

# The Tradition of Quran Recitation in Aceh

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**Abstract:** The authorization for Aceh province to implement Islamic Shari'awas juridically set in the constitution No. 44 (1999) on the Implementation of Aceh as the special region or the autonomous region which includes religious life, custom, education, and establishment of regional policy to Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam. Furthermore, Governor of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province authorized 2 qanuns (local regulation related to governance and society) which serve as foundation for Islamic shari'a.- Qanun No. 10 (2002) concerned on shari'a court and Qanun No. 11 (2002) concerned on shari'a implementation (belief, worship, and Islamic syiar). This regulation might distinguish the cultural life, religious tradition, social interaction, and religious foundation of Aceh people. The standard is how the people understand and explore the religion through the foundation of religion (Quran) itself, for example; the local government policy on provincial and district level requiring a test to read the Qur'an for the leader candidate in various elections such as Candidates for Governors, Regents, Mayors, Legislative Members, even the election of the village head. This reading Qur'an test policy is now also applied for students who will enter to new educational institution, for example. Therefore, this study tries to describe qualitatively the socio-religious phenomena of Acehnese bounded in the regional qanun, which affect the public trust at the national and even international level. Based on observation and interview, the study found that even though the Quran has been taken as the good life foundation for Aceh people, the tradition of Quran recitation is still just a religious tradition that has not been fully understood. Moreover, this tradition exists on certain social levels and certain local communities.

**Keywords:** Tradition, Quran.

## INTRODUCTION

Today's technological developments have been able to shift good traditions into unfavorable in communities. People are easier to operate communication device technology like smartphone than to have worship *mahdhah* on daily activities. The habit of using a smartphone has become an opiate way of life. People tend to sit alone without interacting to the others, enjoy playing games without considering the place and time and obey face to face interaction. Since the last five years, the tradition of using smartphones has become habit that eliminates social values in the community, especially in Aceh, and in Indonesia in general. These negative impacts not only affect the social traditions of the community, but also have impact on religious activities.

Furthermore, the traditions in society contaminated by technological developments is considered unethical. However, technological development should be used to facilitate the community in carrying out social activities and other religious traditions. Technology should be used as a medium for transforming society towards the peaceful community and get blessings from their God (*Baldataun warabul Ghafur*), not the opposite way.

Behavioral deviations in the community occur systematically, develop into subcultures (a system of behavior producing cultural products of society, values, a sense of pride, norms, and morals that are different from the situation in general). Suppose pre-school children are more accustomed to see their parents, brothers, and relatives using smartphones rather than spending their time on religious

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education. Likewise, with the student, they prefer to skip school to play games in internet cafes rather than to learn Qur'an that can lead them to better life. It also has no difference with university students' behavior that they feel happier and enjoy sitting many hours in coffee shops equipped with Wi-Fi service than spending the time to religious activities in Mosques, *Mushalla* or having Islamic study discussion. Certainly, this is due to tradition or habits, custom development (folkways) can be a behavior (mores), a custom, and eventually become a social norm if it develops.<sup>i</sup>

If good habits such as being discipline, honest, punctual, etc. can be developed among children, adolescents, youth and even parents, then life in Acehnese society is not impossible to be better than current habits. Better activities such as Qur'an recitation (reading and understanding) will be achieved, even it will become social norms.

In addition, One of the historical portraits of the Acehnese is embedded in the constitution No. 44 (1999) concerned on 4 (four) Aceh's privileges: religion, education, custom, scholar authorization.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, Governor of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province authorized 2 *qanuns* (local regulation related to governance and society) which serve as foundation for Islamic shari'a.- *Qanun* No. 10 (2002) concerned on *shari'a* court and *Qanun* No. 11 (2002) concerned on shari'a implementation (belief, worship, and Islamic *syiar*). This regulation might distinguish the cultural life, religious tradition, social interaction, and religious foundation of Aceh people.<sup>iv</sup>. *Qanun* No. 13 (2002) concerned on immoral relationship, *Qanun* No. 13 (2003) concerned on gambling, *Qanun* No. 7 (2004) on zakah management, and finally the constitution No. 11 (2006) about Aceh Government consisted of Islamic shari'a regulation on worship, Ahwal Al-Syakhshiyah, Muamalah, Jinayah, Tarbiyah, Dakwah, dan Qada'.

The enactment of the law and the establishment of regional qanun signals the identity of the Acehnese Muslim community in the future to form the tradition of Acehnese based on Al-Quran and Hadith. Shari'a values decorate and underlie community activities whenever and wherever they are. Implementation of Islamic shari'a in Aceh for the people is the reformalisation of Islamic shari'a which has long existed in the Islamic kingdom in Aceh. Following the reformalisation of Islamic shari'a, several Islamic law enforcement agencies were formed, such as the Islamic Sharia Department, Shari'a Court, Wilayatul Hisbah, and custom institutes.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research is intended to find an efficient approach and model in solving the problem of tradition in Qur'an recitation which began to disappear in the Acehnese people. Suppose to revive the recitation of the Quran in each house at least after Maghrib prayer, multiply recitation of the Quran besides the other books, habituate to read Quran after the prayer even only one verse. These issues are elaborated through qualitative research studies with the socio-religious approach of the Acehnese people. Data collection techniques used participatory observation and non-structured interviews and analyzed by using inductive methods.

## Result and Discussion

### Qu'ran Recitation Phenomena in Aceh

The Qur'an recitation for the community is a habit that has been going on for generations. Reciting Qur'an for the people in Aceh is a common thing to do that is started from childhood by reciting Qur'an at Meunasah, attending Qur'an Learning centre, even specifically inviting the teacher to come to the house for children who have financial advantages. These habits are routinely carried out by school-age children, and Qur'an recitation is a routine for them. The time varies from sunset to before Isha, or late at around 10:00 p.m. For the teenage learners, the Qur'an recitation sometimes followed by the learning of Yellow Book. The activity is usually done collectively and lead by a religious leader (*teungku*).

As a result, the phenomenon of Qur'an recitation in Aceh seems to be only conducted by school age people, while for the general public, they are more likely to follow other routine religious activities. These activities tend to be carried out together with different material for each meeting. The routine has an impact on their ability to read the Qu'ran so their ability to recite Qur'an is still like the beginner level.

The issue regarding the ability to recite the Qur'an in Aceh became quite actual when one of the conditions for students to enter higher education and also for people who want to become candidates for regional leaders both legislative and judicial as regulated by qanun is to pass the Qur'an reading test. The community was disappointed by the fact that a total of 114 legislative candidates for Aceh House of representatives (DPRA) from various political parties failed in the test. Independent Election Commission Chairman of the Qur'an Reading Test Working Group, Akmal Afzal to Serambinews .com, Saturday

(07/21/2018) the night after the plenary meeting at the Aceh KIP Office stated that of the 1,338 candidates who took the test were able to read the Qur'an, while 39 people were declared to have failed because they were unable to recite Qur'an.

Other media also mentioned that the Aceh Independent Election Commission (KIP) held a plenary meeting as a result of verification of the candidates for the legislative of the Aceh House of Representatives (DPRA). Chairman of the Qur'an Reading Test Working Group, Akmal Abzal, revealed that there were 1,338 people who took the test to be candidates for the legislative. From the results of the meeting, as many as 114 candidates were declared failed and 39 of them did not pass the Qur'an reading test. "This means that there were 114 people who were declared failed. They must be replaced by other candidates "Akmal said, Saturday (7/21) night, after the plenary meeting. In addition to 39 people who did not pass the Qur'an reading test, as many as 75 other people were declared failed because they were not present until the given period of time.<sup>v</sup>

A religion sociologist as well as lecturer at the State Islamic University (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh through online media said that the Candidates for Legislative Members who failed the Qur'an reading test indicated a major problem- Qur'anic illiteracy- in Aceh. This is a sample that can show the 'iceberg' phenomenon, the large number of Acehnese who cannot recite the Qur'an. Moreover, the failure of many legislative candidates in the Qur'an reading test took place in almost all parts of Aceh, as it was covered by the mass media. It is a fact that many public figures cannot recite the Qur'an. On the other hand, we should be grateful that with the Qur'an test held for legislative candidates, we get a concrete picture of the big problem that we are facing today. This is another face of the Shari'ah area that we are proud of. Without the test, perhaps at any time this phenomenon will never be able to be detected .<sup>vi</sup>

A similar phenomenon also occurred in the selection of new students in Aceh. The results of a review of several universities in Aceh that carried out the Qur'an reading test for new students showed that almost 60% of new students who were admitted to universities almost declared that they did not pass the Qur'an reading test. This test was actually conducted to find out the level of religious understanding of the students so that during their study in the university they will be required to follow the guidance and matriculation of the Qur'an before they are declared as alumni of the university.

There is also Quran reading test for brides and grooms to be. In Aceh, it is obligatory for them to take the Qur'an reading test through their respective village religious leader (*Teungku Imum Gampong*). If they pass the test, a certificate will be provided . If they do not pass, the marriage should be delayed and they have to learn to read the Qur'an again for the next few months. The results of interviews with the head of the Religious Affairs Office in the North Aceh region show that there are still quite a number of prospective brides and grooms who do not have enough ability to pass the test. Sometimes a guidance period should be given to allow them to learn again and finally pass the test.

### **Aceh People Recite Qur'an**

Learning from the history of the golden age of Islam, the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam during the leadership of Sultan Iskandar Muda, which obliged children and the community to establish and make the Qur'an as a book that must be studied in every *meunasah* in Aceh. The present reflection of the results depicted in the test results of legislative candidates, new students and prospective brides and grooms is a real picture of the Aceh people in Qur'an recitation. The tradition of recitation is expected to become a routine for the people of Aceh without exception from childhood to old age.

For the people of Aceh, Reciting Qur'an is a religious activity as an effort to deepen religious knowledge which takes place at home, *Bale*, *Meunasah*, *Mushalla*, Qur'an learning centre (TPA), Mosque, *Dayah* and others. The tradition of recitation by the Acehnese is defined as consisting of two parts. First, reciting the Qur'an and secondly studying the yellow book (*fiqh, tauhid, akhlak, tasawwuf*, and other Islamic sciences). The appeal of *masyarakat mengaji* is intended as Qur'an recitation includes the Qur'an learning activities in *Balee*, mosque, *Meunasah* and special *taklim* assemblies. *Masyarakat mengaji* uses a certain book to be conveyed to audience and then question and answer session is conducted with *teungku* (the teacher). This program has been going on for a long time, but during the observations there are still few special Qur'an recitations for the general public and also the desire and awareness of the community to study the Qur'an individually is still low.

Stimulasi tradisi mengaji masyarakat dengan perlombaan (musabaqah), tradisi mengaji yang terbentuk melalui perlombaan merupakan sarana dalam upaya pembangkitkan motivasi masyarakat untuk mengenal lebih jauh dan mendalam bacaan alquran, isi kandungan alquran, wawasan alquran, dan seni tulis alquran. Sarana tersebut dimanfaatkan sepenuhnya oleh masyarakat walau dengan jumlah yang terbatas namun kegiatan tersebut cukup membuat antusias masyarakat untuk mau membaca dan

mempelajari alquran secara sempurna. Melalui muasabaqah, masyarakat mendengarkan bait-bait, makna, dan nilai-nilai yang terkandung dalam alquran sehingga menjadi mahnet tersendiri bagi masyarakat agar bergerak dirinya untuk senantiasa membaca al-quran kapan dan dimana saja berada.

Stimulants for the qur'an recitation tradition include a competition called *musabaqah*, which is expected to be able to increase motivation of the people to get to know more deeply about the recitation of the Qur'an, the contents of the Qur'an, the Qur'anic insights, and the Qur'anic writing art. These facilities are fully utilized by the community even though with a limited amount but these activities are sufficient to raise public enthusiasm to read and study the Qur'an perfectly. Through *musabaqah*, the public listens to the verses, meanings, and values contained in the Qur'an so that it becomes a magnet for them to motivate themselves to always read Qur'an consistently.

The Qur'an learning movements have also emerged in Aceh like Tastaifi study driven by the alumni of the dayah scholars in Aceh. The muhibbah subuh movement among the young and the elderly, Tasawuf Tauhid Study Assembly, and Naqsyabandiyah tarekat movement. The growth of these kinds of movements throughout Aceh is considered necessary to restore the spirit to recite the Qur'an after dawn prayer at home or at other places. Special Qur'an studies are expected to reduce the illiteracy of alquran as well as to understand and the contents of the Qur'an as a guide for the lives of Muslims. Similarly, the tradition of regular studies in *Mushalla*, *Balee*, *Meunasah*, and others to include special session to study the Qur'an.

### The Virtues of Qur'an Recitation

Qur'an is a living guide for Muslims, a holy book that has extraordinary miracles. It is the words of Allah, the creator of humans, animals, plants and the whole universe. Qur'an can save people from darkness and the misery of the world and give the happiness in the afterlife. Revealed to the last Prophet, Muhammad, who had a privilege in the sight of Allah and his people, Qur'an is a book that completes the books that were passed down beforehand, that can be a cure against physical and mental illness.<sup>vii</sup>

As the foundation and guidance of life, the Qur'an is described as a book that gives life and light for the darkness. Surah Ar-Ra'du verse 28 says "Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured." Next, Surat al-Maidah verse 15-16 says "O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal of the Scripture and overlooking much. There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book. By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.".. Next, Allah promises as mentioned in Surah Al-Fatir verse 29 "Indeed, those who recite the Book of Allah and establish prayer and spend [in His cause] out of what We have provided them, secretly and publicly, [can] expect a profit that will never perish" Likewise, people who want success in various world affairs such as commerce, politics, social, etc., Allah says in Surah Yunus verse 75 that "Then We sent after them Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his establishment with Our signs, but they behaved arrogantly and were a criminal people."

When reciting Qur'an by the community has become a tradition by which the community learns deeply the meaning and content of the verses, Allah explains the virtues of those who recite and learn the contents of the verses and apply them in their daily life as explained in the verse 20 of Surah Al-Muzammil "Indeed, your Lord knows, [O Muhammad], that you stand [in prayer] almost two thirds of the night or half of it or a third of it, and [so do] a group of those with you. And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you [Muslims] will not be able to do it and has turned to you in forgiveness, so recite what is easy [for you] of the Qur'an. He has known that there will be among you those who are ill and others traveling throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah and others fighting for the cause of Allah. So, recite what is easy from it and establish prayer and give zakah and loan Allah a goodly loan. And whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you will find it with Allah. It is better and greater in reward. And seek forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

As a society where sharia law is implemented, besides being a guide to life, reading Qur'an is an obligation. The community will find many benefits as mentioned in hadith narrated by bukhari "The best among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it." Furthermore, the hadith of the Prophet explained that the virtues of those who read alquran as narrated by Al Hakim "Whoever recited the Qur'an, studied it, and acted according to what it contains; on the Day of Judgment his parents will be dressed with a crown of light, its brightness is like that of the sun. And his parents will be adorned with two bracelets, of which the whole world is not equivalent to them [in worth]. So, they will say, 'Why are

we being adorned with these?' It will be said, 'This is because of your child taking [the recitation, teaching and acting upon] the Qur'an.' Next hadith narrated by Al-Hakim explains that "Read the Quran, for indeed it will come on the Day of Standing (Judgement) as an intercessor for its companions (Hadith narrated by Muslim) and the prophet (pbuh) said: "Fasting and the Qur'an will intercede for the slave on the Day of Judgement..." (Hadith narrated by Ahmad dan Al-Hakim)

In addition to the above virtues, Abu Daud narrated the importance of reciting Qur'an and studying hadiths "A group of people do not gather in a house amongst the Houses of Allah [i.e. Masjid] reciting the Book of Allah and studying it between themselves - except that tranquility descends upon them, they are enveloped by mercy and surrounded by the angels - and Allah mentions them with those with Him." Another hadith mentions "Indeed, the one who recites the Quran beautifully, smoothly, and precisely, will be in the company of the noble and obedient angels. As for the one who recites with difficulty, stammering or stumbling through its verses, then he will have twice that reward." (hadith narrated by Muttafaqun 'Alaihi). While, in another hadith, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Read and elevate (through the levels of Paradise) and beautify your voice as you did when you were in the worldly life! For verily, your position in Paradise will be at the last verse you recite!" (Narrated by Tirmidhi).

### Model of Tradition of Qur'an Recitation of Aceh People

Society is a human community that is always preoccupied with its human activities. As living beings, humans have physical and spiritual needs which both of these needs are expected to have a balance so that human life is happy in the world as well as in the hereafter. In order to make the tradition of the Qur'an recitation as a spiritual need for humans, it is necessary to have a habit that is routinely carried out both in groups and individually. In order for the activity to recite the Qur'an to be a good tradition, in theory, habituation requires stimulus and tries with an optimistic attitude that is done repeatedly.<sup>viii</sup>

The tradition of reciting the Qur'an for Muslims, especially in Aceh, is expected to be a local culture so that the Qur'an as a way of life always adorns the life of the Acehnese. Culture is a system of socially derived behavior patterns, which work to connect human communities to their ecological environment. In the behavior of the way of life the community includes technology and forms of economic organization, forms of social grouping, political organizations, and religious beliefs and practices.<sup>ix</sup>

Understanding the meaning of tradition in the anthropological dictionary explains that traditions are magical-religious habits of the life of an indigenous population which includes cultures, norms, laws, and interrelated rules that become a regional cultural system.<sup>x</sup> Whereas in the sociology dictionary it is described that traditions are customs and beliefs that can be maintained for generations.<sup>xi</sup> Therefore, the tradition of Qur'an recitation can be a good habit for the people of Aceh so that it becomes a systemic and inherent culture for Aceh people who have a symbol of religion (Shari'a) as reflected in the laws and regional qanun.

Building up the tradition of Qur'an recitation for the people of Aceh can take the patron-client theory which states that there is a relationship between humans and relation between humans and supernatural figures.<sup>xii</sup> Having that the theory in the tradition of Qur'an recitation to the people of Aceh means that to make the Qur'an recitation as a good tradition, it must be started from community leaders who provide good examples so that other people can participate. Strengthening of the tradition needs to be seen again that traditions able to integrate recitations of the Qur'an with , such as to initiate the *peusijek* tradition, wedding ceremony, *tasyakkuran*, and other activities. However, it is better to refer to patron-client theory above that starting a good tradition must begin with the elderly so that it can become a good tradition for the next generation.

Habituation theory in adult education books states that the way to shape habits for adults is to first find the concept of new habits that you want to develop as clearly as possible. Second, start new habits with strong will. Third, do not let exceptions occur until the new habit is deeply rooted. Fourth, practice the new habit at every opportunity, even though in a busy situation, look for opportunities to practice. Fifth, train with a short time interval to be better than the previous practice. Sixth, training should be done as perfectly as possible. Seventh, situations and conditions should be arranged in such a fun way, and eighth, formation of new habits is driven from the inside but is assisted from outside through intermediaries of others or the environment.<sup>xiii</sup>

Qur'anrecitation habit for the people of Aceh can be used as a culture or a good habit to pass it on to the next generation. Given the shift of the current generation, the influence of modern technology and globalization has had an unfavorable cultural impact on the younger generation. At least the tradition of Qur'an recitation can be done within the family, close relatives at the first stage so that it can be done in *Meunasah*, *Balee* and other places that schedule Quran recitations daily or weekly.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this research is the tradition of Qur'an recitation for Acehnese people is still running in some communities. The tradition still occurs at the age of school children while in the general public recitations of the Koran are done on Friday nights specifically reciting surah Yasin and regular recitations that study the yellow book with *fiqh*, *tauhid*, *akhlak*, and *muamalah* materials. Whereas the recitation tradition carried out by some Acehnese is limited to recitation of the Qur'an which is accompanied by a general explanation from religious leader in *balee*, *meunasah*, mosque and other assemblies. However, the community's depth of understanding of the contents of the Qur'an is still relatively very lacking.

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