

## Beyond The Sacred: Analyzing The Transformation of Surakarta's Sekaten and its Implications for Islamic Teaching and Learning

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### ABSTRACT

The annual Sekaten tradition in the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace illustrates how traditional religious practices continue to adapt to modern life. Originally intended to spread Islam and preserve Javanese culture, Sekaten has shifted toward a blend of entertainment, tourism, and digital engagement. While previous research has mostly examined its historical, sociological, and ritual aspects, there is still limited study on how Sekaten functions as a non-formal educational space, especially for young people. This study addresses that gap by exploring how the younger generation interprets the changing meaning of Sekaten. Using qualitative methods historical and phenomenological approaches supported by document analysis, observation, and interviews with youth and palace officials the research finds that Sekaten is increasingly viewed through recreational and commercial lenses. As a result, its religious value is gradually declining. Today, young people tend to see Sekaten mainly as a site of entertainment and digital cultural expression. The study concludes that these shifts reflect broader social and cultural transformations. It recommends a balanced preservation strategy that maintains traditional sacred elements while adapting to the needs of modern youth in education.

**Keywords:** Cultural Transformation, Islamic Education, Surakarta Sekaten Tradition, Young Generation

## INTRODUCTION

The *Sekaten* tradition in the Kasunanan Surakarta is a legacy of Javanese Islamic culture with long and complex historical roots. This tradition not only commemorates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but also serves as a medium for preaching and teaching Islamic values to the Javanese people since the time of the *Wali Songo* (a council of nine revered Islamic preachers in Java). The Wali Songo utilized cultural approaches such as gamelan, wayang, and traditional processions to introduce Islamic teachings in a subtle and contextual manner. These cultural media were effective because they encouraged broad community participation, facilitated the internalization of moral values, and made religious messages easier to remember through symbols, repetition, and collective ritual experiences. Thus, Sekaten serves as a form of cultural preaching that combines spiritual, social, and aesthetic values. With the establishment of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom and the



Kasunanan Surakarta period, this tradition was institutionalized as an annual royal ritual brimming with symbolism. The gamelan instruments of Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari, for example, are not simply musical instruments but symbols of harmony between humans, nature, and God (Eko et al., 2024). This tradition demonstrates how Islamic values have assimilated into local culture without losing their spiritual essence.

However, developments have brought significant changes to the implementation and meaning of the Sekaten tradition. Modernization, urbanization, and advances in information technology have influenced how society, especially the younger generation, understands the meaning of this tradition. In the past two decades, Sekaten in Surakarta has become seen not only as a religious event but also as a cultural and tourism event, attracting thousands of visitors each year. Night markets, folk entertainment, and creative economy festivals have become integral parts of this celebration. Despite its positive impact on the regional economy, concerns have arisen that the spiritual and educational aspects of Sekaten are being displaced by a purely commercial and entertainment orientation (Jannah, 2024). This shift in meaning creates a dilemma between preserving sacred values and the demands of the modern economy, which increasingly dominate the cultural public sphere.

Recent research suggests that this change reflects a broader phenomenon: the transformation of local culture in the face of globalization and digitalization. Traditions that were once sacred are now undergoing commodification and mediatization. According to (Permadi & Yantari, 2024), the *Grebeg Maulid* (A Javanese royal ritual commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday through a ceremonial offering procession symbolizing gratitude and social harmony) and Sekaten traditions in the Yogyakarta region have shifted from being religious rituals to being tourism commodities. In the Surakarta context, this change is evident in the increasing role of local governments and economic actors in organizing Sekaten, which often emphasizes its attractiveness and economic aspects over its spirituality. On the other hand, social media has also accelerated changes in public perception. For the younger generation, Sekaten is now better known as an "*Instagrammable*" cultural festival than a space for religious reflection. This phenomenon demonstrates how religious and traditional values are being renegotiated in the digital public sphere.

Nevertheless, several studies also confirm that Sekaten still holds great potential as a non-formal educational medium for instilling Islamic values, morality, and social togetherness. This tradition implicitly embodies the values of faith, gratitude, solidarity, and respect for Islamic history in the archipelago. According to (Ponulele et al., 2023), many young Islamic boarding school students (*santri*) still interpret Sekaten as a moment to strengthen their Islamic identity and love for ancestral traditions. Unfortunately, this educational approach has not been systematically optimized, especially in the context of Islamic cultural education for the younger generation. The weak socialization of Sekaten's philosophical values has left many young people understanding only its ceremonial aspects, rather than its spiritual meaning. This indicates the need to recontextualize the Sekaten tradition as a medium for non-formal Islamic education relevant to contemporary social dynamics through the

reinterpretation of ritual symbols, the integration of cultural meanings into educational practices, and the active involvement of younger generations in participatory cultural activities that reconnect ceremonial forms with their spiritual foundations.

Based on this description, this study aims to examine in-depth the transformation of the Sekaten tradition in Surakarta from cultural, religious, and educational perspectives, and to examine how the younger generation interprets these changes. This research also seeks to identify strategies for preserving the Sekaten tradition so that it retains its educational and spiritual value without losing its cultural and economic appeal. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the study of local culture-based Islamic education, as well as practical contributions to local governments, educational institutions, and communities in developing a model for cultural preservation that integrates traditional values with modern needs.

## **METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative methodology combining historical and phenomenological approaches to capture both the continuity and transformation of the Sekaten tradition. The historical approach is used to trace the origins, symbolic meanings, and shifts in values over time, providing a contextual framework for understanding the tradition's original religious and cultural functions. In contrast, the phenomenological approach explores the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the younger generation regarding the contemporary meaning of Sekaten. Together, these approaches complement each other by allowing historical tracing to inform and contextualize phenomenological insights, thereby revealing how past religious meanings are preserved, reinterpreted, or transformed in present-day cultural practices (Kuntowijaya, 2021).

### **Research Location and Subjects**

This research was conducted in the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace, the center of the Sekaten tradition. Subjects included young participants attending Sekaten activities, officials from the Palace, and local residents participating in cultural activities. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants deemed knowledgeable and directly involved in Sekaten activities. Based on field data, there were six primary respondents aged 18-25 from various areas around Surakarta, such as Ngawi, Boyolali, Karanganyar, and Sukoharjo.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with young participants and Palace officials using open-ended questions to explore their perceptions of the religious, cultural, and entertainment significance of the Sekaten tradition. Based on the interviews, most informants stated that Sekaten is now better known as an entertainment and culinary event, although religious values are still recognized as its primary roots. Participatory observation was

conducted by attending the Sekaten procession, including the gamelan music of Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari, the Grebeg Maulid ceremony, and the night market activities. These observations helped researchers understand community interactions and how sacred spaces and entertainment blend into one celebration. Documentation included the collection of photographs, archives, and video recordings of Sekaten activities, as well as historical documents from the Surakarta Palace. This documentary data was used to trace the continuity and changes in traditional practices over time.

### **Research Stages**

The researchers began with a literature review to understand the history of Sekaten and the Islamic values it embodies. Next, they conducted direct observations at the Sekaten activity locations to obtain contextual data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted both in person and online using Google Forms to solicit responses from the younger generation. After data collection, triangulation was conducted between the interviews, observations, and documents to ensure data validity.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and interpretively, with subjective interpretations systematically linked to Islamic educational and cultural frameworks by relating informants' experiences to established values of *da'wah* (Islamic preacher), moral education, and cultural transmission embedded in the Sekaten tradition, following the stages of the Miles & Huberman model: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Data reduction was carried out by selecting important information from interviews and observations related to the research focus, namely the religious, cultural, and entertainment meanings of Sekaten. The reduced data was then presented in the form of main themes: (1) religious meaning and *da'wah* values, (2) the shift in function to entertainment and economics, and (3) efforts to preserve traditional values among the younger generation. The final stage was phenomenological interpretation, in which the researcher interpreted the subjective meanings of informants' experiences regarding the changes in the Sekaten tradition and related them to the historical and social context of Surakarta society.

### **Data Validity**

To maintain credibility, triangulation of sources and methods was conducted by comparing interview results from various informants, field observation notes, and official documents from the Palace. The validity of the findings was tested through member checking, which involves reconfirming the interpretations with several key informants to ensure that the research results reflect the respondents' authentic perspectives.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Understanding Sekaten

Sekaten in Javanese comes from the word "*sekati*," meaning balance. Another opinion states that "sekaten" comes from the words "*suka*" and "*ati*," meaning "happy" or "pleasant" (Awanti, 2012). Another term, "Sekaten," is believed to originate from the Arabic word "*syahadatain*," meaning the two sentences of the shahada: "*asyhadu an la ilaha illallah wa asyhadu anna muhammadar rasulullah*." However, field findings indicate that while this Islamic root is still recognized by some young participants, particularly those with religious educational backgrounds, many others tend to associate Sekaten more strongly with its contemporary functions as an entertainment and cultural tourism event rather than with its original confessional meaning. This etymology suggests that the essence of the Sekaten celebration is the confession of faith in Islam. In the context of the Wali Songo's preaching, especially Sunan Kalijaga, the term "syahadatain" was then absorbed into Javanese language and culture, becoming "sekaten," to make it easier to remember and pronounce for lay people new to Islam. This etymological meaning aligns with an archival source from the Surakarta Palace entitled "The History of Sekaten in the Surakarta Palace," which asserts: "*Sekaten is derived from the word syahadatain, meaning two sentences that signify one's conversion to Islam.*"

From this, it can be understood that Sekaten is not merely a cultural ceremony, but rather a symbol of one's spiritual transition to Islam. In the early days, attending Sekaten was a moment of da'wah, where people were invited to recite the syahadatain as a sign of embracing Islam (Eko et al., 2024). Based on field observations and interviews, this spiritual function is no longer practiced explicitly; however, some participants still associate Sekaten with moments of religious reflection, particularly during mosque-centered rituals and the performance of the Sekaten gamelan. Through this symbolism, Sekaten is perceived by certain participants as a reminder of Islamic teachings and the meaning of the shahada, although such interpretations are not uniformly shared among contemporary audiences.

The following table summarizes the results of interviews with several young people inside and outside Solo City:

**Table 1.** Summary of Interview Findings on Youth Perceptions of the Sekaten Tradition

No	Aspect Explored	Main Findings from Young Participants	Interpretation
1	Knowledge of Sekaten's Origin	Most participants recognize Sekaten as a cultural and annual palace tradition; only a few are aware of its etymological link to syahadatain.	Indicates limited understanding of Sekaten's Islamic-historical roots among the younger generation.
2	Religious Meaning	A small number of participants associate Sekaten with Islamic reflection, particularly during mosque-centered rituals and gamelan performances.	Spiritual meaning persists but is no longer dominant or explicitly practiced.
3	Sekaten as Entertainment	The majority perceive Sekaten primarily as an entertainment event, night market, and cultural festival.	Shows a shift toward recreational and tourism-oriented interpretations.
4	Educational Value	Participants generally do not receive structured explanations of Sekaten's religious or philosophical meanings.	Weak transmission of educational and da'wah values in contemporary practice.
5	Role of Gamelan Sekaten	Some participants describe the gamelan as calming and spiritually evocative, while others view it as a cultural performance.	Demonstrates diverse interpretations influenced by personal background and education.
6	Expectations for the Future	Several participants express interest in Sekaten being accompanied by explanations, narratives, or educational activities.	Suggests potential for recontextualizing Sekaten as a non-formal Islamic educational medium.

In practice, Sekaten is a living tradition that serves as a medium for culturally based Islamic da'wah. As explained by (Zahrah et al., 2025), this tradition represents the cultural da'wah approach of the Wali Songo, particularly Sunan Kalijaga, who spread Islam by utilizing elements of art, music, and ritual familiar to Javanese society. Thus, Sekaten is not only a religious celebration but also a non-formal educational platform through which values of monotheism, morality, social solidarity, and respect for Islamic history are transmitted via ritual processions, mosque-centered religious activities, symbolic performances of the Sekaten gamelan, and collective participation in commemorative practices that convey religious narratives and ethical messages. Functionally, Sekaten occupies a strategic position in Javanese society because it serves as a meeting place for religious and aesthetic values.

Sekaten can be defined as a religious and cultural ritual rooted in Javanese Islamic tradition, serving as a medium for da'wah, a symbol of legitimacy of power, and a means of social integration between the palace and the community. Through gamelan, processions, and the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, Sekaten displays harmony between the spiritual (faith), social (togetherness), and cultural (art) dimensions.

### A Brief History of Sekaten

The Sekaten tradition has long historical roots and is closely linked to the arrival and spread of Islam in Java. According to the archives of the Surakarta Palace and various historical records, Sekaten first emerged during the Demak Kingdom under the reign of Raden Patah (Sultan Bintoro I). At that time, the Wali Songo, particularly Sunan Kalijaga, initiated the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's

birthday, using gamelan instruments as a means of propagation. This approach was a clever acculturation strategy, as Javanese society, which still strongly adhered to Hindu-Buddhist traditions, readily accepted Islamic teachings through traditional arts and ceremonies. This tradition was later called "Sekaten," which is believed to originate from the word "syahadatain," the two sentences of the shahada, a symbol of Islam (Pramudita et al., 2022).

Initially, Sekaten was an adaptation of an ancient royal ceremony called Amemule Raja Wedha, a royal feast during the Majapahit era to commemorate important palace holidays. After the spread of Islam, the ceremony was transformed by the *Wali* (guardians) into a commemoration of the Prophet's birthday. Sunan Kalijaga created two special gamelan instruments, Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari, which were played for seven days and seven nights in the mosque courtyard. Through the sounds of these gamelan instruments, the community was drawn closer to the mosque and introduced to Islamic teachings. This tradition later developed into the forerunner of Sekaten as it is known today (Firmansyah et al., 2025).

After the Demak Kingdom, the Sekaten tradition was preserved by the Pajang Kingdom and then by the Islamic Mataram Kingdom under the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma. During this period, Sekaten was established as an official royal ceremony to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and to strengthen the legitimacy of the king's power, who was considered the caliph of God on earth. From this, the Sekaten tradition acquired balanced political and spiritual dimensions: as a means of Islamic preaching and as a symbol of harmony between the ruler, the people, and God (Eko et al., 2024).

When Islamic Mataram split into the Kasunanan Surakarta and the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, the Sekaten tradition was practiced in both kingdoms. However, Sekaten in Surakarta is considered the most authentic continuation, stemming directly from the Mataram heritage and still using the original heirloom gamelan. Since the reign of Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono II (1745 AD), Sekaten in Surakarta has been held every Rabiul Awal, beginning with the *Miyos Gongso* (Javanese ritual procession symbolizing the formal emergence of sacred authority) Sekaten procession, which marks the departure of the gamelan from the palace to the Surakarta Grand Mosque. It concludes with the *Mulat Gongso* (Javanese ritual procession marking the opening of a sacred communal event) procession, which marks the return of the gamelan to the palace after the ceremony.

The Sekaten ceremony in Surakarta (Solo) consists of a number of traditional activities held during the month of Mulud, or Rabiul Awal, in the Javanese calendar. All these processions occur sequentially and have their own symbolic meaning. Broadly speaking, the main stages of the Sekaten celebration include several traditional ceremonies that are central to the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday at the Surakarta Hadiningrat Palace.

The first event is the Miyos Gongso Sekaten, a procession of two heirloom gamelan instruments from the palace, Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari, from the Sri Manganti Hall to the Grand Mosque of Surakarta. The gamelan instruments are paraded along with courtiers, palace soldiers, and

religious officials. Upon arriving at the mosque courtyard, the two gamelan instruments are placed in two special halls: the Pagongan Kidul (Southern Pagongan) for Kyai Guntur Madu and the Pagongan Lor (North Pagongan) for Kyai Guntur Sari. Since then, the gamelan instruments have been played alternately daily, from morning to night. The sound of the gamelan instruments is believed to bring blessings and invite the public to approach the mosque, listen to sermons, and commemorate the Prophet's birthday.

During the seven days of Sekaten, the atmosphere around Surakarta's North Square becomes very lively. Outside the sacred area of the mosque and palace, the community holds the Sekaten Night Market, which offers a variety of folk entertainment, traditional games, culinary delights, and artistic performances. This night market serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as an economic and social platform for the community. The existence of the night market in the context of Sekaten serves as a space for social interaction between the community and the palace, as well as a tangible manifestation of the harmony between spirituality and the people's lives.

The culmination of the Sekaten event is the Grebeg Maulud, held on the 12th of Rabiul Awal, coinciding with the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. On that day, Sri Susuhunan leads the procession of the Gunungan Garebeg (a piled-up harvest) a cone-shaped pile of crops symbolizing prosperity and gratitude to Allah SWT. The gunungan is then paraded from the Surakarta Palace to the Grand Mosque, accompanied by troops of soldiers and royal officials. After prayers are given by the Kyai Penghulu Keraton (the head of the palace), the gunungan is distributed to the community in the tradition of ngalap berkah (seeking blessings), believed to bring good fortune and safety to those who receive it (Nursolehah et al., 2022).

After the entire ceremony is completed, a closing ceremony called Mulat Gongso (the return of the Sekaten gamelan from the mosque to the palace) is held. This procession marks the end of the ritual and symbolizes the return of cosmic balance between the human world and the spiritual realm. This closing stage has a profound philosophical meaning: that all worldly activities must return to God as the source of all blessings (Zahrah et al., 2025). Thus, the Sekaten series of events is not merely a traditional activity and entertainment, but also a spiritual journey that illustrates the synergy between faith, culture, and Javanese-Islamic traditions inherited from our ancestors.

### **The Commodification of Sekaten in the Modern Era**

Sekaten was originally a religious tradition created by the Wali Songo (Nahdlatul Ulama), particularly Sunan Kalijaga, as a means of Islamic propagation adapted to Javanese culture. Through Sekaten gamelan, the Garebeg Mulud procession, and the recitation of the Shahadatain, the community is invited to learn about Islamic values in a subtle and meaningful way. However, over time, this sacred meaning has begun to shift due to the influence of modernization and the tourism economy. Many people now prefer

Thus, Sekaten is not only a religious celebration but also a non-formal educational platform



through which values of monotheism, morality, social solidarity, and respect for Islamic history are transmitted via ritual processions, mosque-centered religious activities, symbolic performances of the Sekaten gamelan, and collective participation in commemorative practices that convey religious narratives and ethical messages. Sacred spaces around mosques and palaces have been transformed into areas of economic activity, such as night markets and culinary stalls, which are crowded with visitors (Pramusinto & Wahono, 2020).

This change represents a form of cultural commodification, the process by which a tradition or spiritual value is repackaged into a product with economic value. In the context of Sekaten, religious rituals are used as a tourist attraction and to promote the region. Research conducted by (Pramusinto & Wahono, 2020) shows that the implementation of Sekaten in Surakarta is inseparable from the goal of developing regional tourism. The city government, businesses, and the community work together to package the event to make it more attractive to visitors, although this often diminishes its inherent religious meaning. Entertainment activities such as night markets, concerts, and bazaars are more dominant than the religious processions that are at the heart of this tradition.

On the other hand, (Dutayana & Bustami, 2022) explain that the transformation of Sekaten in the 21st century occurred due to a shift in the mindset of modern society, which places greater emphasis on entertainment and social media. For the younger generation, Sekaten is no longer a sacred ritual, but rather a time for taking photos, shopping, and enjoying entertainment. This phenomenon shows that the religious and socio-cultural significance of Sekaten is being displaced by economic value and visual aesthetics. The tradition, which was once a medium for preaching, has now become a symbol of popular culture consumed by the masses. However, this change also opens up new opportunities, as Sekaten can function as a non-formal educational medium through the integration of short interpretative sessions, visual historical exhibitions, and symbolic explanations embedded within existing cultural performances and public spaces, allowing educational content to complement rather than replace the festival's cultural and entertainment appeal.

Furthermore, research (Eko et al., 2024) found that the people of Surakarta are now constructing new meanings for Sekaten as part of the city's identity and a tourist attraction. From the perspective of social interpretation theory, they see this tradition as more than just a religious ritual, but also a means of strengthening a sense of togetherness and local pride. However, researchers also highlight that this social construct risks shifting religious understanding toward a consumerist culture if not balanced with contextual preaching and educational activities. Therefore, it is crucial for Islamic educational institutions to utilize the Sekaten period as a space for social and spiritual learning, so that the younger generation continues to understand the preaching values underlying this tradition.

Meanwhile, from a historical perspective, (Daryanto, 2016) explains that in its early days, Sekaten gamelan served as a highly effective medium for Islamic preaching. Through the distinctive sounds of the gamelan, people were drawn to the mosque and encouraged to understand the meaning of the Shahada and the values of monotheism. However, this educational function has diminished, as

Sekaten gamelan is more often presented as an artistic performance without explanation of its religious significance. This indicates a shift in orientation from preaching to entertainment, in line with the increasingly strong process of cultural commodification.

Therefore, the commodification of Sekaten is not only a cultural economic issue but also a challenge for Islamic education. This tradition must be preserved to prevent the loss of its spiritual and moral values. The government, religious scholars, and academics need to work together to creatively package Sekaten without losing its religious significance. This can be done by creating Islamic cultural literacy programs, conducting studies on Sekaten symbols, and involving madrasah students in educational activities surrounding the event. In this way, Sekaten can become a cultural preaching medium that remains relevant to modern society.

## **Discussion**

### **The Shifting Meaning of the Sekaten Tradition in Surakarta**

Research results indicate that the Sekaten tradition in the Kasunanan Surakarta has undergone a significant transformation in meaning, shifting from a religious celebration to a combination of entertainment, culture, and the creative economy. The majority of informants aged 18–25 acknowledged that Sekaten is now better known as an entertainment and culinary event than a religious ritual, a perception that reflects the views of the interviewed participants but does not claim to represent the entirety of the youth population in Surakarta, given the qualitative and purposive nature of the sampling. Of the six respondents, four believed that religious values still exist but are no longer the primary focus. This phenomenon confirms a shift in the younger generation's perception of Sekaten, consistent with research (Permadi & Yantari, 2024), which found that Maulid rituals like Sekaten in Yogyakarta have also experienced commodification and mediatization due to the influence of the tourism industry.

One respondent stated that "Sekaten used to serve to spread Islam, but now the focus is on entertainment, such as night markets and culinary activities." This view reinforces the indication that Sekaten's sacred dimension is being diminished by commercial interests and modernization. This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of cultural modernization, which views globalization and industrialization as causing a shift in societal orientation from sacred values to profane and consumerist ones, a shift that has reduced the effectiveness of Sekaten as a medium for informal religious teaching, as religious messages and moral values are increasingly conveyed implicitly or fragmented, rather than through focused and reflective transmission among younger generations. Giddens (Utomo et al., 2024) emphasizes that modernity has "disassociated" cultural practices from their original context (disembedding), transforming them into entertainment and creative economy commodities. In this context, Sekaten no longer functions solely as a religious ritual, but also as a recreational venue and a symbol of modernity in Surakarta society. However, this process also reflects a form of social adaptation and value negotiation that allows traditions to persist in the modern cultural

space (Rodliyatun & Zaman, 2022).

### **Younger Generation Perspectives on Religious and Cultural Values**

Although the sacred value of Sekaten has begun to shift, some younger generations still understand the spiritual roots of this tradition as a commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. They believe that activities such as the gamelan music of Kyai Guntur Madu and Guntur Sari still have religious significance, even though they are often viewed as cultural spectacles (Zahrah et al., 2025). One informant from Ngawi said, "The rhythm of the Sekaten gamelan is soft yet magical, as if reminiscent of the meaning of the Shahadatain." This expression indicates that although the performance has blended with entertainment and public elements, there are aspects of cultural da'wah still alive in the participants' personal spiritual experiences. Sensitivity to the beauty of the gamelan's sound and the ritual atmosphere allows for the emergence of a dimension of religious reflection that is not always formally apparent, but rather felt through the senses and feelings.

From a cultural philosophy perspective, this illustrates the process of value transformation, in which traditions undergo changes in form without losing their spiritual substance. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of the dual value of culture, where traditions function simultaneously as public entertainment and a means of spiritual contemplation (Utomo et al., 2024). This dual value reveals that traditional cultures like Sekaten are not one-dimensional; they harbor layers of meaning that can change depending on the context of the recipient, generation, and social conditions. For example, in the study "Javanese Gamelan in the Perspective of Sayyid Hossein Nasr" it was found that gamelan is not only a traditional art form, but also a spiritual medium that deepens the aesthetic relationship with transcendence (Nauval et al., 2025).

However, interviews also indicate that most young people have not yet gained a deep understanding of the historical significance and religious values of Sekaten, either through formal education or family. This lack of cultural socialization and education has resulted in a lack of awareness among young people of the da'wah philosophy embedded within the tradition. Similar conditions have been observed in other local Islamic cultures, where local wisdom and religious values are often "tucked away" among entertainment and aesthetic aspects, resulting in less systematic exposure in formal curricula or family education. For example, the study "Islamic Traditions in Strengthening Local Wisdom Values in the Era of Disruption" found that technological and media disruptions have distorted perceptions of Islamic traditions: some local Islamic values persist through adaptation, but their detailed and historical understanding tends to weaken (Ramdhani & Wahidin, 2022).

Furthermore, the study "Islamic Symbolism and Cultural Integration in the Sekaten Ceremony in Yogyakarta" shows that Sekaten rituals such as Miyos Gongso, Miyos Dalem, and Grebeg Mulud serve as effective symbolic media for instilling religious values, ethics, and community solidarity through Javanese cultural forms. These rituals possess layers of meaning that are not always explicitly visible but are perceived through their symbols, processes, and ritual aesthetics (Arroisi et al., 2025).

Thus, the presence of spiritual elements remains significant even though they are not always the center of attention or the most communicated aspect.

Philosophically, this transformation confirms that tradition is never static. Culture, as a living practice, continually negotiates meaning: the sacredness of Sekaten is not lost, but is sometimes prioritized in personal or small community experiences, while in public displays prioritize entertainment and aesthetics. Culture, within the framework of reflective modernity, can balance maintaining its spiritual essence and enabling adaptation to contemporary needs, without losing its religious identity.

### **Integrating Traditional Values and Islamic Education**

Field data also shows that some young people want Sekaten to serve not only as aesthetic entertainment but also as a means of non-formal religious education, for example by incorporating lectures, recitations of stories of the Prophet, and explanations of the symbolic meaning of each procession. This proposal demonstrates a new awareness among young Muslims to align entertainment with religious values, so that traditions do not lose their spiritual significance amidst the tide of modernization. (Firmansyah et al., 2025) explain that the educational value of Sekaten music can be used as learning material for local history and Islam in madrasahs (Islamic schools) and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). In this context, Sekaten has the potential to function as an integrative medium between local culture and Islamic education, an approach that is increasingly relevant amidst the declining interest of young people in religious traditions.

This approach aligns with the theory of culture-based Islamic education, which emphasizes that Islamic education is not only conveyed through texts or dogma, but also through cultural and symbolic expressions of society. Culture-based Islamic education serves to strengthen the internalization of spiritual values contextually, especially for young people living in a digital and visual culture. Local wisdom can be a transformative tool for building moral and religious awareness through a creative and contextual approach. Through this model, activities like Sekaten serve not only as entertainment but also as a space for social and religious learning integrated into everyday life.

In *Prophetika: Jurnal Studi Islam*, it is also emphasized that local culture-based religious education is a form of innovation towards sustainable development (SDGs) (Syarifah et al., 2025), as it can preserve cultural heritage while strengthening the community's Islamic identity. Meanwhile, in *Pionir: Jurnal Pendidikan* (Page 11), (Marduati et al., 2024), it shows that using cultural heritage as a learning resource in madrasahs can foster students' love of the nation's history and spiritual values. This means that strengthening Sekaten's educational function can be a form of resilience for Nusantara Islamic culture, where religious values are maintained in a form that is adaptive and appealing to Generation Z.

Through this integration of traditional values and culture-based Islamic education, Sekaten can not only maintain its existence as a religious heritage but also become a model for living cultural

learning. Activities such as Kyai Guntur Madu's gamelan music or the Maulid procession can be incorporated into curriculum enrichment in Islamic educational institutions, as proposed by (Das & Saharuddin, 2024) who emphasize the importance of multicultural learning design to foster tolerance and a love of cultural heritage. Thus, Sekaten can be positioned as a dynamic cultural da'wah space, connecting the past and present within a framework of Islamic values grounded in modern society.

### **Implications for Islamic Education**

Field data shows that some young people hope that the Sekaten tradition will serve not only as aesthetic entertainment but also as a means of non-formal religious education capable of revitalizing the spiritual values behind this cultural procession. The proposal to present religious lectures, recitations of the Prophet's stories, or symbolic explanations of each procession reflects a critical awareness of Sekaten's potential as a medium for preaching and learning Islamic values, particularly when such activities are integrated in brief, informal, and visually engaging formats that complement existing performances and public spaces without disrupting the festival's cultural and entertainment-oriented atmosphere. Gending Sekaten has an important educational dimension for understanding local history and Islamic spirituality in Surakarta. Within the framework of modern Islamic education, this idea can be linked to the concept of cultural-based Islamic education, which emphasizes the integration of Islamic teachings and local wisdom so that the internalization of religious values takes place contextually and is engaging for the younger generation. A culture-based approach remains a potentially effective means of instilling Islamic values in an increasingly pluralistic and dynamic society; however, field data indicate that while some young participants express interest in learning-oriented activities during Sekaten, others encounter barriers to engagement, such as the dominance of entertainment attractions, limited access to explanatory content, and the absence of structured educational facilitation. Research (Iswar et al., 2025) on Islamic education and local culture in Lombok shows that the integration of cultural elements and Islamic values gives rise to a glocal Islamic pedagogy model, namely religious education that is down-to-earth and relevant to the social realities of society. A similar model can be applied to Sekaten by transforming it into an educational space that not only showcases the beauty of tradition but also teaches the values of gratitude, love of one's country, and respect for the history of Islamic propagation. Literacy-based Islamic cultural history teaching in madrasas (Islamic schools) demonstrates that integrating historical and cultural elements into education significantly increases students' awareness of their religious identity. This approach can enrich Sekaten's meaning as a reflective and educational medium for cultural propagation, rather than simply public entertainment.

Furthermore, integrating tradition into Islamic education also serves as a form of resistance to the negative impacts of modernization, such as the commercialization of culture and the diminishment of spiritual values. When Sekaten functions as an educational medium, the tradition is no longer merely an object of entertainment but also a vehicle for religious character formation. In this context, Islamic education needs to take an active role in reconceptualizing tradition as a contextual and humanistic

learning instrument. This is reinforced by the assertion that Islamic educational institutions (Cahyono et al., 2024), such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), have long served as examples of how local wisdom and religious values can combine to foster morality in the digital age. Therefore, integrating Sekaten values into Islamic education is not merely a cultural preservation strategy, but a substantive step to reconnect Islamic spirituality, history, and identity amidst cultural modernization, which may be implemented through culture-based learning models, contextual religious instruction linked to local traditions, project-based activities centered on cultural rituals, and non-formal educational programs that utilize community festivals as experiential learning spaces.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Sekaten tradition in Surakarta has undergone a significant transformation in meaning, shifting from a religious celebration to a cultural event steeped in entertainment and commercialization. This change reflects social dynamics and the influence of modernization, but at the same time demonstrates Islam's adaptive capacity to engage in dialogue with local culture. The Sekaten tradition continues to function as a forum for cultural da'wah and non-formal education, through which values such as gratitude, social solidarity, respect for Islamic history, and moral reflection are most effectively transmitted, although among the younger generation these values are often perceived implicitly through symbolic rituals and communal participation rather than as explicit religious instruction. For the younger generation, Sekaten is understood not only as a historical legacy but also as a space for social expression and cultural identity that integrates spiritual, social, and aesthetic values. This shift in meaning requires reinterpretation and revitalization to maintain its religious substance. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating Sekaten's educational values into contemporary Islamic education, both through formal learning activities in schools and through community-based cultural activities. Practically, the results of this study contribute to the development of a local culture-based approach to Islamic education, emphasizing a balance between preserving tradition and the needs of the digital generation. Researchers recommend collaboration between educational institutions, local governments, and the Surakarta Palace in creating a contextual learning model that utilizes Sekaten as a source of spiritual and cultural learning.

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