

# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Volume 6, Number 3, 1999



---

New Trends of Islamic Resurgence  
in Contemporary Malaysia: Sufi-Revivalism,  
Messianism, and Economic Activism  
**Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid**

---

The Transmission of *al-Manar's* Reformism  
to the Malay-Indonesian World:  
The Cases of *al-Imam* and *al-Munir*  
**Azyumardi Azra**

---

The Morphology of *Adat*: The Celebration  
of Islamic Holy Day in North Coast Java  
**A.G. Muhaimin**

# STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 6, no. 3, 1999

---

## EDITORIAL BOARD:

*M. Quraish Shihab*  
*Taufik Abdullah*  
*Nur M. Fadhil Lubis*  
*M.C. Ricklefs*  
*Martin van Bruinessen*  
*John R. Bowen*  
*M. Atho Mudzhar*  
*M. Kamal Hasan*

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

*Azyumardi Azra*

## EDITORS

*Johan H. Meuleman*  
*Jajat Burhanuddin*  
*Fuad Jabali*  
*Oman Fathurahman*

## ASSISTANT TO THE EDITORS

*Heni Nuroni*

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ADVISOR

*Richard G. Kraince*

## ARABIC LANGUAGE ADVISOR

*Nursamad*

## COVER DESIGNER

*S. Prinika*

STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492) is a journal published quarterly by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM), IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (STT DEPPEN No. 129/SK/DITJEN/PPG/STT/1976) and sponsored by the Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines.

All articles published do not necessarily represent the views of the journal, or other institutions to which it is affiliated. They are solely the views of the authors. The articles contained in this journal have been refereed by the Board of Editors.

## The Morphology of *Adat*: The Celebration of Islamic Holy Day in North Coast Java

**Abstraksi:** *Dalam kajian Islam Indonesia, hubungan adat dan Islam telah lama menjadi satu isu penting—sekaligus kontroversial—berbagai kalangan sarjana. Para sarjana Belanda masa kolonial, khususnya Snouck Hurgronje dan van Vollenhoven, selama ini dianggap paling bertanggungjawab atas berkembangnya pandangan yang cenderung menempatkan adat bertentangan dengan Islam; Islam adalah agama impor dari Timur Tengah, sehingga ia tidak memiliki akar kuat di masyarakat yang masih terikat kuat pada tradisi setempat. Dalam konteks ini, William Roff berpendapat bahwa pemisahan adat-Islam ini lebih merupakan usaha intelektual sistematis dalam rangka kepentingan kolonialisme, di mana mereka secara sadar berupaya menunjukkan kecilnya pengaruh Islam dalam kehidupan masyarakat Nusantara.*

*Senada dengan pandangan Roff, artikel ini berupaya menunjukkan, dengan bukti-bukti antropologis, bahwa pemisahan adat-Islam tidak bisa dipertanggungjawabkan secara akademik. Mengambil kasus upacara perayaan hari-hari besar Islam di masyarakat Cirebon, Jawa Barat, artikel ini justru menegaskan besarnya pengaruh Islam dalam proses pemben-*

tukan adat. Bagi masyarakat Cirebon, adat—berasal dari kata bahasa Arab, ‘*âdah*, berarti “kebiasaan”—merupakan bagian inheren dari sistem keagamaan. Khusus dalam konteks upacara selamatan, adat bahkan menjadi ekspresi identitas keislaman Muslim Cirebon.

Demikianlah, selain perayaan idul fitri dan idul adha—dua hari besar terkemuka bagi masyarakat Muslim—masyarakat Cirebon mengenal perayaan suroan untuk memperingati di antaranya tahun baru Islam pada bulan Muharram; mauludan dan rajaban untuk memperingati masing-masing hari lahir Nabi Muhammad dan pengangkatan kerasulan Muhammad, yang juga dikenal dengan peringatan Isra’ Mi’raj. Selain itu, mereka juga mengenal perayaan ruwahan, jatuh pada pertengahan bulan ke delapan tahun Islam (Sya’ban), yang diyakni sebagai waktu terpenting dalam perjalanan hidup manusia di mana nasib mereka pada masa mendatang ditentukan. Perayaan pada hari-hari besar di atas tentu hanya beberapa dari banyak perayaan lain dalam adat masyarakat Cirebon. Semua perayaan tersebut dilakukan dalam rangka mempertahankan warisan budaya dan sekaligus menunjukkan identitas keislaman mereka.

Oleh karena itu, pelaksanaan perayaan-perayaan di atas senantiasa dilaksanakan dengan suasana keislaman yang sangat kuat. Mereka umumnya mengadakan pengajian atau ceramah keagamaan, pembacaan ayat-ayat al-Qur’an, membagikan makanan untuk para tetangga dan fakir-miskin, mengunjungi kubur, dan praktek-praktek lain yang bisa dilakukan seiring dengan perayaan hari-hari besar Islam tersebut.

Hal penting lain untuk dicatat, istilah adat bagi masyarakat Cirebon tidak hanya mengacu pada praktek hukum—seperti dikatakan van Vollenhoven—yang dipahami berbeda dari hukum Islam atau syari’ah. Bagi mereka adat berarti segala kebiasaan dan perilaku yang umum dipraktikkan masyarakat (barang apa bae kang wis biasa dilakoni deng wong akeh). Jadi, adat dipahami sebagai bersifat alamiah dan secara inheren melekat dalam praktek kehidupan manusia, termasuk kegiatan-kegiatan keagamaan. Beberapa praktek adat memang terkategori sebagai praktek ritual-keagamaan, dan beberapa lagi hanya berfungsi sebagai alat bagi Muslim untuk melaksanakan ajaran-ajaran Islam. Karena itu, sebagian adat memang secara lokal diciptakan, dan sebagian yang lain berasal dari kebiasaan masyarakat asing. Dengan demikian, dari fakta di atas, hubungan adat dan Islam sangat kompleks. Keduanya tidak bisa dipahami secara sederhana sebagai sesuatu yang terpisah dan berbeda satu sama lain.

## The Morphology of *Adat*: The Celebration of Islamic Holy Day in North Coast Java

خلاصة: كانت قضية العلاقة بين العرف والإسلام تشغل حيزاً في دراسة الباحثين والدارسين عن الإسلام في إندونيسيا، والهولنديون منهم وبصفة أخص سنوك هرجرونجي (Snouck Hurgronje) وفان فولين هوفين (van Vollenhoven) يعدون أكثر الناس مسؤولة عن انتشار الآراء التي تميل إلى وضع العرف في موقف ضد الإسلام، حيث يعتبرون الإسلام بضاعة مستوردة من الشرق الأوسط، وليس له أصول راسخة في المجتمع الذي لم يزل متمسكاً بالتقاليد المحلية، ويرى ويليام روف (William Roff) أن الفصل بين الإسلام والعرف كان من اختلاق وابتداع الباحثين يحاولون به التقليل من تأثير الإسلام على حياة المجتمع في الأرخيبيل.

ومسايرة لرأي روف تقوم هذه المقالة بمحاولة للبرهنة - بأدلة أنثروبولوجية - على أن الفصل بين الإسلام والعرف لا يصمد أمام الحقائق العلمية؛ فبالقاء الضوء على الاحتفالات الدينية التي أقيمت بمناسبة الأعياد الإسلامية في مجتمع شيربون (Cirebon) أثبتت هذه المقالة قوة تأثير الإسلام على تكوين الأحكام العرفية، فالعرف باللغة الإندونيسية يطلق عليه اسم *Adat* وهي بدورها عربية الأصل = العادة، وهي تمثل جزءاً لا يتجزأ عن

النظام الديني، وفيما يتعلق بإقامة أية حفلة دينية يعد العرف تعبيراً عن الالتزام الديني وعن الهوية الإسلامية للمسلمين في شيربون.

وهكذا فإنه بجانب العيدين الفطري والأضحى هناك أعياد أخرى عندهم يعرفونه باسم "Suroan" وهي عبارة عن الاحتفالات الشعبية التي أقيمت بمناسبة حلول السنة الجديدة الهجرية في أول شهر المحرم وكذلك "mauludan" و "rajaban". بمناسبة ذكرى كل من المولد النبوي الشريف والبعثة النبوية وحادثة الإسراء والمعراج؛ علاوة على ما هو معهود لديهم من الاحتفال الذي يطلقون عليه اسم "ruwahan" والذي يتم في نصف الشهر الثامن من الشهور القمرية وهو شهر شعبان، حيث يعتقدون أنه من أهم الأوقات في حياة الإنسان إذ يتحدد فيه - حسب اعتقادهم - مستقبل الإنسان. وبالطبع هناك أعياد كثيرة غير التي ذكرت يحتفل بها المجتمع في شيربون وكلها أقيمت للمحافظة على التراث الثقافي والتدليل في نفس الوقت على الهوية الإسلامية.

ولذلك يتم الاحتفال بهذه المناسبات في ظروف مفعمة بمشاعر إسلامية غامرة، وهم يحتفلون بها بإقامة أنشطة مختلفة مثل تلاوة القرآن الكريم وإلقاء المحاضرات الدينية وتوزيع الأطعمة على الجيران والفقراء وزيارة القبور وممارسات أخرى تتمشى مع تلك الأعياد الإسلامية.

والحقيقة الأخرى التي تجدر الإشارة إليها أن مفهوم العرف لدى المجتمع في شيربون لا يقتصر على مجرد ممارسة قانونية - كما زعم فان فولين هوفين - تختلف عن الأحكام الشرعية، بل العرف عندهم شامل للتقاليد والسلوكيات التي يمارسها المجتمع عموماً، ويفهمون العرف على أنها طبيعة وملازم ذاتية في الممارسات البشرية، بما في ذلك الأنشطة الدينية. ومن صحيح القول إن بعض التطبيقات العرفية قد تدخل ضمن الممارسات الدينية، والبعض الآخر مجرد وسيلة للمسلمين لتطبيق الشريعة الإسلامية، ولذلك فمن الممارسات العرفية ما كانت محلية بينما كان البعض الآخر منها وارداً من مجتمعات خارجية؛ وبناء على تلك الحقائق كانت العلاقة بين الإسلام والعرف جد معقدة، وهي لا يمكن فهمها بشكل بسيط وكأنه شيء منفصل ومختلف أحدهما عن الآخر.

I am indebted to Lessa and Vogt (1979:221) who acknowledge the universal truism that men everywhere have endowed time, especially in its calendrical aspect, with sacred meaning. The Roman Catholic calendar, for example, gives testimony to the persistence of the ancient connection between sacred rituals and the yearly round. In large measure, this connection had been made based on the ever-recurring change of seasons in animal and plant life and in celestial phenomena, which all serve as a simple kind of measurement.<sup>1</sup>

For the Muslims, the sacredness of time is confirmed in the Holy Qur'ân which states:

I swear by the time, that perdition shall be the lot of man, except for those who have faith and do good works; who exhort each other to justice and to fortitude. (Q.S 103:1-3)

In reality, social and religious life are in fact regulated by and through the natural calendar, with the moon as a very important maker of time. This is particularly true within Muslim societies, as in Java, which use the lunar month as their calendrical system. Months, for the Muslims, bear sacramental significance for which celebration is held.

Beside the well-known celebration of canonical festivals prescribed by the (Islamic) Law, the festival of Breaking the Fast (*'idul fitri*) and the Sacrificial festival (*'idul adha*), throughout the Muslim world there prevails the practice of commemorating Islamic Holy days. Sometimes the celebration is held with great festivity or with magnificent solemnity. One example of the most widely practiced holiday rituals outside those already mentioned (*'idul fitri* and *'idul adha*), is the commemoration and celebration of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad (*mawlid al-nabi*). When was this practice started and who initiated it, is unclear. N.J.G. Kaptein indicates that the *mawlid* emerged as a festival in the Fatimid Egypt in the 5th H/11th century. On the *Mawlid* held on the 13 Rabi' al-Awwâl 517 H, which coincided with Friday 11 May 1123 AD, the Fatimid Caliph presented from his treasury 6000 dirham of funds, along with 40 dishes of pastry, sugar, almonds, honey and sesame oil for each mausoleum where the *mawlid* was held. Sana' al Mulk ibn Muyassar took care of the distribution of about 400 kg of sweet meats and 1000 kg of bread. By pointing to the Fatimid, Kaptein considers the *mawlid* as a Shi'ite tradition. Only later, he states, before the fall of the Fatimid Dynasty, this tradition entered the Sunni circle. At the approximate time of the collapse of the Fatimid, the Sunni *mawlid* was celebrated in Mosul by 'Umar al-Malla', and then in Mecca about 20 years later. At the beginning of the 7th H/13th century the *mawlid*

was celebrated magnificently in Irbil by Muzaffar al-Din Kokburi, the then ruler. The celebration then began to become a common practice throughout the Islamic world after the 7th.H/13th century.<sup>2</sup>

On Java, as well as elsewhere in Indonesia, the commemoration of *mawlid al-nabi* (*muludan* or *mauluduan*) became an established practice and part of the court tradition. In the Sultanates of Yogyakarta and Surakarta *mawlid* is held every year on the 12 Mulud (Rabi' al-Awwâl) known as *Gerebeg Mulud*. According to popular belief *muludan* is considered religiously meritorious. Its beginning is probably as old as Islam on Java, which began to appear around AD 13th century. The tradition of *mawlid* gave rise to the emergence of other traditions similar to *mawlid* by taking other days, which were assumed to have religious significance to be commemorated. Thus the ideal of *mawlid* was extended to a wider spectrum. When this extension started and who initiated it is also unknown and it is beyond the scope in this paper to trace its historical origin.

The main concern of this paper is to throw light on the issue as follows: what days are currently considered as Holy days, for what reason and how is the commemoration or celebration of that day performed. With special reference to Cirebon, a region in North-coast Java about 250 km East of Jakarta, I shall discuss this issue at some length. The socio-religious function of these celebrations is also explored.

When I asked local people, why do they celebrate a particular Holy day? The answers varied considerably, but one common answer was: "Because it has been our *adat* (lit. meaning tradition or custom)." This answer is interesting because in identifying Holy day celebrations as *adat*, it brings the discussion into a wider spectrum, that is the relation between *adat* and Islam, the subject that has been one of the major concern of the Dutch scholar or Indology scholarship. While the people in Cirebon use the word *adat* to refer to, among other things, something religious, the Dutch scholar as use the very same word solely to refer to something apart from religion. This gives rise to an intriguing question: Is there a difference between this "reality" and Indology scholarship? If yes, what is it? I shall also attempt in this paper to explore the likely answer.

### The Genesis of Islamic Holy Day

The commemoration of Islamic holy days (or holy months), is undoubtedly a genuine Muslim *tradition* coming from within the Muslim community. Historically, it is still difficult to trace this tradition. Rippin agrees with Kaptein, stating that activities such as *mawlid* festi-



vals for celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad were not fully established until about the 13th century A.D.<sup>3</sup> The local people, nevertheless, claimed that commemoration of other days have explicit scriptural roots, suggesting that it had already appeared when the Prophet was still alive, because it is clearly indicated in the holy Qur'ân, saying:

“The number of months (in a year) in the sight of Allah is twelve; so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth. Of them four are sacred; That is the right religion, so wrong not yourself therein ...”<sup>4</sup>

The Qur'ân in fact does not mention the specific months; it is the commentators who argued that there are at least four months in Islam which bear commemorative significance because they are sacred i.e.: Zul-qa'dah (*Kapit*), Zulhijjah (*Raya Agung*), Muharram (*Sura*) and Rajab (*Rejep*), each is respectively the eleventh, the twelfth, the first and the seventh month of the Islamic and Javanese lunar calendar.<sup>5</sup> During these months, the Muslims are especially forbidden to engage in warfare unless forced to defend themselves.

Along with these sacred months there are others in which certain day(s) are held by many Muslims as being holy and on which they make celebration. They are Safar (*Sapar*), Rabi' al-Awwal (*Mulud*), Sha'ban (*Ruwah*) and Ramadhan (*Puasa*), each is respectively the second, the third, the eighth and the ninth months of the Muslim and Javanese calendar. This gives eight out of the twelve months commemorative significance.

### The Pattern and Form of Commemorating Holy Day

The general pattern of commemoration and celebration of Islamic holy day contains one or a combination of the following elements: uttering *du'a* (invocation), fast, non-obligatory prayer, recital of the Qur'ân, recital of the story, biography or tale of the related figure(s) which sanctifies that particular day or month, and *sedekah* (the offering of food or other material to others). Although not necessarily, more often than not, it is accompanied by some form of feast or ceremony. The general occurrence is as follows:

#### *Suroan*

*Suroan* means celebrating or commemorating *Suro* or *Sura*, the first day of the Arabic and Islamic month; it also marks the new year of the Javanese lunar calendar. Its reckoning started on the day when the Prophet Muhammad and his companions took refuge from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. This refuge is referred to as the *hijra*, hence the calendar's name

was derived and usually linked with the starting point for the rise of Islam and its historical upheaval.<sup>6</sup> The merging of older Javanese solar calendrical system (*tabun Saka*) with the Islamic lunar calendar was made in 1663 by Sultan Agung of Mataram retaining the Javanese starting point at 78 AD.<sup>7</sup> Under the new system, the first month of the Javanese calendar coincides with the first month of the Islamic one, and the names of the Javanese months appropriated most of the Islamic ones. Hence, the name of *sura* is given as '*ashura*. Etymologically, the word *sura* in old Javanese (*Kawi*) means giant, in Sanskrit it means god or goddess, powerful, brave and warrior, monkey.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to relate directly those meaning to this context. The most likely explanation is that *sura* is a local reference to the Arabic term '*ashura* meaning the tenth day of Muharam.

From the Islamic view point, the sanctity of Muharam appears from the very name of the month, in that the Arabic word Muharam exactly means "that which is made sacred" (derivation from *haram*, meaning sacred). In addition there is also a possibility that the name '*ashura* is related to '*ashu-nura* (also Arabic) meaning those who received divine light.<sup>9</sup> According to the local belief, the day of '*Ashura* which falls on the tenth of Muharam recalls a number of important events. It traces back to the history of the great monotheistic traditions from the first apostle of God, Adam, who was sent to earth. It is noted as the day of victory for a number of apostles. God gave His grace to Adam and Eve when they sought repentance after being thrown out from paradise; Henoch (Idris) was endowed by God with noble position on this day; Moses received His revelation directly from God in the Sinai desert; it is also believed to the very day when Moses was saved and the Pharaoh drowned in the Red sea; Noah and his disciples touched land safely from the ark after the long and severe flood which killed all the infidels including his own son Kana'an; Abraham was saved unhurt after being burned by King Namrud of Babylon; Joseph was set free from jail and his name was cleared from prosecution for raping Zulaikha, the then Egyptian King's wife; Yacob recovered from serious eye disease, which caused him to be temporarily blind; Jonas came out safely from the belly of a sea monster (the giant *nun* fish). There are some who relate the date with the story of David and Salomon who gained both a divine and a worldly position, being the just and wise king and apostle of God at the same time.

Some informants mention that the day of '*Ashura* coincides with the recovery of Jacob (Ayyub) from serious cholera; further, '*Ashura* marks the birth of Jesus and his Ascension to heaven; it is also the day when the Prophet Muhammad married Khadijah; it is the reunion of

Jacob and Joseph after separation for forty—some say eighty— years; it is the day of the creation of heavens, earth, the Pen (*Qalam*), Adam and Eve.<sup>10</sup> Among the Shi'ite—which seems to be less significant for the local people—'ashura is the day for the commemoration of the death of Husein at Karbela in 61 AH (October 10, 680 AD). Husein is the son of 'Ali, the fourth Khaliph, and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. He was counted as the third *imâm*, the first two *imâm*s being the Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali.

To commemorate the many important events, the Javanese in Cirebon perform *slametan* or *sedekah*, which—according to their belief—is one form of *ibadat*. They offer *bubur sura* or *bubur slabrak* to be distributed to their neighbours and close kins. *Bubur sura* or *bubur slabrak* is rice flour porridge with coconut milk containing various food-stuffs such as vegetables, beans, peanuts, potato, corn, fish, meet and egg. The message behind this act, for the informants I met in Cirebon, is fairly clear. The porridge (*bubur*) itself, which is white in colour, symbolizes the holiness and purity of the day of 'Ashura, whereas the various foodstuffs contained in the *bubur* symbolize the various events that happened on the day they are celebrating. But who, when and where the *adat* of offering *bubur sura* for celebrating 'Ashura was initiated is unclear, although some informants claimed it was initiated by the *wali*.

The Cirebonese Muslim claim that there is nothing wrong in holding a *slametan* by offering *bubur sura*, even it is considered good because it is basically *sedekah*, and has become good *adat*, nevertheless some fairly knowledgeable and devout individuals, like Mang Hawari (42 years), a thoughtful clothing trader at Sumber Market, suggested that the celebration of 'Ashura will be better if it were conducted by performing one or a combination of fasting, voluntary prayer, reciting special invocation (*du'a*) called *du'a* 'Ashura after sunset prayer, feeding orphans and other forms of *sedekah* but not necessarily *bubur sura*. He said that according to his *Kyai* when he was in *Pesantren Leler* in Banyumas (Central Java), doing those things on the day of 'Ashura is considered religiously meritorious.<sup>11</sup> *Slametan* by offering *bubur sura* is still very common in Trusmi, even among people who are only fairly well off. Thus, Pak Satira (38 years), a kerosine peddler, rarely performs the prescribed daily prayers but he always makes *bubur sura* to be offered to his neighbours and close kin because he thinks it is the easiest and most convenient way he can express his being a Muslim. His concern is to remember God (*kanggo iling ning Pengeran*) although he is unwilling to perform prayer (*masih durung kiyeng sembayang*).

### Saparan

*Saparan* is commemoration of *Sapar* (*Safar*), the second month of Javanese/Islamic calendar. *Sapar* is locally known as the mating season for dogs, so that making a marriage contract or holding a marriage ceremony is not recommended during this month because it would equate humans with dogs, an unclean animal. *Sapar* is also believed to be the month of the year when frequent accidents, disasters and bad luck may occur (*wulan kang akeh balai*) especially on the last Wednesday of the month (*Rebo Wekasan*). It is not clear why and how it is believed to be so, but referring to the warning of some gnostics (*ahl al Kashf*), al-Dairaby states that each year God reveals 350,000 accidents or disasters; most of these occur on the last Wednesday of Safar making this day the most precarious day of the year. To avoid danger he suggests performing a four-unit prayer (*shalat empat rakaat*). At each unit, after the *Fatiba*, he recommends reciting respectively *Surah al-Kauthar* (S 108) 17 times at the first unit, *al-Ikhlâs* (S 112) five times at the second unit, *al-Falaq* (S 113) once and *al-Nas* (S 114) once respectively at the third and fourth unit and concluding with special after-prayer *du'a* (*do'a ulan Sapar*).<sup>12</sup>

People take extra precautions on this month by minimizing long distant travel, dangerous work and sinful acts. Doing religiously good work, such as helping others and providing *sedekah*, especially to orphans and widows, is highly recommended. In this case, during the month of *Sapar* the Cirebonese have three popular traditions of commemoration: *Ngapem*, *Ngirab*, and *Rebo Wekasan*.

*Ngapem* refers to making *apem* (baked or steamed slightly fermented rice-flour fritters). *Apem* are to be eaten with *kincah* (dark brown thick liquid made of palm sugar and coconut milk). *Ngapem*, a special feature of *slametan* on *Sapar*, according to Mang Syapi' i (62 years), an ex-farmer and trader, is just like other *slametan*. Along with its social function to maintain brotherhood and community bonds, it has at least two other functions. The offering itself is religiously meritorious because it is one form of *sedekah*. The type of food, as in other *slametan*, also causes symbolic message. In this case *apem* and *kincah* remind recipients, both neighbours and close kin, to be cautious because it is *Sapar*, the month of misery, misfortune or disaster. *Apem*—as the informants said—symbolizes flesh, *kincah* symbolizes blood. Thus *apem*, which is eaten with *kincah*, would remind the recipient to be careful of the possibility of allowing their physical body be involved in deadly accidents, misfortune or disaster.

Another informant said that *ngapem* is a relatively recent tradition initiated and spread from the court (*kraton*). Its roots go back to the early decades of the 18th and 19th century Java when the Dutch carried out political encroachments against Islam and encouraged for more intensive proselytization of Christianity. Muslims mostly failed in their opposition to the Dutch, the *kafir*. The failure of the Cirebonese revolt led by Bagus Serit and Bagus Rangin in 1818 is said to have occurred on *Sapar*. Because the *kraton* was militarily inferior, to be able to exist the *kraton* had no choice but to maintain a double standard: while accepting negotiation and cooperation with the Dutch, the *kraton* spread enmity and hatred among the people toward the Dutch. One means of doing this was to commemorate *Sapar*, the month of misery, by symbolizing the Dutch as *apem* that must be crushed to bloodshed, the *kincah*.

Because *Sapar* is a precarious month, a sudden death through accident, especially on *Rebo Wekasan*, the last Wednesday of the month, is considered extremely unfortunate if it happens to someone who in a sinful state. To avoid this unfortunate accident and the coming of *Rebo Wekasan*, Sunan Kalijaga who is believed to have stayed in Cirebon to learn Islam from Sunan Gunung Jati, is also believed to have begun the practice of bathing in the Drajat river in preparation for religious devotion, including *ratib* or *tahlil*.<sup>13</sup> This act has been followed by other people in subsequent years and has finally become part of the yearly *adat*. Until now, around *Rebo Wekasan* people go to the village of Kalijaga to *ziarah* at the *petilasan* (the remnant of the dwelling) of Sunan Kalijaga. After *ziarah*, those who wish can go up the river by decorated boats, which is a recent development, and bathe at the site where Sunan Kalijaga and his disciples are believed to have bathed. This *adat* is called *ngirab*, meaning originally shaking to rid (the body) of dirt. In this case it refers to the cleansing of sins. Currently, some people regard this *adat* practice as having spiritual meaning, but for the majority of visitors, who are mostly youngsters, it is an occasion for a picnic or a form of annual recreational undertaking to forget the miserable month of *Sapar*.

The story of *Sapar* would be incomplete without touching upon the *Rebo Wekasan*, the Wednesday of the last week of *Sapar*, which is considered as the most crucial day. After the breaking up of night prayer (*Isha*) and until dawn (*subuh*), youngsters, especially those who usually sleep in the *tajug* (prayer house) where they learn the Qur'ân (*ngaji*), split into groups of four to ten, march from house to house chanting repeatedly in front of the door in chorus whenever they reach a house: "*wur tawur nyi tawur, selamat dawa umur*", meaning "sow up Madam

sow up, may you be safe and have long life.”<sup>14</sup> The host then opens the door and before giving them some money asks: “Whose santri are you?” The group members answer by mentioning the prayer house to which they belong or the Qur’anic teacher from whom they learn the Qur’ân. When they do not belong to any *tajug*, they answer: “*Blok-an*,” meaning “on a Block-basis,” and then mention the name of a hamlet where they live or come from. This means the group is formed on locality basis, the hamlet, rather than on *the tajug*. They do this mostly for fun, taking the advantage of the prevailing *adat*. The money they get is distributed among themselves and used for their own purposes, most of them say for “*jajan*” (buying snacks).

The story of origin generally refers to the legendary figure of Sheikh Siti Jenar alias Sheikh Lemah Abang, alias Sheikh Datuk Abdul Djalil, alias Sheikh Jabaranta. Once, according to the legend, he was a member of the council of *Wali-Sanga* (Nine Saints), but was dismissed because his teachings did not conform with the general view of the other *walis* either on religious matters or on the strategy of teaching the Islamic faiths to new converts. He was sentenced to death by the *wali* tribunal for teaching Sufi doctrine publicly to the laymen who were unprepared to receive it because they had not had the necessary prerequisite training for it. Among these prerequisites is sound knowledge of theology and Islamic Law. This might result in a misunderstanding of sufi doctrine causing some of them, for example, to bypass the *shari’ah* and move directly to take up the mystical path. Sheikh Lemah Abang’s teaching therefore was thought of by the *wali* council as dangerous for the development of Islam. In a trial held at Great (Agung) Mosque of Cirebon, Sheikh Lemah Abang could not deny this allegation; thence the death penalty was announced and Sunan Kudus carried out the execution using the *Kentanaga*, Sunan Gunung Jati’s dagger (*keris*). Sheikh Lemah Abang was buried at Pemlaten, a grave complex in the southern part of the city of Cirebon. After his death, many of his followers, referred to as *abangan* (meaning followers of Lemah Abang) were at a lost.<sup>15</sup> Sunan Kalijaga suggested and Sunan Gunung Jati agreed that under the guise of the miserable *Rebo Wekasan*, the *abangan* group were advised to wander from house to house praying for the safety and long life of the villagers; in return the villagers were also advised to provide them with alms. Year after year such a practice was performed not only by the followers of Lemah Abang but also by the students at many *tajug* and other youngsters as well and, at last, it became part of *adat*.

### *Muludan and Rajaban*

*Mauludan* means celebrating *maulud* (Arabic: *mawlud*), meaning the birthday (of the Prophet Muhammad) on 12 Rabi' al-Awwal (*Mulud*), the third month of the Islamic/Javanese calendar, which coincides with the 20th of April 571 AD. Although the Prophet is also believed to have died on the same date, the day of his birth—not his death—is significant in the celebration. *Rajaban*, on the other hand, means celebrating the event which happened on *Rajab*, the *isra'-mi'raj* or the Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad from the mosque of Al-Haram in Mecca to the mosque of Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, Palestine, and then to the seven heavens. This event is believed to have occurred at the night of 27 Rajab (*Rejep*), the seventh month of the Islamic/Javanese calendar, when the Prophet was 51 years and 9 months old. In Cirebon, both *Mulud* and *Rejep* are the most important celebration after the Fasting month.

### *Muludan*

Like *Gerebeg Mulud* or *Sekaten* at the courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta in Central Java, Cirebon has its own *gerebeg*, called *panjang-jimat* which is held simultaneously at the three *kraton*, Kesepuhan, Kanoman and Kacirebonan on 12th *Mulud* each year.<sup>16</sup> The festival attracts many people throughout Java, and involves almost every stratum of Cirebonese society. It has been described by Siddique it as a part of the “machineries for the maintenance of symbolic universe of Sunan Gunung Jati.”<sup>17</sup>

The festival consists of highly ritualized and elaborate procedures, pregnant with symbolic meaning. In the first place, it expresses both solemnity and gaiety at the same time, due to the birth of the Apostle of God in this world. The focal point of the festival is a ceremony in the *kraton*, followed by a carnival carrying *panjang jimat* and other *pusaka* (heirlooms) from the Great Hall (*Bangsai Agung*) Panembahan to the Great Prayer House (*Langgar Agung*) at 9.00 p.m, and back to *Bangsai Agung* Panembahan at 11.00 p.m. At the *Langgar Agung*, before returning to the *Bangsai Agung*, *aysraqalan* is held, led by *kraton* religious official (*Penghulu Kraton*).<sup>18</sup> *Sega rasul* (literally meaning apostle rice, the special rice cooked with turmeric and spices), is then served to the assembled crowd; the crowd struggles eagerly to get a portion, even a small one, for its *baraka* (blessing) The preparation for the whole procession starts on the 15th of Sapar by cleansing and painting the *kraton*. This work is mainly done by voluntary workers.

The main item exposed at the carnival is the *panjang-jimat*, the main heirloom (*pusaka*) in the form of large oval Chinese porcelain plates, with symmetrical decoration containing the testimony of faith (*kalimat-shahadat*), written in ornate Arabic script. These plates are believed to have been brought by Sunan Gunung Jati himself. Concerning the festival, Pakuningrat SH, the Sultan of Kesepuhan, in his speech on the ceremony preceding the carnival at the *kraton*'s main hall, Bangsal Prabayaksa, on September 10, 1992, explained among other things that the festival is a reminder to all of us. He said, *panjang* means long or unceasing, *jimat* stands for *si(ji) kang diru(mat)*, that which is solemnly preserved i.e. the *kalimat syahadat* (the word of witness), as written on the plates. The *Panjang-jimat* festival thus, he said, symbolizes our concern for life-long or unceasing preservation of the *Kalimat Syahadat*, the religion of Islam.

The carnival is basically an allegorical dramatization of the momentous event when the Prophet was born. There are at least 19 important items at the carnival, one item follows the other, each is preceded by a man carrying a candle. The first is a man with a torch of candle-light in his hand. He acts as a servant (*khadam*) walking to give light to the second items, two men who follow him: one of them carries a spear representing Abd al-Muthalib, the Prophet's grandfather, the other, who is older, represents his adviser. They are walking at night time to seek a midwife. Next follows a group of men bringing ornamental decor called *manggaran* (from *manggar*, meaning coconut flower), *nagan* (from *naga*, meaning dragon), and *jantungan* (from *jantung*, meaning banana bud from which the banana fruits spring up); all symbolize the honour of Abd al-Muthalib's personage. A woman with a brass bowl (*bokor*) containing coins comes next, symbolizes the dignity of the midwife. After her, also a woman brings a tray with a bottle of distilled rose water (*lenga marwar*) to symbolize pre-bearing liquid (amniotic fluid). This liquid is logically put before the most symbolized dignified born baby, the Prophet Muhammad, who is represented by the Sultan himself (when unable to take post, the sultan authorizes someone to take this position for him). A tray containing *goyah* flower, paste and powder of traditional herbal medicine held by a woman follows to symbolize the placenta. The Court Religious Official (*Penghulu Kraton*) is responsible for the care of the umbilical cord. This symbolizes his advisory function to maintain the religious dignity of the *kraton*. The core of the carnival, already mentioned, is the exposition of *panjang jimat* which comes at the 12th item in the carnival sequence, resembling the 12 Rabi' al-Awwal



or *Mulud*, the birthday of the Prophet, whose mission is to propagate the Islamic faith, subsumed into *kalimat shahadat*, written in the plates. Each plate is taken care by two men with two escorts signifying a great concern of the *kraton* to safeguard the *shahadat*. All the carriers are *kaum* (care taker) of the Great Mosque, to show that in fact, their special duty is to safeguard the Islamic faith in its truest sense, the enactment of what is seen mainly in the mosque. The *panjang jimat* are seven in number signifying the *kalimat shahadat* as the basis on which everyone enters and passes through the seven stages of the eschatological ladder (*martabat pitu*), one of the essential theosophical doctrines of Tarekat Shattariyah, traditionally held by the *kraton*.

After *panjang jimat*, come the next successive items, two men carrying jars containing beer to resemble afterbirth blood, followed by another two, each carries a tray with a bottle on it, containing another type of beer which symbolizes phlegm. A *pendil* (rice-cooker pot) containing *sega-wuduk* (spiced rice cooked with coconut milk), is carried by a man to symbolize the suffering of the mother at giving birth. Next to *pendil* is *tumpeng* (a ricemount) called *sega jeneng* (rice for naming) with *ayam bekakak* (roasted chicken), symbolizing after-birth thanks giving (*syukuran* or *slametan*) due to the birth of the baby. In Cirebon this type of *slametan* is one of the most popular tradition, usually offered when the umbilical cord is dried and pulled off (*puput*).

The last three main items at the carnival are first, eight *cepon* (huge bamboo basket) resembling eight attributes of the Prophet, four of which are the must attributes; *sidq* (truthful), *amana* (trustworthy), *tabligh* (conveying), *fatana* (intelligent); and another four is the negation or the opposites, the must-not attributes, *kidzib* (truthless), *khianat* (betraying), *kitman* (corrupt), *balada* (stupid). Each *cepon* is full of rice meaning prosperity with full of God's Grace for the whole world (*rahmatan lil-'alamin*). Next, comes four *meron* or *tenong* (large round containers), representing mankind which is physically constructed from four elements, soil, water, air and fire. Another informant said that they are representing four closest companions of the Prophets, the four Caliphs, Abu Bakr al-Sidq, Ūmar, Uthmân and 'Alî. Finally, there come four *dongdang*, also a type of large container, symbolizing the spiritual element of mankind consisting of Spirit of God (*Ruh Allah*), the Words of God (*Kalam Allah*), the light of God (*Nur Allah*) and the witness (*shuhud*) for the existence of God. Another informant said, they resemble the four schools of Islam (*madzhab*), Mâlîki, Shâfi'î, Hanafî and Hanbalî.

Such festive processions of smaller extent and in different manner—but mainly centre on the cleansing and exposition of *pusaka* to the public—also occur at some other *kramat* (shrines) places, such as Astana Gunung Jati on the 11th, Panguragan on the 12th, Tuk on the 17th and Trusmi on the 25th of *Mulud* each year. Whereas outside these milieu, people in the villages also celebrate *mulud* in their own ways. The most common feature is *marhabanan* and *pengajian*. The former is about the same thing as *asyraqalan* mentioned earlier, the latter is basically public speaking, ranging in its intensity from the simplest and informal, involving only a small group and a local *kyai* sitting together at a *tajug* or a mosque, to a glaring festive and formal assembly, attracting thousands of audience by presenting a famous professional speaker or religious orator. The content of the speech also ranges from simple and informal story-telling about the background, the event of the birth and the life of the Prophet, taken from an Arabic text (*kitab*) with translation and short explanation by the speaker, to sophistication on the meaning of the birth of the Prophet in relation to the contemporary situation of the Muslim world and daily life.

The performance of *asyraqalan* or *marhabanan*, mainly during the month of *Mulud* and *Rajab*, may be held by request from an individual who wants to invite his neighbours to come to his house or to his *tajug* (privately owned prayer house adjacent to the house) for that purpose or, when it is to be held at *desa* (village) mosque, by a common agreement of the community. In either case, the participants sit together on mats in rectangular formation. In their midst there is a jar containing pure water and a tray containing flowers and perfume. In the front room of the house, or *tajug* after all furniture are removed, mats are spread. Some Arabic books, *al-Barzanji*, or Collection of *Marwliid al Diba'iy*, appear on benches or pillows in neat cases. When they think all the expected participants are already present or nearly complete, one of them proposes, “let’s begin (*ayo dimulai bae*),” the others responded, “O.K., (*ya... ayo*)” and the performance is started. There is lack of formality in this performance, although the solemnity is significant. Sometimes, males and females are involved at the same occasion but mostly they are separated by a curtain. In most cases women have their own group and their own occasions. Sometimes, when the performance is about to start, incense is burnt and the fragrance helps intensify the spiritual atmosphere.

*Al-Fatiba*, the first verse of the Qur’ân, is recited several times, whose merit is intended to honour the Prophet, his wives, his descendants,

his companions, and his followers, dead or alive. Then the leader, one who is very acquainted with *al-Barzanji* and who has good chanting voice, takes the first recital of Arabic lyrics of twelve verses of *al-Barzanji*. The verses he sings and chants contain appeals to God to give the highest dignity to the Prophet, his ancestors and his descendants, together with a hope, that similar merits also emanates to his companions, his followers, the pious, the participants of the gathering and all Muslims, dead or alive. The first verse reads as follows:

*Ya rabb salli 'ala Muhammad-Ya rabb salli 'alaih wa sallim.*  
(Oh God [please] exalt Muhammad-oh God [please] exalt him and give him peace).

This verse is repeated by others in chorus, then it is also chanted in response to the leader each time he finishes reciting each of the twelve verses. When this is over they move to reciting the poetic narrative of the background and family of the Prophet before he was born, such as his parents, his ancestors, his clan and the situation of the then contemporary Mecca. The recital is done by several people one after another in turn. When the verse speaks about the eventual impetus of the birth of the Prophet, all participants rise up into standing position to resemble spontaneous veneration, respect, honour and joy at the same time. While rising into standing, the following verses are chanted in chorus:

*Salla'llah 'alâ Muhammad, salla'llah 'alaih wa sallam 2X.*  
(Allah exalts Muhammad, Allah exalts him and endows him with peace).

When all are standing solemnly, the leader chants the following verse and the other repeat:

*Marhaba ya nur al-'ain, marhaba jadd Al-Husein,*  
*Marhaba abla wa sabla, marhaba ya khair da'i.*  
(Welcome the light of the eyes, welcome grandfather of Husein,  
Welcome and best regard, welcome the best propagator).

This verse is repeated again and again by all participants to respond the leader each time he chants a verse. Sometimes a participant takes an initiative to change the melody, after shouting in Arabic: "O God, (please) exalt Muhammad (*sall'Allah 'ala Muhammad*)" the other reply: "Certainly God exalts him and endows him with peace (*sall'Allah 'alaih wa sallim*)." Then he starts with further chants in a new melody. The first four verses of the lyrics are as follow:

*Ya Nabi salam 'alaik, ya Rasul salam 'alaik,*  
*Ya Habib salam 'alaik, salawat Allah 'alaik.*  
*Ashraq al-badr 'alaina, fakhtafat min-hu 'l budur,*  
*Mitsla husnik ma raayna, qatt ya wajh al-surur.*

(O, Prophet peace be upon you, O, Apostle peace be upon you,  
O, Beloved peace be upon you, Allah's exaltation be upon you.

Already arised the full moon upon us, thence [all other] lights are dimmed,  
such a beauty we have ever seen, is the sight of you o the most cheerful face).

No less than 22 verses are chanted in various melodies before they go back to sitting position to conclude the performance with a *du'a*. When the *du'a* is finished, some participants take the flower and/or drink the water. Foods are served by the host and all participants eat and chat. They then stand up asking permission to leave the house, and the host answered them with thanks. Some hosts provide *brekat* (from Arabic *baraka*; it refers to foods given to the guests to be brought home).

#### *Rajaban*

In Cirebon, *Rajaban* or *Isra'-Mi'raj* mostly takes the form of *pengajian*, but unlike *pengajian* on *muludan* whose main theme is around the birth of the Prophet, the main theme of *rajaban* centres around the Ascension of the Prophet from Mecca to Palestine about which the Qur'ân (S 17:1) states:

Glory to (Allah) who did take His servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram, in Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (the mosque of al-Aqsa, known by the Arabs being in Palestine), whose precincts We did Bless, in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).

Concerning the Ascension of Muhammad to heaven they take among other a *hadith* transmitted by Al-Ghaiti, saying:

"And then he (the Prophet) was given (by God) means of Ascension to where the spirits of Adam's descendants go."

While there is a disagreement among Muslim intellectuals on the nature of the ascension, whether it involved physical or mere spiritual ascension, the local belief definitely follows the traditionalist contention. This contention, as advocated in many *pengajian*, claims that the ascension involved the whole entity of Muhammad's human nature as a "servant", on which the Qur'ân explicitly indicated, which therefore comprised both his spiritual and physical elements. They consider the phenomenon of Muhammad's ascension as a catalytic test of whether or not a believer is sincere. An exemplary sincere believer is said to be Abu Bakar al-Sidq (the first Khaliph) who accepted without reserve the truthfulness of the story merely because the story came from the Prophet. Many of Abu Bakar contemporaries did not believe because Muhammad's Ascension was technically impossible. According to Pak Sa'id (53 years), an

office clerk at Kecamatan Weru, the phenomenon of the Prophet's ascension is unthinkable and thus beyond human rationality. Sincere believers will accept it, whereas the non-sincere may reject it. For those who believe in it will think that the Ascension is the work of God, rather than the work of Muhammad; what thing is impossible then when God wishes it?

Many propagators use the achievement of advanced space technology—which had been unthinkable a few decades or centuries ago yet it now becomes reality—as a support to the technical possibility of the Ascension. Traditional *pengajian*, on the other hand, taking the event for granted as a part of Islamic belief, replicates a detailed story of the Ascension into minutes, including how Gabriel, prior to the Ascension, carried out heart operation on Muhammad by which he removed from Muhammad's heart, all bad elements such as hatred, jealousy and anger and then filled the heart to the full with all good elements such as love, mercy and wisdom. The *pengajian* also replicates how, during the Ascension, the Prophet met with the previous prophets in heavens during the journey and back to Mecca with prescription from God for the Muslims to observe the duty of daily prayers five times a day.<sup>19</sup> The name of the month *Rajab* itself, they claim, consists of three Arabic letters: *ra* [Ñ], *jim* [Ì] and *ba* [È] each stands respectively for *Ra-sulullah*, *J-ibril* (Gabriel) and *B-uraq* (the vehicle for the Ascension).

### *Ruwahan*

*Ruwahan* commemorates *Ruwah*, the eighth month of Javanese calendar which coincides with *Sha'ban*, the eight month of Islamic calendar. The Javanese *ruwah* may be derived from Arabic, *rub(s)* or *arwah(pl)*, meaning spirit. According to popular belief, on the mid night of 15th of *Ruwah* (*Nisfu Sha'ban*) the tree of life—upon whose leaves the names of the living are written—is shaken; the names written on the fallen leaves indicates the mortals to die in the coming year.<sup>20</sup> During this month, a number of people use the day to recollect the deceased and visit their tombs. According to a *hadith* transmitted by Muslim, Abû Dâwud and Tirmîdhî from Abî Hurairâ, the Prophet recommended visiting graves—not only on *Sha'ban*—as such a visit may remind someone, especially the visitor, about the death that will come unavoidably to living being, and think about life after death.<sup>21</sup>

Conforming with this *hadith*, another *hadith* transmitted by Tirmîdhî says that on this night God's mercy descends to the lowest heaven and calls the mortals in order to grant them with forgiveness. An informant in Cirebon called this *panen pangapura* (harvest time of forgive-

ness) and thus, it is a good time for those who wish to take the chance and get merit from it. Among fairly devout Muslims, after *maghrib* prayer of the 15th day of the month (*limalase ruwah*) or *Nisfu Sha'ban* or mid *Sha'ban*, they read *Surat Yasin* (Sura 36 of the Holy Qur'ân) three times and fast on that day. The first recital of *Surat Yasin* is intended to ask God for repentance, the second for healthy and longer life, and the third for safety in this world and hereafter.

For people in a number of villages, *Ruwah* is known as the month for *ngunjung* (literally means to visit). Led by the *Kuwu* (*Desa* [village] Chief) and elders, they visit the grave of their ancestors, especially the founder of the *desa* called *Ki Gede* or *Ki Buyut* if the founder is male and *Nyi Gede* or *Nyi Buyut* if the founder is female. Sometimes this procession is accompanied by a carnival.<sup>22</sup>

During my research in Kalitengah, one of the villages in Cirebon, the villagers held *ngunjung* by performing a cross-country march from Kalitengah to Astana to visit the grave of the founder of the *Desa*, *Nyi Gede Kalitengah*. The march, about six kilometres long, went via village pathway instead of via the 13 km paved road from the *desa* to the Astana Gunung Jati grave complex, where the founder of the *desa*, *Nyi Gede Kalitengah*, was buried. Her tomb lies just outside the east-wall of Sunan Gunung Jati's shrine. The one-hour march was attended by approximately 300 people, male and female of various ages, led by the *kuwu* (Chief) and local elders. The focal point is not the march itself but the supplication (*dedonga*, from Arabic *du'a* meaning to pray) at the tombs. Some people carried foods partly to be offered to the key bearer (*juru kunci*) of Astana grave complex, partly for their own consumption after the break up of *dedonga*. At the Astana they first visited Sunan Gunung Jati's grave, sat on the floor in front of the third of the nine-door shrine and prayed there by reciting *tablil*, a certain type of supplication. The door is always closed but at this occasion, in service to the Kalitengah people, it opened although no one was allowed to step beyond this limit to observe the ascending pathway to Sunan Gunung Jati's tomb.

After *tablil*, they went to the tomb of *Nyi Gede Kalitengah* to do the same thing, the *tablil*. Pak Suganda (57 years), an army veteran, one of the elders, explained that the purpose of the *ngunjung* is to express thankfulness to *Nyi Gede*, who first came to Kalitengah and initiated to the settlement, by asking God to pardon all her sins and give her well being in her grave. They also believe that this form of worship is not only meritorious for *Nyi Gede* but also for those who pray for her and inhabit the *desa*. But the reason for taking *Ruwah*

according Pak Suganda, is unclear except that it has become their *adat*, and they feel there is no reason to change or abolish it, as “there is nothing wrong with it.” At the Astana grave complex there were other groups from other *desas* who did the same thing and explained similar objectives. To express their respect to their *desa* founder, some groups even took the initiative to renovate their Ki/Nyi Gede’s shrine at their expense. A knowledgeable informant said, performing the mid-*Ruwah* (*Nisfu-Sha’ban*) to visit the graves has a root in the tradition of the Prophet. Once, on *Nisfu Sha’ban*, the Prophet secretly went to Baqi’ (the grave complex in Mecca) and prayed there so intensely that his tears fell from his eyes. Ali, his companion and son in law, followed him secretly and watched from a distance. Seeing the Prophet crying, Ali came and asked, “why?” The Prophet explained that it was the night of forgiveness of sin (*lailat al bara’a*) and he (the Prophet) had been praying to God for forgiveness of sins made by both his ancestors and his deceased believers. This seems to indicate the fact that Islam, in its own way, has some sort of ancestor cult.

### *Syarwalan*

Along with the traditions around the fasting month (*Ramadhan*) and *riaya* which I described previously, there is *Syarwalan* or *Raya Syarwal* for celebrating *Syarwal* (Arabic: *Shawal*) the 10th month of either Islamic and Javanese calendar. For the Muslim, the next day after the end of *Ramadhan* (*riaya*), they fast for six more days and thus *Raya Syarwal*, the 8th day of *Syarwal* is its end. The celebration is made not only by the fasting pious but also going to visit Astana Grave complex in the course of *syarwalan*. At this occasion all doors leading to Sunan Gunung Jati’s tomb are opened not to give way to public but to the three Sultans of Kesepuhan, Kanoman and Keceribonan, and their families, to visit Sunan Gunung Jati’s tomb. The visit was made after attending a traditional procession at each *kraton*. The sultans came there still in their formal *kraton* clothing. Upon their return from *ziarah* to *kraton*, there was a mass struggle to shake hands with them. Sultan Kanoman and his families, in particular, held a *slametan* attended by Astana custodians. Siddique (1978:136) interprets that by this procession and visitation, the sultan’s position at the apex of the religious hierarchy among the *kraton* milieu is reaffirmed.

The mass populace come and go on that occasion, flocking around the burial complexes, in the square, at the mosque, at Gunung Jati, and in the street, numbering around 150.000 people. They are mostly obli-

ous of the sultans and their consorts. They rather, along with *dedonga*, take the occasion for recreation, to enjoy having the gathering and seeing beautiful panorama toward the sea from the top of Gunung Jati. It is true that the presence of sultans is of special attraction for many people. However, the two *lawang pungkur* (rear doors) at the left and right wings of the grave complex leading to the top of the hill —where graves of Ki or Nyi Gede of various *desas* lies—is a more important factor to attract the people to come. Thus, they can go around the grave complex, ascending and descending the top of Gunung Sembung from one *lawang pungkur* at the east wing to another one at the west. On *Raya Syawal* therefore, people visit three tombs: Sunan Gunung Jati's, the Ki or Nyi Gede's, and then across the main road up to the hill of Gunung Jati, Sheik Datuk Kafi's. The latter is known as the first Islamic teacher who came from Arabia to Cirebon in early 15th century and resided at Gunung Jati where Rarasantang, Sunan Gunung Jati's mother, and her elder brother Walangsungsang, learned Islam. Upon his death Sheikh was also buried there. Such an occasion like *Syawalan* also occurs on 11th of *Mulud* and 10th of *Raya Agung*.

Currently, which is recent development, the commemoration of Islamic Holy days is mostly subsumed into *pengajian* which makes multifarious form of traditional commemorations into uniformity, leaving no difference between one commemoration and the other except in their reference and content of the speech given by the speaker.

### The Significance of Holy Day Celebration

It is Edmund Leach who explicitly expresses a feeling of puzzlement at why men all over the world mark out their calendars by means of festivals. He then looks at various functions the holding of festivals may fulfil, one of which is the ordering of time. He finds that the interval between two successive festivals of the same type is a "period," usually a named period such as "week," "month," "year" and thus, according to Leach, without festivals such periods would not exist. All order would go out of social life.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the general function of festivals noted by Leach, the commemoration of Holy days in the Javanese context seems to have at least two other functions: one is the maintenance of cultural heritage the other is the expression of religious identity. The Javanese who are mostly Muslims are bound with the duty ordained by Islamic Law to perform daily prayer, weekly Friday congregation, yearly fasting and alms, and for those who can afford it to carry out pilgrimage to Mecca



once during a life-time. The rhythmic pulse of the observation of these duties is governed by lunar reckoning. Thus the proper calendar, the Islamic/Javanese lunar calendar is in use. The presence of the colonial government hampered the use of this calendar by officially imposing the use of another one, the solar calendar. As this encroachment penetrated more widely into the civil life, the use of solar reckoning superseded the lunar one. By virtue of the Holy day, commemorations and festivals on the important days already set out by the Islamic/Javanese calendar are recalled. The calendar has not totally faded from social life, although in daily life, especially in urban areas, the lunar calendar is almost non-functional.

The practice of commemorating Holy days in various forms is used by local people to express in public that they belong to the Muslim community, whether or not in daily life their behaviour conforms to the Islamic precepts. By becoming involved in Holy day celebrations, they implicitly declare their attachment to the Muslim community. Under the guise of *syi' ar Islam* (the common sign of Islam) they work together in a group, set up a committee, raise funds, administer the proceedings, and organize the whole process. Thus a renewed social bond in a sacred atmosphere of Muslim brotherhood as well as a refreshed "concept of religions," in Titiev's (1979:336) words, is re-established. The maintenance of *adat* and expression of Muslim identity are always inherently contained in the celebration of Holy days.

Under the pressure from a strong wave of modernization with its attractive advocacy of rationalism, pragmatism, efficiency and development, the tradition of commemorating holy days, as well as the traditions of *slametan* and *syukuran* which are basically emotional, non-pragmatic and, in most cases, against the principle of economic efficiency, persist unshakably, even in large cities where modernization is most significant. Quite probably this is one aspect that leads Hodgson (1974) to a question: "Why the triumph of Islam in Java is so complete."

### **Adat and Islam: a Unique Relationship?**

The celebration of Islamic Holy days of various kinds, large or small, with or without festivals, is only one segment of Javanese ritual activities referred to as *adat*. Other activities belonging to this category, the *adat*, are ceremonies held in connection with rites of the passage, death ritual, the veneration of saints (*wali*) and seasonal feasts. Rites of the passage are held in relation to pregnancy (four months, seven months,

nine months); birth ceremonies (*puputan*, *kekah*, *bāncakan*); boys' circumcisions and girls' first marriages. Death ceremonies comprises burial and after death *slametan* (three days, seven days, forty days, 100 days, and the first, second and third year or 1000 day memorial). Veneration of saints occurs in the form of *ziarah* visits to the tombs of the *wali* which, as Fox noted, is widely practiced throughout Java and is considered as an expression of piety.<sup>24</sup>

Similar to the commemoration of Holy days as an expression of Muslim identity, the local people think that by holding *slametan* (expecting safety) or *syukuran* (thanks giving) in relation to the stages of the life cycle, on the occasion of the death of a family member as well as in other occasions, one affirms one's identity as a Muslim and proclaims it publicly, at least to the neighbours. In their view, only Muslims hold *slametan* and thus, anyone who holds a *slametan* or *syukuran* must necessarily be a Muslim even if in daily life they do not observe the prescribed Islamic duties. In fact, acceptance and proclamation of being affiliated to a certain religion and a commitment to or observation of its duties are two different things, although at the ideal level of orthodoxy, both should go hand in hand. In the minds of the local people, it is already clear that throughout the discussion presented thus far, *adat* is rooted directly or indirectly in religion, especially Islam or something that has been Islamized. In contrast, the works of Dutch scholars on *adat*, *Adat-Recht* scholarship theory, sees *adat* as a distinctive entity separate from Islam. It is therefore interesting to examine the relationship between *adat* and Islam in a Cirebonese context which seems to suggest otherwise.

The word *adat* is derived from Arabic '*ada* (pl. '*adat*) meaning custom, or habit and is considered as synonymous with '*urf*, something which is commonly known or accepted. It generally refers to a product of long-standing convention, either deliberately adopted or the result of unconscious adaptation to circumstances, a convention that has been followed where practical considerations have been uppermost.<sup>25</sup> Its use applies to an entire community, and individuals have become accustomed to it. Even an animal is said to have his own *adat*.<sup>26</sup> The early Sunni scholars attempted to consider some '*urf* as the roots of the *fiqh*, but in Wahhabi Arabia, '*urf*, if contrary to the rigid code held by the rulers, has been stigmatized as *taghut*, mistaken conduct of the ungodly *jahiliya* way.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of whether *adat* is a legitimate source of *shari'a* or the ungodly practice of *jahiliya*, the term *adat* itself, along with so many other Indonesian words borrowed from Arabic, is an indication of the strong semantic influence of Islam on Javanese culture.

Since the nineteenth century, especially due to the influence of Van Vollenhoven and his followers, *adat* has been used by the colonial government in Indonesia as a legal term designating a right which gave currency to an independent legal system apart from the canon law of Islam (*shari'a*).<sup>28</sup> Local *adat* was encoded into units of jural management, whereby legal pluralism in colonial Indonesia was introduced.<sup>29</sup> Under this scheme, based on a classification of *adat* systems as cultural geographic units, the Dutch divided Indonesia at least into nineteen *adat* law areas.<sup>30</sup> The so called “*adat-law*”, rather than the *shari'a*, was then imposed wherever possible; one objective was to divorce the indigenous people from Islam. However, *adat* law was applied inconsistently, in that under the 1854 Constitution, (article 75, para 3), the application of *adat* rules which were in conflict with generally recognized principles of justice—defined in European terms but not in terms of *shari'a*—was strictly forbidden.<sup>31</sup>

In Cirebon, the word *adat* is generally used to refer to custom, habit or any form of ordinary behaviour commonly observed by many people. In local expression, it is “everything which is commonly done by many people (*barang apa bae kang wis biasa dilakoni deng wong akeh*).” To illustrate its real meaning, the following expressions may be helpful:

“*Sejen tempat ya sejen adat; wong kene adate mengenken, wong kana adate mengkonon.*”

(“Different places have different custom; the custom of people staying here is like this, whereas the custom of people staying over there is as that”)

“*Adate wong kene iku ari sembayang sarungan karo topongan*”

(It is the people’s custom here to wear *sarung* and *topong* at prayer).

Commenting to someone who complains about a demanding and frequent crying child, one says:

“*Ya adate ari bocah iku ya doyan nangis*”

(It is natural—so do not complain nor be startled—if a child likes crying).

Many other examples can be put forward but the point is that *adat*, from the Cirebonese perspectives, is no more than custom or tradition. While—as in other parts of Java—there is no such thing as *desa adat*, neither is there an *adat* official; there is no sense, at least in contemporary Cirebon, of any jural implications to the so called *adat* like in some other places such as West Sumatra or Bali. Thus, in the context of Cirebon, *adat* may be categorized as follows: (1) *adat* is conceived as a natural phenomenon whose occurrence is commonly and inherently attached to human conduct, to a way of doing something including religious duties and social behaviour; (2) *adat* may be genuinely of local creation, while

other *adat* may be of foreign origin; (3) some *adat* may be ritualized and some other *adat* may be loosely technical. Most people are hardly aware when *adat* came into being and where it came from. From a religious view point (4), some *adat* is good and other *adat* is bad; some matches precisely with the *Shari'ah* set forth in *fiqh*, some other *adat* matches with the ethical spirit emanating from Islam, still some other *adat* may run parallel to Islam, while other may stand in opposition to Islam.

Thus we find in Cirebon, for instance, the *sepikulan-segendongan* principle in the rules of inheritance, whereby a male sibling gets twice that of the female. This is an example of *adat* belonging to the first category;<sup>32</sup> many forms of feasts may be an example of the second category; the use of local clothing to cover *'awrat* at prayer is an example for the third; whereas activities such as cock-fighting and gambling on *lebaran* (*Id al-Fitr*) are examples of the fourth. Given that *adat* may either be good or bad, its treatment, whether one would keep it or avoid it, is subject to further individual own ethical consideration — based on Islamic, Christian, or other forms of ethical standards.

Pak Sholeh (44 years), a thoughtful trader, claimed that there is a hadith, which he said can be used as one of the scriptural bases that encompass whether certain *adat* is acceptable or otherwise. The *hadith* says: "What the faithful believers find it good, it is presumably good in the sight of God." (Transmitted by Ahmad).

Pak Sholeh asserted that by applying the *hadith* in relation to a number of ritual and ceremonial activities and feasts belonging to *adat*, "we see how the true believers, represented by scholars (*'ulamâ'*) and pious figures, behave." Needless to say, he said, that such activities as commemoration of Islamic Holy days and many forms of *slametan* have gained support from, been contended by and become part of favourable work of so many *'ulamâ'*, pious figures and *kyais*. We can deduce from the fact that those things, according to Pak Soleh, have become the Muslims' good *adat* (*wis dadi adat kang bagus kanggo wong Islam*). It is thus sometimes difficult and perhaps unnecessary to set a clear boundary between *adat* and *shari'ah*. To clarify further the relationship between the two, Pak Soleh gave the following illustration:

"The case of *adat* and *shari'a* is just like doing prayer and wearing *sarung* and *topong*. Prayer belongs to *shari'a*, wearing *sarung* and *topong* belongs to Javanese *adat*. How then, should they be separated? It is true that prayer is valid without wearing *sarung* and *topong* provided the *awrat* is covered. But clearly, praying and wearing *sarung* and *topong* are united, they do not oppose *shari'ah*; rather, to our taste, it even looks better as it indicates more humbleness to God."

### Concluding Remarks

The indigenous view of and approach to *adat vis a vis shari'ah* such as Pak Soleh's undeniably represents the position of many traditionalist Muslim villagers, especially in Java. This position stands against the main stream of *adat-recht* and Indological scholarship represented by Snouck Hurgronje and Van Vollenhoven who exploited *adat* as the useful means to enable the colonial government to exercise its political power. In dealing with Islam in South-East Asia, Hurgronje and others argued for a necessary separation and opposition between *adat* and *shari'ah* (Islam).<sup>33</sup>

Based on the strong denial of the significance of Islam and in the interest of the integrity of colonial state, the Dutch colonial policy fostered ethnic divisions and manipulated the "adat-law" issue. The European colonial cultures, especially British and Dutch, had distorted Islam at the very start when they made systematic descriptions of Islam. Ironically, it is this confusion and distortion that provided the framework for much of the scholarly study of Islam in South-East Asia that followed.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the framework for the scholarship of South-East Asian Islam rested on the confusion and distortion of colonial culture which started since the first time when Islam was systematically described.<sup>35</sup> The reliability of this scholarship enterprise is under sieged by the current trend toward retrospective analysis of its premises. As Ellen asserts, unlike tribal religions, the local manifestations of any of the great theism, including Islam, cannot be understood in terms of ethnographic particularities alone,<sup>36</sup> especially when that ethnography is of the colonial provenance which, according to Ellen, made little advance in the analysis of Muslim beliefs and practices other than as part of the documentation of local cultural assemblages. As Hooker asserts, Islam, being the youngest world's monotheism, in its own view, is intended to complete the great Judea-Christian traditions. In its own view, Islam prescribes a complete scheme for the temporal and spiritual worlds and thereby it does not separate religion from daily life, which is the position that the secular West can hardly comprehend.<sup>37</sup> To this end Islam has a Holy Book, revealed by God, the Qur'ân, containing 6666 verses. It also has over one million written traditions of the Prophet, a vast number of works by the '*ulamâ*' (Islamic scholars) which, based on the Qur'ân and the *hadith*, inscribe the principle of the divine message in every segment of human conduct from the ethical principles for a ruler to such a thing as going to the toilet. It is therefore complex business to judge certain traditions held by a Mus-

lim community in terms of what is Islamic or non-Islamic, by using a simple rule of thumb. To understand the local manifestations of great traditions such as Islam, along with picking up ethnographic particularities, the literary Islamic tradition must be taken into account because directly or indirectly this tradition has influenced deeply the minds of Muslims. Ellen is right in holding that an initial recognition of a distinctive Muslim culture within the totality of Islamic tradition is prerequisite before one starts to grapple with understanding local expressions of Islamic faith. Under the universality of the divine message, Muslims all over the world live within diverse cultural niches whose expression bears the colour of this diversity, that is the diversity of *adat*. It is this recognition that many Indologists failed to fulfil.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, Ellen sees that the ensuing discourse on South-East Asian Muslim societies always view the relation between *adat* and Islam as either mingling, suggesting their unstructured mixing, or the apparently conflicting, suggesting their reification and existence as two definite and separate bodies of knowledge and practice. Either view, Ellen argues, is profoundly misleading and an over-simplification.<sup>39</sup> Recent studies concerning the issues of *adat*, Islam and the relation between the two do not come up with any conclusive or straightforward attribution. Hooker (1974) suggested that to attack the issue there must be a language or method of investigation that allows varieties of data to be taken into account. To this end a method to distinguish between individuality of the human substantiate and the concept of legal personality must first be established.<sup>40</sup> Nagata (1974), on the other hand, who studied the perceptions and practices of *adat* among urban Malays concludes that *adat* represents a more generalized concern with a way of life, with ceremonial rites of passage, and with religion, indicating his difficulty in separating *adat* from religion (Islam), and in attributing a relationship between them.<sup>41</sup> Indeed the relation between *adat* and Islam is both unique and complex, difficult to describe and probably unnecessary to distinguish. One thing is clear; while the relationship deserves careful study, the Hurgronjenian contention on the necessary separation between *adat* and Islam, especially on Java, has lost its validity and thus must be reconsidered.

## Notes

1. Lessa, W.A and Vogt, E.Z (1979), *Reader in Comparative Religion*, 4th ed., New York: Harper and Row.
2. Kaptein, N J G (1993), *Muhammad's Birthday Festival*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, esp. pp. 9, 41, 42
3. Rippin, A (1990), p 98.
4. Qur'ân, (S 9:36).
5. *The Holy Qur'an, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, p 510; Adnan, K.H.M (1969), *Peringatan Hari-Hari Besar Islam*, Sala: A.B. Siti Syamsijah, p 6.
6. Citing *Widyaprada*, Adnan claims that Islamic calendar was firstly adopted in Java in 1443 AD when Sunan Giri, one of the nine Javanese *wali*, established a settlement called Bintara. See: Adnan, K.H.M (1969), *Peringatan Hari-Hari Besar Islam*, Sala : A.B. Siti Samsijah, pp 12-13. Less than a decade after this adoption the settlement grew into an Islamic political centre and became the first Islamic kingdom on Java called Demak whose king was Raden Fatah and marked the beginning of Islamic era in the Javanese history.
7. Simuh, (1988), *Mistik Islam Kejawen Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita*, Jakarta : University of Indonesia Press, pp 11-12. The reckoning of *Tahun Saka* refers to a legendary figure of Ajisaka, probably an Indian, who came to Java in AD 78 and created (or introduced) Javanese alphabet. In Cirebonese literary tradition Ajisaka is referred to as Sheikh Subakir.
8. Dirdjosiswojo (1957), *Kawi-Djinarya*, Djilid 1, Klaten : Pertjetakan Republik Indonesia, p 215.
9. Adnan, K.H.M (1969), p 12.
10. About similar specification of events happening in the 10th of Muharram also appears in the work of Abd al Rahman al Safuri Al Shafi' i, (n.d), echoing Kurtubi. See: *Nazhat al Majalis*, vol. 1, Beirut : Al Maktaba al Sa' baniya, p. 174.
11. The scriptural bases (the *hadiths*) and their explanations for the merits of doing those things, see *Nazhat al Majalis*, vol. 1, pp. 173-175.
12. Al-Dairaby, S.A (n.d), *Mujarrabat al-Dairaby al Kabir*, Semarang: Al Munawar, p 74.
13. There is a *Desa* in Southern Cirebon called Kalijaga, where Sunan Kalijaga is believed to have stayed. The Drajat river passes this *desa*, on which local people, even until recently, relied for their water supply, especially for bathing and washing.
14. In Sundanese villages the word *nyi* (madam) is replaced by *ji*, which stands for *Haji*, a reference or title for those who have been to Mecca; it is used here as honorary reference to the host(ess), irrespective whether or not the host(ess) is a haji.
15. One informant, who claimed that the term *abangan* referred to the followers of Sheikh Lemah Abang, explained that they (the *abangan*) do believe in one God and in Muhammad as the apostle of God but they are still reluctant to do religious duties for various reasons, mostly due to their ignorance of Islamic doctrine. They only do *slametan* because this is the easiest way to express their belief and sense of piety. Man Akmal (57 years) a trading commissioner (*palen*), a supposed *abangan*, did not deny such characterization while advocating the principle of *padu bener bae* (just rightful). He said: "*Wong iku padu bener bae, rukun karo tangga, guru ratu wong tuwa karo kudu diormati; kanggo apa sembayang jungkal-jungkel ari tindak lakume bli bener?*" ("The most important thing for an individual is good conduct, living in harmony with neighbours, respecting teachers, king (ruler) and the two parents; what is daily prayer for, if the daily conduct is improper?"). In daily life, at least during my field-work, the term *abangan*, if known, was hardly ever used. Man Akmal identified himself as *wong bener* (rightful people), not as *abangan*.
16. The word *gerebeg* is derived from Javanese *anggrubuyug*, meaning to escort, i.e., to get together escorting the court families who are going to an assembly where the com-

- memoration of mawlid al-Nabi is to be performed. See: Adnan, KHM (1969), p.18.
17. See Siddique (1978), especially pp 108-148.
  18. *Asyraqalan* refers to chanting *asyraqal badr 'alaina*, etc, the Arabic hymn for exalting and praising the Prophet, written by Ahmad Barzanji, which is concluded by a *du'a*).
  19. For an excellent treatment on both Mawlid and Muhammad' s Ascension see: Schimmel, A. (1985), *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of The Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hills: The University of Carolina Press.
  20. See: "Sha'ban", in *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*; See also: Ahmad Qodhi, A. (1992), *Nur Muhammad: Menyingskap Asal Usul Kejadian Makhluk (Tarjamah Daqooiqul Akhbar)*, Bandung : Husaini, p 33.
  21. Rasyid, S. (1988), *Fiqh Islam*, Bandung : Masa Baru, pp 182-183.
  22. Probably, *Ngunjung* festival in Cirebon can be equated with *Bersih Desa* in Central Java.
  23. Leach E, "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time" in Lessa, W.A and Vogt, E.Z (1979), pp 221-229.
  24. Fox, J.J (1992), "Ziarah Visits to the tombs of the Wali, The Founders of Islam on Java", in Ricklefs, M.C (ed), *Islam in Indonesian Social Context*, Melbourne: CSEAS-Monash University.
  25. Levy, R (1957), *The Social Structure of Islam*, London: Cambridge University Press, p 248
  26. See "Adat Law" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
  27. Levy, R (1957), pp 248-249.
  28. See "Ada" , in *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*.
  29. Ellen, R.F (1983), "Social Theory, Ethnography and the Understanding of Practical Islam in South-East Asia", in Hooker, M.B (1983) ed, *Islam in South-East Asia*, Leiden : E.J. Brill. p 52.
  30. Hooker, M.B (1978), *Adat Law in Modern Indonesia*, Kuala Lumpur : Oxford University Press, pp 16, 30.
  31. *Ibid*, p 46.
  32. Some informants said that the *sepikulan-segendongan* is *bukum* (Islamic law) which has become *adat*, and is commonly practiced even by ignorant people, although there are some who apply equal division and this, according my informant, is not against the Shari'aas long as both sides agree. The shari' a, he said, set the principle but when *ishlah* (agreement) and *ridla* (sincerity) are achieved the latter may be taken. When the involving persons do not agree, the *Shari'*ashould be enforced.
  33. Hooker, M.B (1983) ed, pp 59-60.
  34. Ellen, R.F (1983), "Social Theory ..." , pp 52-53.
  35. *Ibid*, p 52.
  36. Ellen, R.F (1983), "Social Theory ..." , p 50.
  37. Hooker, M.B (1983) ed, p vii.
  38. Ellen, R.F (1983), "Social Theory ..." , p 50.
  39. Ellen, R.F (1983), "Social Theory ..." , p 64.
  40. Hooker, M.B (1974), " *Adat* and Islam in Malaya" in *Bijdragen tot de taal Land en Volkenkunde*, Deel 30, 1974, pp. 70-90.
  41. Nagata, J.A (1974), "*Adat* in the City: Some Perceptions And Practices Among Urban Malays" *ibid*, pp. 91-109.

---

A.G. Muhaimin is researcher at *Religious Research and Development, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Indonesia*.