes is expected to provide understanding to the Akit tribe.<sup>35</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The ritual of *bedekéh* by *bomoh* is a process of treating health disorders and diseases, a means of interaction between the macrocosm and microcosm, a means of harmonizing relation between the supernatural and the real world, a form of respect for gods, spirits of the ancestors of Akit, antu (ghosts), and nature. universe and as thanksgiving to God. The Akit community has recognized religion as a cultural process with religious values. The principle in Malay says that the Malays live on earth, so slowly Akit's beliefs and beliefs also adjust to how to follow the traditions prevailing in Malay society. Cultural beliefs and religious teachings form harmonization in the traditions that exist in the Malay Muslim community and Malay society in general. Rituals passed down from generation to generation in today's life must be understood and can be studied in terms of cultural and religious studies. As such, the rituals that are considered contradictory by people who have embraced religion are contrary to the Malay community before they knew religion, the community's view was seen from the perspective of religion and culture.

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<sup>35</sup>Vahid Aghale and Abbas Afshar, "Socio-Hydrological Agent-Based Modelling for Analysing the Impacts of Supply Enhancement Strategies on the Cap-and-Trade Scheme," *Hydrological Sciences Journal* 66, no. 1 (2021): 55.

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