



**SHAMAN, SAIVA AND SUFI,  
A STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION  
OF MALAY MAGIC**

**R. O. WINSTEDT**

Global Grey ebooks

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**MALAY MAGIC**

**BY**  
**R. O. WINSTEDT**

1925

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This edition was created and published by Global Grey

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## 6. THE RITUAL OF THE RICE-FIELD

IN the magic safe-guarding rice from seed-time to harvest survives the primitive ritual of the Indonesian race. Strip away the obvious accretions, the names of Hindu deities, the thin Muslim veneer, and the essence of the ritual remains intact in Malaya to-day. It deals with the soul-substance, human, animal, vegetable, with the spirits of dead magicians, nature-spirits and Father Sky and Mother Earth. Except for Sky and Earth the spirits invoked lack the omnipresence and individuality of gods, bear generic names and are indefinite in number. Their sphere is a particular district. They inhabit the rice-field, the thick jungle, the rays of the setting sun. No temples are erected in their honour. The customary and symbolic rites that persuade them to friendly relations with man can be enacted in a forest clearing, in the corner of a rice swamp, on the floor of a village barn. No shaman or priest of Siva or Muslim elder presides. The magician has the narrow scope of the spirits he serves. He belongs to one small village or humble district. Often the rites controlling the growth of rice are conducted by an old Malay woman, relic of the far distant past when man hunted and killed, and woman, the bearer of young, delved, lending the benign influence of her motherhood to make crops prolific. Among many aborigines this older custom is observed and the rites are celebrated not by a man but by a woman, fitting midwife for the rice-baby. Still in parts of the country agricultural implements are given by the Malay groom to his bride as a wedding present.

Before starting to fell a clearing for rice, the farmer takes a lump of benzoin on a plate wrapped in a white cloth as a present to the local magician, a survivor in Malay culture whose trust is "first in God, next in His Prophet, and then in the magicians of old, the ancestral spirits who own the clumps and clods " of the locality.<sup>1</sup> This expert recites charms over the benzoin and returns it to the planter with traditional instructions. First he is to burn the

<sup>1</sup> Except where acknowledgment is made to other sources, the following account is based on two manuscripts written for me by Perak Malay headmen twelve years ago. It contains certain interesting details hitherto not noted in the Peninsula

































































































































