

## SUNAN GESENG: THE CATALYST OF ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE IN 15TH CENTURY KEDIRI

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### ABSTRACT

The process of Islamization in Nusantara, especially in Java, cannot be separated from the role of Wali Songo. This role found momentum in the form of Islamic institutionalization through the Demak Sultanate, which was the first Islamic sultanate in Java. This sultanate could dominate almost all Java regions, including Kediri. Islam in Kediri was spread by Sunan Geseng, a student of Sunan Kalijaga who was given the task of spreading Islam to the southern part of Java. Researchers found that Sunan Geseng played a role in the spread of Islam in Kediri around the 15th century. In this research, researchers used historical methods with research stages, namely, heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This research aims to determine Sunan Geseng's role in spreading Islam in Kediri around the 15th century. Researchers found that Sunan Geseng traveled around the 15th century to spread Islam, including Kediri, after the Demak sultanate's founding. In Kediri, he used the Bil-hikmah da'wah method in preaching, founded a hermitage to teach Islamic teachings, and gave advice related to Islam.

**Keywords:** Islamization, Kediri, the Role of Sunan Geseng

### ABSTRAK

*Proses Islamisasi di Nusantara khususnya di Jawa tidak terlepas dari peran Wali Songo. Peran ini menemukan momentum dalam bentuk institusionalisasi Islam melalui Kesultanan Demak yang merupakan kesultanan Islam pertama di Jawa. Kesultanan ini mampu menghegemoni nyaris seluruh wilayah di Jawa termasuk Kediri. Islam di Kediri salah satunya disebarkan oleh Sunan Geseng yang merupakan murid Sunan Kalijaga yang mendapatkan tugas untuk menyebarkan agama Islam ke Pulau Jawa bagian selatan. Peneliti menemukan bahwa Sunan Geseng berperan terhadap penyebaran agama Islam di Kediri sekitar abad ke-15. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode historis dengan tahapan penelitian yaitu, heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peranan Sunan Geseng dalam penyebaran agama Islam di Kediri sekitar abad ke-15. Dari penelitian tersebut, peneliti mendapatkan hasil bahwa Sunan Geseng sekitar abad ke 15 melakukan perjalanan menyebarkan agama Islam termasuk ke Kediri setelah berdirinya kesultanan Demak. Di Kediri, beliau menggunakan metode dakwah Bil-hikmah dalam berdakwah, mendirikan padepokan untuk mengajarkan ajaran-ajaran Islam, serta memberikan nasihat-nasihat yang berhubungan dengan keislaman.*

**Kata kunci:** Islamisasi, Kediri, Peranan Sunan Geseng



## INTRODUCTION

The process of Islamization in Nusantara, especially in Java, cannot be separated from the role of the Wali Songo. The word Wali Songo can generally be interpreted as nine saints who are considered close to Allah SWT, and always worship Him, and have capacities beyond human habits. The Islamic Encyclopedia says that the Wali Songo were nine clerics who were pioneers and fighters for the spread of Islam on the island of Java. It can be concluded that the Wali Songo are nine guardians who are considered close to Allah SWT and have capacities beyond human habits, and are tasked with spreading the religion of Islam.

The role of Wali Songo in spreading Islam on the island of Java is enormous. In the 14th century, the saints preached and broadcast Islam throughout the island of Java. According to the Islamic Encyclopedia, Wali Songo was a pioneer and fighter in developing Islam on the island of Java in the 15th century. This is because Wali Songo succeeded in designing and helping to establish the first Islamic sultanate in Java, namely the Demak sultanate, so it would be easy to fight for the Islamic religion.

Kediri has been one of the essential cities in East Java since the Hindu Buddhist era with the emergence of the Kadiri Kingdom. Hindu Buddhist influence in this region persisted until the Majapahit kingdom. However, this influence faded with the arrival of Islam. It cannot be separated from the impact of the founding of the Demak Sultanate in the 15th century as the main door to the spread of Islam in Java. Therefore, under the Demak sultanate's leadership, Islam's influence increasingly spread in Java, especially Kediri, because it was not only spread by the Wali Songo but was also assisted by the Wali Songo's students.

Sunan Geseng was one of Sunan Kalijaga's students tasked with spreading Islam to the southern island of Java. Sunan Geseng was originally named Cokrojoyo; he came from the Bagelan area and worked as a palm sap tapper and farmer. He received *Karomah* after being taught the shahadat sentence by Sunan Kalijaga in the form of turning palm sugar into gold. After embracing Islam and becoming a student of Sunan Kalijaga, he helped spread Islam to several areas such as Magelang, Semarang, Purworejo, Kendal, Bantul, Kediri, Etc. Traces of Sunan Geseng's preaching in spreading Islam to these areas still exist today in the form of teachings, advice, traditions, buildings such as mosques, pavilions, and even his grave. It is proof that Sunan Geseng also played an essential role in the spread of Islam.

Several studies discuss Sunan Geseng, including research conducted by Faelasofa (2011) which examines the teachings of Sunan Geseng for the religious life of society; Ahmed (2019) menyebarkan agama Islam ke daerah-daerah tersebut masih ada sampai sekarang baik itu dalam bentuk ajaran, nasihat, tradisi, bangunan seperti masjid, pendopo, hingga makam beliau. Hal ini yang menjadi bukti bahwa Sunan Geseng juga berperan penting dalam penyebaran agama Islam.

which examines the tradition of pilgrimage to Sunan Geseng's grave in Kediri; Oktaviyani (2017) which discusses cults and blackjack traditions at Sunan Geseng's grave in Grabag District, Magelang Regency, Central Java. However, these studies have not discussed Sunan Geseng's role in spreading Islam in the Kediri area around the 15th century.

Therefore, it is considered essential to explore the role of Sunan Geseng in the spread of Islam in Kediri around the 15th century. The Islamization process in the Kediri area can be said to be successful because of several teachings brought by Sunan

Geseng and his cultural approach, which the people in Kediri have practiced to this day. It is proven that currently, there is a Majelis Dzikirurohmah, which was founded in 1999 and is part of the Sunan Geseng Foundation in Kediri, where the establishment of this foundation is written in the articles of association of the Sunan Geseng Foundation, which was ratified and established in Jakarta on 27 June 2006. From here, the researchers conducted an in-depth study regarding the role of Sunan Geseng in the spread of Islam in Kediri in the 15th century. This research will focus on three things, namely, the biography of Sunan Geseng, the role of Sunan Geseng in the spread of Islam in Kediri in the 15th century and the values of the preaching taught, as well as the continuity of the embodiment of Sunan Geseng's preaching in the practices of the Majelis Dzikirurrohmah.

### **METHOD**

The research method used by researchers in this research is the historical method. According to Garraghan, the historical method is a set of rules and principles intended to help collect historical sources, evaluate them critically, and present the results obtained in generally written form. Some stages must be carried out in historical research, which includes topic selection, source collection, verification, interpretation and historiography. Choosing a topic means finding a suitable problem that can be turned into a historical topic with a manageable discussion that can be done within the agreed time. The next stage is collecting sources, both primary and secondary sources. The data collected by researchers is in the form of primary data in the form of interviews and photographs of heritage, as well as secondary data originating from literature studies, both books and articles. The next stage is historical verification or criticism by critically examining the sources and information obtained to test the authenticity and truth of these sources using other sources obtained by the researcher. Then, the researcher carries out an interpretation in which the researcher selects various sources to analyze and combine, then interprets the facts he obtains. Moreover, the final step is historiography or writing history chronologically. After the source has been verified and the facts have been proven, it can be accounted for in written form.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Biography of Cokrojoyo or Sunan Geseng**

Sunan, or what is usually referred to as a wali, is a propagator of Islam who is known to have extensive knowledge regarding Islam and miracles. Apart from that, a person called a Sunan usually has *Karomah* because of their *istiqomah* in carrying out devotion to Allah SWT. *Karamah* is a sign of righteousness from a guardian which cannot be manifested to someone fake except as a sign to someone whose confession is not valid. It is also said that *karomah* is an extraordinary matter with the concomitant recognition of its guardianship.

Sunan Geseng was one of the saints who spread Islam in Nusantara, specifically in Java. He was a student of Sunan Kalijaga, who is believed to be a descendant of King Girindrawardhana. Sunan Geseng's real name was Cokrojoyo, son of Tumenggung Wonojoyo. He was his father's successor as a Tumenggung who ruled the Bagelan area, Purworejo, under the rule of the Majapahit kingdom. Cokrojoyo is a popular leader. It can be seen from his attitude in helping the community to process agricultural products and farming methods.



Initially, Cokrojoyo was Hindu-Buddhist. However, he converted to Islam. It started with him being a coconut water seller in Central Java when Islam began to develop. One day, when Cokrojoyo sang the Macapat song, namely pucung, which was then heard by Sunan Kalijaga, who at that time was on a missionary trip to the southern and western regions of Central Java, Sunan Kalijaga intended to change the pucung song into a beautiful song with the lyrics of tauhid or Sholawat. Who speak Javanese and Arabic. After this, Cokrojoyo said two sentences of Shahadad and then decided to become a student of Sunan Kalijaga to continue his preaching to Java.

There is a myth that is often heard regarding Sunan Geseng. It was even told by Gus Nung Adikusuma, the Imam of Jama'ah Dzukurrohmah Kediri, and related to Cokrojoyo or Sunan Geseng. He said Sunan Geseng was formerly known as Cokrojoyo, he wanted to deepen his religious knowledge and was asked by Sunan Kalijaga to practice Kalimosodo, which contains the two sentences of the Creed and the Prophet's prayer. Apart from that, he was also asked to practice Asmaul Husna.

Cokrojoyo, after studying with Sunan Kalijaga, was asked to meditate for approximately three years to practice Kalimosodo in a forest. After approximately three years, Sunan Kalijaga just remembered that he had left a student who was in prayer, so he invited Sunan Giri to look for his student (Cokrojoyo). The place used as *Kholwat* turned out to be overgrown with trees, so Sunan Kalijaga burned it down. After being burned, all the plants burned except Cokrojoyo, which was still alive, but its skin was exposed to the ashes of the plants. Therefore, he had the title Sunan Geseng because his repentance was at the behest of his teacher. Furthermore, Cokrojoyo, already called Sunan Geseng, was invited together by Sunan Kalijaga to build the era of the Demak Bintoro kingdom and was tasked with being Walisongo's treasurer. Meanwhile, the village used as a place for kholwat was built into a village called Geseng Village.

The time and the place of Sunan Geseng's death is not known for sure. It gave rise to several Sunan Geseng graves in Java, such as Magelang, Bantul, Tuban, and Kediri. However, according to the results of an interview with Gus Nung, it was explained that Sunan Geseng's last stop in the spread of Islam was in the Kediri area. Meanwhile, in the Kediri area, Sunan Geseng's grave is located in Kampung Dalem, which is slightly into an alley (figure 1). In this tomb (see figure 2), there is a pavilion in the Sunan Geseng Hall, which was previously a hermitage founded by him, and this pavilion was inaugurated by the Imam of the Majelis Dzukurrohmah, namely Gus Nung Adi Kusuma, in 2011.



Figure 1. Verranda of the graveyard of Auliya' Sunan Geseng Kediri

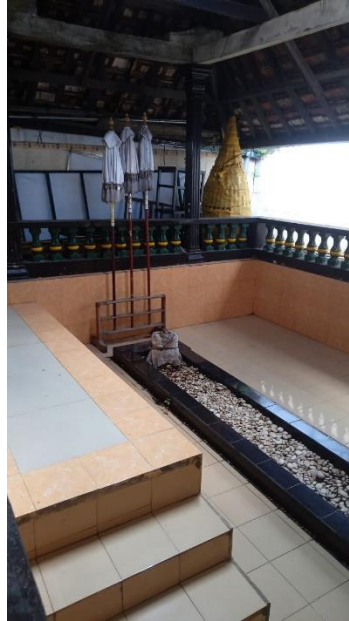


Figure 2. Sunan Geseng's tomb

### **The Role of Sunan Geseng in the Spread of Islam in Kediri and the Da'wah Values Taught**

In the 15th century, when the Demak Sultanate was established as the first sultanate in Java, the saints, assisted by their students, spread Islam in the Java area. The Guardians carried out the spread of Islam by traveling to areas in Java, including urban, rural, and mountainous areas. Sunan Geseng, who at that time was a student of Sunan Kalijaga and also included in the ranks of the Guardians, was given the task by his teacher to spread Islam to the southern island of Java. From here it turns out that he succeeded in spreading Islam in the southern part of Java and Central Java, which includes Kebumen, Magelang, Temanggung, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Pati, Tuban, and Kediri.

According to Gus Nung Adikusumo from interviews, Sunan Geseng spread Islam by wandering eastward so that he walked from the south coast to the north coast to Surabaya, then turned around to the Lamongan area and finally arrived in Kediri. Gus Nung also said that Kediri was Sunan Geseng's last stop in the spread of Islam (Ahmad, 2019). In Kediri, he is thought to have spread Islam around the 15th or 16th century. It is because when the Demak sultanate was founded, the saints began to travel to spread the religion of Islam. Therefore, in the 15th century, it was said to be the main door to the spread of Islam in Java.

In Kediri in the 15th century, it is estimated that there were already several Muslim communities. It is because a religious figure had entered Kediri to spread Islam before the Wali Songo era. However, not all Muslims remember that Kediri, before the Demak Sultanate was founded, was an essential area in the Kadiri and Majapahit kingdoms, so Hindu-Buddhist influence is still inherent. Therefore, the arrival of Sunan Geseng still had an influence on Islamization in Kediri.

In spreading Islam in Kediri, the da'wah method used by Sunan Geseng is the *Bil-hikmah da'wah* method, where in conveying the da'wah message, he looks at the situation and condition of the *mad'u* (or the person who is the target of his da'wah). Apart from that, the language used is simple and easy to understand, so his teachings



can be conveyed well. The means used by Sunan Geseng to spread Islam in Kediri was by building a hermitage or Islamic boarding school in the Kampungdalem area. Previously, the name of this Islamic boarding school was called Padepokan, so there was no particular name, considering that the current name and the previous name were very different. This pavilion was founded to teach Islamic teachings and traditions in Kediri. Now, the hermitage has become a pavilion around the Sunan Geseng Tomb area, which is still used by pilgrims and for religious activities.

From the results of the interview with Gus Nung, it is known that Sunan Geseng, while in Kediri, taught the teachings of *Sasahidan* in which there are four main teaching contents, which include: 1) Fighting for faith by pledging the two sentences of the Creed, 2.) Fighting for the spread of Islam, friendship, and helping brotherhood between believers, 3.) Practicing alms has a broad meaning: wanting to help fellow believers in the form of *Amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, 4.) Remembering death, because we are only temporary in this world, and all will die (returning to Allah SWT) by taking responsibility for all our deeds deed. *Sasahidan*'s teachings aim to convert people who are still Hindu-Buddhist to Islam. Apart from that, this teaching is almost the same as *Kalimosodo*, taught by Sunan Kalijaga.

Not only *Sasahidan*'s teachings but Sunan Geseng also spread good advice to the community, which advice is still remembered today, including:

*First*, life is like a *Wewayangan* (image). It means that life is not absolute and eternal, where this world appears before our eyes and looks beautiful. However, if you explore further, you will see the real shackles. It can be said that life is like a picture that appears before the eyes, like the work of a painter with beautiful strokes on canvas, but this is not an honest view. Therefore, if you already know the world and its beauty, try to get to know who painted it, namely Allah SWT, and do not stay calm in this unreal life.

*Second*, walking is just a blink of an eye. It means that life is not eternal and will disappear in time. With this brief moment, it is hoped that humans will become aware and remember what they have obtained as provisions for a proper and eternal life in the future.

*Third*, it runs for a while like a wayang story, in the middle of which are puppeteers (always under the supervision of Allah SWT). It means that all humans in this world do not have more power and abilities because everything they do is based on the will and power of the mastermind, namely Allah SWT. Therefore, the words and actions of humans are regulated by the puppeteer. Therefore, wayang is depicted as a human.

*Fourth*, do not feel smart if there are no benefits, do not feel rich if there is no charity, and do not feel capable if there are no good deeds in fighting for the cause of Allah SWT. It means, as a human being, do not feel clever if it is not applicable, do not feel rich if you do not give alms, and do not feel capable if you do not want to fight in the way of Allah SWT. It is because what we have, such as knowledge, wealth, and abilities, is a trust Allah SWT gives, and there will be accountability. Knowledge, wealth, and abilities will only be helpful if they are used for good or fighting in the path of Allah SWT.

*Fifth*, good, modest humans live in the world as servants because everyone will eventually die; what they bring is only charity and blessings from Allah SWT. It means that humans were created to serve horizontally and vertically, where this service is

solely intended to gain the blessing of Allah SWT. It is because humans will die in the future. This death is not the end of the human journey because, after that, the human will enter an essential and eternal journey carrying life's deeds in this world.

Sunan Geseng spread Islam to several areas so that one place and another almost had the same religious activities. Sunan Geseng's teachings in Kediri are influential in society, and there is even a council that practices the teachings that Sunan Geseng taught. This assembly is called the Majelis Dzukurrohmah, formed in 1999 and located in Kampung Dalem. They often carry out religious activities in the Sunan Geseng pavilion.

### **Continuity of the Realization of Sunan Geseng Da'wah Values in the Practices of the Majelis Dzukurrohmah**

Sunan Geseng uses simple and easy-to-understand language in conveying his preaching. Apart from that, he carried out his da'wah wisely and politely, considering that the target of his da'wah was the Javanese people. Sunan Geseng's method of preaching was almost the same as his teacher, Sunan Kalijaga. It is also shown by his preaching using shadow puppets, performing Seletan to give thanks for the presence of Allah and give alms, as well as glorifying guests who are invited to perform dhikr.

Sunan Geseng was as wise as Wali Allah in spreading Islam in that he accepted the good and noble cultures of the local community. Even though at least this does not violate Aqidah and Sharia, it is effectively used to unite. This wise method used by Sunan Geseng was put into practice by the Dzukurrohmah assembly by holding activities such as during the month of Muharom (Suro), where they performed the Dzukurrohmah Amaliyah blessing and recited the Prophet's prayers 1000 times. It was done for 40 days at the Sunan Geseng Hall in Kediri. Then, after 40 days, a khataman will be held, bringing 40 complete tumpeng, which is considered alms. It aims to glorify the guests, students, ulama', and the broader community by eating together and chanting the Prophet's prayers. After that, it will continue with recitation activities to add to the repertoire related to the Islamic religion.

There are several traditions and pilgrimages carried out by the Dzukurrohmah assembly and also the community to honor Sunan Geseng for his role in the spread of Islam in Kediri as follows:

*First*, weekly Friday night activities. This weekly Friday night activity is the only activity carried out together and routinely once a week. This activity is almost the same as recitation, where the congregation will bring water and place it at Gus Nung Adi Kusuma's small table. After that, the water brought by the congregation will be recited verses from the holy Qur'an and sentences of dhikr so that it is hoped that the water will bring blessings and goodness to water users. Therefore, this activity is carried out without any special equipment. Meanwhile, the number of congregants is usually at most 40 people.

*Second*, the monthly Wednesday Kliwon evening activity. Another monthly activity carried out by the community, especially the Majelis Dzukurrohmah, is the monthly Wednesday Kliwon evening activity, the implementation of which is almost similar to the weekly Friday evening activity. However, what differentiates the two is that there are more congregations for this monthly activity than the weekly one.

*Third*, prayers for the month of Muharram, Ramadhan, and before the Prophet's birthday. This Sholawatan activity is almost the same as weekly and monthly activities in which the activities consist of reading verses from the holy Qur'an, Dizkir, and



Sholawatan so that it will provide goodness and blessings to those who read it, listen to it, or practice it. Apart from that, the equipment used is almost the same, namely using water, except there are additions such as perfume, which will also be placed in front of the recitation leader.

*Fourth, Khataman.* *Khataman* is the culmination of the above activities held every third of the month, where the Khataman has many congregations, up to more than 100 people. There is also more equipment to carry out this activity than the previous activity. The leading equipment is a mountain made from harvested vegetables and other plants accompanied by Apem cake. This harvest mountain expresses gratitude to Allah SWT for the blessings given through the earth's produce. Meanwhile, the mountains containing the Apem cake are a manifestation of a profound apology for the mistakes that have been made. At the end of the activity, the congregation will fight over this mountain. Apart from the Gunungan, in this Khataman activity, there is also tumpeng, which is distributed to the congregation as food. Apart from the tumpeng provided, the congregation brought their tumpeng and gathered it with other Tumpeng. Tumpeng was held as a form of equality because the congregation who consumed tumpeng came from various levels of society. However, consuming this tumpeng means that they come from the same or even position. The Tumpeng that has been collected will be distributed when the congregation has fought over the mountains.

*Fifth, Siraman.* *Siraman* is an annual activity held at Sunan Geseng's grave. This activity is held around the 10th of Muharram. There are also quite a lot of followers of this Siraman activity. Meanwhile, the only equipment needed is perfume, bottled water, and a cone. There is equipment that is characteristic of this activity, namely a large barrel filled with flowers, fragrance, and water, where the water and fragrance are poured over the heads of the congregation at the end of the event. This watering is done with the aim of cleansing and purifying oneself from all sins. After watering, the committee will give two sticks of turmeric and a coconut leaf to achieve the congregation's wishes.

*Sixth, haul Sunan Geseng.* Many congregations attended the Sunan Geseng haul activity, and the number was equivalent to the Khataman activity. The activity is almost the same as the Khataman activity in which there are Gunungan and Tumpeng; only the Gunungan activity is filled with Apem cake. The meaning of this mountain of Apem cake is an apology to Allah SWT so that all sins committed will be forgiven. Apart from that, the equipment inside is the same as the Khataman; the congregation brings water and perfume.

Some activities above are held for individual purposes, and some are collective. If the activity is because someone wants to ask for safety, then that person only gives tumpeng, which will later be distributed to the surrounding community. Meanwhile, if it is for collective purposes, the equipment used in each activity at the Sunan Geseng tomb is almost the same, and perhaps there are only a few activities that contain the same equipment.

## CONCLUSION

Sunan Geseng was one of the saints who spread Islam in Nusantara, specifically in Java. He was a student of Sunan Kalijaga, who is believed to be a descendant of King Girindrawardhana. While studying, he was asked to perform *Kholwat* and broadcast



Kalimosodo or two sentences of the shahada and sholawat. Thus, around the 15th century, he and other Sunans began to spread Islam in the Java area, and Sunan Geseng started by walking eastwards, ending in the Kediri area. Sunan Geseng's role in spreading Islam in Kediri is by spreading the Sasahidan teachings, which consist of 4 main teachings, and providing advice in which good values are taught. In spreading Islam in Kediri, Sunan Geseng used the Bil-Hihmah preaching method and simple and easy-to-understand language to convey his preaching. In order to respect Sunan Geseng's role in the spread of Islam in Kediri, a Majelis Dzikirurohmah was established to organize pilgrimages and traditions at Sunan Geseng's grave in Kampungdalem, Kediri City. The Majelis Dikrurrohman practices the wise method used by Sunan Geseng, namely by not rejecting the noble cultures of the local community. So, it can be said that the embodiment of Sunan Geseng's da'wah values has continued in the practice of the Dzikirurohmah.

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