

The Existence and Essence of Sekaten Ceremony at Karaton Surakarta

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Abstract. *Karaton* Surakarta in the month of *Mulud* according to Java calendar. The excitement presented in *Sekaten* ceremony for one week has always attracted the attention in Surakarta region from the time of the kingdom to the present day. There are two things that need to be studied further namely the existence and essence of *Sekaten* ceremony considering that the writings about it are still rare. The existence, description, and essence of *Sekaten* ceremony is the focus of the study in this paper from the perspective of history, anthropology, and symbolic interpretation. The use of *gamelan sekaten* as a means of spreading the religion of Islam that began since the period of Demak, Pajang, Mataram (Kota Gedhe), Mataram (Plered), Kartasura, and Surakarta, *Sekaten's gamelan* does not always appear in every periods. Internal factors such as the status of the ruler and external factors such as conducive socio-political situation. *Sekaten* ceremony presents a meeting of two different things together and able to be harmony in one goal and orientation called *loro-loroning atunggal*. The essence of *loro-loroning atunggal* in *Sekaten* ceremony caused the Javanese society to accept the presence of Islam as a new religion.

Keywords: *sekaten ceremony, javanese culture, existence, essence*

1 Introduction

Sekaten ceremony is a ceremony held every year in the month of *Mulud* according to the calculation of the Java calendar. *Sekaten* ceremony always brings festivity and attracts the attention of people in the Surakarta region. Purbadipura describes the festivity of the *Sekaten* ceremony during the reign of Paku Buwana X in the *Serat Sri Karongron*. Purbadipura describes in the North Square (Alun-Alun Utara) full of stalls selling food, toys, and so on. Old and young people, big and small, men and women gathered to the place where *Sekaten* ceremony was held. They come from various directions, both from within and outside the city of Surakarta. Many also come from places far from Surakarta. They went there by the train and trem, from the station and then they walk to the Masjid Agung in the *gamelan sekaten* was beaten (*ditabuh*). The streets leading to the Masjid Agung are crowded, after seeing the *gamelan sekaten* beaten, they head to the Alun-Alun watching the crowds in the Alun-Alun [1].

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Ceremony *Sekaten* or commonly called with *Sekaten* is a ceremony that has the longest karaton tradition, which takes seven days. Many things can be studied from the event held for one week. Starting from the economic, social, political, tourism, to the issues of art that are present in the ceremony of *Sekaten* includes art, music, and craft. A ceremony involving various elements in the palace (*karaton*), even all of the departments or *bebadan* in *karaton* actively involved in *Sekaten* ceremony. *Bebadan* actively involved in the ceremony *Sekaten* include *Sanaprabu* which provides facilities and infrastructure of the ceremony, *Mandrabudaya* prepare human resources in the field of art, *Yogiswara* who provide human resources in the field of religion until, *Gandarasan* preparing offerings of ceremonies ranging from *mandhaping Gangsa Sekaten*² to the peak of *Garebeg Mulud* to *Purwakanthi* event which provides various flower arrangements for starting in sounding the gamelan music ceremony equipment *Sekaten*.

The complexity of the series of ceremonies *Sekaten* that lasted for one week would be interesting to be studied further considering not many writings that specifically discuss the existence and essence of *Sekaten* ceremony. Writing about the existence and essence of *Sekaten* still rarely found, the majority of studies about *Sekaten* still revolves around the sphere of *Sekaten* as a means of spreading Islam religion, so there is necessary for a study that leads to the writing of the study of the existence and essence of *Sekaten*. Writing about the existence and essence of this *Sekaten* aims to reveal the existence of *Sekaten* ceremony, describing the *Sekaten* ceremony and discover the essence of *Sekaten* ceremony. The existence and essence of the *Sekaten* ceremony in this paper will be examined from a historical perspective and symbolic interpretation. Historical perspective will reveal the existence of the *Sekaten* ceremony since the time of the Sultanate of Demak, while the symbolic interpretation is used to examine the *Sekaten* ceremony which cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of Java where the *Sekaten* ceremony grows and develops. The relevant symbolic culture is used to find / discover the essence of the *Sekaten* ceremony held by the Karaton Surakarta.

2 Method

The methodology used in writing this article is a qualitative study in which the methodology has the main objectives, such as (i) describing and explaining; (ii) dig deep information; and (iii) exploring and interpreting. While the approach used is the historical approach. The historical method according to Gottschalk in Dudung Abdurahman is a critical process of recording and relics of the past. A slightly different opinion is proposed by Dudung Abdurahman which states that the historical method in the general sense is the investigation of a problem that uses the path of resolution from a historical perspective or point of view. More specifically, Dudung Abdurahman quotes Garraghan's assertion that historical research methods are rules and various systematic principles for collecting various historical sources effectively, and judging them critically, and proposing the synthesis of the results achieved in the form of writing.

3 Discussion

Sekaten ceremony included in the category of inaugural ceremony in this case is the legitimacy of the king's legitimacy. Through the ceremony a king will show his power, including the ceremony of *Sekaten*. In the *Sekaten* ceremony, the king showed his power by

² The procession of Gamelan *Sekaten* coming from the palace to Masjid Agung

showing up two gamelan devices with a larger size than the gamelan in general. Also in the peak of *Sekaten* event, the king held a *Garebeg Mulud* procession involving various gamelan devices and involving many courtiers (*abdi dalem*) as supporters of *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony.

The main activity of *Sekaten* ceremony in Surakarta which is held for seven days to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW is the approach of the truth of the *shahada* (*syahadat*) to the people. *Sekaten* comes from the word 'syahadain' which means two sentences of shahada, symbolically two sentences of these shahada are represented in two devices of gamelan *sekatén Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Sari* and *Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Madu* which played alternately. The placement of two gamelan devices in two different places namely *Bangsals Pradangga Kidul* and *Bangsals Pradangga Lor* in the yard of the *Masjid Agung* is also a representation of two sentences of shahada which are shahada of tauhid and syahadat rasul [2]. Two sets of gamelan *sekatén* instruments in the *Karaton Surakarta* each have the same number and type, consisting of

- A pair of *bonang* consisting of the *ricikan bonang* and *panembung*, played by two *pengrawit* (musicians).
- Two *rancak demung*, every *demung* played by a *pengrawit*.
- Four *rancak saron barung*, every *rancak* played by a *pengrawit*.
- Two faces of *saron penerus*, played each by a *pengrawit*.
- A pair of *kempyang*, played by a *pengrawit*.
- A pair or two large *gongs*, sounded by a *pengrawit*.
- A *bedhug* hung on one *gayor*³, played by a *pengrawit*.

Function as a means of spreading the religion of Islam causes gamelan *sekatén* has a larger shape and size than others gamelan in general. This gamelan has a larger size and volume of gamelan in general, with percussion instrumentation as the main medium, added by the drum instrument (*Bedhug*). The addition of a *Bedhug* instrument is a form of compromise because in the Javanese musical tradition the *bedug* instrument does not contribute significantly or even play a role in *karawitan* show, the compromise is the unification of two different instruments of origin and function. *Gamelan* which is a product of Javanese culture combined with a *bedug* instrument that is a tool of communal worship in the mosque. Thus the element of Islam is also visible from the physical form of the existence of a drum instrument (*Bedhug*).

The *Sekaten* ceremony for seven days in the *Bangsals Pradangga* of *Masjid Agung Surakarta* always sound two obligatory *gendhing* at the beginning of presentation, two of which are *Ladrang Rambu* and *Ladrang Rangkung*. *Rambu* interpreted derived from the Arabic word 'Rabbunu' which means *Allah Tuhanku dan Rangkung* (God my Lord) interpreted also derived from the Arabic word 'Rakhun' which means great soul or big soul [3]. The two pieces of *Gending* must always be sounded either by the *Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Madu* gamelan in the southern ward as well as *Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Sari* in the northern ward (*bangsal*). Placement and *gendhing* in pairs in presentation is the application of the concept of Javanese culture that is the balance of life. Balance for the Javanese is considered very important because it is closely related to the image of ethical values and cultural aesthetics [4].

For one week two gamelan *sekatén* instruments were sounded alternately, and on 12 *Mulud* closed with *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony marked by the release of a pair of *pareden* or *gunungan* (mountains) from the *Karaton Surakarta* towards the *Masjid Agung*. At this ceremony is showed *hajatan dalem pareden* that symbolizes fertility, common people call it *garebeg* ceremony with the title of *gunungan*. The number of *hajatan dalem gunungan* issued as much as two *gunungan* men and women, added with 24 *jodhang* which is divided into

³ *Gamelan* supporting pillars

two, namely 12 *jodhang gunung* male and 12 *jodhang gunung* women, and interspersed with *gunungan* children which called as *saradan* and 24 *ancak canthoka*.

3.1 The Existence of *Sekaten* Ceremony

The use of *gamelan sekaten* as a means of spreading the religion of Islam that began since the time of Demak experienced ups and downs, meaning that at certain periods *gamelan sekaten* does not reveal its existence. This can be understood as the process of the transition of power from Demak to Pajang there happened an internal conflicts or internal political machinations of the chaos kingdom. Until in the early Mataram time, after the period Panembahan Senapati and continued to Panembahan Seda Krapyak, *gamelan sekaten* also has not seen its existence. This is allegedly related to the status of Panembahan Senapati and Panembahan Seda Krapyak who titled as *Panembahan*. The title of the Panembahan is not the title that should be for the king, the title of Panembahan is more of a nuance and ascetic power that symbolizes a person who has a virtue (prior) in transcendental life [5]

The mention of the king with *Panembahan* is found in the Babad Tanah Djawi which states that Panembahan Senapati "*lajeng jumeneng Sultan wonten ing Matawis. Nanging mboten karan: tetiyang kathah sami mastani Panembahan Senapati kemawon* (Panembahan Senapati later became Sultan in Mataram. But it is not called the Sultan, because people generally refer to Panembahan Senapati)." This news gives the impression as if the title was less high level or less level of honor The meaning of the *kemawon* means only that the title of the Panembahan is not the title of a king but is used by a person under the king, the title of Panembahan is under the Sultan or Susuhunan [6], while the *gamelan sekaten* is *pusaka kepraboning* or symbol of the majesty of a king. Be aware of this case, both do not dare to use *gamelan sekaten* as a symbol of King greatness.

The new *gamelan sekaten* reveals its existence again during the reign of Sultan Agung, the greatest king of Mataram. Sultan Agung tried to revive the symbols of the majesty of a king, since then *gamelan Sekaten* as *pusaka kepraboning nata* began to show its existence. Sultan Agung made *gamelan Sekaten* "new" and given the name Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Sari in the year of Java 1566. This year's number is *sengkalan*⁴ that appears on *rancakan*⁵ *saron*⁶ dan *demung*⁷ of *gamelan Sekaten* Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Sari. The *Palihan nagari* event or *Giyanti* Agreement (1755) affected the existence of the *gamelan sekaten*. The contents of the agreement that divides Mataram into Surakarta and Yogyakarta cause *gamelan sekaten* is also divided into two, meaning that each kingdom does not get a complete *gamelan sekaten*. So that the task of each of the fractional kingdom to complete the *gamelan*, in Yogyakarta's sultanate then known as *gamelan sekaten* Kanjeng Kyai Naga Wilaga, while in Surakarta still use the name Kanjeng Kyai Guntur Sari.

Sekaten ceremony has receded when Paku Buwana XI took control of the Karaton Surakarta government due to difficulties in the field of economy as well as internal political crisis that stemmed from differences of opinion about who substitute Paku Buwana X because Sunan did not officially appoint the crown prince. Economic difficulties as well as internal political crises affecting the cultural life of the palace were exacerbated by the arrival of Japan to Indonesia.

Karaton Surakarta is also affected by the arrival of Japan in Indonesia. In Surakarta the arrival of Japan in addition to impact on the socio-economic field also affects the field of art, including karawitan. Almost all art activities are stopped, including the *Sekaten*

⁴ Sentences that have the meaning of numbers in each word, are used to indicate the year the occurrence of an event or the creation of an object that is considered important

⁵ Resonators made of wood.

⁶ One *gamelan* instrument in the form of blades.

⁷ One *gamelan* instrument is in the form of blades and is larger than *saron*.

ceremony. *Sekaten* ceremony in 1944 was prohibited to be held in the complex of Masjid Agung and *gamelan sekaten* was only allowed to sound during the day [7].

Until the reign of Paku Buwana XII, *Sekaten* ceremony is still held. Although at the beginning of Paku Buwana XII the socio-political and economic situation was not yet fully conducive due to the merging of swaprja to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, but the *Sekaten* ceremony was held. Until the death of Paku Buwana XII that caused internal conflicts in Karaton Surakarta because of the succession of the king of Karaton Surakarta, *Sekaten* ceremony still held in the courtyard of Masjid Agung Surakarta.

3.2 Essence of *Sekaten* Ceremony

The idea of spreading the religion of Islam with artefact of *gamelan sekaten* which poured in the activity of *Sekaten* ceremony for one week coincides with the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW indicates that the activity of art and religious procession are two inseparable things. Sunan Kalijaga managed to exploit the potential of local culture for the purposes of spreading Islamic religion. Pradjapangrawit describes the success of Islamic broadcasting almost evenly on Java [8]. The use of *gamelan sekaten* artifacts and the sound of *gamelan sekaten* for one week and ended with *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony as a means of propagation of Islamic propaganda, certainly raises the question why the *Sekaten* ceremony able to win the hearts of Javanese people to embrace Islam and leave the Hindu-Buddhist religion that has been embraced? This question will be answered by examining the essence of the *Sekaten* ceremony. The essence of the *Sekaten* ceremony certainly has the value of the Java soul so as to capture the hearts of Javanese to embrace Islam.

Sekaten kagungan Dalem of King Surakarta (the properties of *Sekaten* ceremony) amounted to two or a pair, namely Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari. In *Sekaten's* one week-long ceremony, *Sekaten's gamelan* instruments are housed in the southern Bangsal Pagongan (large place) and the northern Bangsal Pagongan (large place) in the courtyard of the Masjid Agung (Grand Mosque). *Gamelan* Kyai Guntur Madu is placed in Bangsal Pagongan south, while Kyai Guntur Sari *gamelan* is placed in the northern Bangsal Pagongan. Two *gamelan sekaten* devices placed in Bangsal Pagongan of south and north represent two sentences of shahada (*syahadat*), ie *syahadat 'ain* and *syahadat rasul* (prophet). A pair of *gamelan Sekaten* in the presentation always alternates starting from the *gamelan* Kyai Guntur Madu device in Bangsal Pagongan south first, then followed by *gamelan sekaten* Kyai Guntur sari in Bangsal Pagongan north. It can be said that two devices *gamelan sekaten* Kyai Guntur Madu and Kyai Guntur Sari is a pair of *gamelan sekaten* that cannot be separated from one another.

Physically *gamelan sekaten* form consists of several instruments such as *bonang*, *demung*, *saron barung*, *saron*, *penerus*, *kempyang*, *gong*, and *bedhug* (drum). Except for *bedhug* instruments, other instruments in the device of *gamelan sekaten* are two or a pair. Exceptions existed in the drum instrument because the drum instrument is not an instrument derived from the realm of Javanese culture. The presence of a *bedug* instrument becomes apparent when *Sekaten's gamelan* is sounded

Presentation of *gending-gending Sekaten* that begins with a pair of obligatory *gending* that is *Ladrang Rambu* and *Ladrang Rangkung* after completion presented by each *gamelan* device, and then followed by presentation of *gending-gending srambahan*. *Gending-gending srambahan* is a *gending* that is not mandatory presented in the sound of *gamelan sekaten*. Nevertheless there is an agreed convention that the presentation of *gending-gending srambahan* of both *gamelan sekaten* devices must present the *gending* group *bonang* and the *gending* group of *rebab*⁸. The presentation of *gending rebab* and *gending*

⁸ *Gending* that starts with the sound of instrument *rebab*

*bonang*⁹ should not be done simultaneously between *gamelan sekaten* Kyai Guntur Madu and *Gamelan Kyai Guntur Sari*, but both *gamelan sekaten* devices must present two different *gending* groups. It can be said that the presentation of *gending-gending srambahan* in the sound of *gamelan sekaten* also follow to the concept of pairing.

The series of *Sekaten* ceremonies that started with the sound of *gamelan sekaten* for seven days, closed with *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony on 12 *Mulud* or 12 *Rabiul Awal*, the majority of Surakarta people called *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony with *Gunungan Sekaten*. *Garebeg Mulud* ceremony presents a pair of *Canthang Balung*¹⁰. *Canthang Balung* is part of royal employee so that it can be called with a *abdi dalem Canthang Balung*, another name of *Canthang Balung* is a *abdi dalem Kridha Hastama*. This *abdi dalem* has a special duty at the time of the ceremony *Garebeg Mulud*. Their Duty is in the front row, wearing *dodot* patterned *tambal* or *sindur*. *Canthang Balung* has a title that is *Gunalelewa* and *Sukalelewa*, both are smart and active people.

The completeness of the next *Garebeg Besar* ceremony is a pair of *gamelan pakurmatan* namely *Monggang* and *Kodhok Ngorek*. *Gamelan Monggang* and *Kodhok Ngorek* in the context of *Garebeg* ceremony is a paired *gamelan*, although they have different characters. *Gamelan Monggang* has masculine character while *gamelan Kodhok Ngorek* has feminine character [3]. The union of two different characters from both *gamelan* instruments is also interpreted as a classification of dualism that complement each other, those are feminism and masculinity.

Instruments of *Garebeg* ceremony that became the main icon is *gunungan* or *pareden*. On each *garebeg* ceremony pair of *gunungan* (mountains) are certainly present, a pair of *gunungan* consisting of *gunungan jaler* (men) and *gunungan pawestri* (women). The procession of *garebeg* ceremony begins with *gunungan* men, followed by *gunungan* children, and then *gunungan pawestri*. The procession of *gunungan* is guarded by *Wiratamtama* warriors, *Jagasura*, *Jayasura*, *Darapati*, *Sarageni*, and *Baki* warriors in front of *gunungan* and *Panyutra* warriors escorting from behind. After the procession arrived at the *Masjid Agung*, the *abdi dalem* (courtiers) *Juru Suranata* began to recite prayers for the welfare and salvation of the king, the palace and all the *abdi dalem* and *sentana dalem*. After praying was offered, *gunungan* and the equipment were distributed to all followers of the ceremonies. A pair of *gunungan* that is *gunungan jaler* and *gunungan pawestri* is also the embodiment of classification of dualism that complement each other.

Gamelan instruments, physical form of *gamelan sekaten*, compulsory *gending*, *gending srambahan*, *Canthang Balung*, *Monggang* and *Kodhok Ngorek*, and *gunungan* that always in pair can be said as part of Javanese culture which summarized in *loro-loroning atunggal* meaning two but one. The meeting of two different things commonly called marriage, which is capable of harmonizing two different things. The difference is not destructed but harmonized to be aligned in one goal and one orientation, this is called *loro-loroning atunggal* [9]. Two things which are different by the Javanese interpreted as *wewadining jagad* is the soul and body. It can be said that the process of the united of two different worlds namely soul and body is marriage cosmos. The implementation of *loro-loroning atunggal* or marriage is essentially a synthesis process. *Loro-loroning atunggal* or the union of two different things ie soul and body ultimately lead to the expression of the unity of human and God (*manunggaling kawula lan Gusti*). The soul is a substitute for God (*Gusti*) and body substitute human (*kawula*), so unity (*manunggaling*) between the people and God (*Gusti*) this is called *loro-loroning atunggal*.

⁹ *Gending* that starts with the sound of instrument *bonang*

¹⁰ On the approval of Sunan (King), the number of *Canthang Balung* is sometimes more than a pair, but the number must be even, it can be four, six, or eight.

The unity of human and God (*Manunggaling kawula Gusti*) in its meaning does not mean unity between human body (*kawula*) and God (*Gusti*), but the unity of man with God destiny (*karsane Gusti*). In the level of implementation of Islamic teachings can be interpreted for example Allah ordered prayer (to do *Sholat*), man (*kawula*) then perform the prayer (*Sholat*). Likewise, when Allah commands moslem people to do fasting, charity, away from Allah's prohibition, keep the commandments of God, then the subjects have to carry out all these commands. In the knowledge of *Tauhid*, this understanding is called *tauhid ubudiyah*¹¹ which means the unity of people and God (*manunggaling kawula lan Gusti*), with *kawula manunggal ing karsane Gusti* (human beings merge with God's command).

The essence of the *Sekaten* ceremony which leads to the unity (*manunggaling*) between the people and God (*Gusti*) to two distinctly become inseparable things (*loro-loroning atunggal*) causes the Javanese society to accept with open hands the religion of Islam as their belief. The strategy of Islamic *da'wah* in Java using a compromise approach that is using *gamelan sekaten* as an early attraction in the end resulted. Sunan Kalijaga managed to exploit the potential of local culture for the purposes of Islamic *da'wah*.

4 Conclusion

Sekaten ceremony is an annual ceremony held by the Karaton Surakarta in the month of *Mulud* according to the calculation of the Java calendar. Since the time of the kingdom until now *Sekaten* ceremony always present a festive and attract the attention of people in the region of Surakarta. Various elements involved in *Sekaten* ceremony until it can be said that almost all lifelines involved in the implementation of *Sekaten* ceremony. The ceremony attributed to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad SAW using *gamelan sekaten* as the main icon in the celebration that lasted for one week.

The use of *gamelan sekaten* as a means of spreading the religion of Islam that began since the time of Demak experienced ups and downs, meaning that at certain periods *gamelan sekaten* does not reveal its existence. Since the days of Demak, Pajang, Mataram (Gedhe Town), Mataram (Plered), Kartasura, and Surakarta, *gamelan sekaten* do not always appear in every periods. Internal factors such as the status of the ruler and external factors such as socio-political situation which is not conducive caused the existence of *gamelan sekaten* does not show its existence in every periods. The physical form of *gamelan sekaten* which has bigger size and volume than *gamelan* in general size resulted from the idea based on *gamelan sekaten* function as a means of Islamic *da'wah*. The instruments of *Gamelan sekaten* consists of percussion as main medium, added with *bedhug* (drum) instrument. The addition of a *bedhug* instrument is a form of compromise because in the Javanese musical tradition the *bedhug* instrument does not make a significant contribution or even does not play a role in karawitan show, the compromise is the unification of two different instruments of origin and function. The unity of two different things are called marriages, which capable of harmonizing two distinct things, the distinction is not destroyed but harmonized in order to be harmony in one purpose and one orientation, this is called *loro-loroning atunggal*. The essence of *loro-loroning atunggal* is what causes the Javanese society to accept the presence of Islam as a new religion for Javanese society.

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¹¹ *Ubudiyah* is derived from the word '*abada*' which means worshiping, serving, being a slave, obedient and obedient servant of the glorified (*al ma'bud*).

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