

SEKATEN: A STUDY ON THE VALUES AND RELATIONSHIPS OF GOD, THE UNIVERSE, AND SOCIETY IN YOGYAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the process of spreading Islam through Sekaten and the orientation of Javanese cultural values embedded in Yogyakarta. The process of Islamization in this context is closely linked to the role of the Walisongo, who facilitated the inclusive integration of Islam through traditions and culture, allowing it to endure to this day. Sekati, or gamelan music, was used as a medium for Islamization. This tradition later evolved into what is now known as Sekaten, which remains a preserved cultural heritage. The term Sekaten is derived from Syahadatain, meaning the two Islamic declarations of faith. However, Sekaten has evolved beyond a tool for Islamization and has become a means of entertainment and a source of economic support for the community. The research adopts a descriptive method with description, interpretation, heuristics, and critical reflection from a philosophical, qualitative perspective. It draws on sources such as journals, books, news articles, and other literature. The positive impacts of Sekaten on the relationship between God, the universe, and society, as analyzed through the relevant theories, include an inclusive renewal of the Islamization process, the preservation of culture, and the fostering of moral values in society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islam in Java was brought by missionaries known as the Wali Songo. These wali initially approached the Javanese by understanding their practices, which were still heavily influenced by Hindu-Buddhist culture, such as a fondness for gatherings, listening to sermons, music, and ceremonies. At the center of the Javanese religious system was a simple, formal, understated, and almost private ceremony called *Slametan* (*kenduren*). *Slametan* is the Javanese version of what might be considered the most common religious ritual worldwide, and it symbolizes the mystical and social unity of its participants. Friends, neighbors, colleagues, relatives, ancestral spirits, and nearly forgotten gods sit together

at one table, thereby forming a social group bound to assist and cooperate [1].

Over time, Islam was gradually accepted by the Indonesian people, particularly those on Java. The spread of Islam there took a long process. It faced two cultural environments: first, the local culture, which held firmly to traditions with an animistic religious core. According to animistic beliefs, people at the time had strong faith in spirits and objects in the universe with magical powers. Ancestral worship and legends led to the veneration of ancestral spirits. Second, the influence of Hindu-Buddhist culture, which had significantly impacted Javanese religion, customs, and culture since the 4th century CE.

Given such conditions, the propagation of Islam in Java was carried out

gradually, as Hindu-Buddhist traditions were deeply ingrained in Javanese society. Facing this situation, the Wali Songo made compromises in their call to spread Islam. Local traditions and beliefs were not forcibly eradicated but were respected as realities. Adaptation to local customs and culture was employed as a means of disseminating Islam. They emphasized a cultural approach, utilizing various cultural forms familiar to the Javanese people. One technique was *Wayang*, a Javanese art form that has existed since prehistoric times [2] [3].

This cultural approach became Wali Songo's foundation to gradually connect with and approach the community. One region on Java where Islam spread was Mataram, which includes Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Klaten, and others. Yogyakarta, a sultanate, was one of the largest Islamic regions on Java. It is also known as the Keraton Kesultanan Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, under the leadership of a Sultan titled *Ngarso Dalem Sampeyan Dalem Inggang Sinuhun Kanjeng Sultan Hamengku Buwono Senopati Ing-Ngalogo Ngabdurrahman Sayiddin Panotogomo Khalifatullah*.

Yogyakarta holds strategic importance in the dynamics of community, national, and state life. Its significance extends beyond the Yogyakarta community, contributing to the nation's struggle and Indonesia's existence, as well as in traditional ceremonies or customs. Consequently, Yogyakarta is known as the city of culture. This identity is closely tied to the renown of the Islamic Mataram kingdom located in Kota Gede and the development of the Yogyakarta Sultanate.

Javanese traditional ceremonies represent a form of cultural heritage. Culture is a social legacy exclusively owned by the supporting society through learning. One city that still strongly upholds its traditions and ancestral heritage is Yogyakarta. A tradition still preserved and practiced today is the *Sekaten* tradition, a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) birthday held annually from the 5th to the 11th of the month in the northern square of the Javanese palace (Qasri). Currently, the *sekaten* tradition is conducted by three Javanese palaces: Yogyakarta, Surakarta,

and Cirebon. This ceremony is a cultural event that maintains its form and timing as it continues to be performed according to customary schedules [4].

The *Sekaten* tradition was initially an effort by Wali Songo to introduce Islam to the community through art and culture. However, over time, *sekaten* has lost much of its sacredness. Many people no longer understand its true meaning. The *sekaten* celebration has been modified with entertainment outside its original context, such as night markets operating for a month. This activity reflects the cooperation between the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace and the Yogyakarta City Government [5]. Social changes may have led to shifts in attitudes, functions, and meanings of *sekaten* itself. Nonetheless, the *sekaten* tradition is still preserved as a cultural heritage, symbolizing the assimilation of Islam with local culture.

Several research questions arise from this topic, which will be explored in greater depth, including: (1) What is the history of *Sekaten* in the Yogyakarta Palace? (2) What are the procedures for carrying out the *Sekaten* tradition in the Yogyakarta Palace? (3) How can the values contained in the *Sekaten* tradition in the Yogyakarta Palace be analyzed? (4) How can the relationship of *Sekaten* with God, the universe, and society be analyzed?.

In Indonesia, religion and culture are inseparable. Culture is part of religion; they are interconnected and complement each other. When religious law (Qur'an and Hadith) is the primary source, culture (customary law) becomes secondary. This means culture can serve as a general legal source when primary sources cannot address certain questions [6]. Based on the discussions above, the researcher is interested in conducting a more in-depth study of the *sekaten* procession, the social changes leading to shifts in its meaning, and the differences between the past and present forms of *sekaten*. This research is presented in a study titled: *SEKATEN: A Study on the Values and Relations of God, the Universe, and Society in Yogyakarta*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Tradition Sekaten in Yogyakarta*

Several studies that the researcher has identified as being related to the material object and the formal object of this research include a study conducted by Alfi, M. (2020) [7] entitled *Islamic Values in the Sekaten Tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace*. This study aims to identify and examine the Islamic values contained in the *Sekaten* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace and employs a qualitative research approach. The findings indicate that the Islamic values present in the *Sekaten* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace are in line with Islamic teachings, particularly the value of *aqidah* (faith), which is reflected in the origin of the term “*Sekaten*,” derived from the phrase *syahadatain*.

2.2 *Wayang Kulit as Media of Islamic Spreadings*

The second study is an undergraduate thesis by Ruli, P. (2007) entitled *Wayang Kulit as a Medium for the Dissemination of Islam in Demak in the Fifteenth Century* [8]. This study aims to identify and examine the role of *wayang kulit* as a medium for the spread of Islam in Demak and also uses a qualitative research method. The results show that *wayang kulit* had a significant influence as a medium for the dissemination of Islam in Demak, as evidenced by the acculturation between Islamic teachings and Javanese culture, which were integrated into a tradition of Islamization.

2.3 *Caring for Sekaten, Caring for Indonesia*

Discussion of the *Sekaten* tradition in Indonesia is inexhaustible and can be assured to have a significant impact on society. As explained by Willy Khayati and Rahma Hayati (2024) [9] in their article on the concept of preserving *Sekaten* within an Indonesian national framework, the presence of *Sekaten* in society is not merely coincidental. Rather, it is the result of long-standing processes of communication, acculturation, and the symbolization of Islamic teachings from the

past to the present, all of which contribute many positive values.

One of the challenges identified is that the understanding of *Sekaten* among young people remains relatively limited. Therefore, the cultural identity and local traditions embodied in *Sekaten* have the potential to shape the attitudes and character of youth in the development of Islam within their social environment. Preserving the *Sekaten* tradition, especially among the younger generation, is not an easy task and must be accompanied by rational and relevant approaches. One such approach is learning from the methods of the *Walisonogo*, who spread Islam through local culture gradually, peacefully, and without offending any group. Through this approach, the values and influence of *Sekaten* within society—particularly among young people—can continue to be sustained.

Moreover, the preservation of *Sekaten* is also reflected in the performance of musical instruments and other forms of traditional art, which contribute to the continuity and visibility of Islamic dissemination that is widely recognized by the public. Thus, young people are encouraged not only to preserve the *Sekaten* tradition as a local cultural practice in a literal sense, but also to understand and maintain its meaning, essence, and supporting elements.

The key point emphasized in this literature is that collective efforts through mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) to preserve *Sekaten* as a local cultural heritage play an important role in maintaining Indonesia's national unity. Given the vast number of local traditions and cultures in Indonesia, preservation is not an easy task. In this context, *Sekaten* serves as a guiding example, highlighting the importance of preserving other local cultures throughout Indonesia as well.

2.4 *Islam Nusantara and Local Culture*

The *Sekaten* tradition, as a local cultural practice in Java that we are familiar with, is one of the unique media for the spread of Islam and has significantly influenced

theological, historical, and philosophical frameworks. Furthermore, the presence of Sekaten as a living tradition within society has become an entry point for the concept of *Islam Nusantara*. As discussed in the literature by Khabib Muhammad Lutfi (2016) [10] regarding the concept of Islam Nusantara and local culture as the identity of the Indonesian nation, it can be referred to as Islam Nusantara because, theologically, it is able to balance and coexist equally with local cultures, particularly in Indonesia.

The diversity of local traditions and cultures reflects Indonesia's unique national identity. Moreover, the emergence of the term Islam Nusantara has broadened perspectives on the spread of Islam that harmoniously coexists with Indonesian local cultures. Based on research on Sekaten and other local traditions and cultures, these practices represent one form of the existence of Islam Nusantara. The meaning and concept of Islam Nusantara are distinctly Indonesian, as they are able to engage in peaceful and harmonious dialogue with local cultures—without violence, intimidation, or coercion against surrounding communities.

Literature on the concept of Islam Nusantara and local culture (such as Sekaten) presents eight approaches that can be understood through straightforward reasoning. These include philosophical, cultural, linguistic, philosophy of law, legal, historical-anthropological, historical-philological, and sociological-anthropological-historical approaches. As a result, the acculturation of Islam with Indonesian local cultures (one of which is Sekaten) has been widely accepted by society without conflict.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Two important theories underpinning the analysis of the *Sekaten* tradition in Yogyakarta are the theories of acculturation and inclusivism. The tradition continues to be observed in three kingdoms: Cirebon, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. In Yogyakarta, the tradition adopts practices from the Demak Kingdom, reflecting

historical connections between the two. *Sekaten* in Yogyakarta serves as a cultural heritage of the Wali Songo. For the local community, the tradition is a festive celebration blending religious values and entertainment, offering a combination of tradition and faith. Each stage of the tradition conveys profound meanings, encouraging love for the Prophet Muhammad and strengthening faith in Allah SWT.

One unique aspect of *Sekaten* in Yogyakarta is the *Gunungan*, a mountain-shaped offering paraded during the peak of the event, which attendees eagerly vie for. *Sekaten* is thus analyzed using theories like acculturation and inclusivism. Koentjaraningrat (2005:155) defines acculturation as the process of transferring elements from various cultures that interact and integrate without abandoning original traditions. Acculturation is the blending of two cultures, encompassing knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices passed down through generations. In contrast, the theory of inclusivism emphasizes understanding others through shared substantive values, advocating that truth and salvation are not monopolized by a single religion but encompass all religions. Inclusivism promotes an essential understanding of religion [11].

Indirectly, this form of inclusivism introduces a new phase in local traditions and culture, which are inherently accessible and welcoming to be understood and enjoyed by the broader society. Rather than being exclusive, it offers a more expansive perspective and a universal concept of salvation that is open to all. Viewed through these two theoretical frameworks, future analyses may enable a deeper examination of the essence of *Sekaten* as a rich local tradition and cultural heritage, particularly within Javanese society. This analysis goes beyond merely discussing the historical background of *Sekaten*, its ritual procedures as practiced in Yogyakarta, and the significant values embedded within it. Instead, by employing a combined theoretical approach of inclusivism and acculturation, the research seeks to reveal the nature of the sacred relationship between

God, the universe, and society. At the same time, it emphasizes the preservation of *Sekaten*'s core essence by foregrounding openness and hospitality toward others,

guiding local traditions and cultures toward a process of acculturation that is non-violent and characterized by harmony (in line with the theoretical framework outlined below).

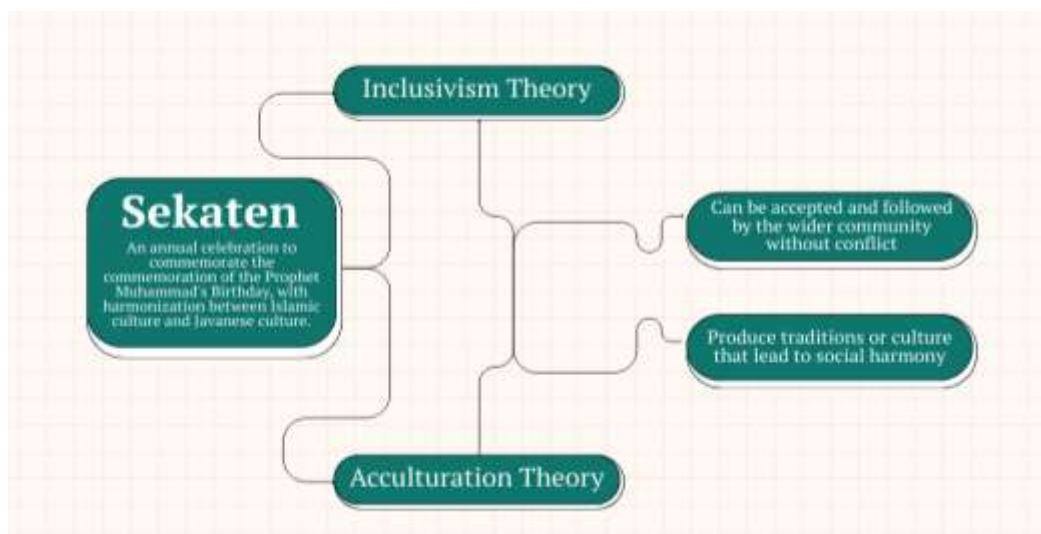


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of inclusivism and acculturation in *Sekaten*

3. METHODS

The research method used is qualitative, encompassing library studies and sources such as books, journals, articles, and news. The approach employed is philosophical hermeneutics, systematically examining the values embedded in the *Sekaten* tradition in the Yogyakarta Palace and their relation to God, the universe, and society through description, interpretation, and critical evaluation. To support this, there are other studies closely related to the material and formal objects, especially concerning the *Sekaten* tradition. Among them is the research by Alfi, M. (2020), *Islamic Values in the Sekaten Tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace*. This study aimed to identify and analyze the Islamic values within the *Sekaten* tradition at the Yogyakarta Palace using qualitative methods. The results indicate that the Islamic values in the *Sekaten* tradition align with Islamic teachings, such as the value of faith reflected in the origin of the name *Sekaten*, derived from the *syahadatain* (the Islamic declaration of faith). The second study, a thesis by Ruli, P. (2007), titled *Wayang kulit as a Medium for Spreading Islam in Demak in the 15th Century*, aimed to analyze the values of *wayang kulit* as a medium for spreading Islam

in Demak. This qualitative research found that *wayang kulit* played a significant role as a medium for Islamization, evidenced by the cultural fusion between Islam and Javanese tradition.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 History and Definition of *Sekaten*

Yogyakarta is one of the regions where a royal government continues to operate. This began when Prince Mangkubumi established a palace in Yogyakarta in 1756. Prince Mangkubumi, also known as Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono I, became one of the first two kings to rule the Yogyakarta Palace after the Mataram kingdom was divided into two: Surakarta and Yogyakarta (1755 AD). This division of territory was inseparable from Dutch intervention, as evidenced by the Treaty of Giyanti concluded between Prince Mangkubumi, Paku Buwono III, and the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Upon learning of this, Prince Mangkubumi sought to liberate the Mataram kingdom from Dutch influence. In short, due to pressure from Prince Mangkubumi's forces, the Dutch eventually reached an agreement [12]

The integration of the special region of Yogyakarta stemmed from complex negotiations at the inception of regional governance. However, after various considerations, Yogyakarta was granted a special status. This special status was awarded not only because the region operated as a monarchy but also because it served as the nation's capital, highlighting its unique position compared to Jakarta, the official capital city. In addition to its special status, Yogyakarta is known as a "student city," where youths from both within and outside Yogyakarta come to pursue education. Yogyakarta is also renowned as *Kavling Inalaya* and a popular tourist destination, both in Indonesia and internationally. Amidst rapid development, Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, as the head of government, continues to preserve the legacy of ancient cultural heritage, including the enduring tradition of *sekaten*.

Sekaten, derived from the Javanese word *sekati*, means balance. Beyond Javanese, *Sekaten* carries multiple interpretations. It stems from the words *suka* and *ati*, meaning joy or "happiness." Another view connects it to *sesek* and *ati*, implying troubled heart, or *sekat*, meaning limits—suggesting self-restraint from evil and distinguishing right from wrong. In Arabic, *Sekaten* is associated with *syahadatain*, referring to the affirmation of faith: belief in the oneness of Allah (*tawhid syahadat*) and the prophethood of Muhammad (*shahadat rasul*) [4]. According to Sunan Kalijaga, to facilitate the spread of Islam, the wali (Islamic saints) utilized popular Javanese mediums, such as gamelan music. This idea was embraced, and during the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, gamelan performances were held at Demak Mosque. The establishment of the Demak kingdom marked the growth of Islam in Java, following the fall of the Majapahit kingdom in 1400 AD. The Demak kingdom became the first and largest Islamic kingdom on Java's northern coast, succeeded by other Islamic kingdoms, including Pajang and Mataram. These eventually split into the Surakarta and Yogyakarta kingdoms [1].

The kingdom played a vital role in spreading Islam across Java and parts of the Indonesian archipelago. The *Sekaten* tradition originated during the Demak kingdom under Sultan Agung's initiative. Today, it is preserved in the Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces. The strategy was effective; large crowds gathered at mosques during gamelan performances, where Islamic teachings were conveyed between musical sessions. Thus, the celebration was named *Sekaten* and is held annually from the 6th to the 12th of Rabi'ul Awwal [13].

Currently, the *Sekaten* tradition is maintained by three Javanese palaces: Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Cirebon. It is a cultural event linking the past to the present, adhering to customary schedules [14]. From a social science perspective, the ceremony represents a structured and consistent pattern of events, held annually. The tradition continues to captivate public interest. The *sekaten* ceremony, often associated with a public festival or night market, lasts seven days from the 5th to the 12th of Rabi'ul Awwal.

4.2 Values and Procedures for Implementing *Sekaten*

Sekaten is held to commemorate the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday. This tradition is carried out by the Yogyakarta Palace every 6th to 11th of birth. The *Sekaten* tradition ends or is closed on the 12th day of birth. The closing ceremony is held with a ceremony called *Grebeg Maulud*. The tradition in Yogyakarta ends on the 12th of *Maulud*, because this date is considered the birth and death of the Prophet Muhammad [13]. *Sekaten* is a tradition that has become a routine agenda set by Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono and Pakubuwono. The celebration is held every 5th of Rabiul Awal in the afternoon until the 11th of Rabiul Awal at night. A series of *Sekaten* Ceremonies begin with the Miyos Gangsa *Sekaten* Ceremony of Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Madu and Kanjeng Kyai Naga Wilaga from the Kraton to the Pagongan of the Great Mosque, the Numplak Wajik Ceremony continued with the making of Gunungan, the Tedhak Dalem

Ceremony to the Great Mosque, the Kondur Gangsa Ceremony, and ends with the Garebek Ceremony marked by the release of the Dalem hajad/alms in the form of Gunungan which is carried from the Kraton to the Great Mosque [14].

In carrying out the procession of the ceremony, the *Sekaten* tradition in Yogyakarta uses two main places. The first place used in the ceremony procession is *Tratag Sitihiinggil*. *Tratag Sitihiinggil* is a large building in the form of an elongated square, with very high pillars, on a relatively high floor or one and a half meters higher than the normal level. The name *Tratag Sitihiinggil* comes from Javanese, and the word *Tratag* means a place of shelter. *Sitihiinggil* consists of two words, namely the word *Siti* which means earth, and *Hakkal* which means high. *Tratag Sitihiinggil* is used to prepare the Pasowan Grebeg road. In the *Sekaten* tradition, Pasovanan Grebeg is a performance where the Sultan sits at a station called Bangsal Manguntur Tangkil. Then the sultan's relatives, courtiers, and people sit together and pray to the sultan. In addition to prayers for the Sultan, they also hear reports and orders from the Sultan.

The second place used for the *Sekaten* ceremony is the Gedhe Kauman Mosque. The Gedhe Kauman Mosque is located to the west of the northern square of the Yogyakarta Palace. The courtyard of the mosque is where gamelan was introduced into the *sekat* tradition. This mosque has a large yard or courtyard so that it attracts many people who want to play there. There is a traditional door in front of this mosque. In this tradition, there is an additional activity, that is the night market. The *Sekaten* Night Market is located in the North Plaza of the Yogyakarta Palace. Initially, in the tradition, there were no night market activities. This night market activity was held in the *Sekaten* tradition when the Dutch colonized Indonesia. The reason the Dutch added a night market to the tradition was because the Dutch did not like the spread of Islam through the Yogyakarta Palace through the *Sekaten* tradition [15], [16]. Some things that need to be explained in the

Implementation of the *Sekaten* Ceremony are: [13]

First, the *Sekaten* gamelan stage is moved to the courtyard of the Grand Mosque, precisely at midnight. The two sets of Gamelan are moved to the Bangsal Pagongan with the escort of Mantrijero soldiers and Ketanggung soldiers. Kyai Gunturmadu Gamelan and Kyai Nagawilaga Gamelan are placed in the Bangsal Pagongan on the north and south sides. In the courtyard of the mosque, the Gamelan is played continuously, day and night for seven days in a row, except Friday before Friday prayers. After Friday prayers are finished, at around 13.00 noon, the gamelan is played again.

Second, treasury of *Sekaten* gendhing: Rambu, five feet; Rangkung, five feet; lunggadung, four feet; order, there are six; Andongondun, five of them; Rendeng, about five; Yaumi, five years; Gliyung is the sixth; rujak six Dindang Sabina there are six people; Muru Putih, Orang Aring, Six Paths; there are six people; spinach, six ways; Supiatun, many things; Srundeng Gosong, Pelog Pathet Barang [17].

Third, the gamelan that was first played was Kyai Gunturmadu. The gendhing was a concoction of pathet gangsal, dhawah gendhing Rambu. Next, Kyai Gunturmadu was played with a concoction of pethet gangsal, dhawah gendhing Rangkung. That's how it was, alternately, Kyai Gunturmadu and Kyai Nagawilaga were played alternately. The gendhing that are then sung in sequence are the gendhing racikan pathet gangsal, dhawah gendhing Andong-andong or gendhing Lunggadumpel, one of which is chosen [18].

Fourth, stage Sri Sultan and his entourage are present at the Grand Mosque to listen to the reading of the history of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. On the 11th of Rabi'ul Awal, around 20.00 at night. This event takes place on the porch of the Grand Mosque. Before entering the porch of the mosque, the Sultan heads to the southern pagongan to spread udhik-udhik. The udhik-udhik that is spread is always directed to the traders, before then being spread towards the people attending this ceremony. After the distribution

of udhik-udhik in the pagongan, the Sultan and his entourage then enter the porch of the mosque, to spread udhi-udhik. On the porch of the mosque, the udhik-udhik is fought over by the abdi dalem mengulon (who serve the Penghulu). After the udhi-udhik ceremony was completed, on the orders of the Sultan, the history of the Prophet Muhammad SAW was read, by Kanjeng Kyai Penghulu.

Fifth, the stage of returning the *Sekaten* Gamelan is on the 11th of Maulud or 11th of Rabi'ul Awal, after the Sultan and his entourage have finished listening to the reading of the history of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and left the Grand Mosque for the Palace. The ceremony of moving the *Sekaten* Gamelan is carried out at midnight [19]

After *Sekaten* is over, the Garebeg ceremony is held the next day. Because the Garebeg ceremony takes place in the month of Maulud, it is called Garebeg Maulud. The *Sekaten* tradition is a tradition that has long been preserved in the Yogyakarta Palace. Behind the celebrations and rituals, this tradition hides a different meaning or value. The holding of this *sekaten* ceremony is conceptually a commitment of the sultan and the karot to spread Islam throughout the kingdom, therefore every *sekaten* event is held as a form of celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday (SAW) with gratitude to Allah SWT [20]

The historical meaning related to the Sultan's personality as the legitimate heir to the Panembahan Senopati and the Islamic Kingdom of Mataram and also related to the existence of the previous Sultan, so the obligation that must be carried out by the Sultan after him is to be responsible for continuing this tradition both in terms of maintaining and preserving its cultural heritage. As well as the cultural meaning where Sri Sultan as the leader of the Palace who is also the heir to the culture inspired by the old culture must uphold and always preserve the cultural traditions that have existed since ancient times which were outlined from generation to generation by the previous king. From this description, it can be concluded that the *Sekaten* ceremony is an

expression of the power of tradition and respect for cultural heritage and ancestors.

4.3 Perspective of Acculturation and Inclusivism Theories in *Sekaten*

Acculturation refers to the social process in which two or more cultures meet and influence one another. This process occurs when a group of people with particular without losing the original elements of the group's culture encounters a foreign culture. Gradually, the foreign culture is adopted and assimilated into the local culture. The process of acculturation is marked by the acceptance of the new culture, accompanied by the integration of new values that align with the existing cultural and stylistic similarities. Inherently flexible, acculturation allows one culture to merge into another seamlessly. It involves the mutual transfer of cultural elements, fostering interaction without abandoning the original culture. Culture itself is defined as an organized system of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the universe, material objects, and properties that a large group of people acquire over generations through individual and group efforts. Acculturation is also a process that immigrants undergo to adapt and adopt local cultures [21].

The *Sekaten* tradition is an example of acculturation between local culture and the dominant Islamic religion in Yogyakarta. The influence of Islam on Javanese culture evident in Sufism and legends has significantly impacted both the nobility and the general populace. In Javanese traditions, there is always a close relationship between cultural and religious values. The outcome of cultural acculturation is determined by the strength of each culture. The stronger the prayer culture, the faster its spread. In the process of acculturation, all differences coexist with commonalities until the more influential culture plays a dominant role. The acculturation processes in Indonesia have produced various systems and arts that continue to exist and be practiced today. The

Sekaten celebration, particularly in Surakarta, represents a synthesis and acculturation of culture, merging Islam as a religious culture with local traditions. This relationship and collaboration between Islam as a major textual tradition and local culture should be viewed as a successful acculturation process that enriches the diversity of Islamic cultural expressions after encountering local cultural frameworks [22], [23].

This perspective on cultural acculturation creates a new understanding that plays a vital role in integrating and blending two different cultural elements, producing a deeply rooted culture in society without losing the essence of both. Another perspective from the *Sekaten* celebration is that Islam has been reinterpreted [24]. This includes the indigenization of Islam and cultural negotiations where two cultural elements interact. These negotiations involve mutual adjustments and aim to create a new cultural framework acceptable to both sides.

The role of acculturation as a distinctive perspective within the *Sekaten* tradition has not emerged through an easy process. Rather, it has undergone a long and complex historical journey, involving multiple stages of adaptation and negotiation, which has enabled it to persist and remain meaningful within society up to the present day.

The prolonged process of acculturation in the *Sekaten* tradition is closely linked to the broad dissemination of Islam and the establishment of effective communication between Islamic teachings and newly encountered cultural elements within society. Prior to the occurrence of acculturation, *Sekaten*—during the pre-Islamic period in Java under earlier kingdoms—was practiced in accordance with prevailing beliefs. Fundamentally, the *Sekaten* ceremony represents a cultural heritage tradition whose form and character have evolved over time. Initially, it functioned as an annual ritual of Hindu kingdoms, involving offerings or sacrifices to ancestral spirits [1], [25]

Subsequently, the arrival of the Walisongo in the region introduced a transformative approach that sought to align Islamic teachings with existing local cultural contexts. Through effective patterns of communication and interaction with the community—without undermining or negating local values—*Sekaten* gradually developed into a tradition that continues to thrive today, attracting wide public participation and appreciation [26], [27]. Moreover, the acculturated form of *Sekaten* that emerged within society has served as an important medium for Islamic da'wah, not only during the time of the Walisongo but also extending to contemporary Islamic scholars.

Furthermore, the process of acculturation within *Sekaten* cannot be separated from the openness of local communities toward newcomers who became part of this ongoing cultural interaction. The perspective of inclusivism strengthens the values produced through acculturation, as reflected in historical developments following the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom around 1400 CE. During this period, Islam began to spread rapidly in Java with the establishment of the Demak Kingdom as the first and largest Islamic polity on the northern coast of Java, followed by other kingdoms such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta. These kingdoms played a crucial role in disseminating Islam across Java and other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. The *Sekaten* tradition has existed since the era of the Demak Kingdom, with Sultan Agung initiating the *Sekaten* celebration, which continues to be preserved within the Yogyakarta and Surakarta palaces to this day [28]. At that time, Islam was introduced as a religion of universal mercy (*rahmatan lil'alam*). The Walisongo actively propagated Islam, aiming to convert communities still adhering to animistic and dynamistic beliefs. In the course of their missionary efforts, the Walisongo employed various strategies to attract public interest in Islam, one of which was the use of gamelan music—a form of traditional art that was highly popular at the time [29], [30]. From an

inclusivist perspective, understanding others entails recognizing shared universal values. Consequently, truth and salvation are no longer monopolized by a single religion but instead function as a shared umbrella among religious traditions. The *Sekaten* tradition in Yogyakarta not only serves as a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday but also operates as a medium for disseminating Islamic teachings. In addition to emphasizing religious dimensions, *Sekaten* provides entertainment for the broader community. Beyond its cultural and religious significance, the series of *Sekaten* activities also exerts a substantial impact on the local economy. This annual tradition organized by the Yogyakarta Palace contributes significantly to the economic well-being of the Yogyakarta community [29], [31].

Therefore, the urgency and essence of integrating the perspectives of acculturation and inclusivism have contributed to shaping the *Sekaten* tradition as a more positive and constructive form of local culture. Beyond this, these two perspectives offer a broader understanding of *Sekaten* as a moderate tradition with wide social reach—one that is not exclusively oriented toward Islam alone, but whose social meanings extend to adherents of diverse religions and belief systems.

4.4 Correlation Analysis of The Relationship of *Sekaten* to God, The Universe, and Society

All local traditions and cultural practices in Indonesia, particularly those performed by communities, are not carried out arbitrarily or without meaning. Rather, they embody profound messages that are integrally transcendental, linking God, the universe, and society within a cosmological framework deeply rooted in Javanese culture. As a product of cultural acculturation between Javanese traditions and Islamic influence, *Sekaten* establishes a strong and enduring relationship [32], [33]. It is not merely an annual celebration commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, but also a cultural

mechanism that simultaneously connects three dimensions: the theological, the cosmological, and social harmony within society.

Fundamentally, *Sekaten* is an annual tradition organized by the Yogyakarta Palace during the month of Maulud to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The *Sekaten* ceremony is held regularly once a year, specifically from the 5th to the 11th of Rabi' al-Awwal, and concludes with the Grebeg Maulud procession on the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal. This tradition has long been preserved by the Yogyakarta Palace. Beneath its festive celebrations and ritual practices, *Sekaten* contains profound meanings and complex relational dimensions.

There exists a close relationship between God, the Universe, and society within *sekaten*, encompassing multiple values and interpretations. From a theological perspective, the religious significance of the *Sekaten* ceremony lies in its conceptual foundation as part of the Sultan's and the palace's responsibility to disseminate Islamic teachings throughout the kingdom. Accordingly, each *Sekaten* celebration serves as an expression of gratitude to Allah SWT while commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Moreover, the relationship between *Sekaten* and God reflects a sense of human responsibility toward all that has been bestowed by Allah SWT, as manifested in various aspects of life [34]. Both directly and indirectly, *Sekaten* encourages the community to continuously remember and draw closer to Allah, the Creator, through inclusive, persuasive, and culturally grounded approaches. This can be observed through the harmonious recitation of the shahada, the use of gamelan music, and other symbolic rituals imbued with religious meaning.

Equally important is *Sekaten's* relationship with the universe, or its cosmological dimension, which is particularly represented by the Gunungan. The form and contents of the Gunungan are composed of various natural products, each carrying its own symbolic meaning. For Javanese society,

nature has long been an integral part of their lived environment, the relationship between humans and nature is inseparable from Javanese identity [35]. From the perspective of Javanese culture—which views nature as possessing both nurturing and potentially destructive qualities—humans are not expected to submit passively to natural forces. Instead, they are obliged to actively safeguard their lives through the responsible management of natural resources, as nature fundamentally shapes their daily existence and future aspirations. Consequently, Javanese society understands that nature can bring blessings and peace, yet it also holds the potential to threaten human life.

As explained through the meanings and functions of ritual objects used in the *Sekaten* ceremony, these elements reflect human perceptions of God and the universe. The Gunungan, for instance, constructed from agricultural products cultivated by the community, symbolizes the relationship between humans and nature. Thus, the cosmological dimension of the *Sekaten* tradition embodies philosophical values that serve as a reminder for society to maintain a sense of responsibility, justice, and care toward the natural environment entrusted by God [36]. In other words, humans are required to preserve harmony with nature (the cosmological dimension) as part of the divine order (the theological dimension).

Beyond ecological and theological relationships, Javanese culture also emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmonious social relations. Javanese society is taught not only to sustain good relationships with others but also to show respect toward elders and uphold social

hierarchies. Maintaining relationships based on social stratification is viewed as a manifestation of mutual respect. The principle of respect, which underlies hierarchical social relations, holds intrinsic value and must therefore be preserved and practiced in accordance with prevailing social norms. From this perspective, it can be concluded that Javanese people believe that maintaining harmonious relationships with others significantly influences the quality of life, fostering social well-being [37]. In Javanese thought, peace and social harmony are regarded as natural conditions that prevail unless disrupted, much like the calm surface of the sea that remains undisturbed unless affected by strong winds or opposing currents.

These principles are reflected in the practice of the *Sekaten* ceremony, which also conveys the value of respecting others. As social beings, humans inherently depend on one another. Similarly, the organization of the *Sekaten* ceremony cannot be conducted individually; it requires collective participation and cooperation. Fundamentally, human beings are taught to uphold the spirit of mutual assistance (*gotong royong*), as all living beings inevitably rely on others. Therefore, the correlation among the three dimensions—the theological, cosmological, and social—within the *Sekaten* Tradition illustrates that life is perceived as an indivisible unity. Balance, harmony, and equilibrium are essential in sustaining this unity, as all aspects of existence circulate within the interconnected relationship between God, nature, and humanity.



Figure 2. Sekaten Mind map Correlation and Relationship to God, The Universe, and Society

5. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that four main points emerge: the history of *Sekaten*, the procedures of its implementation at the Yogyakarta Palace, the values embedded within the tradition, and the relationship of *Sekaten* to God, the universe, and society. These aspects have had a positive psychological and sociological impact on the community. The worldview reflected in the *Sekaten* ceremony teaches people to always express gratitude to Allah SWT in their daily lives. For the Javanese people, nature has been their habitat since childhood. In their cultural perspective, nature is viewed as both powerful and awe-inspiring. Humans, however, must not merely submit to its power but also strive to maintain harmony with nature. The perception of time within the ceremony integrates orientations toward the past, present, and future, emphasizing the importance of adhering to principles that promote goodness for future life.

In addition to fostering harmony with nature, the Javanese are taught to maintain good relationships with others and respect elders. Upholding relationships based on social stratification or hierarchy is a manifestation of the principle of mutual

respect, which is deeply ingrained in Javanese society. This principle obliges individuals to preserve and uphold harmonious relationships. The *Sekaten* ceremony also highlights the importance of mutual assistance and maintaining harmony among people. From this analysis, it is evident that the *Sekaten* ceremony embodies values that promote goodness in daily life through its religious and cultural practices. The tradition in Yogyakarta is widely held to celebrate the birth of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and to promote the teachings of Islam. While it emphasizes the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday and the dissemination of Islamic teachings, *Sekaten* also provides entertainment for the community. Hence, efforts should be made to continue holding *Sekaten* annually to ensure the spread of Islam and the preservation of this cultural heritage.

The discussion on the history of *Sekaten*, the procedures of its implementation at the Yogyakarta Palace, and the values embedded within the tradition as well as the relationship of *Sekaten* to God, the universe, and society remains relevant today, particularly in the fields of cultural philosophy, local wisdom, and contextual Islamic education. The researcher acknowledges that this mini-study has its shortcomings and is far from satisfactory.

However, it is hoped that this study contributes to providing information and a source of knowledge for other researchers who wish to explore similar topics. Future research on *Sekaten* should include more comprehensive literature and involve collaboration with government agencies, particularly relevant departments, to enhance the depth of the study. The values embedded in the tradition, along with its relationship to




God, the universe, and society, can also serve as a critical reflection on current social, political, and economic issues. It is hoped that more research will delve into the values embodied in the *Sekaten* tradition and its philosophical, cultural, and societal relevance, thus enriching understanding and appreciation of this enduring cultural heritage.

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