

# Islam and Local Culturation in the Cukur Gembel Tradition of Dieng, Wonosobo

**Siswoyo Aris Munandar**

STAI Sadra, Jakarta

Email: [siswoyoaris31@gmail.com](mailto:siswoyoaris31@gmail.com)

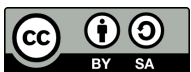
**Muhammad Fahrurrozi**

Department of Aqidah and Philosophy, Al-Azhar University, Cairo

## Abstract

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation with rich cultural diversity, one example being the *ruwatan cukur gembal* (dreadlocks shaving ritual) in Dieng Village, Wonosobo Regency. Children with dreadlocks are regarded as special, and their hair is not cut until they or their parents request it, often after fulfilling unusual wishes such as a basket of eggs, a mouse, or traditional food. This study examines the tradition through cultural and Islamic perspectives using a case study approach, with data gathered from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Findings show that the ritual has deep historical roots linked to Kyai Kolo Dete and Nyai Roro Kidul. Beyond being a cultural event, it incorporates religious aspects such as Qur'anic recitations, prayers, and the Javanese hymn *Kidung Rumekso Ing Wengi*, attributed to Sunan Kalijaga. The ceremony reflects tolerance, spirituality, and communal harmony, while in an Islamic framework it promotes togetherness, respect for parents, and the significance of prayer. As the tradition continues to evolve, preserving it in harmony with Islamic values is crucial. Thus, the *cukur gembal* ritual serves not only as a marker of cultural identity but also as a medium for reinforcing Islamic values within the community.

**Keywords:** Islam and Culture, Dreadlocks (*cukur gembal*), Wonosobo, Kiai Kolodate, Indigenous People of Southeast Asia



## Introduction

The history of Islam's spread in Indonesia, particularly in Java, reflects a pattern of peaceful integration with local beliefs such as animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Paisun, 2010). This process was facilitated by Islam's flexibility in accommodating local traditions while providing comprehensive guidance for life (Dofari, 2018). Consequently, Islam spread to many parts of the archipelago in a relatively harmonious manner, with little tension or conflict. It was easily accepted as a religion of peace, even though people at the time already practiced animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The spread of Islam also produced distinctive local expressions and variants, highlighting that Islam in Indonesia has never been monolithic (Widiana, 2015).

According to Nurcholish Madjid (1988:70), cited in Agus's *Indonesian Islamic Studies*, Islam's primary appeal was psychological, offering a radically egalitarian outlook and a scientific spirit that made it a revolutionary concept. Preachers such as the Walisongo often employed cultural approaches to spread Islam. In Java, for example, the Nyadran ritual held during Sha'ban involves communal gatherings where families host visitors openly. Attendees come not only from local villages but also from surrounding areas, arriving in pickup trucks, private cars, and motorcycles. Families bring offerings in *tenong* filled with food. The tradition begins with cleaning ancestral graves (*besik*) and praying for the deceased, followed by family reunions (Dofari, 2018).

Similarly, in the Dieng plateau of Wonosobo, which borders Banjarnegara, local traditions remain closely tied to history. Dieng was once the seat of early Hindu kingdoms before the 9th century and served as a sacred site for meditation (*topo broto*) due to its cool climate, serene landscape, and spiritual atmosphere. Kings, including Eyang Loano, were said to have meditated there. Alongside its historical significance, Dieng is home to a unique living tradition: the dreadlocks-cutting ritual (*cukur gimbal*). This tradition, rich in cultural and religious meaning, continues to be preserved and invites further exploration of its cultural and Islamic values.

Another term for cutting dreadlocks is *ruwatan*. The word *ruwatan* derives from *ruwat* or *mangruwat*, meaning to neutralize, remove curses, eliminate misfortune, blemishes, and so forth. According to a legend preserved in the Dieng community and its surroundings, dreadlocked children were entrusted to Kyai Kolo Dete, a courtier during the 14th-century Islamic Mataram period (Nisa, 2020). Together with Kyai Walid and Kyai Karim, Kyai Kolo Dete was assigned by the Kingdom of Mataram to establish governance in the Wonosobo and Banjarnegara regions. While Kyai Walid and Kyai Karim served in Wonosobo, Kyai Kolo Dete was responsible for the Dieng plateau and its surrounding areas, including Pejawaran Village, which remains within the Dieng territory. Upon arriving in Dieng, Kyai Kolo Dete and his wife, Ni Roro Rence, are said to have received a revelation from the Queen of the South Coast. The couple was tasked with guiding the Dieng community toward prosperity, with the presence of dreadlocked children considered a symbolic marker of communal welfare (Widiana, 2015).

In addition, several books and studies have discussed the Ruwatan tradition. For instance, the *Panduan Ruwatan Cukur Rambut Gembel Pekan Budaya Dieng 2005*, published by the Sub-Directorate of Culture, provides guidelines for conducting the ritual during Dieng Cultural Week. This book also elaborates on the offerings used in the ceremony and their symbolic meanings. However, it mainly focuses on the general implementation of the ritual, whereas the present research aims to explore the deeper significance behind the practice. Moreover, Eki Satria's (2017) article, *Tradisi Ruwatan Anak Gembal di Dieng*, examines the Ruwatan tradition as a cultural practice that should be preserved and promoted as a cultural tourism asset. His study highlights the belief that Ruwatan brings blessings and prosperity to both the village and the child, while also generating economic benefits by attracting local and international tourists.

Furthermore, research conducted by Rizky Nailatul Fauni and Trisna Sukmayadi emphasizes how the values of local wisdom embedded in the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF)—which features cultural parades, the shaving of dreadlocked children, blessings, lantern festivals, and jazz performances—contribute to national character building. The festival fosters values such as community care, environmental awareness, mutual cooperation, patriotism, creativity, independence, and tolerance. Nevertheless, despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have not addressed the Ruwatan ritual from the perspective of Islam and local cultural acculturation. Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the Islamic values embedded within the *ruwatan cukur gembal* tradition in Dieng, Wonosobo.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach with data collected through direct observation of the shaving ritual, in-depth interviews with community leaders, parents of dreadlocked children, and religious figures, as well as document analysis of literature and cultural archives. The findings show that the *cukur gembal* tradition is not in conflict with Islam; rather, it represents a local expression that has been shaped by a process of Islamization. The ritual functions as a form of cultural da'wah, connecting Islamic teachings with the lived experiences and heritage of the Dieng community.

From a cultural perspective, the tradition highlights how local beliefs and practices can be harmonized with Islamic values through rituals that include prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and communal gatherings. Sociologically, it illustrates that local traditions such as *cukur gembal* not only survive but also adapt as expressions of a contextually rooted Islamic identity. This underscores the importance of moderate and contextual approaches in interpreting the diversity of Islamic practices in Indonesia. In an era of cultural homogenization and religious purism, safeguarding local traditions that embody Islamic values is vital for preserving Indonesia's pluralism and fostering communal harmony.

## **Myth and History of Shaving Dreadlocks (*Cukur Gembel*) in Dieng**

Dieng holds a significant historical position as the former residence of archipelagic kings and the site of a Hindu kingdom prior to the 9th century. Its highland location, cool

climate, scenic beauty, and tranquil atmosphere made it a favored place for meditation (*topo broto*) by ancient rulers, including Eyang Loano. Beyond its historical value, Dieng is also recognized for preserving the unique *cukur gimbang*, which is believed to be spiritually connected to children entrusted by local ancestral figures, most notably Kiai Kolo Dete, also known as Tumenggung Kolo Dete. During the 14th-century Islamic Mataram period, Kiai Kolo Dete served as a courtier and was assigned, along with Kiai Walid and Kiai Karim, to establish governance in the Wonosobo region. He eventually settled in the Dieng Plateau with his wife, Nini Roro Rence, and is regarded as having played a key role in shaping local traditions (Nugroho, 2014).

The dual titles of *Kiai* and *Tumenggung* significantly influence historical interpretation, offering insights from different perspectives. The designation of Kolodete as *Tumenggung* suggests his noble lineage within the kingdom of his era, while the title *Kiai* reflects a close connection to the process of Islamization in Dieng. This interpretation aligns with what is recorded in the *Serat Babat Kedhu* (Salehudin et al., 2017), which explains that:

“Sunan Bonang banjur utusan santrine loro kang aran Ki Walik lan Ki Karim, kautus supaua bisa mbabad wewengkon Dieng sakkiwo tengene supaya bisa salin agama suci agamning Rasul yaiku Islam. Santri loro kui banjur lumarab tedhak saksanakbrayate tumuju ing wewengkon sakiwa tengene Dieng, kanthi nganngo saranah dakwah mawa seni budaya tari kang banjur diarani seni tari lengger, sing minangka tembung kerata basa eling ngger. Saya suwe akeh kang kesemsem marang agama anyar iki, nanging emane ana siji sing durung bisa salin agama yaiku penguwasa kahyangan Dieng kang peparab Kaladite, Mbok menawa asale saka tembung Kaladitya. Mula Kiai Karim banjur tedhak ing Dieng Bantha kawruh banjur gelem ngrasuk Islam lan peparab kiai Kaladite, nanging piyambeke banjur moksa lan ningga keppepeling sig sapa woong duwe anak rambute gimbang kuwe kudu direksa amarga bocah kuwi isih tedhak turunane Kiai Kolodete”.

It is widely believed that Kiai Kolodete was once the ruler of the Dieng Plateau in ancient times. Originally a follower of Hinduism, he later converted to Islam through the teachings of Ki Karim, a disciple of Sunan Bonang and an Islamic preacher in the Wonosobo and Dieng regions. Over time, Kolodete became known by both titles—*Tumenggung* and *Kiai*. According to the official website [visit.banjarnegararakab.go.id](http://visit.banjarnegararakab.go.id), the people of Dieng believe that dreadlocked children are spiritual gifts entrusted by Kiai Kolodete. He served as an official during the 14th-century Islamic Mataram era, tasked with establishing governance in the Dieng Plateau. Upon arriving in Dieng, Kolodete and his wife, Nini Roro Rence, are said to have received a divine revelation from the Queen of the South Coast. Their mission was to guide the community toward prosperity, symbolized by the appearance of dreadlocked children. Since then, such children have been regarded as sacred figures in the Dieng region (Zaidi et al., 2020).

The dreadlocks of these children are believed to have been inherited from their ancestor, Kiai Kolodete. It is said that he swore never to cut his hair or bathe until the village he built achieved prosperity. From then on, his descendants were believed to have dreadlocks like him. However, another version suggests that the dreadlocked children were entrusted by

Kanjeng Ratu Kidul of the South Coast. Regardless of the differing accounts of its origins, the dreadlocks ritual remains a cultural heritage rich with meaning, traditions, and ancestral values (Alhaa, 2019).

According to *The Phenomenon of the Dieng Plateau* by Dewi Liesnoor Setyowati and Puji Hardati, the dreadlocks tradition is also connected to the history of the Duke of Banjar, the forerunner of Banjarnegara Regency. The Duke of Banjar was the first duke before the Banyumas Residency area was divided into Banyumas, Cilacap, Purbalingga, and Banjarnegara. During his rule, coinciding with the Diponegoro War of 1825–1830, many saints practiced meditation, or *tirakat* and *tapa*. One of the main sites for such practices was Goa Mandala, located in Dukuh Payaman Karanggondang. This cave is considered sacred and has long required a guardian or caretaker, a role passed down from generation to generation (Arif & Faturrahman, 2013).

The tradition of dreadlocks in Dieng thus carries profound historical and cultural significance. Initially, the caretaker of the tradition was Mbah Sukmogiri, followed by Mbah Raga Jaya, and later Mbah Kuwuk. When Mbah Kuwuk became the caretaker, he himself had dreadlocks and displayed unusual behavior. Since his death, his children and descendants have preserved the dreadlocks tradition. To honor their ancestors and ward off misfortune, family members with dreadlocks undergo a ritual shaving ceremony, a practice that continues to this day.

For the people of Dieng, the phenomenon of dreadlocks often becomes a frequent topic of conversation, sometimes even turning into lively discussions in their local language. The meaning behind this tradition is deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. The ritual of shaving dreadlocks, still performed today, reflects the strong commitment of the Dieng community to preserve ancestral customs despite the challenges of globalization. Passed down through generations, the dreadlock tradition and its shaving ritual remain an integral part of community life. This demonstrates that the symbolic meaning of the ritual continues to be held in high regard. The understanding of this tradition is preserved and transmitted through cultural storytelling, which plays a crucial role in conveying its symbolic significance to future generations (Arif & Faturrahman, 2013).

From the stories mentioned above, most of the people of Dieng and Wonosobo believe that dreadlocked children are descendants of Kyai Kolo Dete and his wife, Nini Roro Rence. They are believed to have come to Dieng with the mission of guiding the community toward prosperity. The presence of dreadlocked children is regarded as a sign of welfare and prosperity for the Dieng people. Since then, dreadlocked children have been seen as symbols of prosperity in the region. The dreadlock-shaving ceremony is routinely held every year during the month of Suro, which coincides with the Islamic New Year. In addition, the ritual is also celebrated every August, serving both cultural and spiritual purposes (Wening, 2023).

This is also reinforced by the Kedu Tribe Chronicle, the contents of which are as follows:

“Sak banjure ana ing salah sijine serat babat kedhu, mertelakake, nalika jaman semana kraton Demak Bintara wiwit ngadeg adi kraton anyar nyirnakake penguwasane kraton Majapahit tumraping tanah Jawa, para wali mupakat yen kepingin kasi ngislamake wong Jawa kudu bisa ngilangake pengaruh-pengaruh Hindu salah sijine ya kangana wewengkon Dieng, lan Dieng sakkiwa tengene kudu dibabad, ora ana lia ya mung pengaruh Hindune dadi dudu alas gung liwang liwang. Sunan Bonang ngutus santri loro kang aran Ki Walik lan Ki Karim, keutus supayane bisa mbabad wewengkon Dieng sak kiwa tengene supaya bisa salin Agama suci agamaning Rasul yaiku Islam. Santri loro kui banjur lumarah tindak sak anak brayate tumuju ing sak kiwa tengene Dieng, kanthi nganggo sarana dakwah mawa seni budaya kang banjur diarani seni tari lengger, sing minangka tembung kerata basa elinga ngger, saya suewe akeh kang kasemsem marang agama anyar iki, nanging emane ana siji sing durung bisa salin agama yaiku penguasa khayangan Dieng kang peparab Kolodete, mbok menawa asalae saka tembung kaladitya. Mula Kiai Karim tindak ing Dieng Bantha kawruh banjur gelem ngrasuk Islam, lan peparah Kiai Kolodete, namung piambake banjur moksa lan ninggal kepepiling seng sapa wonge duwe anak rambute gembel kuwi kudu direksa amarga bocah kuwi isih tedhak turune Kiai Kolodete.”

In the passage that reads, “namung piambake (Kiai Kolodete) banjur moksa lan died kepepiling seng, say hello wonge duwe, anak rambute gembel kuwi kudu direksa amarga bocah kuwi isih tedhak Turune Kiai Kolodete,” it is explained that dreadlocked children are considered descendants of Kiai Kolodete, who was once a ruler of Dieng and originally a follower of Hinduism before converting to Islam through the guidance of Kiyai Karim (Prihatin, 2018). The commodification of the myth of dreadlocks can indeed serve as a means of cultural preservation while simultaneously generating economic benefits for the people of the Dieng Plateau. However, its sacredness, authenticity, and underlying meaning risk diminishing in the face of increasing market demand. For this reason, support from various stakeholders is essential to safeguard the authenticity of the dreadlock myth amid ongoing modifications and reinterpretations (Febriyanto et al., 2018).

## Procession and Procedure for *Cukur Gembel*

Although some of the processions and procedures may have changed over time, the essence of the ritual remains the same. The religious background of the community does not oppose the practice of shaving dreadlocks. Even though the majority of Dieng’s population adheres to Islam, the form of Islam practiced there is often classified as *Kejawen Islam*, which remains deeply intertwined with customs, myths, and local wisdom. Moreover, the relatively low level of formal education has shaped the mindset of people who are strongly influenced by cultural traditions. From the interaction of these various elements in the Dieng community, the dreadlock-shaving ritual has acquired a symbolic meaning that has led to the collective agreement to conduct the ritual through traditional ceremonies every time a child’s dreadlocks are cut. This reality reflects the existence of a cultural community in Dieng. Nevertheless, noble traditions and cultural heritage across the archipelago must be preserved and continuously reinterpreted (Amin, 2020).

In the past, the dreadlock *ruwatan* was a simple ritual that could be performed privately in each household without the elaborate series of ceremonies now observed at the Arjuna

Temple. Parents would merely hold a recitation gathering after fulfilling the child's specific request and provide offerings, particularly *tumpeng*, once the cutting was completed. However, since the 2000s, the ritual has transformed into an annual customary event, opened to the public, and made attractive to tourists. This traditional ceremony, known as *ruwatan*, is performed when cutting dreadlocks and involves a lengthy process. Prior to the ritual, various ceremonial items must be prepared, such as flowers, green young coconuts, and yellow young coconuts, intended to ensure the smooth running of the event for all participants. Before the ritual begins, the dreadlocked children are bathed using water drawn from seven sacred wells in Dieng (Chrisanti, 2021).

The activities are preceded by prayers at several sacred sites so that the ritual proceeds without disruption. These prayer locations include Dwarawati Temple, the Arjuna Temple complex, Sendang Maerokoco, Balai Kambang Lake, Bima Temple, Sikidang Crater, the Mandalasari Hermitage Complex, Kali Pepek, and the Dieng Cemetery. Following these rituals, a carnival is held the next day leading to the shaving site. The procession begins at the house of the traditional elders and continues to Sendang Maerokoco or Sendang Sedayu. The dreadlocked children are accompanied by elders, community leaders, traditional art associations, and local residents (Cahyono, n.d.).

Dreadlocks usually begin to grow when a child reaches the age of two, becoming thicker as they grow older. Their appearance often occurs suddenly, marked by a fever, after which the hair becomes matted and transforms into dreadlocks overnight. Even after washing, the hair does not return to its original form, and therefore a ritual ceremony is required to restore normal hair growth. The children of Dieng display various types of dreadlocks, each regarded with unique cultural significance (Damayanti, 2011).

The types of dreadlocks found among children in Dieng are diverse and carry symbolic meanings within the community. One type is *Gimbal Pari*, in which the hair grows elongated and forms small bundles resembling clusters of rice, a symbol of fertility and prosperity. Another type is *Gimbal Jatha*, characterized by a large collection of dreadlocks that remain separated rather than attached together, signifying abundance and multiplicity. *Gimbal Wedhus* refers to dreadlocks that resemble sheep's wool, reflecting softness yet density, and is often associated with the livelihood of agrarian society. Meanwhile, *Gimbal Gombak* describes dreadlocks that grow specifically at the back of the head, while *Gimbal Pethek* refers to those that appear around or above the ear area, both of which are seen as unusual growth patterns tied to mystical significance. *Gimbal Kuncung* denotes dreadlocks that grow on the crown area, slightly toward the front of the head, symbolizing centrality and prominence. Finally, *Gimbal Gelung* represents dreadlocks that clump together at the back of the head, forming a shape similar to a bun, which is often regarded as aesthetically unique and spiritually meaningful. These variations illustrate the richness of local belief and the deep cultural interpretation attached to the phenomenon of dreadlocks in Dieng.

Dreadlocks in Dieng will only be cut through a special procession known as *ruwatan*. The implementation of *ruwatan* must follow specific rules and be based on the will of the child with dreadlocks. Before the cutting procession is carried out, the child will make a

request, and this request must be fulfilled by their parents. The local community believes that if the cutting is done without the proper ceremony, without the child's consent, or if the request is not granted, the dreadlocks that have been cut will grow back.

Before undergoing this tradition, the child who is about to be *cukur gimbal* must pass through a series of ritual processions. Local people believe that dreadlocked children in Dieng are entrusted by the gods. Because they are considered as gifts from God, these children are treated differently compared to others. This special treatment often makes them more expressive, explorative, and spoiled. The climax of the ritual occurs the day before the haircut, when the child is asked to make a wish. The request can be in any form, and parents usually ask closer to the day of the ritual to anticipate the possibility of the child changing their mind.

According to *Liputan6.com*, the requests of dreadlocked children who undergo the ruwatan process vary greatly. Some ask for luxury items, others for unusual things, and many for simple wishes. For instance, Anindita Purbaningrum (6) asked for three sticks of quail egg satay and two sticks of chicken satay, but specifically wanted to buy them in front of the hospital. Laela Handayani (6) asked for a "tablet with an apple on it," which turned out to mean an iPhone. Meanwhile, Nadhira Thafana Pramarsetyo (4) only requested fried fish.

The wishes of these children are often unique and diverse, ranging from toy makeup, toy bicycles, and nail polish, to more expensive requests like cell phones, even a five-camera smartphone, or a refrigerator. There are also extraordinary requests such as asking for a snow bath. However, the child who asked for snow was not granted the wish when the haircut was performed. On the other hand, some children only requested snacks. In 2023, the dreadlock-shaving tradition reached a new milestone, with a record-breaking 15 participants. The event concluded with a procession of the handover of the MURI record.

There are also instances in which a child makes a particular request prior to the hair-cutting ritual. However, cases have been documented where, despite the request being fulfilled, the dreadlocks continued to grow. Further inquiry revealed that in one case the item was purchased using the grandmother's money rather than that of the parents. This is considered invalid because, as explained by the Head of the Dieng Technical Implementation Unit (UPT), Aryadi Darwanto, "If the request must be fulfilled by the parents, then it has to be with the parents' money. It cannot be replaced with the grandmother's money" (*Liputan6.com*).

Comparable narratives were reported by Slamet Budiono, Head of Dieng Kulon Village, Batur, Banjarnegara, who noted that certain individuals attempted to cut dreadlocks without conducting the required ritual. Moreover, these attempts were not in accordance with the wishes of the child. It is believed that when scissors are brought close to the child's head under such conditions, the child will faint, the scissors will fall spontaneously, and the parents may lose their balance (Rasyid, 2023).

According to the Assistant Stakeholder of Dieng Kulon Customs, Mbah Sumanto, children with dreadlocks (*anak gembel*) often articulate diverse and unique requests. Follow-

ing the passing of the traditional elder Mbah Naryono, Sumanto temporarily assumed the role of custodian, supported by Mbah Sumarsono. Both figures were entrusted with preserving the ritual, including overseeing the shaving of dreadlocks. It is noteworthy, however, that not all participating children originate from Dieng; several come from other regions, demonstrating the wider social recognition of the ritual.

In practice, all requests and ritual offerings are positioned beside the child undergoing the haircut. The child is seated on the mother's lap, covered by the father, and the cutting procession begins with collective prayers led by community members and family. The dreadlocks are subsequently wrapped in a shroud and either interred or preserved by the parents. Upon completion, the ritual transitions into a communal *selamatan* or feast, in which blessings are conferred upon attendees. The *selamatan* (or *kenduri*) functions as a communal prayer ritual, typically led by a religious authority such as a *kyai* or, in the village context, a *modin* (Otto Sukatno Cr, 2003). During the event, hosts customarily prepare symbolic foods including *tumpeng* rice, assorted traditional snacks, and *ingkung* chicken. Guests, upon departing, are provided with wrapped food, which in Javanese cultural terminology is regarded as a blessing (Taqwin, n.d.).

The equipment used in the *cukur gembal* procession carries both practical and symbolic functions that reflect the cultural and spiritual values of the Dieng community. Incense is considered indispensable, as its smoke symbolizes prayers rising to the divine. A water barrel, dipper, and *kembang setaman* (a mixture of flowers) are prepared for bathing the ritual participants, signifying purification before the ceremony. Scissors are employed to cut the dreadlocks, while a bowl filled with water and flowers is used to hold the shorn hair, representing the cleansing of burdens and the restoration of balance. Seven pieces of white cloth symbolize the purity of the ritual participants, while twenty-one coins serve as a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. A gold ring represents power and majesty, reinforcing the dignified nature of the ceremony. Market snacks such as *jadah*, *jenang*, red and white porridge, *wajik*, and fruits are offered as symbols of gratitude, fertility, and communal sharing. Special clothing also plays an important role: the *jarik* cloth with slope motifs embodies majesty and dignity, ensuring that the participants appear noble and honorable; male participants wear plain *beskap* shirts, usually black, along with a *blangkon*, while female participants wear *kebaya*, all of which reinforce traditional aesthetics and the solemnity of the ritual.

For families who have children with dreadlocks, it is essential to understand the established procedures. These procedures are typically learned from traditional leaders and village elders, particularly during carrying (*ngendong*) moments. In this context, carrying (*ngendong*) dreadlocked children serves not only as a means of fulfilling tradition but also as a channel through which community leaders communicate the symbolic meaning of the haircut ritual. It also functions as an important medium of learning for parents of dreadlocked children, ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed down to future generations. Similar to other traditional ceremonies, the dreadlocks haircut ritual follows specific stages, each imbued with symbolic and cultural significance. The process of this ceremony

is described as follows:

### *Carnival/Kirab*

The dreadlocked children who are to undergo the ruwatan ritual must participate in a kirab (parade), beginning at the house of the traditional leaders in Dieng Kulon Village and proceeding to the Pandawa Temple complex (Arjuna), located about one kilometer away. The kirab is carried out on foot, with a procession of people bringing offerings of gratitude, while spectators follow the group along the route toward the site of the ritual.

The series of activities begins several days before the ruwatan ceremony is held. Traditional elders first make pilgrimages to places considered sacred and collect water from seven springs on the Dieng Plateau. In total, they visit 21 sites, including the seven springs. This pilgrimage can be completed in a single day or spread across several days. Its purpose is to ask permission from the ancestors and spiritual guardians of nature so that the ritual may proceed smoothly, while also offering prayers that the ceremony will bring blessings to the child, their family, and the entire Dieng community.

On the day of the ceremony, the sequence of rituals begins in the morning. The children with dreadlocks gather at the house of the traditional elders before being led on foot in a communal procession through the village toward the Arjuna Temple complex. Accompanying the children are women carrying various food offerings, commonly known as domas, along with artistic groups and traditional elders who guide the ritual. The first stop for the procession is Medium Sedayu, a spring where the children undergo a purification ritual known as *penjamasan*. From there, the group continues to Dharmasala, where the children's attire is adjusted and prepared. Finally, the procession arrives at one of the temples within the Arjuna Temple complex, where the ritual haircut takes place.

### *Washing Hair (Keramas)*

Upon arriving at the first stop, the dreadlocked children are draped with a white scarf (mori cloth) around their necks by the adat leaders. Immediately afterward, their hair is washed. The hair-washing ritual, using well water mixed with seven types of flowers, is conducted under the guidance of the traditional leaders. The ceremony is accompanied by sacred incantations and Islamic prayers, which are recited in Javanese.

### *Welcome to the Entertainment Stage*

Following the hair-washing ritual, the dreadlocked children are led to the entertainment stage, situated not far from Sendang Sedayu. There, both the children and the thousands of spectators are treated to a series of artistic performances, including Ampyak-Ampyak Pringondhani and traditional Dieng dances.

After passing through the three preceding stages, the procession arrives at the core of the event: the cutting of dreadlocked hair, conducted directly in front of the Arjuna Temple. In this sacred space, various offerings are arranged, along with objects requested by the

children with dreadlocks. Although the ritual remains under the guidance of traditional leaders, the act of cutting the hair can be performed by anyone, including ordinary villagers and even foreign tourists who occasionally take part in the ceremony. According to Jajang Agus Sonjaya's thesis on Dieng, those believed to be favored by Grandmother Kaladete often grow dreadlocks mysteriously. These children typically express specific wishes to their parents, which must eventually be fulfilled through the hair-cutting ritual that draws the participation of many members of the community.

Before the cutting itself, the ritual leader or caretaker, usually on the day before, seeks permission from the Dieng "Mbahu Rekso"—guardian spirits believed to reside on mountain peaks, near springs, within volcanic craters, and inside temples. These spirits are said to enter the body of a chosen medium during the ceremony, enabling communication with the assembled community. Such dialogues not only address the children's requests but also extend to broader issues concerning the environment and society—for instance, the destruction of forests, the narrowing of the Serayu River, the neglect of sacred sites, or even more mundane local problems. The essence of the dreadlock-cutting ritual lies precisely here: in the transmission of moral values and social teachings delivered through the spirit's voice. The messages vary in content and meaning. For example, when a child considered unattractive requests a cap, it symbolizes his wish to grow into a pious individual and serves as a reminder to his parents to remain steadfast in their religious duties.

Once the hair has been cut, it is carefully wrapped in white *mori* cloth before being released into Telaga Warna. This final stage, known as *melrung*, is optional; immersing the cut hair into a lake is not obligatory, and each family retains the freedom to decide whether to perform it. The symbolic meaning of this act is to return to nature what was originally bestowed by it: whatever is given must ultimately be restored. Thus, the cut dreadlocks may be consigned to natural sites considered sacred, such as Telaga Warna, Telaga Balai Kambang, the Serayu River, or the slopes of Mount Sindoro, Mount Sumbing, Mount Prahau, and Mount Rogojembangan. After undergoing this complete ritual process, the child's dreadlocks are believed never to grow back (Habibi, 2023).

## **An Islamic Perspective on Local Traditions**

According to Ustadz Abdul Somad, the practice of growing dreadlocks can be related to the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In his narration, it is stated that the Prophet had long hair due to the climatic conditions in Mecca, where he lived, which required hair as a natural protection from the intense heat. Ustadz Abdul Somad explained, "The Prophet SAW, as narrated by my teacher, our shaykh used to say, experienced very hot conditions in Mecca. The Prophet's head was protected first by his hair, then by the *golansuwah* (kopyah), and finally by the *imamah* (turban)." Ustadz Somad emphasized that maintaining long and thick hair is not prohibited in Islam, provided it does not cause harm (*mudhorat*) or inconvenience to the owner. Thus, dreadlocks or long hair, as long as they do not cause damage or harm, are permissible under Islamic law.

From an Islamic perspective, the *cukur gimbal* also carries significant religious value. Islam considers hair as a part of God's grace that must be maintained and preserved. In the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, it is explained that hair is a component of the body that requires care, and grooming itself is regarded as an act of worship. Therefore, the practice of shaving dreadlocks is not merely a cultural ritual but also a form of worship and a means of honoring God's blessings. Through this ritual, local communities demonstrate respect and gratitude for divine grace while simultaneously expressing their commitment to preserving local traditions and cultural heritage.

However, in contemporary times, certain local practices, including the dreadlocks tradition, are sometimes perceived as misaligned with Islamic teachings. Consequently, it is essential for the community to understand and uphold the dreadlocks tradition within a framework consistent with Islamic principles. Muslims have a responsibility to protect and preserve this practice while ensuring that it does not conflict with religious values. This can be achieved by performing the dreadlocks ritual in a respectful manner and avoiding activities that contradict Islamic teachings. Overall, the Shaving of Dreadlocks represents a form of cultural expression that embodies and applies Islamic values within society. The Islamic values reflected in the shaving of dreadlocks include:

## Tolerance

Despite the Dieng community having embraced Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism, beliefs in spirits and ancestral figures remain evident, as reflected in the ritual tradition of shaving dreadlocked hair. The Dieng people predominantly belong to the *abangan* class of Javanese Islam, practicing their faith syncretically while incorporating animistic, mystical, and occult elements. While most residents are Muslims who recognize Allah as God and the Prophet Muhammad as His messenger, they also maintain beliefs in Nyi Roro Kidul, ancestral spirits (*Pepunden*), and sacred sites. As a result, the cultural values of the Dieng community reflect a syncretic integration of multiple belief systems (Febrian, 2020).

An intriguing feature of the dreadlocks shaving ritual for young children is the co-existence of three religious and belief systems: Islam, Hinduism, and Kejawen. During the shaving of nine dreadlocked children at the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF), elements representing Islam appear in the form of prayer, while the *ruwatan* ceremony embodies a combination of Kejawen—closely associated with animism and mysticism—and Hinduism. According to Jajang Agus Sonjaya, founding archaeologist of the Action Studio for the Preservation of Architecture and Archaeological Areas (Stapaka), this integration illustrates a remarkable synthesis of Islam, Hinduism, and Kejawen in Dieng. These practices enable children participating in the ritual to live harmoniously within the highland community of Central Java (Fauni et al., n.d.-b).

In addition to syncretic beliefs, the ritual emphasizes core religious values such as honesty, justice, truth, and piety, demonstrated by traditional leaders who guide the ceremony and recite Qur'anic prayers. These activities aim to seek divine protection and health for

the children entrusted to the ritual. Despite Dieng's numerous relics of its Hindu past—including temples, statues, and stone inscriptions—the predominantly Muslim community continues to preserve and honor these historical sites. This reflects the Dieng people's profound respect and appreciation for the heritage of their ancestors.

Tolerance in the implementation of the dreadlocks ritual tradition is consistently upheld by every member of the community who participates in this practice. Consequently, the procession of the dreadlocks ritual does not conflict with the religious teachings of the Wonosobo people (2023a). The dialectic between the Qur'an and local Dieng culture emphasizes reconstructive rather than destructive engagement, highlighting that culture must be regarded as something noble because it represents the cumulative thoughts and efforts of the community. As a result, as mentioned above, this approach nurtures individuals who are religiously devout, culturally active, and morally noble. Such cultural acculturation fosters a sense of tolerance toward fellow Muslims and, more broadly, toward all human beings, including non-Muslims. In this way, it cultivates an Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah Islamiyyah*), a humanistic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah insaniyyah*), and a national brotherhood (*ukhuwwah wathaniyyah*).

In the context of the ruwatan shaving ritual, the participants include both the children whose hair is braided and their parents, representing the human components of the broader principle of *mamau hayuning bawono*, or the pursuit of harmony with the world. This principle reflects the concept of *Hablum Min Alam*, emphasizing the relationship between humans and nature. As God's creation, nature is regarded as equal to humans, yet it is subjugated to human use for noble purposes and not vice versa. Should this order be reversed, humans risk becoming enslaved to the universe rather than fulfilling their role as God's vicegerents on earth, tasked with managing and organizing the natural world according to divine principles. The ruwatan ritual exemplifies this balance, as it utilizes natural products, derived from plants themselves, for the offerings used in the shaving procession, demonstrating a harmonious and purposeful engagement with nature (Alhaa, 2019).

## Inclusion of Qur'anic Verses and Shalawat

Dreadlocks hair itself is not inherently tied to any particular religion. The reason participants in the ruwatan ritual recite blessings and make promises is that they are Muslims, expressing gratitude and performing prayers in accordance with their faith. The participants carry out ruwatan and engage in prayers and thanksgiving as taught within their religious tradition. They recite blessings and promises because that is what they have learned in their faith, following role models whose influence shapes their religious appreciation. In this context, they also revere their ancestor, Kyai Kolodete, as part of their spiritual heritage (Yulianto & Abidin, 2016).

During the procession of shaving the dreadlocks, one can observe chants alternating in Javanese and Sanskrit, alongside Arabic recitations drawn from the Qur'an and prayers. Central to the ceremony is a unified recitation that conveys prayers and hopes to God

Almighty, represented by traditional and religious leaders. During the shaving ritual, the child's spiritual connection is linked to the presence of one of Dieng's "Mbahu Rekso" (guardians), namely Eyang Kaladete, whose "moksa" (body and soul) is believed to favor certain individuals in Dieng, particularly children (Harmawati et al., 2016).

Thus, religious values are inseparable from the *cukur gimbal* ritual. The use of Islamic prayers remains essential, with participants reciting specific texts, often considered "spells," which are actually prayers derived from the Qur'an but rendered in Javanese. These recitations aim to seek Allah SWT's protection for children and their recovery from illnesses. The spiritual significance of the Dieng Culture Festival (DCF) is profound, as it incorporates not only human participants but also non-human entities, reflecting the community's belief that humans coexist with other beings in this world. Every event is held to honor ancestors through rituals conducted in their memory.

According to staff from the Banjarnegara Tourism and Culture Office, the Islamic component of the ritual is performed through *tahlil* and is traditionally led by local leaders. Mr. Ifin explained, "The Islamic version of the dreadlocks haircut is recited by tahlil and so on, while in the traditional version, the dreadlocks shaving procession is conducted by village elders or traditional leaders who recite mantras." Similarly, Pak Ahmad noted that in the past, many dreadlocks were shaved by clergy. He stated, "Yes, in the past it was mostly done by clergy, and if the ritual was not properly observed, the hair might grow back. Recently, the Javanese tradition has been more widely used, although it is not fundamentally different from what was performed by religious leaders" (Fajrin, 2009).

In the implementation of the ruwatan tradition, prayer recitations play an integral role. Sholawat is recited during thanksgiving events, carnivals, and the dreadlocks cutting ceremony held at the Arjuna Temple area. During the sholawat thanksgiving event, the recitation precedes the *tahlil*, specifically the Sholawat al-Barjan. Sholawat is also performed during the carnival, accompanied by tambourine music played by the youth of Dieng Kulon Village. The main event, the cutting of dreadlocks, similarly incorporates sholawat readings, sung both by the master of ceremonies and traditional leaders throughout the procession (Amin, 2020).

Interviews with Mbah Sumanto further confirm the presence of sholawat readings within the ruwatan tradition. He explained, "Sholawat recitations are performed just before the main event, namely during the thanksgiving ceremony, the carnival, and the peak ruwatan event, as a sign of our love for the Prophet Muhammad. Sholawat readings are always accompanied by tambourine music." These accounts demonstrate that the dreadlocks ritual tradition encompasses not only a creed value emphasizing the oneness of Allah but also cultural-religious values, particularly the communal practice of reciting Sholawat by the residents of Dieng Village.

#### Shaving Dreadlocks Accompanied by the Song of Rumecko ing Wengi

The hair-shaving procession is accompanied by the *Kidung Rumecko ing Wengi*, performed by a gamelan troupe from Dieng Kulon. As Mbah Sumanto stated, "During the cutting procession, it is accompanied by the Rumecko ing Wengi song." This song serves

to prevent disaster during the shaving ritual, as it contains messages emphasizing devotion, faith, and piety to Allah SWT, while also praying for protection from disease, deliverance from poverty, repelling misfortune, and other calamities. The *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi* explicitly functions as a prayer or incantation to ward off night-time dangers such as witchcraft, sorcery, thieves, harmful deeds, and all forms of threats to one's safety. In Indonesian, its meaning can be summarized as providing spiritual protection and safeguarding participants from all elements that may endanger them.

“There is a prayer sung through the night,

A shield of strength, keeping all illness from sight,

Deliverance from every calamity near,

Even jinn and demons will not come near.

No magic can harm, no evil prevail,

No danger can strike, no malice assail.

Fire turns to water, the thief keeps away,

And the sevenfold perils dissolve and sway.”

The implied meaning of this chant is to remind people to draw closer to God Almighty, thereby avoiding curses and more devastating calamities. Consequently, all human beings are required to maintain faith and devotion to God Almighty (Aryanto, 2021). One of Sunan Kalijaga's works that illustrates these aspects is the *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi*. As a medium of moral guidance, this ballad conveys six main teachings aligned with the values of the Qur'an, which have been analyzed in this paper: faith in Allah SWT, maintaining good relations with God, fellow human beings, and nature, recognizing the position of humans as the most perfect of creatures, valuing the privilege of prayer, understanding problems and their solutions, and acknowledging that all rewards depend on one's actions.

Moreover, this paper describes the practice of Javanese religious rituals, such as ceremonies including the shaving of dreadlocks. The core of the ballad reflects the religious ritual practices of the Javanese community as they developed historically. In its presentation, Sunan Kalijaga combined pre-Islamic cultural heritage with Islamic law, producing a work that was easily comprehensible and widely accepted by the people of that era.

In the *Rumeksa Ing Wengi* ballad, the relationship between humans and God—the third dimension of theology—is particularly evident. This is reflected in the eighth stanza: *Lan*

*den sabar sukur ing Widhi, Insya Allah tineknanan, Sakarsa nureku.* As explained, every action is undertaken with patience, gratitude, and surrender to Allah. Implicitly, this hymn encourages the strengthening of monotheistic devotion to God (Allah), for it is impossible for someone to be truly grateful and surrender to that in which they do not believe (Sidiq, 2016).

### *Alms/Sodakoh*

Charity, or alms (*sodakoh*), in the context of the dreadlocks ritual, is intended for safety, directly implying blessings and fortune for those who are invited, as it allows the attendees to share a meal together. These alms are provided by those who perform the ritual and then distributed to the people who come to participate. In the Islamic framework, the dreadlocks ritual is conducted with a *slametan*, which aims to seek protection and safety from Allah SWT, without incorporating elements of mysticism or occultism. Pak Ahmad directly stated, “Yes indeed, it is highly recommended by our religion to pray to the Almighty for salvation. Beyond seeking safety, the *slametan* also carries the intention of helping neighbors and giving alms to others.” According to Mr. Ahmad, the primary purpose of *ruwatan*, or the dreadlocks shaving ritual, is grounded in Islamic teachings about mutual assistance, charity, and asking for protection from Allah SWT.

## **Conclusion**

The tradition of cutting dreadlocks, established by Kyai Kolodete, is considered sacred by the people of Wonosobo and its surrounding areas. For children whose hair naturally grows into dreadlocks, parents dare not cut it without performing a special ritual, reflecting an ancestral belief that has been preserved for generations, particularly in Tlogojati Village. One of the key requirements of the ritual is that the child’s parents prepare several offerings, while also fulfilling any specific requests made by the child, because if these wishes are not granted, the dreadlocks are believed to grow back. The Dreadlocks Ruwatan tradition also embodies Islamic values, serving as an expression of profound gratitude for God’s blessings through the thanksgiving rituals preceding the ruwatan event. The complete ruwatan procession—from preparation to the hair-cutting ceremony—includes prayer recitations, verses from the Qur’an, and sholawat. Moral teachings toward God are evident in the ritual, as all prayers and expressions of gratitude are directed solely to Allah SWT. Meanwhile, moral values toward humans are manifested in the spirit of togetherness, sincerity, mutual assistance, and deliberation that are clearly visible throughout the ruwatan procession.

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