

CATUR PIWULANG OF SUNAN DRAJAT: THE HUMANITARIAN TURN IN THE HISTORY OF ISLAMIC DA'WAH IN JAVA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Nur Laili^{*1}, Lala Afrizia², Nur Saidah³, Irfan Afandi⁴

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Islam Ibrahimy Banyuwangi, Indonesia

Abstract

This study is motivated by the importance of re-examining the da'wah strategies of the Walisongo, which contributed significantly to the Islamization of Java through peaceful, adaptive, and human-centered approaches. One of the most prominent figures in this regard was Sunan Drajat, whose teachings of Catur Piwulang emphasized social concern and the dignity of human beings. This study aims to analyze Catur Piwulang as a form of humanistic da'wah in the history of Islamization in Java and to examine its relevance to Islamic education. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using library research and a historical-hermeneutic perspective. Data were collected from books, scholarly articles, and historical sources related to Sunan Drajat's da'wah, Islamic humanism, and Islamic education, and were analyzed through content analysis and historical analysis. The findings reveal that Catur Piwulang—which teaches giving a cane to the blind, food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to those exposed to rain—represents a da'wah strategy oriented toward fulfilling basic human needs, upholding human dignity, and strengthening social solidarity. These values reflect the principles of Islamic humanism and correspond with the humanistic theories of Paulo Freire and Abraham Maslow. Furthermore, Catur Piwulang demonstrates strong relevance to Islamic education by promoting empathy, social responsibility, justice, and humanitarian awareness. In conclusion, Sunan Drajat's Catur Piwulang can be understood as a form of humanistic da'wah that remains relevant as a paradigm for developing moderate, inclusive, and socially civilized Islamic da'wah and education.

Keywords: Catur Piwulang; Humanistic da'wah; Sunan Drajat; Islamic humanism; Islamic education.

INTRODUCTION

The long history of the arrival of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago constitutes an important part of the historical development of indigenous societies. Various historical sources record different accounts regarding the spread of Islam in Indonesia. Nevertheless, among the numerous existing theories, one fact remains undisputed: Islam, as a religion embodying *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, was disseminated through peaceful and adaptive means (Indriyani & Putra, 2025: 181). This was achieved by integrating Islamic values into pre-existing local traditions, teachings, and cultural practices (Permatasai & Hudaidah, 2021: 2). Consequently, the spread of Islam was readily accepted by local communities and became closely associated with values of tolerance and social harmony.

The successful dissemination of Islam cannot be separated from the significant contributions of prominent religious figures, particularly the *Walisongo*. The *Walisongo* occupy a central position in the history of Islamic propagation, especially on the island of Java. They were a group of Muslim scholars who played a pivotal role in the Islamization of Java during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They are widely recognized as da'wah figures who not only conveyed Islamic teachings textually but also employed cultural and social approaches that were compatible with local social conditions (Sunyoto, 2017: 112). Rather than rejecting indigenous traditions, the

*Correspondance Author: lailin879@gmail.com

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Walisongo adopted a strategy of cultural acculturation that enabled Islamic values to be accepted without eliminating the cultural identity of Javanese society. This strategy made Islamic da'wah more accessible and acceptable within a pluralistic and multicultural community (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025: 218). The centers of Islamic propagation established by the Walisongo were primarily located in Surabaya, Gresik, and Tuban in East Java; Demak, Kudus, and Muria in Central Java; and Cirebon in West Java (Kurniawan et al., 2024: 28). From these strategic centers, Islam gradually spread across the archipelago and eventually became one of the major religions embraced by Indonesian society today.

Any discussion of the *Walisongo* is inseparable from an examination of their long and influential da'wah journey. Their strategies and approaches continue to attract scholarly attention from various perspectives. Several previous studies have examined the *Walisongo*, with some focusing specifically on Sunan Drajat. For example, Rohmawati & Meiludin (2020) analyzed the semiotic dimensions and cultural values embedded in the historical heritage of Sunan Drajat. Rofiq & Rozaq (2023) highlighted the da'wah messages of Sunan Drajat through a semiotic analysis. Safi'i (2024) investigated the Islamic values promoted by Sunan Drajat as a form of cultural da'wah that contributes to strengthening religious moderation. Meanwhile, Al Muzakki et al., (2024) focused on the potential of *Catur Piwulang* as a source of social studies learning by emphasizing its humanistic and socio-religious values. Although these studies provide important insights into the character, teachings, and da'wah strategies of Sunan Drajat, they primarily focus on cultural symbols, da'wah messages from a semiotic perspective, cultural da'wah, religious moderation, and the utilization of *Catur Piwulang* as a learning resource. To date, little scholarly attention has been devoted to positioning *Catur Piwulang* as a humanistic da'wah strategy centered on fulfilling basic human needs and upholding human dignity.

Addressing this research gap, the present study offers a new perspective by interpreting *Catur Piwulang* as a form of humanitarian turn in the history of Islamic da'wah in Java. While previous studies have largely emphasized symbolic, cultural, and moderative dimensions, this study highlights the humanitarian dimension as the core of Sunan Drajat's da'wah strategy. Furthermore, through the study entitled "*Catur Piwulang of Sunan Drajat: The Humanitarian Turn in the History of Islamic Da'wah in Java and Its Relevance to Islamic Education*," this research seeks to broaden existing discussions by linking the values embodied in *Catur Piwulang* with the development of contemporary Islamic education. In doing so, it contributes not only to the historiography of Islamic da'wah in the Indonesian archipelago but also to the strengthening of a humanistic and socially just paradigm of Islamic education.

Therefore, an examination of Sunan Drajat's *Catur Piwulang* is essential for enriching historical understandings of Islamic da'wah in Java while simultaneously offering a contextual and humanitarian model of da'wah that remains relevant to contemporary Islamic education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a library research design. The selection of this method was based on the nature of the research object, namely historical texts and literature concerning the da'wah of Sunan Drajat. Library research is particularly relevant in Islamic studies because its primary sources consist of manuscripts, historical documents, and academic literature (Subagiya, 2023). A historical-hermeneutic approach was applied to interpret the humanistic values embedded in *Catur Piwulang* and to relate them to the socio-cultural context of Javanese society. Hermeneutics is considered essential for enabling the interpretation of texts in accordance with changing historical and social contexts (Abdurrohman & Fanani, 2024).

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary materials. The primary data comprised narratives and teachings contained in *Catur Piwulang* attributed to Sunan Drajat, while the secondary data included books, journal articles, and traditional records related to the da'wah of the *Walisongo*, Islamic humanism, and Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago. Data were collected through documentation techniques, including searching, recording, and selecting literature relevant to the research topic. The library research procedure followed six stages: topic

identification, source retrieval, source selection, source evaluation, data analysis, and report preparation.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and historical analysis. Content analysis was employed to identify humanistic da'wah messages contained in the text, while historical analysis was used to situate the teachings of *Catur Piwulang* within the broader context of the spread of Islam in Java (Balqis, Santoso, & Husniyah, 2023).

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed. Triangulation was conducted by comparing information derived from sources with different characteristics, including primary texts containing the narratives and teachings of *Catur Piwulang*, secondary sources such as books and scholarly articles on Sunan Drajat's da'wah and the *Walisongo*, and historical sources describing the social conditions of Javanese society during the Islamization period. The triangulation process involved identifying the consistency of meanings, historical contexts, and interpretations across these sources. Data were considered valid when consistent information regarding the social values, humanitarian principles, and da'wah strategies of Sunan Drajat was found across multiple sources. In cases where discrepancies emerged, further verification was conducted using more authoritative and relevant references. Through this process, the resulting interpretations were not based on a single source but were strengthened through corroborating evidence from multiple references.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Genealogy of Sunan Drajat's Humanistic Da'wah

Around 1470 CE, a figure named Raden Qasim is believed to have been born. He was the youngest son of Raden Rahmad (Sunan Ampel) and Nyi Ageng Manila, and later became widely known as Sunan Drajat (Sunyoto, 2017: 304). Raden Qasim was renowned for his remarkable intellectual capacity, which was closely associated with the guidance he received from his teachers. He was educated directly by his father, Raden Rahmad (Sunan Ampel), one of the pioneering members of the *Walisongo* who played a pivotal role in the spread of Islam through education. Sunan Ampel was known for mentoring young disciples and preparing them to continue his mission of disseminating Islam across various regions of Java (Syalaftiyah & Harianto, 2020: 169). However, before that, Raden Qasim was first sent to Cirebon to study under Sunan Gunung Jati. He later married Dewi Sufiyah, the daughter of his teacher, Sunan Gunung Jati. After their marriage, Raden Qasim settled in an area called Kadraja with his three children, namely Pangeran Regyana (Tranggana), Pangeran Sandi, and his only daughter, Dewi Wuryan. As a result, he later became known as Sunan Drajat (Sunyoto, 2017: 306). For this reason, Raden Qasim became more widely known as Sunan Drajat.

As one of the nine saints who played an important role in the Islamization of Java, Sunan Drajat shared the same vision and mission as the other members of the *Walisongo*, namely to spread the teachings of Islam. Drawing upon the religious knowledge he acquired from his father and father-in-law, Sunan Drajat carried out his da'wah in the western coastal region of Gresik, in accordance with the mandate given by Sunan Ampel (Sunyoto, 2017: 308). However, the most interesting aspect to discuss here is his approach to da'wah. Similar to his father, who propagated Islam through education by establishing an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) (Rosyidah et al., 2025: 278), Sunan Drajat also founded a *pesantren*, following the example of his teacher. Sunan Gunung Jati was likewise known to have established a *pesantren* and was given the title Shaykh Jati (Sunyoto, 2017: 292). However, the *pesantren* established by Sunan Drajat was characterized by its strong emphasis on social and humanitarian values.

The da'wah model developed by Sunan Drajat was essentially part of the collective da'wah approach of the *Walisongo*, which emphasized wisdom, tolerance, and the ability to understand the social conditions of the community. Rather than confronting local culture, da'wah was carried out through adaptation and dialogue with existing traditions, allowing Islamic values to be gradually accepted by society (Lutfillah, 2019: 44-45).

Sunan Drajat was known for his high intellectual ability and strong sense of social concern. He demonstrated deep compassion for the poor. Moreover, in conveying the teachings of Islam, Sunan Drajat consistently emphasized the importance of empathy, generosity, and the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) (Husniyah & Muhlis, 2023: 311). This emphasis was not without reason, as his period of da'wah coincided with the decline of the Majapahit Kingdom and the expansion of Islam, which resulted in the emergence of different social groups within society. The first group consisted of Muslims from the western regions who had permanently settled in Java. They were described as having proper clothing and adequate food. The second group comprised Chinese migrants who had fled their homeland and settled on the island of Java; they were likewise described as having decent clothing and sufficient food. The last group consisted of the indigenous population, who were described as living in severe poverty, wearing little or no clothing, having unkempt hair, walking barefoot, and worshipping ancestral spirits (Sunyoto, 2017: 112).

Catur Piwulang as a Da'wah Teaching and Social Artifact

The author aims to further clarify some of the fundamental distinctions between ethical-academic reasoning and ideological-theological-political discourse patterns or reasoning in this sub-chapter, drawing on the numerous prior explanations stated above. Between textual and contextual reasoning, between ideological-theocentric and philosophical-anthropocentric-academic reasoning, and between political reasoning and sensible politics, there are a number of significant distinctions between the two types of reasoning.

In his da'wah, Sunan Drajat employed a gentle and inclusive approach. One example of this can be seen in his use of moral advice delivered through *gamelan* performances, which he combined with traditional songs (*tembang*) and harmonized with the local culture of the time. This approach enabled his da'wah to be accepted by the community without the use of violence or coercion (Rofiq & Rozaq, 2023: 49). The following are the four pieces of advice that later became known as *Catur Piwulang* (Four Teachings) of Sunan Drajat:

1. *Mewehono teken marang wong kang wuto*
2. *Mewehono pangan marang wong kang kaliren*
3. *Mewehono sandang marang wong kang wudo*
4. *Mewehono payung marang wong kang kudanan*

These *Catur Piwulang* are prominently displayed within the Sunan Drajat burial complex, where pilgrims can read and reflect upon their profound meanings (Rofiq & Rozaq, 2023: 49-50). Therefore, the message of his da'wah continues to be appreciated and reflected upon to this day.

The teachings of “giving a walking stick to the blind, food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and an umbrella to those caught in the rain” should not be understood merely as acts of providing physical assistance. Rather, they convey profound humanitarian values. A walking stick for the blind symbolizes guidance for those who have lost their direction in life; food for the hungry represents the provision of knowledge as well as spiritual nourishment; clothing for the naked symbolizes the preservation of human dignity and self-respect; while an umbrella for those caught in the rain represents protection and care for those who are experiencing hardship.

Catur Piwulang of Sunan Drajat as a Humanistic Da'wah Strategy

Catur Piwulang of Sunan Drajat can be viewed not only as a set of moral teachings but also as a humanistic da'wah strategy characterized by Sufi spirituality and reflecting a da'wah orientation centered on humanitarian concerns. These four teachings demonstrate that da'wah does not begin with the direct transmission of religious doctrine, but rather with efforts to understand and respond to the actual needs of the community. In the context of Javanese society during the transitional period following the decline of the Majapahit Kingdom, which was still marked by social inequality and poverty (Sunyoto, 2017: 112), Such an approach became an effective strategy for building social closeness while gradually instilling Islamic values.

The first teaching, *mewehono teken marang wong kang wuto* (give a walking stick to the blind), should not be understood merely in its literal sense as providing assistance to people with physical disabilities. Symbolically, the walking stick represents guidance and support for individuals who have lost their direction in life. Through this teaching, Sunan Drajat emphasized that da'wah should serve as a means of empowerment and enlightenment. Those who have not yet understood the teachings of Islam or who experience confusion in dealing with social realities should not be blamed or marginalized, but rather guided with wisdom (Safi'i, 2024: 11). This value demonstrates that Sunan Drajat's da'wah was oriented toward the process of humanizing people by providing access to knowledge and fostering awareness.

The second teaching, *mewehono pangan marang wong kang kaliren* (give food to the hungry), reflects Sunan Drajat's concern for the fulfillment of basic human needs. This message indicates that social welfare is an inseparable part of Islamic da'wah. It is difficult to expect people to fully embrace religious teachings when their most basic needs have not yet been met. Therefore, providing food should not be understood merely as an act of charity, but also as an expression of solidarity with members of society who experience economic hardship (Safi'i, 2024: 12). In this context, da'wah functions as an instrument of social transformation that seeks to alleviate people's suffering while embodying the value of *rahmah* for all humanity.

The third teaching, *mewehono sandang marang wong kang wudo* (give clothing to the naked), conveys the importance of respecting human dignity. Clothing not only serves to cover the body but also symbolizes a person's honor and self-respect. Through this teaching, Sunan Drajat emphasized that every individual deserves to be treated with dignity regardless of their social status. Therefore, da'wah should not be limited to religious preaching alone, but must also be accompanied by concrete actions that help people preserve their dignity as God's creation (Al Muzakki et al., 2024: 17).

The fourth teaching, *mewehono payung marang wong kang kudanan* (give an umbrella to those caught in the rain), illustrates the importance of social protection and care. In this context, the umbrella can be understood as a symbol of the presence of individuals or groups who are able to provide a sense of security when others are facing life's difficulties. This teaching demonstrates that, according to Sunan Drajat, da'wah serves not only as a means of conveying religious teachings but also as a social mechanism that fosters compassion, solidarity, and protection for vulnerable members of society (Al Muzakki et al., 2024: 17).

These four teachings demonstrate a consistent pattern of placing human beings as the central subject of da'wah. Sunan Drajat did not begin his da'wah with theological debates or rigid doctrinal emphasis, but rather by addressing people's needs and upholding their dignity. Thus, *Catur Piwulang* can be understood as a humanistic da'wah strategy that uses social service as the entry point for religious transformation. Through this approach, Islam is presented not only as a system of belief but also as a social force that offers solutions to the various humanitarian issues faced by Javanese society during that period.

In general, humanism is a worldview centered on human beings and humanitarian values. The term may also be understood as an effort to cultivate awareness of human dignity and to promote a more meaningful and prosperous life for humanity (Aminullah, 2022: 222). The term *humanistic* is derived from the Latin word *humanitas*, which originates from *humanus*, meaning the nature or characteristics of human beings. This concept encompasses aspects such as culture, morality, wisdom, and humanity. Over time, the humanistic perspective has come to be understood as an approach that emphasizes the importance of human dignity, values, and potential in social and cultural life. In education, the humanistic approach places human beings at the center of the learning and self-development process, emphasizing the values of empathy, justice, and freedom (Al Ayyubi et al., 2024: 14).

In this regard, the *Catur Piwulang* introduced by Sunan Drajat implicitly demonstrates concern for the weak and marginalized. These values are consistent with Paulo Freire's idea of education as a practice of liberation for the oppressed. Freire emphasized a humanistic approach

to education as a means of liberating human beings from the constraints of injustice and inequality within society (Al Ayyubi et al., 2024: 14). Thus, *Catur Piwulang* of Sunan Drajat can be understood as a form of humanistic education that advocates for the weak and marginalized, in line with Paulo Freire's concept of education as a practice of liberation from social injustice.

Likewise, Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs provides a useful framework for understanding Sunan Drajat's humanistic da'wah strategy. Maslow argued that human beings possess a hierarchy of needs, ranging from physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, and esteem needs to self-actualization (Setyaningrum et al., 2025: 202-203). This is consistent with *Catur Piwulang*, which emphasizes the fulfillment of basic human needs, such as food and clothing, while also providing moral guidance and social protection that lead individuals toward dignity and self-actualization. Thus, Sunan Drajat's da'wah not only provided material assistance to the disadvantaged but also humanized them as whole persons, in accordance with the humanistic principles reflected in Maslow's theory.

Catur Piwulang within the Framework of Islamic Humanism and Its Relevance

Humanism in the Islamic tradition is not understood as a worldview that separates human beings from the divine dimension, but rather as an effort to uphold human dignity within the framework of servitude to Allah. From the perspective of Islamic humanism, religious teachings are concerned not only with the vertical relationship between human beings and God, but also with the fulfillment of human needs and the promotion of social well-being. Therefore, respect for human dignity constitutes an integral part of religious practice, and faith cannot be separated from concrete actions that bring benefit to others (Badrudin, 2020: 875-876). Marcel A. Boisard explains that humanism is rooted in Islamic teachings, which emphasize Islamic existentialism, unity and balance, commitment to harmony, respect for human rights, and concern for issues such as poverty, slavery, and justice (Aminullah, 2022: 229). These values are reflected in *Catur Piwulang* of Sunan Drajat, which teaches providing assistance to those who are hungry, unclothed, or suffering, while also offering moral guidance. Thus, Sunan Drajat's humanistic da'wah strategy can be regarded as an embodiment of Islamic humanism that emphasizes social concern and justice for the weak and marginalized.

Within the same framework, the humanitarian teachings of the Qur'an, particularly in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143, which describes the Muslim community as *ummatan wasatan* (a moderate community), are closely related to Sunan Drajat's humanistic da'wah strategy as expressed through *Catur Piwulang*. The principle of moderation embodied in this verse calls upon Muslims to uphold justice, maintain balance, and show concern for others (Nurhasanah et al., 2025: 153). This principle is reflected in Sunan Drajat's teachings on providing food, clothing, and protection for those in need. Thus, Sunan Drajat's humanistic da'wah strategy is not only relevant to modern humanistic theories but also consistent with Qur'anic ethical principles that position Muslims as role models in upholding human dignity and humanity.

This perspective reinforces the argument that humanism is not a foreign concept within the Islamic tradition. The history of Islamic thought demonstrates that humanitarian values rooted in the principles of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), justice, and compassion have long served as the moral foundation of Islamic civilization. Therefore, the social concern promoted by Sunan Drajat through *Catur Piwulang* can be understood as a manifestation of Islamic humanism that has long been embedded in the intellectual and educational traditions of Islam (Muna et al., 2026: 654).

Based on the above discussion, *Catur Piwulang* of Sunan Drajat can be understood as a comprehensive humanistic da'wah strategy that integrates the fulfillment of human needs. Consequently, Sunan Drajat's da'wah remains relevant and can serve as a model for contemporary generations in building a more humane and civilized society.

In the context of education, Sunan Drajat's da'wah through *Catur Piwulang* represents a form of educational praxis that integrates humanistic values with the principle of *tawhid*. According to Sunan Drajat, education is not merely oriented toward the transmission of religious knowledge

but also toward fostering the social and moral awareness of society. Through *Catur Piwulang*, the values of empathy, responsibility, and solidarity are cultivated as the core of Islamic education, which views human beings as dignified creatures. This humanistic dimension is theocentric, meaning that it is rooted in consciousness of God rather than merely in social ethics. Thus, the primary objective of education from the perspective of Sunan Drajat's da'wah is to humanize people through a liberating spiritual approach that prevents dehumanization and nurtures social piety (Saifullah & Sukarman, 2023: 63). Thus, Sunan Drajat's teachings through *Catur Piwulang* provide meaningful inspiration for the development of Islamic education that is oriented toward humanity, justice, and social responsibility.

The humanistic educational model exemplified by Sunan Drajat also remains relevant to contemporary Islamic education. His da'wah approach, which emphasizes empathy and community empowerment, can be adapted into Islamic character education curricula. Values such as helping those in need, guiding those who have lost their way, and protecting the vulnerable reflect the principles of participatory education, which are now widely recognized in the concept of *service-learning*. In this context, Islamic education should not only develop intellectual competence but also cultivate active social responsibility. By integrating the principles of *Catur Piwulang* into educational practice, students are encouraged to internalize Islamic teachings through meaningful social experiences, as exemplified by Sunan Drajat's humanistic and socially just educational praxis (Saifullah & Sukarman, 2023: 64-64). Based on these considerations, *Catur Piwulang* deserves to serve as a foundation for Islamic education that integrates spiritual values and social responsibility in a balanced manner.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that *Catur Piwulang* of Sunan Drajat represents a manifestation of humanistic da'wah rooted in Islamic values and Javanese local wisdom. The teachings, which advocate “giving a walking stick to the blind, food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and an umbrella to those caught in the rain,” illustrate a da'wah strategy that emphasizes the fulfillment of basic human needs while upholding human dignity. Sunan Drajat's da'wah was not merely a moral appeal but also a form of social action that supported the weak and sought to liberate people from both physical and spiritual suffering. *Catur Piwulang* can be understood as an expression of Islamic humanism that embodies the spirit of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation) and the principle of *ummatan wasatan* (the moderate community), which emphasize moderation and justice in the practice of Islam. Its values are consistent with Paulo Freire's concept of education as a practice of liberation and Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs, in which da'wah is directed toward fulfilling physical, social, and spiritual needs in a balanced manner.

In the context of Islamic education, the teachings of *Catur Piwulang* reflect a humanistic-theocentric educational approach that views human beings as dignified creatures devoted to God. The values of empathy, solidarity, and social responsibility embedded in these teachings provide an important foundation for the development of Islamic education that not only transmits religious knowledge but also cultivates social piety and humanitarian awareness. Therefore, *Catur Piwulang* of Sunan Drajat remains a valuable legacy of da'wah and education that continues to be relevant for building an Islamic civilization that is humanistic, inclusive, and civilized.

This study is limited by its reliance on library research and historical-hermeneutic analysis and therefore has not been able to empirically examine the implementation of the values of *Catur Piwulang* in contemporary Islamic educational practice. Future research may focus on field studies in Islamic educational institutions or communities that continue to preserve the teachings of Sunan Drajat in order to explore how these humanistic values are actualized in social and educational settings. In addition, comparative studies between Sunan Drajat's da'wah model and those of other members of the Walisongo would further enrich the discourse on humanistic da'wah within the Islamic tradition of the Indonesian archipelago.

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