

From Ritual to Ecological Meaning: Islamic Ecotheology and the Banyu Udan Tradition in Sleman



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ABSTRAK

Keberlanjutan sumber daya air di Sleman tidak hanya berkaitan dengan pengelolaan sumber daya, tetapi juga dengan makna budaya dan keagamaan air hujan. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana Kenduri Banyu Udan dalam Komunitas Banyu Bening mengonstruksi dan menegosiasikan makna sakral dan ekologis air hujan. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif melalui wawancara semiterstruktur terhadap enam informan yang dipilih berdasarkan kriteria yang telah ditetapkan, observasi nonpartisipan, dan dokumentasi. Karena pengumpulan data tidak bertepatan dengan ritual, struktur dan simbolisme Kenduri Banyu Udan dikaji melalui wawancara, foto, arsip komunitas, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa air hujan dikonstruksi sebagai karunia Allah yang berkaitan dengan rasa syukur, amanah, khalifah, tanggung jawab moral, dan kepedulian terhadap ciptaan. Makna tersebut diwujudkan melalui simbol ritual, aktivitas kolektif, edukasi lingkungan, dan praktik konservasi. Namun, internalisasi berlangsung berbeda karena skeptisisme terhadap kualitas air hujan, ketergantungan pada air tanah, dan ketidakmerataan keterlibatan rumah tangga. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ritual lokal menjadi ruang sosial untuk melegitimasi dan menegosiasikan makna ekologis tanpa menghasilkan perilaku lingkungan yang seragam.

ABSTRACT

Water sustainability in Sleman involves not only resource management but also the cultural and religious meanings attached to rainwater. This study analyzes how Kenduri Banyu Udan within the Banyu Bening Community constructs and negotiates the sacred and ecological meanings of rainwater. The study employs a descriptive qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected informants, non-participant observation, and documentation. As data collection did not coincide with the ritual, the structure and symbolism of Kenduri Banyu Udan were examined through interviews, photographs, community archives, and related documentation. The findings indicate that rainwater is constructed as a divine provision associated with gratitude, *amanah*, *khalifah*, moral responsibility, and care for creation. These meanings are expressed through ritual symbols, collective activities, environmental education, and conservation practices. However, internalization varies due to skepticism regarding rainwater quality, continued dependence on groundwater, and uneven household engagement. The study demonstrates that local rituals provide a social space for legitimizing and negotiating ecological meanings without necessarily producing uniform environmental behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Global environmental degradation has intensified pressure on natural resources and challenged the sustainability of human–environment relations. Water is particularly significant because its availability is closely connected to human livelihoods, ecosystem functioning, and food security. However, water-related environmental challenges cannot be addressed solely through technical infrastructure or resource-management policies. Increasing attention has therefore been directed toward the social, cultural, and religious dimensions of environmental responsibility. Environmental responsibility may be shaped by religious values, local knowledge, social relationships, and culturally embedded understandings of nature (Pratisti, 2024; Sabir et al., 2025). Within Islamic contexts, environmental responsibility has likewise been articulated through concepts such as *amanah*, *khalifah*, *mizan*, and the ethical use of natural resources, although their expression is shaped by particular social and cultural contexts (Fatoni et al., 2025; Abd-Elsalam & Binay, 2024). Water also occupies an important position in Islamic environmental thought, being understood not only as a material necessity but also in relation to divine provision, gratitude, and responsible use (Blankinship et al., 2024).

This issue is particularly relevant to Sleman Regency, where water availability remains an important environmental concern. The Balai Besar Wilayah Sungai (BBWS) Serayu Opak reported in 2025 that Sleman experiences water shortages during the dry season while also facing flood risks during periods of intense rainfall. In response, water-conservation infrastructure such as Embung Sendangtirta has been developed to improve water storage, support irrigation, and strengthen water conservation. At the broader groundwater-management level, the Geological Agency of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has identified the Yogyakarta–Sleman Groundwater Basin as part of the national context requiring attention to groundwater conservation. These conditions demonstrate that water management in Sleman involves not only availability but also the balance between utilization, storage, recharge, and conservation (BBWS Serayu Opak, 2025).

Within this environmental context, the Banyu Bening Community in Tempursari Hamlet, Sardonoarjo Village, Ngaglik, Sleman, has developed community-based practices for rainwater management and conservation. Rainwater harvesting, environmental education, and community activities constitute important elements of these practices (Subarkah, 2025). The annual Kenduri Banyu Udan tradition provides an additional cultural and religious setting in which rainwater is represented and interpreted collectively. Held in conjunction with the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, the tradition incorporates collective prayer, the Riris Mangenjali dance, the pouring of collected rainwater into a jug, and the distribution of agricultural produce through the *gunungan* ritual. Thus, rainwater is not positioned merely as a physical resource but also becomes part of a cultural and religious system of meaning.

The relationship between rainwater conservation and religious-cultural meaning is particularly evident in research on the Banyu Bening Community. Zunariyah et al. (2026) examine rainwater harvesting in Banyu Bening from an environmental-sociological perspective and demonstrate that the movement is shaped by interactions among environmental conservation, religious values, cultural interpretations, and community practices. Their study establishes an important empirical foundation by showing that rainwater conservation in Banyu Bening cannot be separated from the community’s social and religious context. However, its primary focus is the rainwater-harvesting movement as a social practice and the relationship between conservation, myths, religion, and ecological action. The present study moves from this foundation toward a more specific question: how does rainwater acquire religious and ecological meaning within the recurring ritual of Kenduri Banyu Udan?

Research in other Indonesian contexts further demonstrates that ecological values can be embodied through religious practices and local traditions. Jakti et al. (2025) show that water conservation in Central Java can become integrated with religious values, local leadership, rainwater harvesting, and community participation. Taqwin et al. (2026) demonstrate that Islamic ecological ethics may be expressed as *lived ecotheology* through local agrarian rituals, cosmological understandings, and everyday environmental practices. Fatoni et al. (2025) similarly show how Qur’anic principles such as *amanah*, *mizan*, *anti-israf*, and *anti-fasad* can be translated into ecological practices and everyday lifestyles. Research on the protection of water springs also indicates that spiritual values, community traditions, cultural capital, and ritual practices may become interconnected in local environmental conservation (Maksum et al., 2023). From a broader comparative perspective, Kourgialas et al. (2026) demonstrate that water acquires religious meanings across different traditions through symbolic interpretation, ritual practices, sacred landscapes, and material infrastructures. Taken together, these studies indicate that water can function simultaneously as an ecological resource and a culturally and religiously meaningful object.

Nevertheless, the presence of religious environmental values does not necessarily produce uniform ecological behavior. Pratisti (2024) argues that Muslim environmental responsibility is shaped by experience, cultural interpretation, and social relationships, indicating that environmental responsibility is context-dependent rather than monolithic. Bunayar et al. (2025) likewise demonstrate that the internalization of ecotheological values may be supported through habituation, exemplary behavior, supervision, and collective environmental activities, while encountering obstacles related to discipline, institutional consistency, supervision, and infrastructure. At a broader theoretical level, Sabir et al. (2025), through a systematic review of research on religion and environmental behavior, show that the relationship between religious values and environmental action is complex and moderated by contextual factors. These findings are important for understanding Kenduri Banyu Udan because participation in a religiously meaningful environmental ritual should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of uniform or sustained ecological behavior.

Against this background, a specific research gap remains. Existing research has established that rainwater harvesting can function as a community-based environmental practice (Zunariyah et al., 2026), water conservation can be integrated with religious values and local leadership (Jakti et al., 2025), local traditions can embody Islamic ecological ethics (Taqwin et al., 2026), and religious values can be translated into environmental practices (Fatoni et al., 2025). However, less attention has been given to the social construction of rainwater itself

as a religiously meaningful and ecologically significant object within a recurring ritual, particularly to how such meanings are collectively produced, stabilized, interpreted, and differently internalized by community members. This distinction is significant because many studies of ecological traditions focus on ecosystems, agricultural landscapes, forests, coastal environments, or other natural resources, whereas Kenduri Banyu Udan places rainwater itself at the center of ritual representation.

The gap is further illuminated by the empirical conditions within the Banyu Bening Community. The community promotes rainwater conservation and associates rainwater with religious and ecological meanings, yet some community members continue to express skepticism toward rainwater quality, maintain dependence on groundwater, or adopt household rainwater-harvesting practices unevenly. The analytical problem is therefore not simply whether Kenduri Banyu Udan contains ecological values, but how those values become meaningful to community members and how their internalization may be accepted, negotiated, questioned, or only partially translated into everyday environmental practices. The study consequently positions Kenduri Banyu Udan not as proof of an already completed ecological transformation, but as a social and religious arena in which ecological meanings are produced and differently interpreted.

To examine this process, the sociology of religious knowledge developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann provides the principal analytical framework because it explains how meanings produced through social interaction can become objectified and subsequently internalized by individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this study, externalization refers to the production and expression of ecological-religious meanings through narratives, rituals, symbols, and collective practices, including the representation of rainwater as divine provision and blessing. Objectivation concerns the process through which these meanings acquire social stability through repeated rituals, communal narratives, and organized activities such as rainwater education and harvesting. Internalization refers to the extent to which community members incorporate, negotiate, or question these socially produced meanings in their understandings and practices concerning water. These processes are treated as interconnected rather than mechanically linear because shared participation in a ritual does not necessarily produce identical interpretations or behavioral outcomes. Berger's concept of the sacred canopy further assists in explaining how religious meanings can provide legitimacy for particular interpretations of social and natural reality (Berger, 1967).

The study is also situated within the contemporary development of Islamic ecotheology in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has formally included ecotheology among its eight priority programs for 2025–2029 through Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 244 of 2025 (KARI, 2025). Warandi (2025) further discusses efforts to strengthen ecotheological policy within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This policy context establishes the broader relevance of examining how religious resources are connected with environmental concerns. The significance of the Banyu Bening case, however, does not lie in presenting it as a model that automatically represents national Islamic ecotheology. Rather, it provides a localized empirical setting for examining how religious meaning, cultural ritual, and ecological practice interact within a specific community.

Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How does the Banyu Bening Community construct the sacred legitimacy of rainwater through the Kenduri Banyu Udan tradition? and (2) How are ecological values concerning care, responsibility, and environmental action expressed and internalized through the tradition? In this study, care, responsibility, and environmental action are analytical categories used to examine ecological meanings and practices; they are not presented as three officially established pillars of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The study is positioned at the intersection of the sociology of religious knowledge and Islamic ecotheology, with the objective of explaining how religious and ecological meanings are socially produced and differently internalized rather than assuming a direct transition from ritual participation to environmental behavior.

The novelty of this study lies in shifting the analytical focus from rainwater conservation as a technical or community-development practice toward the social construction of the religious and ecological meaning of rainwater within a recurring ritual. While Zunariyah et al. (2026) provide an important empirical account of rainwater harvesting in the Banyu Bening Community, the present study specifically examines Kenduri Banyu Udan as a ritual arena in which meanings concerning rainwater are produced, objectified, negotiated, and internalized. The study therefore connects three dimensions that have often been examined separately: rainwater as an ecological resource, ritual as a cultural-religious practice, and internalization as a social process of meaning formation. Its contribution is consequently analytical rather than a claim of universal novelty.

The urgency of this study derives from the need to understand why environmental meanings promoted through religious and cultural practices may or may not become part of everyday ecological action. In a context characterized by water-management challenges, groundwater dependence, and the need for community-based conservation, understanding this process is relevant not only for interpreting Kenduri Banyu Udan but also for clarifying the conditions under which religious and cultural resources may contribute to environmental responsibility. By examining both shared meanings and differentiated internalization, this study avoids treating ritual participation as automatic evidence of ecological transformation and instead reveals the complex relationship between religious symbolism, local ecological knowledge, and everyday environmental practice.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the construction and expression of Islamic ecological meanings within the Kenduri Banyu Udan tradition of the Banyu Bening Community. The unit of analysis is the Kenduri Banyu Udan tradition as a community-based religious and ecological practice with particular attention to the meanings attached to rainwater, religious values, community participation, and rainwater conservation practices. The analysis focuses on how these meanings are produced, socially stabilized, interpreted, and internalized by community members. The research was conducted from May to June 2026. A qualitative design was selected because it enables the exploration of meanings, experiences, and social practices within their natural context rather than through predetermined variables (Sulistiyo, 2023).

Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation involving individuals with direct knowledge of or involvement in the Banyu Bening Community and its environmental activities. Six informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of the history and meaning of the tradition, involvement in or familiarity with community environmental activities, and ability to provide information relevant to Islamic ecological values and rainwater conservation. The informants comprised the Chair of the Banyu Bening Community as the key informant; a traditional elder, a member of the Banyu Bening Community Center's management, and a representative of the Serayu-Opak River Basin Authority (BBWS) as primary informants; and two residents of Tempursari Hamlet as supporting informants. Secondary sources included academic literature, community documents, news reports, and relevant policy documents concerning eco-theology and environmental conservation.

Data collection focused on the history and philosophy of Kenduri Banyu Udan, religious interpretations of rainwater, ecological values, community participation, and rainwater conservation practices. The interviews also explored how informants understood, interpreted, accepted, questioned, or negotiated the religious and ecological meanings associated with rainwater and the tradition. Observations examined ongoing community activities, rainwater-harvesting facilities, and environmental practices during the research period. Because the fieldwork did not coincide with the implementation of Kenduri Banyu Udan, information concerning its ritual procession and symbolic meanings was obtained through in-depth interviews, documentary materials, photographs, and community archives.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data reduction, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were selected, organized, and coded according to recurring meanings and issues relevant to the research questions. Related codes were subsequently grouped into analytical categories concerning the sacred meaning of rainwater, human–nature relations, ecological values, environmental knowledge, conservation practices, and the role of the tradition. The interpretation of these categories was further related to the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization derived from the sociology of religious knowledge. Data were then displayed through thematic organization and analytical matrices to identify patterns, relationships, similarities, and differences across informants and sources. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by continuously comparing emerging interpretations with the empirical evidence. The analytical process was iterative, allowing interpretations to be refined throughout the study. The dimensions of care, moral responsibility, and environmental action were treated as analytical categories developed in this study rather than as official pillars of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Data credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation compared accounts from the six informants with documentary and archival materials, while methodological triangulation compared interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted with the key informant to clarify factual information concerning the history and meaning of the tradition. Because the key informant was also the founder and chair of the community, the possibility of affirmation bias toward the community's normative narrative was recognized. Therefore, the key

informant's account was not treated as the sole basis of interpretation but was cross-checked with other informants, documentary evidence, and observations of ongoing environmental practices. Particular attention was also given to accounts indicating skepticism toward rainwater quality, continued groundwater dependence, and uneven household engagement in rainwater conservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Profile of the Banyu Bening Community and Its Environmental Activities

The Banyu Bening Community is located in Tempursari Hamlet, Sardonoarjo Village, Ngaglik Subdistrict, Sleman Regency, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. The community was founded by Sri Wahyuningsih in 2012 in response to local concerns about water availability, declining groundwater recharge, and increasing dependence on groundwater extraction. These conditions became the empirical background for developing community-based initiatives that promote rainwater utilization, water conservation, and environmental education. Within these activities, rainwater is addressed not only as a seasonal natural resource but also as an object of collective attention and management.

The community has developed several environmental initiatives. One of the main activities is the development of a Rainwater Harvesting (PAH) system using PVC pipes, storage tanks, and filtration technology. The community also operates the Rainwater School, which provides environmental education concerning rainwater quality, including electrolysis, pH testing, and rainwater hygiene. Another initiative is the principle of “storing water in the earth,” implemented through vegetation planting, biopore construction, garden maintenance, water infiltration, and protection of water catchment areas. These activities demonstrate that the community's environmental program extends beyond the use of rainwater and includes efforts to maintain local ecological conditions.

The interview data indicate that participation in these activities is differentiated. Community leaders and individuals who are more actively involved in Banyu Bening activities provide more detailed accounts of rainwater conservation, environmental education, and ecological programs, while other residents describe their involvement primarily through community service, ritual attendance, environmental cleaning, and general support for conservation. This distinction is important because recognition of ecological values does not necessarily correspond to sustained implementation of conservation practices at the household level.

The community's environmental activities also coexist with continuing questions about rainwater quality and suitability for domestic use. Some residents remain accustomed to groundwater and express reservations about using collected rainwater, particularly for household consumption. Thus, the empirical context of Banyu Bening includes both the promotion of alternative water practices and the persistence of established patterns of groundwater use.

The Structure and Symbolic Elements of Kenduri Banyu Udan

Kenduri Banyu Udan is an annual cultural-religious event associated with the commemoration of Maulid Nabi Muhammad SAW. The event combines cultural performance, religious activities, environmental education, and communal participation. Its three-day structure provides a cultural setting in which rainwater is represented in relation to religious gratitude, agriculture, and human life.

The first day features a *wayang kulit* performance entitled *Banyu Urip*, which presents water as an essential element of life and prosperity. The performance is accompanied by a national seminar entitled “Banyu Udan Panguripan,” involving academics, environmental practitioners, and policymakers. The seminar discusses water management and the water crisis. The combination of cultural performance and scientific discussion places water within both symbolic and practical environmental discourse.

The second day emphasizes religious activities, including Qur'anic recitation and *selawat nabi* involving community leaders and local congregants. These activities provide a religious context in which gratitude for rainfall and concern for the environment are communicated.

The third day constitutes the main Kenduri Banyu Udan ceremony. Community members, traditional leaders, religious figures, and local officials participate in activities involving collected rainwater, dance, prayer, and agricultural symbols. Rainwater collected from different directions is poured into a large jug. The Riris Mangenjali dance represents the arrival of *riris*, or rain, while the *gunungan* consists of agricultural products associated with harvest and food production. The ceremony concludes with an interfaith prayer and *rayahan*, namely the communal distribution or scramble for agricultural products.

These elements connect rainfall with blessing, agriculture, food production, and human life. The rainwater used in the ceremony is therefore incorporated into a symbolic sequence rather than treated merely as a physical substance. Similarly, the agricultural products represented through the *gunungan* connect rainfall with the material conditions of community life. Because the present research was not conducted during the actual Kenduri Banyu Udan procession, the ritual sequence and meanings reported here are based on interview accounts, available documentation, photographs, and community archives. The findings therefore describe the ritual meanings represented in these sources rather than claiming direct ethnographic observation of the ceremony itself.

Sacred Meanings Attached to Rainwater

A. Rainwater as Divine Provision

The interview data consistently connect rainwater with divine creation, blessing, gratitude, and human responsibility. Informant 3 explained:

“In Islam, nature is a creation of Allah SWT entrusted to humanity to be used wisely. Therefore, humans have a duty to protect and preserve it as an expression of gratitude to Allah. Islam teaches humans not to cause destruction on Earth” (Interview with Informant 3, 2026).

This statement places nature within a religious framework in which human use is accompanied by an obligation to protect and preserve. In the context of the Banyu Bening Community, rainwater is consequently understood not only through its material usefulness but also through its relationship to divine creation and human responsibility. The interview data indicate that gratitude is connected to how natural resources are treated in everyday life. A similar meaning is expressed by Informant 5:

“The community believes that nature, especially rainwater, is a gift from Allah SWT that is vital to life. In community life, protecting the environment is considered a form of responsibility toward Allah. This value has been passed down through customs and traditions that have existed for a long time” (Interview with Informant 5, 2026).

The statement explicitly identifies rainwater as a gift from Allah and connects environmental protection with responsibility toward Allah. It also indicates that this meaning is transmitted through customary and traditional practices. Empirically, therefore, the sacred meaning of rainwater is communicated through both religious interpretation and cultural inheritance.

B. Rainwater as an Ecological Resource

Rainwater is also represented as an ecological resource that supports human life, agriculture, and local environmental conditions. The community's PAH facilities, Rainwater School, and water-infiltration activities demonstrate that rainwater is discussed in practical terms alongside its religious significance. Informant 2 stated:

“There is an awareness of the need to maintain environmental balance to prevent damage such as flooding. Traditions remind the community not to be wasteful with water” (Interview with Informant 2, 2026).

The statement connects water use with ecological balance and the prevention of environmental damage. Rainwater is consequently positioned within a broader understanding of environmental management. The finding suggests that the community's discussion of water extends beyond the symbolic value of rainfall toward questions of efficient use, flooding, and ecological balance.

C. Ritual Symbols and Religious Meaning

The sacred meaning of rainwater is also represented through the symbolic elements of Kenduri Banyu Udan. The collection and pouring of rainwater into a common vessel, the Riris Manganjali dance, prayers, and the presentation of agricultural products collectively associate rainfall with blessing, gratitude, agriculture, and life. Informant 1, Sri Wahyuningsih, described the broader function of tradition as follows:

“Traditions serve as a means of building collective awareness among the community to care for the surrounding environment. However, environmental degradation occurs due to the public’s lack of understanding regarding the relationship between religious teachings and environmental conservation” (Interview with Informant 1, 2026).

The Rainwater School represents an organized effort to provide more technical forms of knowledge. Activities involving electrolysis, pH testing, and rainwater hygiene introduce participants to questions concerning water quality rather than relying solely on symbolic or religious interpretations. Similarly, PAH facilities provide practical experience in collecting, storing, and processing rainwater.

Ecological Values Expressed in Community Practices

A. Care for Water and the Environment

Care is expressed through gratitude for rainfall, recognition of water's importance, environmental cleanliness, and attention to ecological balance. Informant 4 stated:

“The Kenduri Banyu Udan tradition makes the community grateful for the rain that falls and the agricultural harvest obtained each year. The community performs community service and cleans the environment together, especially before the tradition takes place” (Interview with Informant 4, 2026).

The statement connects gratitude for rainfall with collective environmental activities. Care is therefore represented not only as an attitude toward nature but also through concrete communal practices such as cleaning the surrounding environment and preparing collectively for the tradition. The findings also show that care extends beyond the ritual itself. Rainwater harvesting, garden maintenance, vegetation planting, and water-infiltration activities provide practical expressions of attention to water and environmental conditions.

B. Moral Responsibility for Creation

Moral responsibility appears in statements concerning the appropriate use of natural resources and the obligation to avoid environmental damage. Informant 3's account identifies human responsibility to protect creation, while Informant 2 connects responsible water use with the prevention of flooding and ecological damage. These accounts indicate that environmental responsibility is articulated in relation to human conduct. Water should not be wasted, the environment should be maintained, and natural resources should be managed carefully. At the empirical level, responsibility therefore appears as a connection between religiously expressed obligations and practical concerns regarding water and environmental conditions.

C. Environmental Action

Environmental action is reflected in PAH development, tree planting, biopore construction, water infiltration, garden maintenance, environmental cleaning, and mutual cooperation. The Rainwater School represents another form of environmental action because it provides practical information concerning water quality and rainwater management. The findings indicate that these practices extend beyond the annual Kenduri Banyu Udan event. The ritual provides a cultural-religious setting for communicating environmental meanings, while the community's broader activities provide opportunities for those meanings to be expressed through practical conservation.

At the same time, these actions are not implemented uniformly by all households. The interview data distinguish between participation in communal activities and sustained individual or household implementation. This distinction becomes particularly visible in relation to rainwater use and groundwater dependence.

Environmental Knowledge, Participation, and Uneven Practice

A. Sources of Environmental Knowledge

Environmental knowledge is obtained from multiple sources rather than exclusively from Kenduri Banyu Udan. Informant 6 stated:

“Nature is God’s creation, which provides many benefits for human life and must therefore be preserved and appreciated. Knowledge is gained from religious leaders, community leaders, schools, social media, and daily experiences” (Interview with Informant 6, 2026).

This statement identifies religious leaders, community leaders, schools, social media, and everyday experience as sources of environmental understanding. The finding demonstrates that ecological knowledge in the community is formed through several overlapping channels.

The Rainwater School provides a more organized form of technical learning through activities involving electrolysis, pH testing, and rainwater hygiene. PAH facilities also provide practical experience in collecting, storing, and managing rainwater. Consequently, environmental knowledge in the community includes both religious-cultural understanding and practical knowledge concerning water quality and management.

B. Community Participation

Participation occurs at several levels. At the communal level, residents participate in ritual activities, environmental cleaning, community service, and other collective activities associated with Kenduri Banyu Udan. Community leaders and active members also participate more extensively in environmental education, rainwater management, and conservation initiatives. The data indicate, however, that participation should not be treated as a single or uniform category. Attendance at a cultural-religious event, participation in community service, involvement in environmental education, and independent implementation of PAH or biopore systems represent different forms of engagement. The empirical evidence therefore points to differentiated participation rather than uniform involvement.

C. Rainwater Skepticism and Groundwater Dependence

An important finding is the persistence of reservations concerning the use of rainwater for household purposes. Although Banyu Bening promotes rainwater harvesting and provides information concerning water quality and treatment, some residents remain accustomed to groundwater and question the suitability of rainwater for consumption. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that religious meaning and environmental education do not automatically resolve practical concerns about water use. Questions of perceived quality, hygiene, familiarity, and established household practices continue to shape how rainwater is accepted. Groundwater dependence therefore represents an existing practical context within which the community's efforts to promote rainwater utilization take place.

The presence of skepticism should not be interpreted simply as rejection of the community's environmental values. Rather, it indicates that the translation of ecological ideas into household practice involves negotiation between newly promoted practices and established patterns of water use.

D. Uneven Household Engagement

The interview data further indicate differences in the extent to which environmental practices are implemented at the household level. Some participants are actively involved in rainwater harvesting, water infiltration, vegetation planting, and environmental education, whereas others participate mainly in communal activities or express general support for environmental conservation.

This unevenness is consistent with Informant 1's observation that environmental degradation continues despite the role of tradition in building collective awareness. The finding suggests that awareness, participation, and sustained household practice should be distinguished analytically. A resident may recognize rainwater as important, participate in Kenduri Banyu Udan, and support environmental activities without necessarily adopting PAH or other conservation measures independently at home. The evidence therefore points to differentiated levels of engagement rather than a uniform process of environmental practice across the selected informants and community actors.

Summary of Empirical Findings

The empirical findings reveal two interconnected patterns. First, rainwater is represented within Banyu Bening as both a religiously meaningful form of divine provision and an ecological resource essential to human and agricultural life. This meaning is expressed through interview accounts and reinforced by the symbolic elements of Kenduri Banyu Udan, including collected rainwater, the Riris Mangenjali dance, prayers, and agricultural representations. Second, ecological values are expressed through three analytical dimensions developed in this study: care for water and the environment, moral responsibility for creation, and environmental action. Care appears through gratitude for rainfall and attention to environmental cleanliness; moral responsibility appears through expectations of wise water use and protection of creation; and environmental action appears through PAH, Rainwater School activities, tree planting, biopores, water infiltration, garden maintenance, and collective environmental work.

The findings also demonstrate that these values are expressed and practiced unevenly. Environmental knowledge comes from religious leaders, community leaders, schools, social media, and everyday experience, while participation ranges from ritual attendance and community service to more sustained involvement in rainwater management and conservation. At the household level, skepticism concerning rainwater quality, continued groundwater dependence, and different levels of practical engagement remain evident.

Accordingly, the Results do not establish a uniform transformation of the community or claim that all residents share the same ecological understanding. Instead, the empirical data demonstrate the coexistence of shared religious and ecological meanings, communal environmental activities, continuing reservations about rainwater, and differentiated levels of household engagement. Kenduri Banyu Udan can therefore be identified empirically as a recurring cultural-religious setting in which meanings concerning rainwater, gratitude, environmental care, responsibility, and conservation are communicated and expressed through both symbolic and practical activities.

Discussion

Constructing the Sacred Legitimacy of Rainwater through Kenduri Banyu Udan

The findings indicate that Kenduri Banyu Udan provides a recurring cultural-religious setting through which rainwater is interpreted as divine provision, a source of life, agricultural support, and an object of human responsibility. Its significance therefore extends beyond the performance of a customary ceremony. Through religious narratives, ritual symbols, communal activities, and environmental practices, rainwater becomes an object of shared social meaning. This finding addresses the first research question concerning how the Banyu Bening Community constructs the sacred legitimacy of rainwater through Kenduri Banyu Udan.

This process can be interpreted through Berger & Luckmann (1966) theory of social construction. Social meanings are produced through human activity and subsequently acquire relatively stable forms within social life. In the Banyu Bening context, meanings associated with rainwater are externalized through religious narratives, the annual *Kenduri*, the symbolic collection and use of rainwater, agricultural representations, environmental education, and community conservation activities. Rainwater is consequently understood not merely as a physical resource but as something associated with divine blessing, gratitude, and responsibility.

The construction of this meaning is strengthened by the integration of Kenduri Banyu Udan with the commemoration of Maulid Nabi Muhammad SAW. Qur'anic recitation, *selawat*, prayer, and other religious activities place rainfall within an Islamic cultural environment. Importantly, the findings do not indicate that the ritual transforms rainwater into a different physical or ontological substance. Rather, the ritual provides a religious framework through which rainwater is interpreted as a blessing that warrants gratitude and responsible use. In this sense, the sacred character of rainwater is a matter of socially produced meaning rather than a claim about its physical properties.

Berger (1967) concept of the sacred canopy further clarifies this process. Religion can provide an overarching symbolic framework through which particular understandings of reality acquire legitimacy and meaningfulness. Applied to Banyu Bening, the sacred canopy does not imply that all community members possess an identical interpretation of rainwater. Instead, Islamic meanings provide a culturally available framework within which rainfall can be understood as divine provision and connected to moral responsibility toward creation. The ritual therefore operates as one social arena through which these meanings are communicated, remembered, and reaffirmed.

This interpretation is consistent with Zunariyah et al. (2026), whose study of the Banyu Bening Community demonstrates that rainwater harvesting is shaped by an interaction between environmental conservation, religious values, and cultural meanings. Their findings show that the effectiveness of rainwater conservation is related not only to technical adaptation but also to the internalization of religious and cultural values. The present study extends this discussion by shifting attention from rainwater harvesting as an environmental movement toward the specific process through which rainwater acquires sacred and ecological meaning through a recurring ritual. Thus, the contribution lies not in claiming a new ecological worldview, but in explaining how a particular natural resource becomes culturally and religiously legitimized through community practice.

From Divine Provision to Ecological Resource: Islamic Meaning and Environmental Ethics

The findings further demonstrate that the religious meaning of rainwater intersects with an understanding of water as an ecological resource. Rainfall is associated with human life, agriculture, environmental balance, and local water availability. Consequently, the religious recognition of rainwater does not remain entirely symbolic but becomes connected with concerns about conservation and sustainable use.

The concepts of *amanah* and *khalifah* provide an important interpretive vocabulary for this relationship. *Amanah* emphasizes responsibility for what is entrusted to human beings, while *khalifah* frames human beings as responsible actors within creation (Mustaqim, 2024; Zumaro, 2026). Within the Banyu Bening context, these principles are reflected in the understanding that water should not be wasted, natural resources should be protected, and environmental conditions should be maintained for present and future needs.

This interpretation corresponds with recent scholarship that understands Islamic environmental ethics as a relationship among God, humans, and nature rather than simply as a collection of normative propositions. Pratisti (2024) emphasizes that Muslim environmental responsibility is shaped by moral imaginaries as well as by cultural interpretation, social experience, and community relationships. Similarly, Taqwin et al. (2026) demonstrate that Islamic ecological concepts such as *khalifah*, *amanah*, and *mizan* can become embedded in local practices and traditions, producing what they describe as lived ecotheology. These studies are particularly relevant to the Banyu Bening findings because they show that Islamic ecological meaning becomes significant through its relationship with lived social and cultural contexts.

The relationship between religious meaning and water conservation is also evident in research specifically addressing water. Abd-Elsalam & Binay (2024) demonstrate that Islamic theological discourse concerning water has developed in response to different environmental and regional conditions, indicating that Islamic environmental thought can adapt to concrete ecological problems. Maksum et al. (2023) and Blankinship et al. (2024) likewise connect Islamic ecological ethics and Qur'anic understandings of water with practices of water conservation. The Banyu Bening findings add a community-level perspective by showing how such ethical meanings coexist with rainwater harvesting, water infiltration, tree planting, biopores, environmental education, and other conservation activities.

The important analytical point is that *amanah* and *khalifah* do not function in the findings merely as abstract theological concepts. Their significance emerges when they are connected to practices of using, protecting, and discussing water. Islamic ecotheology therefore operates as a moral vocabulary through which environmental practices can be interpreted as matters of responsibility rather than merely technical efficiency. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that moral meaning does not eliminate practical considerations. Knowledge, infrastructure, household routines, and perceptions of water quality remain important in determining whether ecological practices are adopted.

This qualification is supported by Sabir et al. (2025), whose systematic review demonstrates that the relationship between religion and environmental behaviour is influenced by multiple factors, including situational context, culture, religiosity, and social conditions. Thus, the Banyu Bening findings should not be interpreted as evidence that religious belief automatically produces environmental behaviour. Rather, religious meaning constitutes one important component within a broader process through which ecological values may become meaningful and actionable.

Ritual Symbols as a Medium of Ecological Meaning

The symbolic structure of Kenduri Banyu Udan provides a medium through which abstract meanings concerning water and nature become collectively recognizable. The use of collected rainwater, the Riris Mangenjali dance, prayer, and agricultural products represented through the *gunungan* connect rainfall with life, agriculture, gratitude, and communal welfare.

The *gunungan* is particularly significant because it links rainfall with the material consequences of ecological processes. Agricultural products symbolize food production and livelihood, while rainfall constitutes an important environmental condition supporting agricultural productivity. The ritual therefore places water within a broader relationship between nature and human subsistence.

Likewise, the Riris Mangenjali dance gives cultural form to the arrival of rain. Rainfall is consequently communicated not only through technical or scientific language but also through cultural representation. Religious activities further frame these representations through gratitude and prayer. The combination of ritual symbols and religious practices allows environmental meanings to be communicated through forms that are socially familiar to community members.

From Berger & Luckmann (1966) perspective, repeated symbolic practices contribute to the objectivation of social meanings. Meanings initially produced through human activity can acquire recognizable and relatively stable forms within social life. In the Banyu Bening context, the annual repetition of Kenduri Banyu Udan, together with its ritual symbols and associated environmental activities, provides a recurring setting in which meanings concerning rainwater are reproduced.

However, objectivation should not be understood as permanently fixing the meaning of rainwater. Berger (1967) discussion of religious world-maintenance helps explain how repeated religious framing can sustain a meaningful order, but the present findings also demonstrate that this order remains open to negotiation. Participants may recognize rainwater as a divine gift while simultaneously questioning its suitability for household consumption or continuing to rely on groundwater. The ritual therefore creates a framework of meaning without eliminating differences in interpretation and practice. Because the present study did not directly observe the ritual procession during fieldwork, these interpretations are based on interview accounts, documentation, photographs, and community archives. The analysis therefore concerns the meanings represented through these sources rather than claiming direct ethnographic observation of the ritual itself.

From Religious Values to Ecological Practices

The second research question concerns how ecological values are expressed and internalized through the tradition. Based on the empirical findings, three analytical dimensions can be identified: care, moral responsibility, and environmental action. These dimensions are analytical categories developed from the present data and should not be interpreted as officially established pillars of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The first dimension, care, concerns recognition that water and nature deserve attention, appreciation, and protection. In Banyu Bening, care is expressed through gratitude for rainfall, recognition of nature as divine creation, concern for environmental cleanliness, and awareness of ecological balance. Pratisti (2024) argues that environmental responsibility among Muslim communities is shaped by moral relationships with place and by cultural and social experience. This perspective helps explain why environmental care in Banyu Bening is not simply an individual attitude but is communicated through religious interpretation and community practice.

The second dimension, moral responsibility, concerns the perceived obligation to use water wisely and avoid environmental degradation. This corresponds closely with *amanah* and *khalifah*. Fatoni et al. (2025), for example, show how ecological piety can be developed by translating Qur'anic principles such as *amanah*, *mizan*, and *anti-israf* into everyday environmental practices. In the Banyu Bening case, responsibility similarly becomes meaningful through practical concerns such as avoiding water waste, maintaining environmental cleanliness, protecting vegetation, and participating in communal conservation activities.

The third dimension, environmental action, concerns the material practices through which ecological values are expressed. These include rainwater harvesting, tree planting, biopore construction, water infiltration, garden maintenance, environmental cleaning, mutual cooperation, and environmental education through the Rainwater School. Jaki et al. (2025) provide a comparable illustration in Central Java, where rainwater conservation and water-related technologies are combined with religious values and participatory community efforts. Bunayar et al. (2025) likewise demonstrate that internalized ecotheological values can be expressed through concrete practices such as waste management, water and electricity conservation, cleanliness activities, and environmental education.

Nevertheless, the three dimensions should not be treated as a linear sequence in which care automatically produces responsibility and responsibility automatically produces action. The findings indicate that a person may appreciate rainfall without implementing rainwater harvesting at home, while participation in environmental cleaning does not necessarily demonstrate sustained household-level conservation. This distinction is essential because it prevents ecological values from being equated automatically with behavioural change.

Knowledge, Participation, and Uneven Internalization

Ecological knowledge in the Banyu Bening context is produced through multiple sources, including religious and community leaders, schools, social media, everyday experience, and environmental programs. Kenduri Banyu Udan is therefore one component within a broader environment of ecological learning rather than the sole source of environmental consciousness.

The Rainwater School illustrates the importance of combining cultural-religious meaning with technical knowledge. Information concerning pH, electrolysis, hygiene, and rainwater treatment addresses practical questions that cannot be answered through religious symbolism alone. Likewise, rainwater harvesting and water-infiltration activities provide opportunities for residents to encounter water conservation through direct experience.

This combination corresponds with the argument of Jaki et al. (2025) that community-based water conservation can develop through the interaction of religious leadership, local participation, and practical innovation. It also resonates with Fatoni et al. (2025), who demonstrate the importance of connecting Qur'anic

interpretation with concrete environmental practices and educational processes. In Banyu Bening, technical knowledge therefore does not replace religious meaning; rather, the two operate in complementary domains.

Participation is nevertheless differentiated. Some community members are actively involved in environmental education, rainwater management, and conservation, while others participate primarily through ritual attendance, communal cleaning, or general community support. These forms of participation should not be treated as identical evidence of internalization.

Berger & Luckmann (1966) conceptualize internalization as the process through which socially available meanings become incorporated into individual consciousness. In the present case, internalization appears in different degrees and forms. Some participants articulate ecological responsibility in explicitly religious terms and connect it with environmental action, whereas others display more limited engagement. The findings therefore support an interpretation of differentiated internalization rather than uniform adoption.

This distinction is theoretically important. Ritual participation makes ecological meanings socially available, but it does not provide sufficient evidence that every participant incorporates those meanings into everyday behaviour. Conversely, environmental practices may also emerge from technical knowledge, personal experience, or practical necessity without being explicitly articulated through religious language. Sabir et al. (2025) similarly emphasize that the relationship between religion and environmental behaviour is shaped by multiple contextual and social factors. Internalization in the Banyu Bening case should therefore be understood as selective, ongoing, and influenced by more than ritual participation alone.

Rainwater Skepticism and Groundwater Dependence as Negotiated Ecological Meaning

The persistence of skepticism toward rainwater and continued dependence on groundwater provide an important qualification to the relationship between religious meaning and environmental practice. Although the Banyu Bening Community promotes rainwater harvesting and provides technical education, some residents remain accustomed to groundwater and express reservations about using rainwater for household consumption.

This finding demonstrates that water has different meanings within different practical contexts. Groundwater occupies an established position within household routines, whereas rainwater is promoted through a combination of religious, cultural, ecological, and technical meanings. Acceptance of rainwater therefore requires more than recognition of its religious significance.

The distinction between symbolic legitimacy and practical acceptance is consequently important. Kenduri Banyu Udan can provide cultural and religious legitimacy for valuing rainfall, but ritual meaning alone cannot resolve concerns regarding hygiene, perceived quality, convenience, familiarity, infrastructure, or household routines. The Rainwater School and related technical education perform a complementary function by addressing questions that symbolic representation cannot answer by itself.

This finding is consistent with Abd-Elsalam & Binay (2024), who show that Islamic approaches to water develop in relation to concrete environmental conditions, and with Sabir et al. (2025), who emphasize that environmental behaviour is influenced by contextual and situational factors beyond religious orientation. Skepticism should therefore not automatically be interpreted as rejection of ecological values. Instead, it can be understood as part of an ongoing process through which new meanings of rainwater encounter established knowledge and everyday practices.

The persistence of groundwater dependence consequently demonstrates that the social construction of rainwater remains open and negotiated. Religious-cultural narratives can explain why rainwater should be valued, while scientific and technical knowledge can help explain how it can be used safely and effectively. Ecological meaning is thus produced at the intersection of symbolic legitimacy, practical credibility, and lived experience.

Situating the Findings within Previous Banyu Bening and Ecotheological Studies

The findings contribute to two interconnected areas of scholarship: research on Banyu Bening and broader studies of Islamic ecotheology and ecological traditions. Zunariyah et al. (2026) provide the most directly relevant recent comparison because they examine rainwater harvesting in the Banyu Bening Community through the interaction of religion, cultural meanings, and environmental conservation. Their study emphasizes the importance of religious values and local knowledge in sustaining rainwater conservation. The present study complements this perspective by focusing more specifically on how Kenduri Banyu Udan constructs and reproduces the meaning of rainwater as sacred provision and ecological resource.

Research on other local traditions also demonstrates that ecological meanings may be embedded within cultural and religious practices. Berutu & Hidayat (2023) show the relationship between Islamic values and ecological practices in the Lubuk Larangan tradition, while Hadinata et al. (2023) demonstrate the interaction of Islamic

values, cultural practices, and ecological meaning in the Erau context. These studies establish that environmental responsibility may be culturally mediated rather than expressed exclusively through formal environmental discourse.

The Banyu Bening case contributes a distinctive configuration because rainwater itself becomes the central object of cultural-religious representation. In other traditions, ecological meanings may focus on forests, fisheries, agriculture, coastal environments, or broader ecosystems. In Kenduri Banyu Udan, rainfall is simultaneously represented as divine provision, agricultural support, a source of life, and an ecological resource requiring responsible management.

The recent literature further strengthens this interpretation. Taqwin et al. (2026) demonstrate how Islamic ecological concepts can become lived through local agrarian traditions, while Widiyanto et al. (2026) show how Islamic spiritual principles such as *khilafah*, *amanah*, and *mizan* can be translated into concrete ecological engagement. These studies support an understanding of ecotheology as something that can be enacted through social practices rather than remaining exclusively doctrinal. The contribution of the present study is therefore complementary: it connects the sociology of social construction with Islamic ecotheology to explain not only what ecological values exist, but how rainwater acquires and maintains religious and ecological meaning through repeated social practices.

Theoretical, Conceptual, and Practical Implications

The central theoretical contribution of this study lies in explaining how rainwater becomes socially constructed as both a religiously meaningful and ecological resource. Through Berger & Luckmann (1966), the findings can be understood through interconnected processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Meanings are externalized through religious narratives, ritual practices, environmental education, and conservation activities; objectivated through the recurring *Kenduri*, ritual symbols, and community programs; and internalized unevenly as participants incorporate, negotiate, or question these meanings in everyday life.

Berger (1967) concept of the sacred canopy further explains how religious meanings provide a broader framework of legitimacy. However, the findings demonstrate that this framework does not determine a single interpretation or behavioural outcome. Instead, it provides symbolic resources through which rainwater can be interpreted as divine provision, linked to gratitude, responsibility, and ecological care.

The conceptual contribution therefore lies in treating an environmental resource itself as an object of social construction. Rainwater is not only materially collected or managed; it is also interpreted, symbolized, legitimized, and negotiated. This provides an analytical bridge between Islamic ecotheology and the sociology of social construction.

The study also offers a more differentiated understanding of internalization. Ritual participation does not automatically result in uniform environmental behaviour. Groundwater dependence, skepticism toward rainwater, differences in ecological knowledge, and variations in household practices demonstrate that internalization is an ongoing process shaped by competing experiences and practical conditions. This prevents a linear assumption that ritual participation necessarily leads to internalized values and then to environmental action.

At the policy and practical level, the findings are relevant to the contemporary institutional development of Islamic ecotheology in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has included ecotheology among its priority programs for 2025–2029 through Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 244 of 2025 (KARI, 2025). Warandi (2025) is relevant in this context because it emphasizes that ecotheology requires translation into concrete institutional and environmental practices rather than remaining solely at the level of normative discourse.

The Banyu Bening case offers a localized illustration of how religious and cultural resources can intersect with environmental practice. It does not, however, imply that Kenduri Banyu Udan constitutes a universally transferable model. Rather, the findings identify several mechanisms that may inform community-based environmental initiatives: connecting environmental concerns with locally meaningful religious narratives; using cultural events as spaces for ecological communication; combining religious interpretation with scientific and technical knowledge; and linking collective values with accessible environmental practices.

This combination is important because the findings demonstrate that environmental behaviour cannot be assumed to emerge from religious awareness alone. Ecological care, moral responsibility, technical knowledge, social participation, infrastructure, and everyday experience interact in shaping practice. Religious narratives may provide moral legitimacy, while environmental education and practical facilities can provide the knowledge and opportunity necessary for implementation.

Taken together, the study shows that Kenduri Banyu Udan functions as a recurring cultural-religious arena through which rainwater acquires sacred and ecological meaning, while the translation of that meaning into everyday environmental practice remains differentiated and ongoing. Its broader contribution is therefore not to argue that ritual itself produces environmental transformation, but to demonstrate that ritual can become an important social arena for legitimizing, communicating, reproducing, and negotiating ecological meanings when connected with knowledge, practical opportunities, and community-based action.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Kenduri Banyu Udan functions as a recurring cultural-religious arena through which the Banyu Bening Community constructs and negotiates the sacred and ecological meaning of rainwater. Rainwater is represented not merely as a physical resource but as divine provision associated with gratitude, *amanah*, *khalifah*, moral responsibility, agriculture, and care for creation. Through religious narratives, ritual symbols, collective activities, environmental education, and conservation practices, these meanings are socially expressed, reproduced, and made available to community members. Following Berger and Luckmann's framework, this process involves externalization through religious and cultural expressions, objectivation through recurring communal and symbolic practices, and differentiated internalization through which community members incorporate, negotiate, or question these meanings.

The study further identifies care, moral responsibility, and environmental action as analytical dimensions emerging from the empirical findings, rather than officially established pillars of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These dimensions are reflected in environmental cleaning, rainwater harvesting, infiltration practices, tree planting, community cooperation, and the Rainwater School. However, the findings demonstrate that symbolic recognition does not automatically produce uniform environmental behaviour. Skepticism concerning rainwater quality, continued groundwater dependence, differences in ecological knowledge, and uneven household engagement indicate that internalization remains selective and negotiated.

Conceptually, this study extends previous research on Banyu Bening by shifting attention from rainwater management and community participation toward the social construction of religious and ecological meaning surrounding rainwater. It further shows that Islamic ecotheological concepts such as *amanah* and *khalifah* can become connected with environmental practices while remaining mediated by technical knowledge, practical accessibility, and established household routines. Thus, Kenduri Banyu Udan provides symbolic legitimacy and a social space for ecological meaning-making, but does not by itself constitute evidence of completed behavioural transformation.

This study is limited to one community and six purposively selected informants. Data collection also did not coincide with the actual ritual procession; therefore, interpretations of ritual symbolism rely on interviews, photographs, documentation, and community archives. Future research should examine diverse communities and employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to explore changes in religious meaning, rainwater practices, and environmental engagement over time.

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