

Indonesia: The Sekaten Festival



The Sekaten Festival of Yogyakarta began as an Islamic religious activity held from 5th to 15th of the Javanese month Mulud, in the regency of Demak Bintoro several centuries ago. Its initial purpose was to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The religious leaders (wali) held a meeting in Masjid Agung Demak, a great mosque built by Raden Patah, the adipati (regent) of Demak Bintoro regency in the year of 1939 aka or 1477 AD. They decided to improve the promulgation of Islam through celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad for seven days. The Demak Bintoro regency eventually became an Islamic Kingdom and Raden Patah was crowned as the first Sultan.

The religious leaders involved Hinduism because at that time there were still many people who were Hindu-Buddhist, the religion professed by most Majapahit people. Majapahit was the last Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom in Java. Moslem leaders realised that people of Majapahit were still very fond of Hindu-Javanese traditional arts such as the gamelan orchestra and Hindu rituals. They decided to use the Javanese musical instrument to celebrate the Prophet's birthday, so gamelan were placed in the yard of the Great Mosque.

Hearing the gamelan orchestra, people from all directions came to the town centre to enjoy the music. This religious activity was called Sekaten, and was then continued by the Islamic Kingdom of Mataram, situated in the territory now known as Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta or Yogyakarta Special Region. Through the Sekaten, religious leaders introduced Islam to the visitors. Whenever people entered the mosque porch, they were required to pronounce a confession of creed called syahadat, syahadatain or sahadat kalimah loro. In the Great Mosque yard they were told to wash their hands, faces and feet with water from the pond outside. Nowadays, the Sekaten tradition has developed into a traditional festival involving thousands of people, and both domestic and foreign tourists. People believe that the term Sekaten originated from Syahadatain.

The festival has become the pride of the Sultan and people of Yogyakarta, for it makes a meaningful contribution to the feature of the Special Region as a unique cultural tourism centre.

[end]

More pictures:



THE SEKATEN FESTIVAL - This festival is open to the public. Thousands of people watch the procession held at midnight



THE GUNUNGAN - Mountain-shaped offerings of cooked rice, fruits, vegetables, peanuts, red paper, eggs and other delicacies. This offering symbolizes the prosperity of the Mataram's land, and is carried by royal servants from the Sultan's Palace to the Great Mosque on the 12th of the Javanese month Mulud, the climax of the Sekaten Festival.

Photo: Disparda DIY



THE PALACE GUARDS - Wearing magnificent uniforms, the palace guards escort the procession heading for the Great Mosque.

Photo: Disparda DIY



THE ROYAL SERVANTS - The royal servants (abdi dalem) march in procession on the first day of the Sekaten Festival, at mid night. The procession leaves the Pancaniti Hall of the Sultan's Palace for the Great Mosque.

Photo: Disparda DIY