



## ***APITAN* AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF GROBOGAN SOCIETY (20TH CENTURY)**

**ABDUL AZIZ**

**UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUNAN KALIJAGA YOGYAKARTA**

Email : [abdul.aziz@uin-suka.ac.id](mailto:abdul.aziz@uin-suka.ac.id)

**DEVI INDRIYANI**

**UNIVERSITAS ISLAM SULTAN AGUNG SEMARANG**

Email: [firstdeviindriyani@gmail.com](mailto:firstdeviindriyani@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

*Apitan*, a longstanding tradition in Grobogan, Central Java, holds its roots in the Hindu-Buddhist era. This cultural practice has significantly shaped and transformed the socio-economic and religious landscape of the community, making it imperative to investigate how *Apitan* has influenced the social, economic, and religious dynamics of Grobogan in the 20th century. This research employs a historical approach with a social perspective. The findings of this study reveal that *Apitan* bestows numerous benefits upon the Grobogan community. Notably, it fosters camaraderie not only among fellow Muslims but also between individuals of different faiths. Furthermore, this tradition serves as a means of disseminating historical insights, perpetuated through community rituals. From a socio-economic standpoint, it has evolved over time, primarily functioning as a platform for the promotion and introduction of halal food and a halal lifestyle. In the pre-independence era, marked by challenging circumstances and limited education, the accessibility of non-halal food forced the populace to consume it. Although *Apitan* continues to be celebrated annually, local traditions face significant challenges in the modern global era. The younger generation is progressively less engaged and interested in the *Apitan* tradition. This predicament necessitates a multi-faceted approach, addressing both the challenges of the times and finding solutions to preserve the local Muslim community's traditions.

**Keywords:** *Apitan*, social, economic, religion.

## ABSTRAK

Apitan, sebuah tradisi yang telah berlangsung lama di Grobogan, Jawa Tengah, memiliki akar yang berasal dari era Hindu-Buddha. Praktik budaya ini telah secara signifikan membentuk dan mengubah lanskap sosial-ekonomi dan keagamaan masyarakat, sehingga penting untuk menyelidiki bagaimana Apitan telah memengaruhi dinamika sosial, ekonomi, dan keagamaan di Grobogan pada abad ke-20. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sejarah dengan perspektif sosial. Temuan dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Apitan memberikan berbagai manfaat bagi masyarakat Grobogan. Terutama, tradisi ini memperkuat persaudaraan tidak hanya di antara sesama Muslim tetapi juga di antara individu dari beragam keyakinan. Selain itu, tradisi ini berperan sebagai sarana untuk menyebarkan wawasan sejarah, yang dilestarikan melalui ritual komunitas. Dari sudut pandang sosial-ekonomi, tradisi ini telah berkembang seiring waktu, terutama sebagai platform untuk promosi dan pengenalan makanan halal dan gaya hidup halal. Pada masa sebelum kemerdekaan, yang ditandai oleh kondisi sulit dan pendidikan yang terbatas, ketersediaan makanan non-halal memaksa masyarakat untuk mengonsumsinya. Meskipun Apitan terus dirayakan setiap tahun, tradisi lokal menghadapi tantangan signifikan dalam era global modern. Generasi muda semakin kurang terlibat dan tertarik pada tradisi Apitan. Situasi ini memerlukan pendekatan multiseluler yang mengatasi tantangan zaman dan mencari solusi untuk melestarikan tradisi masyarakat Muslim lokal.

***Kata kunci:*** Apitan, Sosial, Ekonomi, Keagamaan.

## INTRODUCTION

One of Grobogan's iconic cultural aspects closely intertwined with Islamic teachings and consistently preserved is the *Apitan* tradition. This tradition is believed to have existed since the time of the *walisanga* (Islamic saints who played a key role in the spread of Islam in Java) and has been passed down through generations to the present day. In practice, *Apitan* is quite similar to rituals like "*sedekah bumi*" (earth offering), "*kondangan*" (feasts), "*krayahan*" (village fairs), "*nyadran*" (commemorative events), and "*gas deso*" (community gatherings). *Apitan* is a form of "*sedekah bumi*" conducted in the month of Zulka'dah in the Islamic calendar, specifically on the birthdate of the village head in various areas of Grobogan. The *Apitan* tradition typically extends for two to five consecutive days. Philosophically, *Apitan* is rich in aesthetic and syncretic values. It usually involves religious teachings, expressions of gratitude, wayang (traditional Javanese puppetry), village processions, groups of Islamic students, and recitations of religious texts. This entire sequence allows the community to express gratitude to God for the bountiful harvest. The values of the *Apitan* tradition are diverse, serving as both a channel for religious scholars to impart historical knowledge and promote Islam, as well as a platform for communal bonding, strengthening social relations, and promoting local products as famous brands. This event usually stands as one of the highly anticipated community celebrations in Grobogan.

Groboan has its historical roots dating back to the era of the Hindu Mataram Kingdom. This area once served as the center of the Mataram Kingdom, with its capital located in Medhang Kamulan, Sumedang Purwocarito, or Purwodadi. Later on, the center of the kingdom shifted to the vicinity of Prambanan under various names like Medang I Bhumi Mataram, Medang Mat I Watu, Medang I Poh Pitu, or Medang ri Mamratipura. Grobogan played a significant role in the Mataram and Kahuripan Kingdoms. During the Majapahit, Demak, and Pajang periods, Grobogan was often associated with folk tales featuring figures like Ki Ageng Sela, Ki Ageng Tarub, Bondan KeJawan, and the story of Aji Saka. The introduction of Islam to Grobogan is estimated to have occurred around 1486. Although Majapahit still had its king in 1486, the kingdom had lost the ability to restore its former glory, much like during the reign of Prabu Hayam Wuruk. This was due to several regions gaining independence, as well as the growing influence of Islam in Java during that period. Figures such as Ki Buyut Masharar, Ki Ageng Tarub, Raden Rachmat in Ampel, and Puteri Cempo were already entering the royal courts. Cities along the northern coast of Java had predominantly adopted Islam, including Giri, Gresik, Ampel, Leran, Lasem, Jaratan, Tuban, Sidayu, Bintoro, and others. These cities had opted not to submit to the Hindu monarchs of Majapahit.<sup>1</sup>

In the midst of this societal disintegration, Islamic religious leaders, such as the Wali Songo, played a crucial role in spreading Islam. They gradually introduced Islam

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<sup>1</sup> Santoso, Heri Dwi. "*Apitan*: Pelestarian tradisi agraris lokal masyarakat Jawa." *dalam Jurnal Lensa* 3, no. 2 (2013).

to the inland regions within the Majapahit domain, animistic areas. It was from these areas that the Kejawen form of Islam emerged. The teachers and their students from these regions later became significant figures during the Pajang and Mataram periods. In addition to being a form of gratitude for the blessings they received, *Apitan* also serves as a request for a better life in the coming year, free from harm. Moreover, *Apitan* is an occasion for the residents of a hamlet to gather together, with every family encouraging their children to participate in the event. This fosters continued community bonding.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned information, there is also research examining the *urup* tradition (a form of *Apitan*). It indicates several factors supporting the permissibility of the *urup* tradition. First and foremost, the execution of *urup* reflects principles of goodness, including an element of mutual assistance between those conducting the *urup* and those milling rice. Second, it brings significant benefits, particularly in terms of facilitating trade to sustain livelihoods. Third, despite the practice involving barter, *urup* participants seek a fair exchange, in line with the concept of "عن تراض" (mutual consent). Fourth, the *urup* tradition, when practiced during the harvest season, greatly eases the process for farmers to obtain food without the need to purchase it from markets or stores. Nevertheless, existing literature lacks a comprehensive examination of the social dynamics surrounding the *Apitan* tradition in the community. Consequently, this study adopts a field research approach, collecting data from Desa Gaji, Tlogomulyo, and Tunjungharjo, and utilizing a social perspective and Kuntjaraningrat's acculturation theory.<sup>3</sup>

Gaji is a creative local village within the Tegowanu subdistrict of Grobogan Regency, Central Java. Geographically, Gaji spans an area of 2.32 square kilometers and is home to approximately 1693 residents. Administratively, the village shares its boundaries with Desa Tlogomulyo to the west, Desa Cangkring to the south, and Desa Tunjungharjo to the east. The majority of Gaji's residents adhere to the Islamic faith, with an overwhelming 100% representation, and engage primarily in agricultural activities, predominantly as farmers.

Gaji's land is of the alluvial type, encompassing hues of gray and brownish-gray, typical of low-lying terrain situated at an elevation of approximately 12 meters above sea level, with a gentle slope ranging from 0 to 8%. This fertile land is especially conducive to rice cultivation. The village is known for the agricultural produce it markets, including rice, legumes such as beans and peanuts, corn, koro (a type of legume), soybeans, squash, cucumbers, melons, and watermelons, as well as tubers like sweet potatoes, cassava, peanuts, taro, Chinese yam, and yam bean. Facilities within Desa Gaji are well-established, boasting four local Islamic boarding schools, a state elementary school, a kindergarten, a preschool, a madrasah (Islamic school), and

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<sup>2</sup> Cahyandari, Agnes Gita. "Tradisi *Apitan* pada Masyarakat Dusun Jojogan, Kecamatan Watukumpul, Pemalang–Jawa Tengah."

<sup>3</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Masalah Kebudayaan dan Integrasi Nasional*, (Jakarta: UI Press, 1993), hlm. 248.

a medium-scale traditional market. The village also enjoys good transportation links as it is situated along a main route, serving as an alternative road connecting Demak, via Guntur subdistrict, with Purwodadi, via Gubug-Tegowanu subdistricts.

According to the Tegowanu Subdistrict's Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2016, the population of Gaji Village at the end of the year 2016 was 1,693 people. The population composition based on the data is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio
828	865	1693	95,72

Resource: BPS Tegowanu 2016

## THE *APITAN* TRADITION IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES

In the 14th century, Java was under the rule of the Majapahit kingdom, especially in the central region of Java. This historical fact is evident from the book "Java in the 14th Century," which references the Nagara Kretagama manuscript, revealing that Majapahit once held a grand ceremony, inviting princes and queens from various regions of Java. Princes from places like Lasem, along with their queens, and the prince of Pajang, along with their entourage, were part of this grand gathering.

Ceremonies during the Majapahit era were organized into various types, each tailored to specific purposes and needs of the time. There were religious ceremonies like *Sraddha* (rituals to commemorate the death of Queen Tribuwana Tungga Dewi, the mother of King Hayam Wuruk), *Pajd* (worship), *Shrliddha* (posthumous ceremonies), *Wipras*, *Shlokash* (recitations of Sanskrit verses), and regular ceremonies like *Angastreni*, *Caitra* (March-April ceremonies for the general public), *Booming* (a ceremonial event featuring drums, gamelan music, flutes, and other instruments), *Bhidra* (ceremonies held in August-December in rural areas with a series of praise-related activities).

Around 1273 to 1351 AD, the common people in the Majapahit kingdom were not allowed to hold ceremonies or parties without the knowledge and approval of the kingdom. Princes controlled which festivities could be enjoyed by the public. For example, the *Caitra* ceremony, held as a sign of responsibility toward the common people, was enjoyed by people from all social classes. The kingdom provided clothing and food to all segments of society. Everyone was granted leave from work and celebrated together. Even beggars and homeless people received assistance and food during this event. The *Caitra* ceremony usually included a variety of activities such as booming, recitations of verses, singers, storytellers, and dances. One of the princes usually delivered a speech to encourage people to cultivate the land properly and refrain from haphazardly leaving behind abandoned farmland. During the Majapahit

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<sup>4</sup> Statistik Daerah Kecamatan Tegowanu 2016, BPS Grobogan.

period, forest preservation was highly valued, so clearing new agricultural land without permission and consideration from the kingdom was prohibited.

Besides *the Caitra* ceremony, which was intended for the entire population, there were also grand ceremonies held within the palace. The grand ceremonies in the 14th century were lavish affairs attended by all levels of nobility and members of the Majapahit kingdom. They celebrated for seven days with great splendor, and the food and clothing they provided were abundant, without any budgetary constraints. The royalty distributed food and gifts to four hermits and respected priests. In addition to the palace's inhabitants, Majapahit also invited a countless number of officials (mandarins). Even the heads of common people's groups were allowed to join in the festivities, and the abundance of food and palm wine was such that it was said that the heads of these groups became heavily intoxicated as palm wine flowed everywhere.<sup>5</sup>

Grand ceremonies held within the palace typically followed the Hindu-Buddhist traditions of the time. The ceremonies commenced with the king and princes conducting posthumous rituals to commemorate the deaths of esteemed royal family members. The next day, everyone who participated in the grand event (*Prajiamaritha*) would offer worship to Buddha, carrying offerings that would later be distributed to the congregation. The grand palace festivities were filled with numerous activities, including large-scale dance performances. Invited guests were encouraged to dance freely alongside the performers, accompanied by booming music. The celebration included a communal feast. In addition to dance, there were recitations of verses, singers, storytellers, and choral singing. There were so many invited guests at the grand palace ceremony that the palace grounds were said to be full of lined-up horse-drawn carriages. If we examine the traditions of the *Caitra* ceremony and the grand palace ceremony during the Majapahit kingdom in the 14th century, they bear a striking resemblance to the *Apitan* tradition in Java, especially in Grobogan, Central Java, where the events include *Selawatan* (religious chanting), processions, *Wayang* performances, religious recitations, and communal feasts.

## THE *APITAN* TRADITION AFTER ISLAMIZATION

Although Islam had reached the Indonesian archipelago long before the emergence of the Demak Sultanate, its initial reception among the native population was challenging due to the unorganized and localized propagation efforts. A more structured and intensive approach to Islamic proselytization began with the arrival of Raden Rahmat, also known as Sunan Ampel, in Java. Sunan Ampel, a nephew of the wife of King Brawijaya V of Majapahit, was originally from Champa. He was appointed as an official responsible for customs and excise in the Ampel region of Surabaya, a significant trading center for Majapahit. While in this position, he not only managed fiscal matters but also established a *pesantren*, initiating Islamic education

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<sup>5</sup> Theodore G. TH. Pigeaud. *Java in the 14 th century*. (The Netherlands Institute for International Cultural Relations, 1960), hlm 3-20.

and missionary activities. In the area, he became known as Sunan Ampel. Sunan Ampel orchestrated his sons and disciples to vigorously disseminate Islam to the local population, utilizing various approaches such as Sufism and socio-cultural engagement.<sup>6</sup> This organized movement led by Sunan Ampel and his disciples became known as the Wali Songo, or the Nine Saints.<sup>7</sup>

Some of Sunan Ampel's sons and disciples included Raden Paku (Sunan Giri) in Gresik, Raden Qosim (Sunan Drajat) in Lamongan, Raden Makhdum Ibrahim (Sunan Bonang) in Tuban, and Raden Jin Bun (Raden Patah) in Glagah Wangi. Among them, Sunan Bonang played a prominent role and had a disciple named Sunan Kalijaga, also known as Raden Said, who was the son of the Tuban Regent. Sunan Kalijaga, under the guidance of Sunan Bonang, became one of the most influential saints in Central Java. He was recognized for his adeptness in promoting Islam through cultural means in Demak, such as Wayang Kulit (shadow puppetry), the use of the *bedug* (a large drum) to call people to prayer, and the incorporation of Javanese poetic verses (*syair*) into the message. Sunan Kalijaga's approach to Islamization was marked by dialogue with existing cultural practices and religious traditions.<sup>8</sup> He was a scholar and saint who did not seek to obliterate established customs and culture but rather to enrich and infuse them with Islamic values. This approach later became known as syncretism or "*pribumisasi*," according to the account of Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid).<sup>9</sup>

The Demak Sultanate served as the epicenter of Islamic teachings during its peak. The policies and practices of the sultanate served as a model for the entire Muslim community during that era. However, following the death of Sultan Trenggono, the third ruler of the Demak Sultanate, the kingdom faced internal turmoil and a power struggle among his successors, Arya Penangsang and Sunan Prawata, which marked the tragic conclusion of Demak's history. After the fall of Demak, the Pajang Sultanate took its place, with Sultan Hadiwijaya ascending the throne. This transition also entailed a shift in the character of Islamic teachings, aligning more closely with the preferences of the Pajang Sultanate.

Nonetheless, the Pajang Sultanate's reign was relatively short-lived, eventually giving way to the Mataram Islamic Kingdom. This kingdom was led by Sutawijaya, also known as Panembahan Senopati, the adopted son of Hadiwijaya. The Mataram Kingdom represented the final chapter in the sequence of Javanese ruling kingdoms, and the transition of power was accompanied by a corresponding shift in the form of Islam practiced by the Javanese populace. With the passing of Panembahan Senopati,

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<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Irfan Riyadi, *Transformasi Sufisme Islam Dari Demak ke Mataram* (Yogyakarta: UINSUKA, 2015), hlm, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Asyari, Muchamad Munawir, Erik Aditia Ismaya, and Muhammad Noor Ahsin. "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Karakter Dalam Tradisi Apitan Masyarakat Singocandi Kudus." *WASIS: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2021), 34-40.

<sup>8</sup> Soedjpto Abimanyu, *Babad Tanah Jawi*, (Jakarta: Laksana, 2014), hlm, 306.

<sup>9</sup> Supriyanto. *Dakwah Sinkretis Sunan Kalijaga*. (*Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, Vol.3 No.1 Januari-Juni 2009), hlm, 10-19.

he was succeeded by his son, Pangeran Jolang, who continued his father's expansion efforts and the development of Kota Gede. Following him, the throne was assumed by Senopati's grandson, Raden Mas Rangsang, known by the title Sultan Agung Senapati Ing Alogo. Sultan Agung held a position of immense importance in the realm of Mataram, not only as a great ruler but also as a figure of virtue, deep religiosity, and literary prowess, particularly in the domain of religious literature, including Sufi teachings, known as "suluk." Suluk was a form of Javanese literature infused with Islamic spirituality and Sufi wisdom.<sup>10</sup>

During Sultan Agung's rule, there was a significant shift in the approach to upholding Islam. Unlike the initial stages of Islamic propagation, Sultan Agung introduced a concept that merged three religions into a single framework. These three religions referred to the amalgamation of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, commonly known as syncretism. Sultan Agung's approach markedly differed from that of the early Islamic propagators. At this point, it becomes apparent that Islamic teachings in Java underwent a substantial transformation, adopting a form of Javanese-Islamic syncretism. Many pre-Islamic traditions were revived during Sultan Agung's reign. These included the construction of the Imogiri cemetery on a mountain, where the belief held that those interred there were descendants of deities.<sup>11</sup> This practice involved a deep belief in supernatural powers that protected the Mataram kingdom, accompanied by various ritual ceremonies, such as the Larung Saji to the South Sea, seeking protection from Nyai Roro Kidul, the ruler of the South Sea, Merapi and Mount Lawu.<sup>12</sup>

Moving forward, between 1726 and 1749 AD, the socio-cultural and literary life in Java continued to flourish, influenced by Sufism and Islam. During this period, Queen Pakubowono, the grandmother of King Pakubuwono II, played a substantial role in the Islamization of Java. She was a prominent figure among the royal literati in Kartasura, known for her works inspired by Islam, as well as being a pious Sufi, an expert in occult sciences, and a politically influential personality. Syncretism from that era can be observed in the "suluk garwa kancana," a work composed in 1730 by Queen Pakubowono. This work drew inspiration from Sufi Islamic teachings, advising rulers not to become excessively engrossed in the praises of their subjects or the people within the palace. In addition to composing suluk, Queen Pakubowono also restructured the narratives of Yusuf and Sultan Iskandar. Similar to Sultan Agung's era a century before, in 1726 AD, efforts were made to emphasize the Islamic character of Kartasura under the reign of King Pakubuwono II. It is noted that a month after King Pakubuwono II's official coronation, the kingdom directly organized the coronation and declared that henceforth, all Kartasura residents were to diligently attend Friday

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<sup>10</sup> Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawulo Gusti: Pantheisme dan Monisme Dalam Sastra Suluk Jawa* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1990), hlm.35.

<sup>11</sup> Laporan Penelitian: Kekunaan Di Bayat Klaten (Yogyakarta: Fakultas Sastra Budaya UGM, 1974), hlm, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Usamah. *Transformasi Islam dari Demak Hingga Mataram*. (Surabaya: Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, 2019), hlm, 24 – 30.

prayers at the mosque, unless they had valid reasons to refrain. King Pakubuwono II stated that the failure to establish these prayers would make the palace more vulnerable to enemy attacks.

The introduction of Islamic traditions had already commenced during the Kartasura era, including pilgrimages to tombs, grand Mawlid celebrations in honor of the Prophet Muhammad (Mauludan), and the recitation of the Quran. The Quranic recitation was introduced through the familiarization of the "Usulbiyah" book by Queen Pakubowono. The community at that time had been educated to read the Usulbiyah, and to boost interest in reading, Queen Pakubowono declared that the rewards for rewriting its verses were equal to those of reciting the Quran. She further asserted that the book was protected by God and 7,700 angels, guarding it against evil, sorcery, and offering solutions to difficulties. It was believed that a non-believer who possessed the book would convert to Islam. Those who read it aloud would receive rewards and honor, guaranteeing their entry into heaven. If an illiterate person recited it, they would become educated and gain comprehensive knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

Syncretism in Islamic traditions during the Mataram era is still evident today. One such tradition is the grand harvest festival, which originated during the Mataram Kingdom, and the Catri, which evolved from the Majapahit period, eventually becoming the *Apitan* tradition in the 20th century. The *Apitan* ceremony is celebrated in various regions of Central Java, particularly in Grobogan. Grobogan itself has been profoundly influenced socially, religiously, culturally, and economically by the Demak, Pajang, and Mataram Kingdoms, as a significant portion of Grobogan was under the jurisdiction of Demak and Pajang. Even during the Pajang era, Grobogan was associated with the royal family of Ki Ageng Sela, particularly Ki Ageng Enis, Ki Ageng Pemanahan, and Ki Panjawi, who had strong family ties with Raden Bagus, the adopted son of Sultan Pajang Hadiwijaya. Additionally, during the reign of Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma (1613-1645), Grobogan, Pati, Santenan, Sela, Jipang, Blora, Warung, and Demak fell under the rule of the Mataram Kingdom, with T. Mangunoneng serving as the regent. This historical data demonstrates the factual origins of the culture present in Grobogan today.<sup>14</sup>

Based on the findings of the researcher's interviews with the village head, it has been ascertained that the *Apitan* ceremony's funding is derived from two primary sources. The first source originates from the village budget, while the second source entails mandatory contributions collected collectively from the community.<sup>15</sup> The Grobogan government's active engagement in preserving the *Apitan* tradition is exemplified by the compulsory participation of the village heads within the sub-

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<sup>13</sup> Ricklefs, M. C. (1964). *Mystic synthesis in Java (A history of Islamization the Fourteenth to Nineteenth Century)*. The Free Press 1964, hlm, 30 – 40.

<sup>14</sup><https://www.grobogan.go.id/profil/sejarah/grobogan-pada-masa-mataram-kartosuro-surakarta>.

<sup>15</sup> Sriyanto, Mr, Edi Kurniawan, and Halim Sukma Aji. "Local wisdom of Kandri Village as a form of Environmental Conservation." In *International Conference on Rural Studies in Asia (ICoRSIA 2018)*, pp. 182-184. Atlantis Press, 2019.

district. This participation involves them taking turns to attend the *Apitan* ceremony in various hamlets, despite differences in the chosen days for the ceremony's implementation among different villages.

In addition to receiving support from the local government, the community demonstrates strong endorsement for the implementation of the *Apitan* Ceremony in Gaji Village. This endorsement is particularly evident among religious leaders or village elders who believe that the *Apitan* ceremony facilitates the clerics' ability to convey their teachings to the entire community. In Gaji Village, *Apitan* is not solely considered an inherited cultural tradition but is also perceived as a platform for universal social interaction, fostering connections within the community, between the community and village religious leaders (clerics), and between the community and village authorities.

The *Apitan* tradition in Grobogan, exemplified by the 2019 *Apitan* ceremony, consists of several integral components. Firstly, the "Gugur Gunung" or "Mountain Descending" ritual involves a comprehensive cleaning of the village area, led by the village head and carried out collectively by male community members. Typically, women are responsible for preparing local cuisine to be served following the ritual. The second element, "Manakiban," brings the village residents together for a communal gathering at local mosques one day before the *Apitan* ceremony. During this event, a religious leader or "Kiai" presides over recitations and prayers dedicated to deceased relatives, Islamic scholars, and village leaders. The third component, the "Qosidahan/Sholawatan Gathering," primarily involves women in the village congregating at the mosque, bringing various light snacks that are exchanged among participants. The occasion is characterized by supplications to Allah and praises for the great prophet Muhammad. The fourth element is the "Kirab/Arakan," where community members participate by parading various agricultural products, accompanied by tambourines and drum bands. This procession typically includes students from religious schools (madrasah) guided by their teachers and adults. Along the route, community members prepare and distribute food and drinks to participants free of charge. On the concluding day of the *Apitan* ceremony, the entire community gathers either at the village head's residence or the village hall, in the fifth component known as "Pengajian." Often, before the puppet show (wayang), an Islamic scholar or "Ulama" delivers a religious lecture. Traditional local cuisine is also offered during this event. Lastly, the sixth and final element is the "Wayangan" or "Puppet Show," a traditional art form conducted by a puppeteer, or "*dalang*," engaging in dialogues with puppet characters. This performance is typically accompanied by a gamelan orchestra and female singers (*sinden*). The audience observes the puppet show from behind a screen (*kelir*). The wayang show serves as the climax of the *Apitan* ceremony and often incorporates meaningful messages and advice through Javanese dialogues, portraying characters from the Mahabharata, Krishna's stories, and the Ramayana.

These elements collectively form the rich and vibrant tapestry of the Apitan tradition in Grobogan, reflecting the community's cultural and religious heritage.<sup>16</sup>

The *Apitan* tradition in Grobogan is characterized by several fundamental values that have played a pivotal role in shaping the community's cultural and religious identity. First and foremost is the principle of moderation in religious genealogy, reflecting the community's open-minded and adaptable nature towards social, religious, and cultural changes from the 14th to the 20th century. This moderation has allowed for tolerance and acceptance of various beliefs and practices. Secondly, there is a strong commitment to the preservation of Islamic culture, emphasizing its integral role in the lives of the Grobogan community. This commitment stems from the belief that maintaining these cultural practices is essential for the well-being and unity of the people. Lastly, the community's approach to the *Apitan* tradition is characterized by a collective and inclusive social decision-making process. This decision-making reflects the importance of consensus and cooperation among the people, ensuring that the *Apitan* tradition remains a cherished and meaningful aspect of their lives.

Historically, the people of Java have exhibited an adaptable, amicable, and open-minded disposition, a characteristic that paved the way for the peaceful Islamization process led by the ulama (Islamic scholars) and the Wali Songo (nine Islamic saints). The introduction of Islam in Grobogan, which began during the late Majapahit period, was gradual and peaceful. The ulama did not immediately impose Islamic practices on Java, and changes occurred progressively. The ulama also did not completely ban practices that contradicted Islamic teachings, such as the creation of offerings, traditional dances, or the burning of incense to summon or ward off supernatural entities. In addition to tolerating the customs of Muslims who still retained Hindu-Buddhist legacies, the ulama respected the presence of those with non-Islamic beliefs, i.e., indigenous beliefs.<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, individuals who firmly adhered to Javanese beliefs willingly accepted and allowed Muslims to practice their faith. These principles have persisted from generation to generation, fostering a culture of tolerance toward cultural, belief, or social changes in Grobogan. The *Apitan* is seen by the Grobogan people as a Javanese tradition that does not conflict with Islam. Instead, it is viewed as a tradition that aligns with Islamic values. The majority of Muslims accept its existence, and the non-Muslim community has shown tolerance by actively participating in various *Apitan* events over the years.<sup>18</sup>

Culture in the heart of Grobogan's community is analogous to salt in a vegetable dish, with every facet of life accompanied by specific customs and traditions.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview: Mr. Teguh Raharjo, leader of Gaji village, Monday 8 January 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Nikmah, Faridhatun. "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Karakter dalam Tradisi Apitan di Desa Serangan, Kecamatan Bonang, Kabupaten Demak." *Handep: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Budaya* 3, no. 2 (2020): 215-232.

<sup>18</sup> Interview: Mr. Sugeng, Kiai of Pesantren An-nur, Ketua RT 09/02 and teacher of Madrasah Al-Hidayah Gaji. Sunday 20 February 2021.

The life journey of individuals in Grobogan, from their time in the womb to their eventual passing, is intricately linked to numerous traditions and cultural practices. As long as the village cleric still encourages by saying, "*monggo lakonono*" (please proceed), these traditions endure because they are believed to hold intrinsic value or bring about positive influences when carried out. These traditions are not merely viewed as cultural practices but are considered to have a profound influence on the well-being of individuals and the broader universe.<sup>19</sup>

The results of interviews with prominent figures and religious leaders in Grobogan reveal that the culture and customs in Grobogan are highly significant. The local culture is preserved, and its values are practiced. The commitment of the entire community is founded on the belief that ceremonies dedicated to God bring inner peace to the soul and protect humans from harm. Another reason for the importance of culture in Grobogan is that culture serves as a means, outside of prayer, for praising, praying, and hoping to God.

Grobogan is one of the diverse regions in Central Java, where the process of Islamization has been ongoing since the late Majapahit era up to the present day. Interviews related to the agreement and disagreement of the people regarding the *Apitan* are as follows: "From my childhood until now, over 80 years of age, from the colonial period to independence, I have never seen the Muslim community lacking enthusiasm for new things, except when it relates to dark arts and criminal activities. When I was young, around 25-35 years old, I worked under Mr. Lurah Kholil, and I know very well how community organizations functioned post-independence. Especially *Apitan*, the majority of Grobogan's population are farmers, and *Apitan* is a form of thanksgiving and alms-giving to the land, so there is no one who is not enthusiastic about it."<sup>20</sup> The reality of farmers hoping for fertile land, Muslims always relying on hope and gratitude to Allah, and culture as a series of activities repeated from decade to decade create interconnected relationships. This is the basis for the acceptance of the *Apitan* culture among the majority of Muslims in Grobogan".

## ISLAM AND JAVANESE CULTURE

Culture, as a result of interaction, becomes a shared agreement within a community. Cultural interaction, including acculturation and assimilation, can take place between individuals or groups.<sup>21</sup> At the individual level, the interaction process, often in the form of communication, leads to a shared agreement that is collectively adopted. Communication and interaction intertwine to create collective culture, known as collective culture. This process can take place in a specific area, leading to what is

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<sup>19</sup> Interview: Mr. Suyudi, Kiai of the Village and Chairman of Musholla Al-Ikhlâs, Monday 21 February 2021

<sup>20</sup> Interview: Mr Sarwi "Figure of Gaji's village", Monday, 21 February 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Widianâ, N. Akulturasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal Dalam Tradisi Nyumpet di Desa Sekuro, Kecamatan Mlonggo, Kabupaten Jepara, (*Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 2015), 291-294.

known as local culture. *Apitan* falls under the category of local culture in the Grobogan region. *Apitan* emerged as a shared agreement between ulama, the government, and the community, and its realization has experienced social-religious dynamics in accordance with the development of knowledge and the people's conditions.<sup>22</sup>

In the period from 1950 to the late 2000s, customs such as the "*ledek*" (female dance), the tradition of making offerings, and the practice of hanging "*ketupat lepet*" (rice cakes) on house doors for deceased family spirits were still prevalent. However, as the community has become predominantly *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) and knowledge has advanced, these practices have changed. For instance, offerings have evolved into "*bancakan*" and thanksgiving ceremonies, "*ledek*" has been replaced by "*kasidahan*" (religious singing). These rituals, although rooted in Javanese beliefs, have taken on Islamic content. The openness of Grobogan's people has played a significant role in facilitating the process of Islamization through the methods of acculturation and assimilation of culture. Gradually, the community transformed, shifting from Javanese values to Islamic values. The *Apitan* tradition itself has experienced social-religious changes from the late 16th century to the present.<sup>23</sup>

The presence of numerous local pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Grobogan has given rise to many ulama (Islamic scholars) and santri who integrate into all elements of society and governance. This significant Muslim influence reflects the commitment of Muslims and ulama to uphold the principle of monotheism (Tauhid) in Grobogan. The majority of the population played a vital role in shaping the culture. The *Apitan* tradition has roots in the Majapahit Kingdom, originally known as "*caitra*," representing the kingdom's accountability ceremony to the people. Over time, it underwent a cultural syncretism transformation into the "*sedekah bumi*" during the Islamic Mataram Kingdom under the leadership of Sultan Agung and was also influenced by the Islamic Demak Kingdom. Modern ulama continued the spread of Islam and the alteration of community practices that contradicted Islamic values through cultural methods and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge across Grobogan. An interview with a local ulama in Gaji Village about the role of Muslims in the content and preservation of *Apitan* is as follows: "The big pesantren (Islamic boarding school) will always have many santri. Santri who are considered to have sufficient knowledge of Islam will, after graduation, be sent back to their hometowns. Some are granted authority by the Kiai (Islamic scholars) to reside in specific villages outside their domicile. After Indonesia's independence, the people in Grobogan were not all Muslims as they are now. In the past, people were Muslims only in name; they did not know how to pray, recite praises, or even study the Quran, except for their

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<sup>22</sup> Zulaeha, Ida, Lulu April Farida, and Fathur Rokhman. "Phonological and Lexical Shifts Javanese Dialect in Diachronic Studies." In *1st Progress in Social Science, Humanities and Education Research Symposium (PSSHERS 2019)*, pp. 1137-1144. Atlantis Press, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Interview: Mr. Sugeng, Kiai of Pesantren An-Nur, RT 09/02 and teacher in Madrasah Al-Hidayah Gaji", Sunday 20 February 2021.

identity cards. The presence of many local Islamic pesantren was the reason behind Islam spreading through santri. *Apitan* is one way of proselytizing."<sup>24</sup>

## IMPACTS OF *APITAN* IN GROBOGAN

*Apitan* serves as a means of "*ukhuwah Islamiyah*" (Islamic brotherhood). In the "*Gugur Gunung*" event (cleaning the village), the entire community, including religious leaders, village officials, and the general population, participates in communal labor. This event instills a strong commitment in the community to take part. Usually, women prepare various foods and drinks to serve. According to interviews conducted by the researcher with village residents, individuals are acutely aware of the importance of their participation in the "*Gugur Gunung*" event. The enthusiasm of the community for this tradition stems from their love for their hometown (environment) and the desire to foster camaraderie. Not all residents of Gaji Village have professions in their hometown, as some are migrants or young people who received education outside the area. *Apitan* brings these people together with their relatives, old friends, or even newcomers they haven't had a chance to meet.<sup>25</sup>

*Apitan* nurtures the practice of "*musyawarah ulil amri*" (consultation among community leaders). The *Apitan* culture demonstrates the unity of the community in adhering to the ulama's religious opinions and the government's regulations. This unity sets an example for Muslims from other regions to engage in consultation in various aspects. The *Apitan* tradition represents an ongoing means of Islamization, with each event carrying Islamic values. The widespread enthusiasm for *Apitan* is also felt by non-Muslims who witness or participate in the event. It is precisely the concept of cultural proselytization that is more appealing to follow. The peaceful atmosphere of *Apitan* becomes a unique feature for non-Muslims to join the tradition. They feel comfortable interacting with Muslims during the cultural event, and though they may not immediately feel compelled to study Islam in depth, they gradually become more interested.

It serves as a means of branding products and increasing village income. The *Apitan* tradition is generally attended by the hosting village community, neighboring village residents, and invited guests, including heads of neighboring villages. This opens up business opportunities for promoting local products to people from other areas. It also helps safeguard and preserve Islamic traditions. The commitment of Muslim families in Gaji Village to include their children in various *Apitan* events is notable. For example, they bring their children to watch and participate in Manakiban, Arakan, Pengajian, and Kasidahan. This ensures that, as children grow older, they

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

<sup>25</sup> Faridatussyifa "Masyarakat Desa Gaji, Santriwati Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum Kudus", wawancara: Selasa, 9 Januari 2021.

learn the importance of upholding Islam and creating a harmonious community. The existence of Islam in a region also depends on the security and harmony of that area.

*Apitan* is a replication of historical insights in the form of a tradition. *Apitan* represents the syncretism of Hindu-Buddhist traditions from the past into an Islamic context. During religious gatherings, village Kiai often mentions the conditions of the Muslim community in Grobogan during the time of the Islamic saints, offering detailed accounts of the names of specific areas or traditions originating from the teachings of past ulama. Children in madrasahs in Grobogan are also taught the Aswaja (Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'ah) knowledge from an early age, making topics such as the early history of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) and the key figures behind it part of the curriculum at schools. As a regional identity (Javanese culture), the implementation of *Apitan* is strongly supported by the Grobogan region. In its execution, *Apitan* receives a financial allocation from the local government. The preservation of the *Apitan* tradition in the community is expected to become a unique and iconic symbol for the Grobogan region. Furthermore, as an introduction to halal food and a halal lifestyle, the difficult circumstances and lack of education during the pre-independence period forced people to consume non-halal food, as it was more accessible. Grobogan's religious leaders at that time permitted this due to the challenging circumstances. However, following independence, these practices began to decline for two main reasons. Firstly, the increasing Islamic knowledge among the Muslim community, particularly the growing number of santri in the community, and secondly, the guidance of ulama through oral advice, the content of traditions, and exemplary behavior in daily life.

## CONCLUSION

*Apitan* has many benefits for the people of Grobogan. It strengthens brotherhood among not only Muslims but also people of different faiths. The tradition serves as a means of disseminating historical insights through community rituals. From a socioeconomic perspective, the tradition has evolved and is now used for promoting local products and introducing the concept of halal food and lifestyle. Despite the continuous annual celebration of *Apitan*, local traditions face challenges in this global era. The younger generation is becoming less involved and interested in *Apitan*. This is a contemporary challenge that needs to be addressed, and solutions must be found to preserve local traditions in a predominantly Muslim community.

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