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# Traditional Rice Farming Ritual Practices of the Magindanawn in Southern Philippines

Saavedra M. Mantikayan, Esmael L. Abas

College of Agriculture, Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology, Doroluman, Arakan, Cotabato Philippines

## Email address:

saavedramantikayan@gmail.com

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**Abstract:** The study is purely a documentation of the traditional rice farming rituals and practices of the Magindanawn in Southern Philippines. Specifically aims: to identify the farming rituals of the Magindanawn farmers; to descriptively analyzed the rationale behind the practice of rituals in farming; and to determine the factors that made rituals persistence amidst the prevalence of the modern Agriculture. The researchers found that farming rituals are based on Magindanawn beliefs as acts or ways of communicating the soul of *uyag-uyag* (life sustenance) which is the elder brother of the spirit (soul) of human being as narrated by Tawalang Kalting. The rationale behind farming rituals retention among Magindanawn were based on their highest one belief that “ALLAH” is the most extremely super power. In such the Traditional Magindanawn found out the following belief: a.) Belief in the competence of ALLAH; b.) Palay (Rice), as one of the bounties given by ALLAH, followed the order of nature. c.) According to the Islamic point of view, Angel Michael is one of the Angels of ALLAH who was instructed as in-charge of bounties all over the World; d.) Human beings are enjoined to follow instruction from ALLAH. Farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers are desired for prosperous production. The rituals before rice planting, like calling the name of stars such as *balatik*, *malala*, *mabu* and others, and calling the names of prominent people and different name of angels are not in conformity with Islamic teaching.

**Keywords:** Traditional Rice Farming, Farming Ritual Practices, Magindanawn, Southern Philippines

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## 1. Introduction

Traditional Knowledge System has been recognized as effective vehicle in the process of Organic Agricultural Sustainable Development. Social Science Scientist agrees that is a repository of biologically loving technology that significantly contributed much to the sustainable development of Agriculture. Abas (1996) pointed out that Indigenous knowledge System is systemic process for the sustainable development of the World's Ecosystem.

Agriculture is the science or art of cultivating the soil for the production of crops. It is the basic industry of world, from which industries originate and upon which they depend. It deserves a high place in the world industries. It also deserves the attention of the best thinkers and the most skillful workers in the world (Phillips et.al., 1952). Along this, the holy Qur'an has this offer:

“Allah has spread out the earth for (His) Creatures: Therein are fruits and date palms, producing spathes (enclosing dates); fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of

the favors of your Lord will ye deny?”(Quran 55:10-13).

Man was created by God as His vicegerent on earth. He is endowed with all the quality and power so that he would be able to work for his survival in order to serve God and live in harmony with nature and his fellowmen. All things in his environment were created to serve his needs. Thus, man is expected to exert his utmost effort to use whatever lays on his hands in accordance with the Divine will.

*Kapangangawid* (meaning Agriculture) is traditional farming system of the Magindanawn. It is the major source of their staple food such as Rice. Hence rituals are a part and inseparable to their farming system activities. Traditionally, the Magindanawn *tali-awid*(farmers) prefer to engage in *kadtalige*ba (slush-and burn farming) system of farming rather than the use of *dadu* (*plow*), in any kind of landscape. Crop rotation was not within their knowledge; hence, they employed shifting cultivation of course with 3-5 years fallow period (Abas, 1997). And most importantly doing so, the Magindanawn farmers usually invoked rituals before clearing the new field. Sodusta (1993) stated that, Agriculture's rituals are ceremonial

forms wherein sacred symbols are involved that combine both emotion and metaphysical conceptions. She further explained that “symbol” means “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as vehicle for conception,”<sup>[6]</sup> the farming rituals of the Magindanawn are observed to be heavily associated with superstitions and traditional beliefs. Thus this research work is purely a documentation of the traditional rice farming rituals and practices of the Magindanawn in Southern Philippines. Specifically aims: to identify the farming rituals and practices of the Magindanawn farmers; to descriptively analyze the rationale behind the practice of rituals in farming; and to determine the factors that made rituals persistence amidst the prevalence of the modern Agriculture.

## 2. Methodology

The research designed of this study is purely descriptive. It includes all the methods and procedure in allocating all necessary data. The study employed the ethnographic method in gathering information about farming rituals practices among Magindanawn rice farmers. Spradley (1979) define ethnographic research as a kind of research to describe a culture. The essential core of ethnographic activity is aimed to understand another way of life from the native's point of view. He further said that it also means learning from the people.

### 2.1. Research Location

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Datu, Paglas, province of Magindanaw, Cotabato in Region 12. The study was conducted from February to September, 2005. The Municipality of Datu Paglas has 23 registered barangays. Eleven of these barangays were chosen as the cites of the study namely: a) Brgy. Poblacion, the center of study; b) Brgy. Damalusay; c) Brgy. Damawato; d) Brgy. Datang (the farthest going to the Northeast); e) Brgy. Katil (the farthest going to the south); f) Brgy. Sepaka; g) Brgy. Bulud; h) Brgy. Lipaw; i) Brgy. Bunawan; and, j) Brgy. Lumuyon (the farthest barangay going to the East).

### 2.2. Respondents

From the 11 registered barangays of Datu Paglas, there are 3,553 Magindanawn farmers out of whom the researchers selected a total of 120 respondents.

### 2.3. Research Findings

Agriculture is the science or art of cultivating the soil for the production of crops. It is the basic industry of the world, from which industries originate and upon which they depend. It deserves a high place in the world industries. It also deserves the attention of the best thinkers and the most skillful workers in the world (Phillips et.al. 1952). Along this, the holy Qur'an has this offer:

“Allah has spread out the earth for (His) Creatures: Therein are fruits and date palms, producing spates (enclosing dates); fodder, and sweet-smelling plants. Then which of the favors of your Lord will ye deny?”(Quran 55:10-13).

Man was created by god as His vicegerent on earth. He is endowed with all the quality and power so that he would be able to work for his survival in order to serve God and live in harmony with nature and his fellowmen. All things in his environment were created to serve his needs. Thus, man is expected to exert his utmost effort to use whatever lies on his hands in accordance with the Divine will.

It is not vain when God placed Adam and Sittie Hawa (Eve) in the beautiful garden. The Holy Qur'an says:

“O Adam: dwell thou and thy life in the Garden, and enjoy (its good things as you wish: but approach not things tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.” Quran 2:19).

Another verse in the Holy Qur'an says:

“God said: “Get ye down, with enmity Between yourselves. On earth will be your Dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time.”

These verses imply that Adam and Sittie Hawa was the first person on earth who gives knowledge to mankind on how the crops were proven by sowing their seed. The holy Qur'an says:

“See ye seed that ye sow in the ground? It is ye that cause it to grow, or are we the Cause? Were it our Will, we could crumble it dry power, and ye would be left in the wonderment, (Saying, “We are ended left with debts (for Nothing).”(Quran 56:63-66).

*Kapangangawid* (in Magindanawn means agriculture) is traditionally the main source of income of the Magindanawn farmers. Traditionally, the Magindanawn *tali-awid* (farmers) prefer to engage in kadtaligebe (kaingin) system of farming rather than the use of dadu (*plow*), either in the palaw (mountain) or in basak (wet field). Crop rotation was not within their knowledge; hence, they transferred from one field to another field. But before doing so, the Magindanawn farmers usually invoked rituals before clearing the new rice field. Sodusta (1993) stated that, Agriculture rituals are ceremonial forms wherein sacred symbols are involved that combine both emotion and metaphysical conceptions. She further explained that “symbol” means “any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as vehicle for conception,” the farming rituals of the Magindanawn are observed to be heavily associated with superstitions and traditional beliefs.

The existence of farming rituals among the Magindanawn was deeply motivated by the conception that every creature was treated equally by God and that this became a sacred customary practice of the Magindanawn farmers to perform rituals on the rice field.

Generally, the rationale behind farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers included:

1. Belief in the completeness of God. The one creator of all creatures, and all His creations were generally, governed by the law of God and the law of nature. To make his creation functional, the instructions of the maker had to be followed:
2. The palay as one of His creations or bounties was designed to follow the order of nature and the creature in-charge of the bounties had with them the instructions of God to be followed in order to make His creation functional and useful.

3. According to the Islamic point of view, angel Michael was one of the angels of God was instructed as in-charge of the bounties all over the world.
4. Human beings were instructed to follow the right instruction of God to seek all kinds of His bounties spread all over the world for their subsistence. This traditional right to be conducted in farming was given by God's instruction to the angel of bounty.

Accordingly, farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers are aimed to achieve maximum crop production. Without observing and practicing farming rituals, crop production would be lesser. It was also believed that rice, given proper conduct of rituals, would usually take a longer period to be consumed; on the other hand, rice without the proper rituals and care would be consumed in a relatively shorter time.

The researcher found out that the rationale behind the farming rituals was based on the beliefs that farming rituals among the Magindanawn was an act, or one way of communicating the soul of *uyag-uyag* (sustenance) which was the elder brother of the soul of human beings, according to the *tarsila* of the Magindanawn folk.

The rituals before clearing the new rice field such as *pagumba* (foretelling the future) and *pagapal* (food offering to evil spirits) were not in conformity with Islamic teachings. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared war on this deception which had no basis in knowledge, divine guidance, or a revealed scripture (Al-Qadarawi, 1984).<sup>[9]</sup> He recited to them what Allah had revealed to him:

Say: No one in the heavens and the earth  
Known the unseen except Allah.

The rituals before planting, like calling the name of the stars such as *balatik* (morning), *malala* (crack), people and the different name of prominent people and the different names of angels like Gibril, Michael, Edzrael, and Edzrapel were invoked by the *apu-napalay* when started to plant rice in the field.



Figure 1. ApunaPalay setting the Ebpalayan.

The *apu-napalay* placed the *ebpalayan* (small house) at the center of the rice field believing that the spirit of the palay called *uyag-uyag* will stay there from the time of planting up to harvesting time to safeguard the rice plant figure 1. He also

performed rituals for greeting the soil before starting to plant it. As soon as the plants were already sprouting, the *kanduli* was a way of thanking and asking more mercy performed rituals in every stage of rice production figure 2. He visited the rice fields from time to time putting in mine and hearth that all destructive elements get away from the Palay perimeter, to ensure quality and prosperous production of rice.



Figure 2. The farmer offer Kaduli or thanks given to Almighty ALLAH for bounty harvest.

### 3. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The researchers found out that the rationale behind farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers was based on the belief that farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers was an act or one way of communicating the soul of *uyag-uyag* (sustenance), which was the elder brother of human beings according to Magindanaw *tarsila* (history). Rituals were also used in communicating with evil spirits which may live in water, land, and in the forest.

The general rationale behind the farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers were as follows:

1. Belief in the completeness and oneness of God.
2. The palay (rice) as one of God's creations or bounties was design to follow the order of nature and the creature.
3. According to the Islamic point of view, angel Michael was instructed as in-charge of the bounties all over the world.
4. All human being were instructed to follow the instructions of God. Farming rituals among Magindanawn farmers were desired for greater production.

The researcher found out that the rituals involved in farming were as follows:

1. The calling of the names of stars, prominent names of people, angels and the mentioning of the names of four rightly guided caliphs.
2. Rituals for greeting the soil.
3. Rituals for sowing the rice/seed.
4. Rituals after sowing the rice.

5. Rituals for permission with peace.
6. Rituals when the plants are sprouting.
7. Rituals for *kanduli* (food offering).
8. Rituals during the vegetative stage of palay.
9. Rituals for *sabandiya* (appreciation).
10. Rituals for *penggemawan* (boating stage).
11. Rituals for curing the diseases of palay.
12. Rituals for the complete development of rice grain.
13. Rituals to cure underdeveloped rice grains of sickness.
14. Rituals for ripening the rice grain.
15. Rituals for harvesting of palay.
16. Rituals after cutting the first rice panicle.
17. Rituals for hauling the harvested rice.
18. Rituals for *tubali* (piling up) of rice.
19. Rituals for *pagapal* (food offering to evil spirits).
20. Rituals for clearing new rice farm with *pagumba* (foretelling the future).

The Magindanawn farmers adhered to traditional farm practices as well as to framing rituals due to the following reasons:

1. They were traditionally oriented.
2. They followed orthodox principles of farming.
3. These became *adat* or customary practices of the Magindanawn farmers, and
4. They lack knowledge on the new technology in rice farming. They believed that using artificial fertilizers without knowing the proper procedures of applying the fertilizer might even destroy the plant.

Furthermore, Magindanawn farmers were economically unstable. Majority of the Magindanawn farmers adhered to rituals in farming and other traditional farm practices because they could not afford and maintain to buy artificial fertilizers and chemicals and other pesticides due to their exorbitant prices. They were too expensive for the Magindanawn farmers. Therefore, they preferred to fertility of the soil by natural, organic means.

The researcher found out that the farming rituals which were in conformity with Islamic teachings were as follows:

1. Invoking the name of God before beginning to work was a declaration of divine permission.
2. Rituals for greeting the soil before planting rice or palay in the farm;
3. Rituals for curing diseases on rice plant;
4. Observing the position and characteristics of stars.
5. The giving of *zakat* after the threshing of rice;
6. Rituals for *kanduli*, permissible by Shari'ah values.

Farming rituals not in conformity with Islamic teachings were as follows:

1. *Pagumba* (foretelling the future).
2. *Pagapal* (food offerings to evil spirits).
3. Calling the names of stars, names of prominent people, angels of God and the names of rightfully guided caliphs;
4. All farming rituals not mentioned above were to be considered as traditional practices or *adat*/customary practices because these were not given sanctions by any *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him.)

The researcher found out that during the duration of this

study. The Magindanawn farmers were very much happy and cooperative in facilitating the collection of data. The key informants helped a lot in the collection of all necessary data of the study.

Another observation about the information was that some of them were reluctant in answering questions being asked but because of some strategy and techniques used, the researcher was able to get their sympathy. Mostly, the Magindanawn farmers depended on the *apu-napalay* in performing the rituals on the rice field. The *apu-napalay* managed to care the rice farm of every rice farmer through rituals. Almost all Magindanawn farmers who adhered to traditional practices were under the care of the *apu-napalay*.

A further observation during the duration of this study was that the Magindanawn farmers, especially orthodox ones, were really advocates of farming rituals with the exception of a few who were influenced by new technology through imitation, learning from their neighboring Christian farmers, and those who had the means to buy fertilizers and pesticides.

Finally, the farming rituals were mixed with Magindanawn indigenous terms, Arabic words and Malay. The researcher found difficulty in translating the different words which he was not familiar with.

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