



Caring for *Sekaten* Traditions, Caring for Indonesia: Preserving Local Cultural Values in the Midst of Foreign Cultural Exposure

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ABSTRACT

Sekaten tradition is an ancestral cultural heritage that has lasted since the days of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom. This tradition holds a philosophical meaning about the relationship of man with the Creator through the *Sekaten* tradition. In addition, the *Sekaten* procession also reflects the spirit of mutual cooperation that is closely inherent in Javanese society. Unfortunately, in today's modern era, the enthusiasm of the younger generation towards *Sekaten* is fading. This may threaten the preservation of this tradition in the future. Efforts to revitalize *Sekaten* need to be done by exploring the philosophical values and local wisdom contained in it. This excavation is important so that the meaning of this tradition remains relevant for the millennial generation. In addition, it is necessary to socialize and assist young people to love and preserve *Sekaten* as a local cultural identity that should be maintained. The participation of all components of society is necessary in order to maintain the existence of *Sekaten* in the midst of modernization, so that ancestral values are maintained and timeless by the changing times.

Keywords: *Sekaten*, tradition, java

ABSTRAK

Tradisi *Sekaten* merupakan warisan budaya leluhur yang telah berlangsung sejak zaman Kerajaan Mataram Islam. Tradisi ini menyimpan makna filosofis tentang hubungan manusia dengan Sang Pencipta melalui tradisi *Sekaten*. Selain itu, prosesi *Sekaten* juga mencerminkan semangat gotong royong yang melekat erat dalam masyarakat Jawa. Sayangnya, di era modern saat ini antusiasme generasi muda terhadap *Sekaten* semakin memudar. Hal ini dapat mengancam kelestarian tradisi ini di masa mendatang. Upaya revitalisasi *Sekaten* perlu dilakukan dengan menggali nilai-nilai filosofis dan kearifan lokal yang terkandung di dalamnya. Penggalian ini penting agar makna tradisi ini tetap relevan bagi generasi milenial. Selain itu, perlu dilakukan sosialisasi dan pendampingan terhadap pemuda-pemudi untuk mencintai dan melestarikan *Sekaten* sebagai identitas budaya lokal yang patut dijaga. Partisipasi seluruh komponen masyarakat diperlukan demi menjaga eksistensi *Sekaten* di tengah modernisasi, sehingga nilai-nilai leluhur tetap terjaga dan tak lekang oleh perubahan zaman.

Kata kunci: *Sekaten*, tradisi, jawa



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1. Introduction

The *Sekaten* tradition is one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage that is still preserved today. This celebration is routinely held every year by the Yogyakarta Palace to commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. *Sekaten* displays traditional rituals, performing arts, and contains deep philosophical meaning. Therefore, efforts to preserve *Sekaten* in the midst of modernization are very important to maintain the sustainability of the nation's noble cultural values [1].

Sekaten has been held since the time of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom in the 16th century. The initial idea was to spread Islam peacefully by fusing pre-existing pre-Islamic cultural values. Since then, *Sekaten* has been believed to be an effective and harmonious means of cultural da'wah without any presence or coercion on the Javanese people [2][3]. This tradition continues to this day under the patronage of the Yogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace.

The *Sekaten* ceremony usually starts from the month of Mulud or Rabiulawal in the Hijri celebration, coinciding with the commemoration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In addition, Javanese music and dance performances also enliven *Sekaten* every day. The *Sekaten* gamelan is believed to be the oldest palace gamelan that is still played today [4].

Sekaten contains many philosophical meanings that reflect the noble values of Javanese culture. Gunungan symbolizes Mount Meru in Hindu mythology, as the central point of the universe. This shows the acculturation of pre-Islamic culture and harmonious Islam. Tumpeng in Gunungan also has a philosophy of hierarchy and balance. Likewise other cultural symbols [5]. This means of preserving Javanese cultural values that are effective in the midst of the onslaught of modernization.

However, the *Sekaten* tradition currently faces various challenges that threaten its existence. The development of technology, globalization, and modern lifestyles have made many young generations less interested in the traditions of their ancestors. In addition, funding problems also often haunt the implementation of *Sekaten* every year. The absence of regeneration of successors of *Sekaten* artists and cultural figures will also make this tradition eroded by the times. Therefore, preservation efforts need to be encouraged so that *Sekaten* can continue to be preserved as the nation's cultural heritage [6].

2. Method

The method chosen in this study is a literature method where data collection is carried out through an in-depth study of various relevant references in the form of journals, books, and other literary sources both in printed and digital form. The references used were obtained from online databases, college holding repositories, scientific search engines, as well as social media platforms and various videos. The analysis is carried out qualitatively by the researcher interpreting and synthesizing ideas and findings from the reviewed literature to answer the questions and objectives of the research [7][8].

3. Result and Discussion

Overview of the Sekaten Tradition

The *Sekaten* tradition is an annual celebration to commemorate the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday which has been carried out since the time of the Islamic Mataram Sultanate in Yogyakarta City. This tradition includes a series of traditional rituals and ceremonies that depict the harmonization between Islamic culture and Javanese culture. One of the characteristics of *Sekaten* is the peak of the Grebeg Maulud event which featured the palace team parading gamelan and food offerings from the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace to the Great Mosque. The parade is a symbol of gratitude and prayer of the Sultan's blessing to his people. After the prayer, at the Great Mosque there was also a lively tambourine music performance [9].

Not to forget, in this *Sekaten* tradition, a unique religious music performance is also performed, namely the *Sekaten* Gamelan, which is believed to be played only once a year in this tradition. The sound of the solemn gamelan was heard from the Baluwarti Palace for a whole week. The chanting of the *Sekaten* Gamelan is believed to have high spiritual value. In addition, at the moment of *Sekaten*, the palace also held exhibitions and cultural performances for the public. This aims to make all levels of society know and understand the philosophical values contained in the *Sekaten* tradition as the ancestral heritage of the Indonesian nation.

Cultural Values

The *Sekaten* tradition in the city of Yogyakarta and the city of Surakarta is an annual tradition that is very rich in meaning. Behind the rituals, *Sekaten* holds many noble cultural values of ancestral heritage that we should preserve. Some of the cultural values contained in *Sekaten* are religious values, mutual cooperation, togetherness, local wisdom, and tolerance. From the religious side, *Sekaten* displays the acculturation of Islamic culture with a harmonious pre-Islamic Javanese culture. This can be seen from the Grebeg Maulud ritual at the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace, where the Sultan and his courtiers paraded gamelan and tumpeng as a symbol of gratitude for the birth of the Prophet Muhammad Saw.

Sekaten also showed the spirit of mutual cooperation and togetherness of the people of Yogyakarta in preparing and enlivening it. Good cooperation between the Palace, the Great Mosque, and local residents should be appreciated and for example, the social interaction that was built during the preparation and implementation of *Sekaten* strengthened the bond of brotherhood among the people of Yogyakarta. In

addition, rituals and cultural art performances in *Sekaten* display local ancestral wisdom in the form of philosophy, symbolic meaning, and high artistic creativity. This is important to be preserved as part of the nation's identity so that it does not become extinct with the times. For example, Gamelan *Sekaten* which is played with full spiritual meaning.

The aspect of tolerance is also seen in the spirit of harmony of all levels of society regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, or class to jointly enliven *Sekaten*. This spirit is in line with *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Some of these noble values are tried to be preserved in the *Sekaten* tradition every year. This Preservation Tradition is an effort to maintain the sustainability of the heritage of ancestors which, if extinct, will be very detrimental to the next generation of the Indonesian nation [10].

Media and Conservation Methods

As an ancient tradition rich in meaning, *Sekaten* in Yogyakarta and in Surakarta should continue to be implemented and preserved. Along with the times, various media and preservation methods have been carried out so that this cultural heritage is not eaten away by the times. The most important preservation medium is the implementation of the *Sekaten* ritual itself every year from generation to generation. Rituals such as *Grebeg Maulud*, *Kraton* parade, *Sekaten* Gamelan, music performances and traditional arts, become a forum for preserving various local cultural values. Through appearances, the philosophical and symbolic meaning behind this tradition can continue to be infused by the wider community [11].

Then, other media that are also used is active community involvement such as through cultural carnivals, festivals, and cultural art exhibitions held by the *Kraton* during the *Sekaten* celebration. By participating in enlivening, the community can increasingly understand, be proud, and strive to preserve this ancestral tradition. Not to forget, promotions through the internet and social media are also actively carried out by various parties ranging from the *Kraton* itself, traditional stakeholders, artists, historians, cultural lovers community, and local governments. With the news and online campaigns, many young people are interested in learning about the *Sekaten* tradition.

The preservation methods are also diverse, ranging from the regeneration of gamelan and artists, as well as involving elementary to high school children to be active and involved in this preservation as well as documenting traditions in the form of videos and printed books, to intensive counseling to instill awareness so that people participate in their own culture. These various media and methods are currently running to preserve *Sekaten* and its noble values. That way, this ancestral heritage will continue to live on for generations to future generations [12].

Sekaten as a Means of Character Education

The *Sekaten* tradition which is held every year in the city of Yogyakarta and the city of Surakarta holds many noble values that are relevant in the formation of the character of today's young generation. This tradition has existed since the time of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom under Sultan Agung, and has an important meaning in preserving the culture and identity of the Javanese people. There are many noble values that can be exemplified from the *Sekaten* tradition, such as nationalism. The implementation of the village cleaning ceremony and earth alms involving all elements of the local community shows the spirit of loving the homeland. This should be instilled from an early age to the younger generation as one of the pillars of the nation's character [13].

In addition, the *Sekaten* tradition also teaches the value of mutual cooperation and togetherness. This can be seen from the volunteerism of residents who donated time and energy during the series of *Sekaten* events. Both material and non-material donations, all of them illustrate the spirit of mutual cooperation that is still thick today. Not only that, this tradition also prioritizes educational tolerance. This is reflected in the enthusiasm of people from all religions who witness *Sekaten*, especially at the peak of the *Grebeg Maulud* event which is attended by interfaith officials. The attitude of respect between religious people was evident during *Sekaten*.

The value of religiosity is also an important part of the *Sekaten* tradition. The *Sekaten* mantra gamelan which is only played during the implementation of *Sekaten*, to the prayers in a series of events thickens the religious identity of the local community. The presence of elders and religious leaders further strengthens the nuances of religiosity in tradition. The four values mentioned above are very relevant in the character education of the current generation of the nation's children. In the midst of incessant foreign influences and the rapid flow of

globalization, the *Sekaten* tradition can teach its own noble cultural values that are important for the continuity of the nation's identity. The life lessons learned from the *Sekaten* tradition can inspire the younger generation to work based on these noble values. Loving one's own culture is the key so that nationalism is always maintained. Having a meaningful tradition with its glittering rituals arouses pride as part of a community that owns beautiful customs. The *Sekaten* tradition essentially has a moral message that is important in shaping the next generation of the nation that is superior and has character. Preserving this tradition means participating in maintaining the noble values of the ancestral heritage for the advancement of Indonesian human civilization in the future.

4. Conclusion

The *Sekaten* tradition holds a philosophical meaning and a long history of Javanese society. The *Sekaten* tradition contains valuable lessons about nationalism, mutual cooperation, tolerance and religiosity. These noble values are important for the younger generation to emulate to strengthen the nation's character. In the midst of the incessant influence of foreigners, upholding the traditions of ancestors can maintain the identity and self-defense of the nation. The tradition of *Sekaten* Preservation through the participation of all elements of society is the key so that its noble values remain relevant in the formation of the character of the nation's next generation.

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