

**MAHMUD AND THE MAGICAL RICE FIELD**

*Mahmud dan Sawah Ajaib*

Property of the State  
Not for Commercial Use

**Language Development and Cultivation Agency  
Ministry of Education and Culture  
Republic of Indonesia  
2018**

## MAHMUD AND THE MAGICAL RICE FIELD

Translated from  
*Mahmud dan Sawah Ajaib*  
written by Rahmat Zainun  
published by  
Language Development and Cultivation Agency  
Ministry of Education and Culture  
in 2016

This translation has been published as the result of the translation program organized  
by The Center for Language Strategy and Diplomacy Development,  
Language Development and Cultivation Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture  
in 2018

Advisory Board	Dadang Sunendar Emi Emilia Gufran Ali Ibrahim
Project Supervisor	Dony Setiawan
Translator	Nita Novianti
Reviewer	Raden Safrina
Editor-In-Chief	Theya Wulan Primasari
Editorial Team	Emma L.M. Nababan Andi Maytendri Matutu Hardina Artating Putriasari Meili Sanny Sinaga

All rights reserved.  
Copyrights of the original book and the translation belong to  
Language Development and Cultivation Agency,  
Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia.

Language Development and Cultivation Agency  
Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia  
Jalan Daksinapati Barat IV, Rawamangun, Jakarta  
Telepon (021) 4706287, 4706288, 4896558, 4894546  
Pos-el: badan.bahasa@kemdikbud.go.id  
www.badanbahasa.kemdikbud.go.id



# Mahmud dan Sawah Ajaib



CERITA RAKYAT DARI ACEH

Ditulis oleh  
**Rahmat Zainun**



## MAHMUD DAN SAWAH AJAIB

Penulis : Rahmat Zainun  
Penyunting : Hidayat Widiyanto  
Ilustrator : Leda  
Penata Letak : Giet Wijaya

Diterbitkan pada tahun 2016 oleh  
Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa  
Jalan Daksinapati Barat IV  
Rawamangun  
Jakarta Timur

### Hak Cipta Dilindungi Undang-Undang

Isi buku ini, baik sebagian maupun seluruhnya, dilarang diperbanyak dalam bentuk apa pun tanpa izin tertulis dari penerbit, kecuali dalam hal pengutipan untuk keperluan penulisan artikel atau karangan ilmiah.

PB 398.209 598 1 ZAI m	<b>Katalog Dalam Terbitan (KDT)</b>  Zainun, Rahmat Mahmud dan Sawah Ajaib: Cerita Rakyat dari Aceh/Rahmat Zainun. Penyunting: Hidayat Widiyanto. Jakarta: Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016.  ix 52 hlm. 21 cm.  ISBN 978-602-437-073-2
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. KESUSASTRAAN RAKYAT-SUMATERA</li><li>2. CERITA RAKYAT-ACEH</li></ol>

## Foreword

Literature work is not only series of word but it also talks about life, both realistically and idealistically of human. If it is realistic, the literature work usually contains life experiences, good model, and wisdom which have been added various style and imagination along with it. Meanwhile, if it idealistic, the literature work contains moral lecture, good character, advices, philosophical symbols, culture and other things related to human life. The life itself is very diverse, varies, and full of various problems and conflicts faced by humans. The diversity in humans life also affects to the diversity of literature work because the contents are inseparable from civilized and dignified humans life.

The literature works that dealing with life utilizes language as medium of deliverance and imaginative art as its *cultural land*. On the basis of the language medium and imaginative art, literature is multidimensional and multi-interpretative. Using language medium, imaginative art and cultural dimension, literature deliver messages to be reviewed or analyzed from various perspectives. The outcome of that perspective depends greatly on who is reviewing and analyzing with various socio-cultural and knowledge background. There is a time when a literary reviewer reviews from the point of view of metaphor, myth, symbol, power, ideology, economy, politics, and culture can be refuted by other reviewers who see from perspective of sound, referent, or irony. Even so, Heraclitus said, "However opposite they work together and from different directions, the most beautiful harmony emerges".

There are many lessons that we can get from reading literature, one of which is reading folktales that are adapted or reprocessed into children's stories. The results of reading literature always inspire and motivate readers to be creative in

finding something new. Reading literature can trigger further imagination, open enlightenment, and add insights. For this reason, we express our gratitude for the processors for the story. We also express our appreciation and gratitude to the Head of the Coaching Center, Head of the Learning Division, and Head of the Subdivision of Modules and Teaching Materials and staffs for all the efforts and hard works carried out until the realization of this book.

Hopefully this storybook is not only useful as a reading material for students and the community to foster a culture of literacy through the National Literacy Movement program, but also useful as an enrichment of our knowledge of past life that can be utilized in addressing current and future life developments.

Jakarta, June 2016

Regards,  
Prof. Dr. Dadang Sunendar, M. Hum.

## Preface

I thank God, Allah Swt., for without God's blessing the story from land of *Rencong* wouldn't have been able to be read by students and literary lovers throughout Indonesia. Aceh, with its religious nuances, saves so much cultural wealth, especially its folklore in the form of legends, fairy tales, and myths. The folklore contains very strong spiritual and social education values. All of them must be passed on to younger generation who will continue to develop this country.

The younger generation should maintain integrity of the story of the community so that they does not lose the values of local wisdom contained in existing folktale. I hope that the results of this work is useful and can be one of the documents to preserve the local culture which is a marker of national identity.

Suggestions, responses, and feedback from readers are welcomed to be used as consideration to improve the quality of this book in the future.

Banda Aceh, April 2016  
Rahmat Zainun

## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	v
Preface.....	vii
Table of Contents .....	viii
Mahmud and the Magical Rice Field .....	1
Polem Mahmud: A Gracious Man who Loves Animals and Plants .....	19
Lem Mahmud in Debt .....	27
Harvesting the Magical Rice .....	37
The Author.....	45
The Editor.....	47



## Mahmud and the Magical Rice Field

The middle-aged man was usually called Polem Mahmud. His thin body made him look like a hungry grasshopper, with thin beard growing on his pointed chin. The white color of the shirt he wore had faded, looking duller than the original color. Several patches of stitches overlapped around the collar and the buttocks of his pants. He walked in between rice fields, occasionally hopping to avoid the muddy rice fields.

From a distance someone called the poor man, “Polem, if you have some free time, please help plow my fields, can you?” asked Cut Meurah, an old woman whose rice field was adjacent to Polem Mahmud’s. It had become a habit of the people in the village to help each other, especially when it came to plowing and harvesting rice.

Smiling, the skinny man replied, “Don’t worry, Cut Po! I will plow your field after I have plowed mine. If things go as planned, I will plow your field the day after tomorrow.”

In the coastal villages, people commonly address older women as “Cut Po” and men as “Polem,” the equivalent of *abang*, and the address is sometimes even shortened to “lem” only. Therefore, most villagers called the poor man Lem Mahmud, whereas his full name was Mahmud Lam Kunyet. Mahmud was the given name from his father, and Lam Kunyet referred to the name of his



hometown. The Acehnese have always been fond of adding home-based origins to their children's names.

Lem Mahmud and his wife Da Limah lived in Krong Raya Village, a village in the interior of Aceh hundreds of years ago. At that time, Kampung Krong Raya was famous as one of the abundant rice producing villages. The name of Kampung Krong Raya comes from two words, *krong* and *raya*. The word *krong* is similar to the word “*karung*” in Indonesian which means “sack” or a rice barn. Meanwhile, the word “*raya*” means great. So, Krong Raya means a great rice barn. And, that was how the village earned the name Krong Raya.

Lem Mahmud and his wife led a frugal life. They lived in an old shack that almost collapsed. The hut they occupied had walls made of sago-palm midribs and floors of hard clay. The roof was made of dried coconut leaves woven on a bamboo. Da Limah herself wove the leaves.

At first, she separated the leaves from the stalks, and then the coconut leaves were soaked in the river for a night to make them easily arranged and not easily broken. After woven on a piece of bamboo of one and a half meter long, the coconut leaves were dried in the sun until they turned yellow and ready to be installed to roof the house.

Lem Mahmud had replaced the roof several times because usually coconut-leaf roof only lasted for a year or two. After that, it ought to be replaced with new coconut leaves. Inside the house, there were only two pieces of palm-leaf mats that were also knitted by his wife. One was used for everyday occasions and the other was used when there were guests visiting his house.

The mat for the guests still looked new because it was rarely used, most of the time only during *Lebaran*<sup>1</sup>. In fact, Lem Mahmud once told his wife, “If at any time one of us dies, this new palm-leaf mat should be used as a pad to bathe our dead bodies.”

There was no furniture in his house, just a round rattan chair near the kitchen stove that faithfully accompanied Lem Mahmud’s days when he did not go to the rice fields. They had no property besides a patch of paddies and a white bullock, inherited from Lem Mahmud’s father who passed away several years ago. Although poor, Lem Mahmud was not a slacker. Every day, he worked hard and enthusiastically.

Early in the morning, after a decent breakfast, he rushed to the rice fields. When the sun was up, he and his wife would be seen already working, plowing the rice fields until the afternoon. Approaching sunset, he would go to the sea looking for fish.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eid-al-Fitr, the religious holiday celebrated by Muslims all over the world in the end of Ramadhan or the fasting month.



The village where Lem Mahmud lived was very unique. To the south of the village stretched rice fields near the hills and Bukit Barisan Mountains, and to the north were the Malacca Straits in the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean. In the daytime, the sea breeze blew to the land, swinging rows of pine trees on the shore, while in the evening the land breeze blew toward the sea, carrying cold air that pierced the bones.

Lem Mahmud understood the movement of the sea and the wind from his father who was also a traditional fisherman. When he was young, Lem Mahmud and his father often fished in a small single-masted boat tied up with a sail-cloth. A pedal was used to steer to the left or right.

Normally, the sea breeze blows during the day from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon. At this time, the temperature of the ocean is cooler when compared to the terrestrial temperature. This is due to the slow nature of the sea to receive heat and release it. As a result, the oceans become regions with high air pressure and the lands become the area with low air pressure. Meanwhile, the land breeze blows from the land to the sea, which generally occurs at night from ten to four in the morning on the coastal areas.

At night, the land will be cooler than the ocean. This is due to the nature of the land that quickly receives heat and cold. The land becomes an area with high air pressure, while the sea becomes an

area with low air pressure. The vertical movement of the air causes cold air from the land to move in place of the rising temperature of the ocean, thus creating airflow from the land to the sea.

It is natural law that the wind will move from a high pressure to a low pressure area. Therefore, in the past Lem Mahmud's father and little Mahmud sailed into the ocean for fishing just after the sunset and only returned home the next day before evening.

For years the sea became an inseparable part of Lem Mahmud's life.

In fact, since his father passed away, Lem Mahmud was the one who sailed Haji<sup>2</sup> Usman's boat, succeeding his father. He became a *pawang*<sup>3</sup> and supervised several fishermen in the fishing boat. Lem Mahmud understood very well the sea that became the foundation of his life. He was an expert at forecasting weather, interpreting natural phenomena, knowing the many fish locations, and understanding the management of the sea that was the source of livelihoods for the people in his village. In his village, he was also known to be a wise man. Therefore, he was appointed as commander of the sea in his village.

---

<sup>2</sup> Indonesian address for a Muslim man who has completed the hajj

<sup>3</sup> Ship master

Sea commander is the person who leads the fisherman and manages the customary law of the sea in Aceh. He organized fishermen in his village to care for the environment, among others by prohibiting the destruction of coral reefs, forbidding the felling of timber trees on the coast such as spruce, pandan, *ketapang*<sup>4</sup>, and mangroves as well prohibiting the catch of dolphins and turtles.

As a sea commander, Lem Mahmud also made a regulation of a one day-off in a week to stop catching any marine biota so that fish, shrimp, and other sea animals can spawn, lay eggs, and breed calmly without getting disturbed by the fishermen. A day-off of sea fishing also provided an opportunity for the fishermen to fix the nets and the boat. In addition, the fishermen could also gather with their families.

The day off from going to sea was set on every Friday. The decision was made considering that Friday is the time for Muslim Acehnese fisherman to fulfill the obligation of Friday prayers in congregation.

On Friday morning, the fishermen generally repaired the damaged nets until the Friday prayer time arrived. They sat down on the floor, and everybody could be seen busily sewing back the broken nets, occasionally joking over coffee and eating the snacks bought

---

<sup>4</sup> Sea almond



by their *pawang* from the coffee shop. When the first call to prayer was made about an hour before the time of Friday prayer, the *pawang* and the fishermen stopped working and went to their respective home to bathe and get ready to go to the mosque.

In the mosque, before the second call to prayer or azan of Friday prayer time, the mosque administrator read reports on the funding for the construction of the mosque. Nearly eighty percent of the mosque construction fund in Lem Mahmud's village came from the alms of the fishermen. It was a tradition passed from one generation to the next for Krong Raya fishermen to set aside five percent of the sustenance earned. For example, if they got anchovies that sold for fifty ringgits, they would pay the alms for two and a half ringgits.

With the report, the general public would find out which fishing boats gained a lot of sustenance. The more often the name of the fishing boats mentioned, the more pride there would be for the fishermen. They felt happy to contribute to the development of their village.

Among Aceh's fishermen, besides the sea commander, there is also the *pawang*. A *pawang* is a master of a fishing boat that supervises several fishermen. This *pawang* is selected based on the experience in fishing. He is responsible for the maintenance of the fishing boat and all fishing equipment. He is also the one who decides which way the fishing spot is and when to move the

anchor up and down. Each fisherman will obey the *pawang*'s command. Because of the task and responsibility, the *pawang* will earn a little more income than the other fishermen.

The *pawang* would also be under the leadership of the sea commander, Lem Mahmud, to convey any information related to marine affairs. So, it was not surprising if Lem Mahmud often sat in a deliberation in the mosque with all *pawang*s after Friday prayer. Among the *pawang*s, Lem Mahmud was very well-respected. Lem Mahmud understood the circumstances of the fishermen's life because before he served as a sea commander, he was also a successful *pawang* in charge of his subordinates.

As the sea commander, Lem Mahmud also often resolved disputes among fishermen with *peudame* (reconciliation) traditions. In this *peudame* tradition, every problem is solved by prioritizing the common good. No one would be aggrieved.

In the tradition and local wisdom of Acehnese fishermen, a sea commander has a territory with certain geographical boundaries. The area is commonly called *lhok* (bay) with clear natural boundaries that are maintained for generations.

So, Lem Mahmud who served as Sea Commander of Lhok Krong Raya had the authority to handle all problems of the fishermen in Lhok Krong Raya area only.

The boundaries of the land include the shoreline, where the fishing trawlers (traditional fishing boat of Aceh) are pulled, to the area where fishing boats/vessels along with their equipment are repaired, whereas the boundaries to high seas commonly reach the limit of free territorial waters. However, the territorial rules do not restrict fishermen from other *lhok* (bays) to fish there as long as the fishing methods do not violate the rules of the local sea commander, still prioritize the sustainability of marine life, and not damage the local marine ecosystem.

The customary law of the sea in Aceh is similar to the tradition of *sasi* in Central Maluku and Southeast Maluku, the tradition of *pamali mamanci ikang* in North Maluku, and the *awig-awig* tradition in West Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. In general, the customary traditions prohibit fishermen from performing certain actions that will damage the marine ecosystems and coastal areas for the benefit of future generations of the fishermen.

As a fishing village, Krong Raya, Lem Mahmud's village, had given birth to great sailors of its time. One of the legends is the Admiral Keumalahayati. She lived during the Sultanate of Aceh led by Sultan Alaidin Ali Riayat Syah IV who ruled between the years 1589-1604 A.D. It is told that Srikandi Keumalahayati is listed as the first female admiral in the world.

At the time of the Sultanate of Aceh, she was so meritorious in expelling the Portuguese who wanted to seize the land of Aceh.

At that time, Keumalahayati became the initiator and commander of the legendary Inong Balee Army. In the Aceh language, *inong* means “woman,” while *balee* means “widow”. So, the Inong Balee Army is a special army of widows of Acehnese warriors who died in the battles against Portuguese fleets attempting to take control of Aceh.

Keumalahayati, who was the wife of one of the fallen admirals, took the initiative to propose that the widows of the warriors be empowered in the military service.

Admiral Keumalahayati was renowned worldwide after successfully destroying a Dutch warship led by General Cornelis de Houtman who was notoriously cruel.

In fact, Cornelis de Houtman was killed in the hands of Keumalahayati in a one-on-one battle on the deck of a ship on September 11, 1599, while his brother Frederich de Houtman was captured and imprisoned for about a year.

Back to Lem Mahmud's story. Despite having worked really hard, Lem Mahmud’s financial life was still helter-skelter. His fish catches were just enough to meet their daily meal needs. Understandably, the fish net he used was torn here and there, as he had no money to fix it. Occasionally, he fished with a small boat made of damar wood he carved by himself.

On his breaks from plowing his only patch of rice field, the man would walk behind a small hut in his rice field. He did that not to rest but to collect fibers of pineapple leaves that grew in the forest not far from his rice field. The pineapple fibers were used as threads to repair the damaged nets.

After a few hundred meters of walking, he stopped at a wild pineapple tree, almost identical to pineapple trees in general, but it does not bear any fruits. Around its leaves there are no thorns like those found on regular pineapples. The pricks are only found at the end of the leaves. The leaf is black, quite long for about eight centimeters. First, he removed the black thorns on the edge of the leaves, and then soaked the leaves in water for a few days to make them soft. Only when they were soft then he pounded the leaves to produce yarn fibers. His creative hands pulled the yarn fibers one by one and spun them.

He sometimes used the yarn fibers to hook river shrimps found near the rice fields. Lem Mahmud had been used to doing it since he was a child. The yarn fiber was tied to the end of a stick from a coconut leaf that had been sharpened in the form of a small loop tailored to the size of a shrimp's eyes. Dexterously, Lem Mahmud hooked the loop of yarn to the eyes of a shrimp hiding behind the rocks.

In addition, the yarn fibers were used to repair torn net. Indeed, he had to regularly replace the yarn fibers with new ones because of



their low resistance. Nevertheless, he was never tired of spinning the wild pineapple fibers.

The process of spinning the yarn for the net took time and required tenacity and patience. It seemed impossible for Lem Mahmud to only rely on his diminishing power to spin the yarn. His eyes were getting shortsighted, and the muscles on his fingers could not be forced to work all night.

The harvest from his rice field was not abundant, either, and in fact, day by day their rice supply was only enough for the daily meal he shared with his wife. Their lives were getting harder. It had been a week that Lem Mahmud did not get a good catch. In fact, the day before not a single fish was caught by his net. The rice supplies were running low. To save rice, Lem Mahmud went to the forest looking for alternative food.

His eyes swept the forest, as he increasingly felt the hunger. He scanned every tree carefully, expecting to find a *gadung*<sup>5</sup> tree. The Acehnese call it *janeng*, a tubal forest plant that grows among the bushes. The trunk is small and has small spikes, creeping like a betel tree. The leaves are green when young. The roots are fibrous and filthy white. To this date, people who are as less fortunate as Lem Mahmud have made *janeng* an alternative food substitute for rice during famine.

---

<sup>5</sup> A type of climbing plant that is edible provided that the tuber is prepared carefully by soaking it in water

It is said that once when the famine hit the village of Lem Mahmud, *janeng* actually became a staple food. Every day, the villagers roamed the forest outside the village to look for this type of tuber plants.

After a few dozen yards into the forest, Lem Mahmud's eyes were fixed on the roots of a plant that crept into an adjacent tree. "Alhamdulillah<sup>6</sup>, I finally found the *janeng* tree," he whispered to himself.

Then with alacrity, Lem Mahmud dug the *janeng* fruit. Sweat moistened his shabby clothes. Every now and then he seemed to stop digging, and with his tired face he heaved a sigh. Moments later, a five-kilogram *janeng* fruit appeared on the ground. Beads of sweat trickled down his face, so he rested for a moment and gulped down the fresh water prepared by his wife. Albeit being exhausted, especially with his age that had passed a half century and the tedious job of searching and digging a *janeng* tree that was very draining, he did not complain; his young spirit was still burning.

After a few moments of lying down on the hills of the forest, he rose and put the *janeng* on his shoulders and carried it home. Arriving home, Da Limah took the *janeng* fruit from her

---

<sup>6</sup> All praise to God



husband's shoulders. Then, she prepared a glass of warm water for her beloved husband.

Lem Mahmud sat on a chair, the only property that they had. He took a deep breath, letting go of his fatigue. Occasionally, he told his wife about the struggle to find the *janeng* that he got from the edge of the forest near their rice fields, as Da Limah listened while peeling the skin off and washing the tuber with water. Then, she cut the fruit into small pieces and rinsed them thoroughly. Next, the sliced *janeng* was sprinkled with salt and let sit in a clay jug for up to three days. After three days of being soaked with salt and water, the slices of *janeng* were put into a *raga*, which is a round fish basket of about six inches in diameter made of rattan the size of a little finger.

The next day, when going fishing, Lem Mahmud brought the slices of *janeng* to the beach. There, the sliced *janeng* was trampled until the toxins contained in the fruit were fully removed. Lem Mahmud would stop stepping on it if the white sap had released all of its intoxicant substances. It was said that Keusyik Dolah, Lem Mahmud's childhood friend once spoke gibberish, getting intoxicated from eating a *janeng* not thoroughly squeezed.

After returning from fishing, Lem Mahmud brought home the *janeng* to be dried in the sun on the next day on a *bleuet*. *Bleuet* is

a flat, rectangular container made of woven coconut leaves. Its size is approximately two and a half meters.

Da Limah and Lem Mahmud were very adept at weaving dried coconut leaves to make *bleuet*. They had ten *bleuets* used to dry their seafood and farm produce. Sometimes, they dried small anchovies on the *bleuet*, and some other times they dried copra on it. Once fully dried, the *janeng* was cooked as a morning meal or mixed with sticky rice.

## **Polem Mahmud: A Gracious Man who Loves Animals and Plants**

Despite his impoverished life, Lem Mahmud was known to be a very kind and generous person. Although smoke was rarely seen coming out of his kitchen, which showed how rarely he cooked, it was not infrequently for him to be seen sharing food with a number of equally unfortunate neighbors.

Lem Mahmud and Da Limah never hurt the feelings of others, including their neighbors. They always maintained a good relationship with other people. If any of their neighbors was sick, they would quickly come to visit. Not only to other people, but Lem Mahmud was also very generous and compassionate to the animals.

Once, he carried some pomfrets and red groupers tied with a rope in his hands. The rope was inserted through gill slits of the fish he caught. It seemed that he was about to sell the fish to the market.

However, about two hundred yards to the market, a cat followed him with a loud meowing. Its voice was half hoarse, apparently from great hunger, and his stomach seemed to be deflated. If only it could speak, perhaps the cat would have been asking for pity, begging for the mercy of Lem Mahmud.



Lem Mahmud stopped his steps. He untied the fish and with affection he gave a pomfret to the cat. The starving cat gobbled the pomfret given by Lem Mahmud. Occasionally, it wagged its tail as if to say thank you. A moment later, the cat disappeared from Lem Mahmud's sight.

Arriving at the market, the untied pomfrets were already re-tied. Lem Mahmud had been awaited by a *toke bangku* and *mugee* who would market the fish caught by fishermen. *Toke bangku* literally means a bench entrepreneur, but in the marine tradition of Aceh a *toke bangku* can be interpreted as a fish collector that accommodates the catch of fishermen. They are called *toke bangku* because they do not work as fishermen; instead, they just sit on a bench in the market while waiting for the fisherman to go fishing.

The fish caught by the fishermen should not be directly purchased by villagers from the hands of the fishermen. Instead, a *toke bangku* will facilitate the trade, and then he will set the price and sell the fish to the *mugee*. Meanwhile, a *mugee* is a fish trader in the market or a roundsman.

After handing the fish to the *toke bangku*, Lem Mahmud went straight home, not waiting for the sale of his fish. Normally, Lem Mahmud took the money from the sale of fish when returning to the market to buy daily household needs. The *toke bangku* and *mugee* played a very important role for the fishermen in Lem

Mahmud's village to sell their fish catches. One might ask: Why do fishermen authorize the sale of fish to *toke bangku*? Because a *toke bangku* knows the market price of fish by comparing the price to that in other villages. Another benefit is that when it is rainy season or fish catches are abundant, a *toke bangku* will still accommodate the catches of the fishermen with a reasonable price so that the fishermen will not have to be worried.

In addition to frequently feeding cats with the fish he caught, Lem Mahmud was very concerned with the biota in the sea. If he happened to catch a small fish, he would release it back to the sea. He believed that later the fish would grow big and certainly be more useful than the catch taken at a young age.

When it was time to plow the fields, everyone in Lem Mahmud's village used cows or buffaloes to plow their fields, including Lem Mahmud. However, Lem Mahmud's way of plowing rice fields was different from that of most people in his village. Every day during the plowing of rice fields, Lem Mahmud often came late to his fields. Sometimes, it was only when the sun had risen that Lem Mahmud could be seen walking along with his favorite white bullock.

Apparently, Lem Mahmud never forced his only bullock to plow the rice field. He always waited for the bullock to wake up by itself in the morning. It never crossed his mind to force the white bullock to wake up faster to plow the fields. The bullock's need

of feed was also really well-attended. When the bullock was tired, he immediately unfastened the *langai*, which is the tool to plow attached on the shoulders of the bullock, and let the bullock rest earlier.

Lem Mahmud was also very concerned with the plants. He never let a little grass that he collected for his bullock get scattered on the streets.

For years he had gone to the rice fields and forests in the mountains, but never had he cut a tree without any clear intention. Once, he was laughed at when he asked for permission from a tree before cutting off its branches to be used as rowers for his small boat.

Even more astonishing, he set aside a few meters of rice in his field for sparrows and other pests to eat. Strangely, the rice pests seemed to know which parts of the rice were allowed to eat and which ones were not.

When his elderly mother was still alive a few years ago, Lem Mahmud also spoiled her. Sometimes he did not hesitate to carry his mother on his arms if his mother wanted to go somewhere. He treated and cared for his stooped mother like a baby who still did







not know anything, exactly the same as how Lem Mahmud was nurtured by his mother when he was little. Not in the least he grudged and felt being forced to take care of his mother.

Lem Mahmud was very concerned about his mother, especially since his birth mother was a deaf, someone who could not hear. He never let his mother down.

In his life, it only occurred to him to care for and protect his mother as well as he could. That was why among of the people of his village, Lem Mahmud was well known for his good soul.

## **Lem Mahmud in Debt**

The economic difficulties of Lem Mahmud's households were getting worse. To meet the needs of their lives, his wife without his knowledge borrowed some money from many people. Their debts were increasing until one day Da Limah asked her husband to do something he never did before.

“Husband, why don't you borrow fifty ringgits from Toke Ali? The money can be used to repair the worn fish net, and half of it can be used to repair the plowing equipment for better rice yields,” Da Limah suggested one day.

Lem Mahmud seemed stunned for a moment to hear her suggestion. In his heart he agreed with Da Limah's advice, but he was hesitant to borrow some money from others. Lem Mahmud seemed afraid that he would not be able to pay his debt, which would make their life even harder.

Lem Mahmud's heart was raging. He hesitated between accepting and rejecting his wife's request. A moment later, Lem Mahmud rushed to the banks of the river near his rice field. He was seen washing his tired face after plowing. Then, for a moment, he raised both hands.

“Oh God, our life is getting harder day by day. I have worked hard tirelessly, day and night. I work really hard to live peacefully

and be able to worship you. Now, I don't know whom to talk to about this misery other than You. I ask for Your guidance. Which way is better, should I follow my wife's advice to borrow money from Toke Ali?"

Lem Mahmud's eyes looked puffy. A moment later it seemed he was resolute to borrow fifty ringgits from Toke Ali. Toke Ali was a rich man in Lem Mahmud's village. His wealth was abundant. Toke Ali had plenty of buffaloes and cows, and he had hundreds of goats. Toke Ali's rice fields were plentiful. Lem Mahmud was often asked by Toke Ali to help plow his fields.

Feeling close to Toke Ali, Lem Mahmud mustered up his courage to borrow money from him. Besides, Toke Ali was well known to be nice and generous.

Arriving at Toke Ali's house, Lem Mahmud initially looked awkward. However, due to his desperate need of money, Lem Mahmud eventually mustered his courage to talk to Toke Ali.

"Look, Toke Ali, actually since two weeks ago I have meant to see you and talk to you about something, but it is only today that God fated me to come here," Lem Mahmud still seemed reluctant to express his intention.

Toke Ali, who was wise, seemed to be reading the signs of Lem Mahmud's intentions as he said, "Polem, I have regarded you as my own brother. If there is anything that can I help you with, just

say it. Don't hesitate! *Insha*<sup>7</sup> Allah I will help you, Polem, if I can."

"Look Toke, you know if I only have a patch of rice field and a piece of fishing net from my late father. Well, it's been a few years that the fish net has been my life support for fishing. However, since the last two weeks I haven't been able to use the net anymore. Its threads were broken by age.

Meanwhile, the rice field that I worked on did not give maximum yields. So, if you are willing to help, please lend me fifty ringgits to repair the net and work on the rice field better," Lem Mahmud asked.

Toke Ali smiled at Lem Mahmud's remark. Without thinking, he immediately gave the fifty ringgits that Lem Mahmud had requested. Lem Mahmud was really glad. In his mind he thought of how his fish catch and the rice yields would be abundant again.

Along the way home Lem Mahmud could not stop feeling grateful for the help of God through Toke Ali who lent him the money. Arriving at home, he immediately told his wife about it. Da Limah seemed happy to hear the news from her husband.

A month later, Lem Mahmud and Da Limah became more zealous in working. The fish net had been repaired, and Lem

---

<sup>7</sup> If God wills



Mahmud's fish catches had increased. In addition to meeting the needs of their daily meals, they sold the fish to the market. He saved his money and it was not long until Lem Mahmud was able to pay twenty-five rupiahs, half of the money he had borrowed from Toke Ali, because he had promised to pay half of his debt when the next harvest time arrived.

However, there was actually an unpaid debt of Da Limah who borrowed the money behind Lem Mahmud's back. Lem Mahmud was a little upset with his wife, who just confided to him about the debt. Now, they hang their hope on the rice they planted six months ago.

A flock of sparrows flew here and there, sometimes perching on the rice fields, watching the surrounding atmosphere. Some of them hovered above the yellowing rice plants. Da Limah's hands swiftly wiggled the rope stretched to the other corner of the rice field. On the rope was hung a scarecrow made of wood. The body was made of straw, dry grasses, and leaves. Its head was an old dried coconut shell dropped to the ground by a squirrel that had eaten it.

Once the rope was pulled, the scarecrow would move like a man who was about to chase away the birds. That is how Lem Mahmud and his wife took turns guarding their rice field for the whole day.

The morning sun was so bright. From a distance, people were seen walking to the rice fields, all carrying sickles and other equipment to harvest the rice.

Indeed, the harvest time had arrived. Lem Mahmud and Da Limah were very much hopeful of the rice harvest this time.

“Husband, hopefully the rice harvest this time can meet our daily needs,” said Da Limah while pointing at their rice.

“Yes, I hope so, too. But more importantly, I hope the rice harvest this time can also pay off our debts,” Lem Mahmud added a moment later.

“Ah yes, today we have an appointment with Toke Ali to harvest his rice. Perhaps tomorrow we will harvest ours,” Lem Mahmud reminded his wife. Toke Ali’s rice fields stretched out as far as the eye could see. Sometimes it took a week to harvest the whole fields. It required many people to do so. Lem Mahmud and Da Limah always helped Toke Ali every harvest time. Usually, they got some sacks of rice grains from helping to harvest Toke Ali’s rice. The rice grains were partially sold to the market to buy the daily necessities and the other half kept for their own food needs.

The next day, as the sun slowly peeked from behind the leaves, Lem Mahmud and Da Limah hurried off to the fields. On the wall





of his house made from the sago midrib hung a sickle that had thinned because of too much sharpening.

Lem Mahmud took it and put it in the burlap sack he wove from coconut fibers. Da Limah prepared the food and drinks for their meal in the field later.

Once arrived in the rice field, Da Limah said happily, “*Alhamdulillah*, dear, our rice harvest is abundant. It’s not for vain that we have worked so long.”

“Thank God! Hopefully the results can also pay off our debts,” Lem Mahmud said, smiling happily to his wife. “We also have to set aside a little rice harvest for those who are entitled, as our ancestors said *watee keumeukoh pembela preh dilee, zakeut ngon utang pembelea tunggee* ‘harvesting (cutting the rice) must be hastened, alms and debt should paid before getting asked for,’” Lem Mahmud added.

In fact, though poor, Lem Mahmud was very reluctant to get a loan. He worried that if he could not pay off the debt, his families would carry the burden. Hence, when the food was not sufficient for three times of meals a day, he often asked his wife to join him fasting. In addition to rewarding, fasting nourished the body for those practicing it.

Some time later, Lem Mahmud descended into his field, as did Da Limah. He cut the rice stalks one by one, and then tied and

arranged the cut stalks one by one. Under the scorching sun, Lem Mahmud's sweat poured down his face, so was Da Limah's, but they did not care. After some time, all the rice had been cut. Then, they rested in a *rangkang*, a hut in the middle of rice fields three to three meters in size. The coconut leaf-roofs were knitted by Da Limah, so were the walls.

This was Lem Mahmud's first harvest with considerable yields compared to that of the previous years. With the harvest, Lem Mahmud was able to pay off the remaining debt to Toke Ali. However, to pay off other loans made by Da Limah, the yield would not be enough. They hoped the next year's rice harvest could pay off the rest of the debt.

A few days later, after returning home from Toke Ali's house to pay off his debt, Lem Mahmud said to his wife, "Dek Nong—Lem Mahmud's intimate call to his wife—I hope we can be grateful for all God's gift, not just material objects, but also the gift of health and happiness. I want both of us not to make it as a habit to get a loan because it will burden our lives," said Lem Mahmud while looking at Da Limah's face, "or, if there is no other way out, you must let me know.

Maybe we can find a way out together." Da Limah did not say anything but just nodded in agreement.

Lem Mahmud was very grateful for all God's gifts. It never crossed his mind to protest about his poverty. When he could not catch a single fish during fishing, he never complained. He believed God had an unknown plan for him.

It was this belief that made Lem Mahmud and Da Limah's household look happy. They were always grateful for whatever God had given them. Happiness, hardship, all was accepted as their destiny. In the past, they had been blessed with a daughter, but the Lord had another plan for them: their daughter died when she was young.

At the age of three, their daughter, Nyak Asiah, was in her cheerful days. One day, the outbreak of diarrhea plagued Kampong Krong Raya. Some villagers fell victims to the disease. Nyak Asiah, Lem Mahmud's daughter, was one of the infected. After a week, the disease did not go away; instead, it got worse. Lem Mahmud had done his utmost to cure his only child, but God willed otherwise.

She died around midnight in the arms of Lem Mahmud. Initially, Lem Mahmud was devastated by the disaster; his wife, Da Limah, was even more affected. However, the despair did not last long. Lem Mahmud and Da Limah sincerely accepted the premature death of their baby. They were very steadfast and put their trust in their Lord.

## Harvesting the Magical Rice

Every morning until sunset, Lem Mahmud and Da Limah worked hand in hand cultivating their rice field. Every half day they plowed the field with the help of their white bullock. Once in a while, the sound of the middle-aged man gulping down the water broke the silence. A few drops of drinking water spilled over a thin shirt torn on the armpits.

Ever since they got abundant rice crops last year, Lem Mahmud had been growing more excited with plowing his rice field with a *langai*, and then he dug the soil using *creu*. Both of these tools were drawn by the white bullocks. When he was tired, he took a break. The bullock that did the plowing stood in the middle of the rice field, still with the plowing equipment mounted on his shoulders.

Da Limah brought a bucket of water drawn from the well near the *rangkang*, their small hut in that field. Then, she gave it to the white bullock that looked thirsty.

The bullock seemed to throw his tail to the right and to the left to ward off the fly that landed on his body.

“Come on, *puteh*, let’s work again!” asked Lem Mahmud to the cow, treating it as if it could speak. Approaching the harvest time, Lem Mahmud and his wife were getting excited. They always

asked God to grant them with the maximum results of their rice crops. It even seemed that no rice pests disturbed the rice field of Lem Mahmud. Rats, snails, slugs, and sparrows seemed reluctant to approach their field.

The sun shone brightly. From a distance, Lem Mahmud's rice field could be seen turning yellow, marking the harvest time. Early in the morning, Lem Mahmud and Da Limah rushed to their field. Arriving in the rice field, Lem Mahmud immediately picked up the sickle and cut the rice assisted by his wife. They were both engrossed in cutting the rice while moving in parallel to the front part of the field in unison without looking back.

As they moved to the border of the other rice fields, they decided to take a break while sitting on the rice field.

How surprised they were when they saw that the rice they had cut had grown back and was ready to be harvested again. Lem Mahmud was seen rubbing his eyes repeatedly as if in total disbelief in what he saw. Then, he cut the rice again. Surprisingly, every time the rice was finished getting harvested, it grew again and ready to be harvested again.

Initially, no one knew about this strange incident. However, other rice farmers eventually noticed the strange thing in Lem Mahmud's rice field. Gradually, the news of the rice that could regrow spread to the whole country. Lem Mahmud and his wife

were grateful for the rare fortune they got. Slowly all of their debts were paid off.

In fact, now Lem Mahmud had turned into a rich man. Their rice crops were abundant. Even Lem Mahmud's *krông*, rice barn, should be expanded to accommodate the rice crops. From the rice harvest, they had been able to buy a fabric store. At that time, a fabric cloth was a very economically valuable asset. In the store, various types of fabrics were sold, from cotton to silk. Lem Mahmud's wealth increasingly grew day by day. However, the fate of Lem Mahmud and his wife did not last very long. One time while harvesting his crops, Lem Mahmud's heart grew with annoyance.

He was upset to see the rice in the field continued to regrow after getting harvested. Then unconsciously he exclaimed, "My goodness, rice, what is it that makes you like this? I harvest the one in front of me, you grow again behind me. I'm really annoyed," Lem Mahmud growled at the rice.

Not long afterwards, with God's will, the harvested rice flew like a swarm of bees and disappeared from Lem Mahmud's sight. He was startled, astonished. He felt a mix of sadness and regret. He rushed home to his wife, Da Limah. When he got home, he was again shocked to see the piles of rice in their rice barn had turned into thick black stones.





“Dear, dear, look at our rice! Everything has turned into stones,” Lem Mahmud screamed in a husky voice. Da Limah was stunned to see what happened. They both then rushed to see their fabric store in the market. From a distance, the crowds were seen observing Lem Mahmud’s fabric store that had also changed into large stones. Piles of dozens of fabric bales at the store had turned into a pile of well-stacked rocks.

Lem Mahmud’s face turned gloomy, as he was saddened by his fate. He really regretted his lack of gratitude for the gifts of God all this time.

He was arrogant and haughty. He wished, if only he had not behaved so, certainly his wealth would have multiplied and benefited others. However, it is no use crying over spilt milk, as it was all his fate.

Now, Lem Mahmud and Da Limah returned to the way they were. The fish net he repaired with the loan money from Toke Ali still faithfully accompanied him to the sea. A plot of magical rice field inherited from his parents had reverted into a common rice field. No more rice was grown and ready to be harvested in seconds.

Lem Mahmud and Da Limah seemed to brood in the small hut in the middle of their rice field. Lem Mahmud realized the mistake he had made. Despite falling back into poverty, Lem Mahmud had never felt hopeless and lazy to work.

From then on and in the years that followed, he and his wife returned to their routines, just like how it used to be. During the day they would go to the rice field and at night they would go fishing. They did not seem to be engrossed in sadness and misfortune.

After several months passed, one afternoon Lem Mahmud said to his wife, Da Limah, “Dear, I’m sure God still loves us both. It is proven by how when we err with our magical rice field, He immediately reminded us of His power.” Lem Mahmud approached his wife while continuing, “So, Dear, I am resolved that starting tomorrow we will be working on our patch of rice field earnestly while we supplicate Him for our rice yields to be abundant and increasing in amount.”

Hearing her husband’s words, Da Limah replied, “Yes, dear. Nothing is impossible if we try hard and seek help only from Him. I am sure we will achieve success again. Of course God has other intentions behind the calamity that befell us.”

Lem Mahmud was stunned by his wife’s answer. He felt increasingly motivated to redeem himself. He thought the success achieved through struggle and hard work would certainly be more satisfying. The sun was slowly setting, as a sign that it was almost nightfall. Red light began to spread in the western horizon. A faint sound of eagles coming back to their nests seemed to be a silent witness to the conversation of the two human beings.

As soon as the rooster crowed early in the morning, Lem Mahmud and his wife got up. They felt a new spirit of life. As the sun slowly rose on the eastern horizon, he and his wife were ready to work even harder.

Every day until the harvest time, they worked seriously and energetically on the patch of the rain-fed rice field that was previously known to be magical. From year to year their harvest continued to increase. Slowly, the life of Lem Mahmud and his wife improved. In fact, they now were able to buy some other patches of rice fields.

Lem Mahmud had now changed. He came to be increasingly grateful for the abundance of gifts from God. No more pride and arrogance in him. He always shared the fortune he got with others in need. After several years of the incident of the magical rice field, Lem Mahmud had become rich again. In fact, his wealth far exceeded his previous one. Lem Mahmud had also restarted the fabric business he once had. Not only one, but he now had three more fabric stores.

The villagers were amazed by Lem Mahmud's life, the life of someone who was patient, persistent, tenacious, passionate, and determined and able to rise from adversity. For Lem Mahmud himself, nothing was special.

He was still Lem Mahmud, someone who loved fellow human beings and other God's creatures. He just hoped their life story could be a life lesson for future generations.

However, after hundreds of years passed, the tens of hectares of rice fields in Kampung Krong Raya that once produced the abundant harvest are no longer planted with rice. For years, the rain-fed rice fields have been left stranded. The people of Krong Raya now rely solely on seasonal fishing and farming as their livelihoods. At certain moments, especially in the wake of the rainy season, they open up farmland on the fringes of the mountains to grow *palawija*<sup>8</sup> crops, such as chilies and onions.

They abandoned the work in the rice fields that their ancestors once started with an excuse that many pests are harming the rice crops. Some of them think it is all caused by the tragedy of Lem Mahmud who was not grateful for the gift of God.

To this date, the stones that resemble a stack of rice paddies and piles of fabric bales can still be seen in the village of Krueng Raya, one of the villages in the interior of Aceh Besar, Aceh Province.

---

<sup>8</sup> Secondary crops, usually grown after lowland rice, the first crop in the one-year crop rotation system.

## The Author



Nama lengkap : Rahmat Zainun, S.Ag., M.Hum.  
Telp kantor/ponsel : (0651) 7551096/085370337451  
Pos-el : rahmat\_zainunabd@yahoo.com  
Akun Facebook : rahmat zainun abdullah  
Alamat kantor : Jalan P. Nyak Makam 21, Lampineung,  
Kecamatan Kuta Alam, Banda Aceh  
23126  
Bidang keahlian : Bahasa dan sastra

**Riwayat Pekerjaan/Profesi (10 tahun terakhir):**

1. 2002–sekarang: Peneliti bahasa dan sastra di Balai Bahasa Provinsi Aceh

**Riwayat Pendidikan Tinggi dan Tahun Belajar:**

1. S-2: Linguistik-Penerjemahan, Pascasarjana Universitas Sumatera Utara (2010—2012)
2. S-1: Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris UIN Ar-raniry Darussalam Banda Aceh (1994—2000)

**Judul Buku dan Tahun Terbit (10 Tahun Terakhir):**

1. Acehnese Everyday (Tim, 2010)
2. Analisis Struktur Puisi A. Hasjmy (2014)

**Informasi Lain:**

Lahir di Banda Aceh, 3 Januari 1977 dari pasangan suami-istri Alm. H. Zainun Abdullah dan Hj. Zuraida Hasan. Sejak tahun 2002 telah melakukan beberapa penelitian baik dalam ranah kajian sastra maupun bahasa. Tulisannya juga beberapa kali menghiasi rubrik bahasa dan sastra tabloid Kontras dan surat kabar Serambi Indonesia.

## **The Editor**

Nama : Hidayat Widiyanto  
Pos-el : [hidayat.widiyanto@kemdikbud.go.id](mailto:hidayat.widiyanto@kemdikbud.go.id)  
Bidang Keahlian : Penyuntingan

### **Riwayat Pekerjaan:**

Peneliti muda di Pusat Pembinaan, Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa.

### **Riwayat Pendidikan:**

S-1 Sastra dari Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung pada tahun 1998

### **Informasi Lain:**

Lahir di Semarang, pada tanggal 14 Oktober 1974. Aktif dalam berbagai kegiatan dan aktivitas kebahasaan, di antaranya penyuntingan bahasa, penyuluhan bahasa, pengajaran bahasa Indonesia bagi orang asing (BIPA), dan berbagai penelitian baik yang dilaksanakan oleh lembaga maupun yang bersifat pribadi.