Chapter V: The Veneration of Wali and Holy Persons: The Case of Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat

This chapter highlights another Majlis Dhikr group that has creatively developed its own practices and formulae to obtain spiritual experiences and religious knowledge absent in conventional Islamic proselytization (dakwah). In this chapter, I will show how this group defines itself as an alternative mystical path among other established Sufi orders while retaining legitimate Sufi practices and how it plays an important role in the dakwah project of Islam. In this chapter I will describe the foundation of Iḥsāniyyat, examine challenges and rivalries involving this group, describe the ritual of Iḥsāniyyat, discuss the structure of Iḥsāniyyat, and analyse the strategy of its dakwah project in the light of Islamic Sufi teachings. This chapter will argue that although the group cannot be categorised as a tarekat mu’tabarah (acknowledged Sufi orders) by Nahdlatul Ulama, this group does attract a lot of people and it is acceptable to both nominal Muslims (abangan) and Muslim santri (strict Muslim). Therefore, this group bridges the Geertzian cultural contrast between abangan and santri.

5.1. The Foundation of Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat

Istighāthat is an Arabic word meaning ‘calling for help’ or ‘appealing for help’ in a critical moment. In this sense, the word istighāthat can be distinguished from the word istansara, which also means to ask someone for assistance but not in a critical moment (Wehr 1966:434). The word istighāthat in its verbal form (yastaghīthu) can be found in five different verses in the Qur’ān (Al-Kahfi: 29; Al-Qaṣaṣ 28; Al-Aḥqāf: 17; Al-Anfāl : 9), all of which imply asking or seeking help at a critical moment.

However, within the Indonesian Islamic context, a term istighāthat (I, istighasah), refers to a compilation of prayers or litanies recited on a particular occasion which consists of an invocation for divine help with the repetition of the sacred names of God and other prayers. In this sense, istighāthat might be considered similar to the dhikr ritual (remembrance), which is widely practised by other Muslims communities in the country. The word istighāthat is usually used by those affiliated with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization, rather than reformist organizations such as Muhammadiyah and PERSIS. The NU
has a particular *istighāthat* prayer which is usually practised and recited by its members when the organization is facing a problem or is holding a major organizational event. *Istighāthat* is frequently practised in NU pesantren and *kelompok pengajian* (religious gatherings) once a week.

According to Kyai Masduki Mahfudz, a chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama religious board of East Java, the *istighāhat* ritual, which is widely practised by Nahdlatul Ulama members, was originally taken from the Sufi tradition, particularly the Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyyah group in Rejoso, Jombang, East Java. The late Kyai Ramli Tamim, the leader of the order, selecting from various sources such as the Qur’an, the Prophet tradition and Muslim scholars’ books, compiled texts of *istighāhat* prayers. The leader of this tarekat told me that compiling these texts took a long time because the author had to perform a special fasting ritual for about forty days for each text. The aim of this ritual fast was not only to ask God to give guidance as where a text should be placed among other texts but also to ask Him to give a benefit for each text of prayer. This is partly because in Islam every prayer is believed to have its own particular function.

The *istighāhat* ritual is often carried out during the opening ceremony of a religious gathering conducted by the Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyyah order. The *istighāhat* prayers collected by Kyai Ramli were first used by the East Java regional board of Nahdlatul Ulama. In 1996, the *istighāhat* ritual was conducted by the organization following information that there would be a great disaster in Indonesia. It was expected that by conducting the ritual, Indonesia would be saved from the disaster. Then, the idea to hold the ritual was brought to the central board of the organization in Jakarta and widely spread in other branches throughout Indonesia. As a result, the ritual has become popular and is used by this organization not only for religious purposes but also for political purposes. For example, in 2001, a major prayer session known as *Istighāhat Kubrā* was held in Senayan, Jakarta to support the president Abdurrahman Wahid, former general chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama, following his impeachment by the Indonesian parliament.

The word *istighāhat* is derived from the Qur’an and hence, the ritual *istighāhat* has a strong basis in the Islamic sources of law. The Qur’an states: ‘When you

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1 The combined *Qadiriyyat Naqshabandiyyat* order was established by Ahmad Khāṭib Sambas (1802-1878). Dhofier as quoted by Mulyati (2004: 259) argues that during 1970’s, there were four centres of this *tarekat* in Java including Rejoso, Jombang, East Java led by Kyai Tamim; Mranggen, Central Java, led by Kyai Muslih; Suralaya, Tasikmalaya, West Java led by Kyai Shohibliwafa Tajul ‘Arifin (Abah Anom), and Pegantongan, Bogor, West Java led by Kyai Thohir Falak.

2 Interview with Kyai Masduki Mahfudz, Malang, January, 2005.

3 Interview with Gus Najib, Kediri, January, 2005.
sought aid from your Lord, so He answered you: I will assist you with a thousand of the angels following one another’ (Al-Anfāl 8:9). Based on this verse, Kyai Mughni, a teacher in Pesantren Jampes, pointed out that the istighāthat ritual as practised by many Indonesian Muslims can be historically traced back to the Prophet himself. As described by Ibn Kathīr in his book, Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm,4 according to the prophetic tradition, in the Badr war, the Prophet felt pessimistic about waging a war against the enemy because the Muslim troops only numbered three hundred, while the enemy’s troops numbered more than a thousand. It was reported that in this critical situation, the Prophet’s companions asked the prophet to ask help from God (istighāthat) to defeat the enemy. In his prayer, the Prophet said: ‘Oh! Lord, fulfill your promise to me, if these groups of Muslim perish, they will never worship you on this earth.’5 It was believed that because of this istighāthat, the Muslims troops could defeat their enemy during the war.

Although the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has a specific istighāthat prayer, it does not officially and specifically give instruction to its members to recite and practise only that istighāthat prayer. As a result, each different community within NU might have different ways and formats of istighāthat prayer. Nevertheless, it is certain that most of these groups have similar objectives, namely, to ask for help and forgiveness from God through the combination of prayer and the repetition of the sacred names of God and dhikr. The Istighāthat Ihsāniyyat group is one group among many others which has different ways and formats of istighāthat ritual compared to Nahdlatul Ulama.

The Istighāthat Ihsāniyyat group was first set up by Gus Abdul Latif Muhammad (b.1968– ), a Muslim cleric from Pesantren Jampes in Kediri. The leader of this group is a grandson of Shaikh Ihsan Muhammad ibn Daḥlān, the author of the two volumes of Sīrāj al-Ṭālibīn,6 a commentary on Al-Ghazālī’s Minhāj al-‘Abidīn Ilā Jannatī Rabbi al-‘Aḥlāmī and two volumes of Manāḥīj al-İmdād,7 a commentary on Zainuddin al-Malibari’s Irshād al-İlbād (Mughni 1982:31). Gus Abdul Latif was born in the pesantren milieu where he spent most of his

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5 “ًادبأ ضرألا يف دبعت الف مالسإلا لهأ نم ةباصعلا هذه كلهت نإ مهللا ،ينتدعو ام يل زجنأ مهللا
6 Sīrāj al-Ṭālibīn is a Sufi book which is well known among Pesantren students in Java. It was written in 1932. This book was published for the first time, in 1936 by Al-Nabhaniyah publishing house in Surabaya, printed by a big publisher in Egypt, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi. The book that I have contains 1098 pages, published by al-Madinah, Surabaya. In the Pesantren Jampes, this book is taught only during the month of Ramadān
7 This book written in 1940 has two volumes (1000 pages). When I was in the field, the book was first published by the family of the author. During Ramadān this book is taught to the student in Jampes. During Ramadhān in 2006, Kyai Said Agil Siraj, taught the officials of Nahdlatul Ulama using this book in the prayer room of the Jakarta headquarters.
time studying religious subjects from primary and secondary to tertiary school levels. He never studied at a secular school. His father, Kyai Muhammad Ibn Ihsan was a Muslim cleric (I., kyai) in the pesantren as well as a Muslim healer (I., tabib), a person who could heal various illnesses by spiritual methods. After finishing his study at his father’s pesantren, Gus Abdul Latif held a teaching position at the pesantren. He taught spiritual healing subjects which were only followed by senior santri (students). Like father like son, he was also a tabib who received many guests who asked for healing or made other requests. He obtained expertise in spiritual healing through wandering from one teacher to another in Java. For example, he learned spiritual healing (I., ketabiban) from his uncle, Kyai Amin in Cirebon, West Java, Kyai Abdullah in Mantenan, Blitar, and Kyai Taraqqi in Malang, and studied tabarrukan (the obtaining of grace) with Kyai Abdul Hamid in Pasuruan, East Java.8

The Istighâthat Iḥsâniyyat group, which now has its central office in Kediri, was first set up in Banyuwangi. The selection of this regency in the eastern region of East Java for the first site for this group was not an accident. From July to November 1998, following the downfall of Suharto, several violent murders occurred in Banyuwangi in particular and many other regions in East Java in general. Ninja were believed to be involved in these violent murders. Local people believed that the killers of sorcerer (I., dukun santet) were ninja, trained killers who wore black masks and dark clothes when they killed their victims. The term ninja was first introduced by the press to identify those who had killed victims in other regions. At the beginning, the targets were dukun santet, but after several months, the range of victims became wider and included not only suspected dukun santet but also local Muslim clerics (kyai) and guru ngaji (Qur’an teachers). Data compiled by a Nahdatul Ulama (NU) investigation team indicated that more than 147 suspected dukun santet were killed during September and October 1998 in Banyuwangi (Manan et al. 2001) along with another 105 victims in neighboring regions of East Java such as Jember, Sumenep and Pasuruan (Brown 2000). Forty percent of these other victims were identified as local Muslims clerics, Nahdatul Ulama activists and guru ngaji (Wijayanta et al. 1998:12-13).

The situation certainly created panic among villagers in Banyuwangi. Although villagers intensified their vigilance, they found it difficult to identify the real killers. Consequently, suspicions increased as to the perpetrators of the killings in Banyuwangi. Moreover, this situation led most people, particularly Muslim clerics, to feel threatened because they felt that they might be future victims. This was not unreasonable because many Muslim clerics and guru ngaji were

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8 Interview with Gus Latif, Kediri, September 2004.
reported to have been killed at that time. It is common among traditional Muslims, when individuals feel insecure because of a threat, that they ask for specific help from kyai.

Plate 5.1: Gus Abdul Latif (Gus Latif), the founder and the leader of the Istighâhat Ihṣâniyyat group.
As described by Mansurnoor, local people will ask kyai for protection especially during a time of unrest and upheaval (Mansurnoor 1990). It was in this situation that Gus Abdul Latif, referred as a Gus and Agus because of his genealogy and kesakten was asked by local people to improve peace, security and trust among them. The first thing he did was to provide the local people with gemblengan, a form of invulnerability (I, kekebalan) by which he transferred a spiritual power so that they became invulnerable to sharp objects, fire and bullets. According to Gus Abdul Latif, cultivating invulnerability can provide a feeling of security because it can protect lives from murder. Due to the threat of murder, these practices were also conducted in other regions in East Java other than Banyuwangi.

The participants in the practice of invulnerability in Banyuwangi included not only those who were known as good people but also those considered bad individuals (I., orang nakal) by local people. The involvement of these individuals in gemblengan led to criticism from local ‘ulamā’. They worried that if those people were allowed to follow gemblengan, they would misuse their spiritual power. However, Gus Abdul Latif denied this, arguing that since the sense of insecurity was felt by everyone, gemblengan should be held both for good and bad people. For dakwah purposes, bad people should be involved in the gemblengan in order to bring them to the right path. In this sense, Gus Abdul Latif believed that people, including orang nakal, have their own sense of right (I., hati nurani). He argued that this sense would be touched if they faced a serious problem in their life and this would lead them to return to the path of God. In addition to this, the local ‘ulamā’ also asked him to obtain permission from the local government before holding gemblengan, otherwise the local police and security officials would arrest Gus Abdul Latif as had happened in 1965 when a lot of people who held gemblengan were arrested by local security forces. However, Gus Abdul Latif continued to hold gemblengan without permission from the police. The success of these gemblengan contributed to his popularity and influence. Services such as gemblengan and spiritual healing, rather than educational services, attracted many followers (Mansurnoor 1990).

One of his followers claimed that the success of gemblengan in Banyuwangi contributed to the improvement of peace within these regions. However, these improvements cannot be attributed solely to the gemblengan or Gus Abdul Latif’s role. Muslim clerics from NU asked the Ministry of Security and Defense, General Wiranto and the Indonesian Army Forces (ABRI) to discover the killers of the dukun santet and transparently investigate this situation so

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9 Term Gus is derived from Agus which means the son of Kyai. However, currently, the word Gus is also used to refer to those who have spiritual power.

10 Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.
that it would not lead to social unrest (Rahim n.d.:16-20). The improvement of security in Banyuwangi was due to help from many people, including the local population of Banyuwangi.

From 1998 to 1999 was a period of turmoil in the Indonesian political landscape. The period was a political transition after the fall of Suharto’s regime in May 1998, followed by religious, ethnic violence and social unrest in many Indonesian areas. On 7 June 1999, the first general election after the downfall of the New Order regime was held to elect the House of Representative members from forty eight parties with different political ideologies.

Heated competition during the general election campaign in 1999 among political parties was felt not only in Jakarta but also in many other provinces and regions in Indonesia. Banyuwangi became an arena for political parties, including Islamic parties, to gain as many voters as possible. In order to attract voters, some political parties recruited charismatic Muslims scholars as vote getters whom they believed had a lot of followers but also had the ability to attract voters in the region. During the campaign, every Muslim scholar supported his own political party and, without doubt, this contributed to the tension among them. In addition, as maintained by Kyai Muhammad Syaiful Hisham, they also strongly condemned local government for having failed to maintain security in Banyuwangi. As a result, relations between them and government or among themselves worsened.

Kyai Muhammad Syaiful Hisham one Muslim cleric (A., ‘ulama’; I., ulama) in Banyuwangi, believed that if the situation continued, more serious conflicts would break out, which would eventually threaten the unity of the social fabric in Banyuwangi. He came up with the idea of calling for unity among those ‘ulamā’ involved in the political contestation and the government under the banner of Pancasila, the Indonesian ideology. The government (umarā’), according to him, should become a partner of the ‘ulamā’, and the latter should serve as advisors to the local government. Therefore, he argued that instead of criticizing and condemning the government, ‘ulamā’ should help the government if it faced a problem in dealing with security in Banyuwangi. He put it this way:

The condemnation of the government conducted by ‘ulamā’ in Banyuwangi is not only useless but it is also destructive. Therefore, it is pointless to condemn the government… Be careful, we live in Indonesia whose national basis is Pancasila and under the symbol of Bhineka Tunggal Ika (The Unity in Diversity). We are all brothers. Many Muslims and Non-Muslims are involved not only in the GOLKAR Party, PKB (The National Awakening Party) but also in PAN (The National Mandate Party) and PDIP (The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). If we struggle to do something
[on behalf of Islam], why should we depend too much on a particular political
depart from condemning the government by changing the political tension through
religious activity which could involve government, ‘ulamā’ and local people.
From the beginning, he intended to help the government establish a peaceful
situation in Banyuwangi. He was asked by local ‘ulamā’ to seek a particular
prayer which could be used to maintain peace in Banyuwangi after the *Ninja*
and *Dukun Santet* tragedy. Kyai Hisham singled out Gus Abdul Latif because
he was previously considered successful in holding *gemblengan* in Banyuwangi.
In addition, he felt an affinity with him because both were classmates when
they studied in Pesantren Jampes, Kediri. Therefore, Kyai Hisham chose Gus
Abdul Latif. In this case, as observed by Mansurnoor, collegiate friendship
developed at pesantren became an invaluable element in building a further
network (Mansurnoor 1990).

Before composing the prayer, Gus Abdul Latif is said to have performed a
particular ritual to seek guidance at his grandfather’s grave. His grandfather,
Kyai Ihsan Dahlan is believed among his followers to be a Muslim saint (Î.,
*walî*) and his tomb has become an object of visitation and veneration. Some of
his followers believe that Gus Abdul Latif can communicate with the late Kyai
Ihsan Dahlan. This is based on the fact that traditionalist ‘ulamā’ believe that
communication between the pious dead and the pious living is possible (Pranowo
1991:47). After receiving guidance, Gus Abdul Latif offered a particular prayer
to Kyai Hisham and asked him and other people in Banyuwangi to recite it in
groups (Î., *berjamaah*) or individually twice a month, once a week or everyday if
needed. Before practising the prayer, Kyai Hisham submitted the prayer to Kyai
Malik Ihsan Dahlan,¹¹ and asked his consent because he was the senior *kyai* in
Pesantren Jampes and one of Kyai Ihsan Dahlan’s sons who was still alive. Kyai
Malik agreed with the composition of the prayer and added particular prayers
to it.

*Kyai* Hisham brought the prayer to Banyuwangi and recited it together with
seventeen people, who later became the first members of this new group.
He, then, was elected by Gus Abdul Latif as a coordinator of the group in
Banyuwangi. Establishing a new religious fraternity required a name to identify
it from others. It was not easy to name and establish a new group, particularly

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¹¹ He has passed away when I returned to Australia.
among many other well-known Sufi orders and *istikhāthat* groups which have existed for many years in Banyuwangi. Thus, the new group was challenged, not only to find a name which could attract the attention of a broad mass of people but also to offer a new type of fraternity which was not similar to others.

Gus Abdul Latif chose *Iḥsāniyyat* as the name of the group. The name *Iḥsāniyyat* was originally taken from the first name, Ihsan, of his grandfather, Kyai Ihsan Dahlan. The use of one’s grandfather’s name as the name of a Sufi order is unusual among Sufi orders. In Sufi tradition, the name of a Sufi order is traditionally taken from the name of their founder. For example, the Naqshabandiyah Order attributed its name to its founder, Bahā’ al-Dīn al-Naqshābandī, the Qadiriyah Order is attributed to Syeikh Abdul Qādir al-Jaylānī, the Shadiliyat Order is attributed to Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shādhifi. Gus Abdul Latif argued that the use of his grandfather’s name for the *istikhāthat* was because he was not only as well-known Muslim ‘ulamā’ but also considered to be the saint of God (A., wāliyullah) who could be used as an object of mediation (A., tawassul or wasīlat) by those who sought for closeness with God. Gus Abdul Latif mentioned that a means (A., wasīlat) is necessary for lay people to achieve the love of God. However, for him, to achieve the love of God is difficult because God is an unseen object. By contrast, lay people can only love something concrete. Therefore, loving those loved by God (I., waliyullah) is the way for them to achieve the love of God.

Furthermore, there might have been another reason for Gus Abdul Latif to choose his grandfather’s name rather than his own name for the new group. He might have thought that other people would be unfamiliar with his name. So he chose Kyai Ihsan Dahlan’s since his grandfather had the reputation of being a prolific writer on Sufism and was an internationally well known ‘ulamā’ who was acknowledged among other Sufi groups and the pesantren community. Therefore, naming the new group *Iḥsāniyyat*, would give the impression to the public that this group was closely linked to the legacy of Kyai Ihsan Dahlan and, as a consequence, this group would become better known.

The name *Iḥsāniyyat* was initially used for this new *istikhāthat* group after Gus Abdul Latif experienced a visionary dream of meeting with Gus Mik, a well-known wāli in Kediri. In his dream, Gus Abdul Latif received the late Gus Mik’s consent to the name of *Iḥsāniyyat*. It is clear that Gus Abdul Latif relied on this other well-known ‘ulamā’, Kyai Hamim Jazuli, usually called Gus Mik, who was the founder of *Dhikr al-Ghāfīlīn* which has many followers spread throughout Indonesia, to justify the foundation of his group. A dream,
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particularly a good dream, can be used as the basis of action for Muslims since it is believed to be revealed by God. Therefore, although received in a dream, the consent from Gus Mik was important for this newly born group.

The consent from Gus Mik had various meanings for the followers of Iḥsāniyyat. Firstly, it showed that there was a close relationship and spiritual chain between their leader and Gus Mik. Secondly, only those who had a similar spiritual level to that of Gus Mik could gain consent from him. In this sense, the followers would think that Gus Abdul Latif was entitled to receive this consent because he had reached the same level of spiritual capacity as Gus Mik. Thirdly, by giving his consent, Gus Mik allowed Gus Abdul Latif to continue his efforts to improve people’s consciousness of God and the hereafter through the establishment of the istighāṭah group. This would prevent Iḥsāniyyat from being considered as a competitor of Dhikr al-Ghāfīlīn in Kediri because Gus Mik, as the founder of Dhikr al-Ghāfīlīn, had given his consent to Gus Abdul Latif. All of these things contributed to enhance the authority of Gus Abdul Latif as well as his group among other groups.

Another challenge the group needed to address was to find a new model of istighāṭah to distinguish it from other istighāṭah groups. In dealing with this issue, Gus Abdul Latif, not only attempted to compose prayers of istighāṭah which were not as lengthy as other istighāṭah prayers, but also introduced vernacular rather than Arabic in the istighāṭah ritual. Furthermore, he combined ritual istighāṭah with interactive dialog on religious issues involving all participants in the ritual and he held cultural arts festivals such as jaranan (hobby-horse dance), reog ponorogo (tiger-mask dance), barongsai (a Chinese traditional dance), and ruwatan12 and dangdutan.

Gus Abdul Latif established Iḥsāniyyat in Kediri on 9 September 1999, one year after the establishment of Iḥsāniyyat in Banyuwangi. This date coincided with the rumor among people that the day of judgment (I., kiamat) would occur on that date at 9:00 a.m. The inauguration of this group in Kediri was held in the graveyard of Kyai Ihsan Dahlan. The rationale behind this establishment was not just to follow upon the success of Iḥsāniyyat in Banyuwangi but also to respond to a request from some villagers who were addicted to drugs, alcohol and gambling. These people asked Gus Abdul Latif to help them escape from addiction. Gus Abdul Latif explained this as follows:

The first members of Iḥsāniyyat in Putih village consisted of eleven people. Those people asked me to cure them from inner illness and help them cease from wrongdoing (I., maksiat) they had done. They could not cure those

12 Ruwatanis a sacred ceremony in the Javanese tradition to ward off misfortune.
illnesses nor help themselves to cease from wrongdoing without help from God. As a result of their sincere wish, I established an Ihsaniyyat group in Kediri as a means of improving morality among the people in Kediri.

At the beginning, the activity of this group was simple. The ritual of istighathat was led by Gus Abdul Latif once in a week at the Kyai Ihsan Dahlan’s tomb, followed by a small group gathering to talk about various topics. As the number of participants in the ritual grew, Gus Abdul Latif held interactive dialogues on religious topics based on questions from the audience before reciting istighathat prayer.

At the same time, Gus Abdul Latif established a group called Paguyuban Tombo Ati (The Heart Healing Community). This group aimed to provide a venue to hold prayers and to discuss Islamic teachings and personal problems for those who were ignored, held in contempt by other religious leaders or regarded by others as local hoodlum (I., preman), the dregs of society (I., sampah masyarakat) and bad individuals (I., orang nakal). An informant told me that the members of this group consisted of drug users, local hoodlum (I., preman), drug traffickers, gamblers, drunks, and prostitutes. Gus Abdul Latif believed that instead of changing their behavior, tagging them with such labels as sampah masyarakat and orang nakal not only prevented them from returning to the right path but also from integrating with other members of society. Therefore, the main target of his appeal was to those described by Gilsenan as people ‘without a shepherd and those who were not touched and accommodated by the existing religious institutions’ (Gilsenan 1973:37). Moreover, Gus Abdul Latif insisted that those who were considered orang nakal actually had a strong desire in their hearts to be good and to follow the right path, but they did not know the way they should take in order to be a good or to resolve their problems. In dealing with these people, as Gus Abdul Latif argued, a gradual approach and a long-term strategy were needed.

Actually, the ritual held both at the Ihsaniyyat and the Paguyuban Tombo Ati was the same. Istighathat prayers were recited in both groups. However, the name Paguyuban Tombo Ati was deliberately used to give the impression that the activity of the group could be attended by everybody, including those people who are still unfamiliar with istighathat prayer. According to Gus Abdul Latif, this strategy was successful in attracting those who were fearful of attending istighathat prayer. They realized that both the Ihsaniyyat group and the Paguyuban Tombo Ati had a similar objective. As a result, they were no longer fearful of joining the group. One of the participants of the Paguyuban Tombo Ati said:
As I realized that Tombo Ati was part of Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat and both were led by Gus Abdul Latif, I joined the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyya without doubt. During the Tombo Ati ritual, I felt that Gus Abdul Latif paid his attention to me and helped me to solve my problems especially those to do with drug addiction.

5.2. Local Rivalry and Challenges

Although there are many other Majlis Dhikr groups and Sufi orders in Kediri, which provide similar ritual to that of Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat, this group has hardly ever faced a serious challenge from those groups. In contrast, in Banyuwangi, this group faced serious challenges especially from local kyai. From its inception, the ritual of Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat, held once every five weeks (i., selapanan) in Banyuwangi was attended not only by local people but also by many local kyai officially invited by the coordinator of the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat group. In fact, besides Gus Abdul Latif, local kyai contributed to attracting their followers to participate in the ritual.

As this new group in Banyuwangi made rapid progress and attracted many followers, this excited the jealousy and fear of other local ‘ulama’in Banyuwangi. Because they were no longer involved by Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat leader as official members of the group, these local kyai who had previously supported the establishment of the group in Banyuwangi withdrew their support. There can be little doubt that the real objections to this group was that it threatened the standing privileges of local kyai. This contributed to a rivalry that developed between the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat group and other groups.

As an informant observed, these kyai did not object to the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat, but they wanted the group to be run and led by local kyai without outside involvement. They argued that there were many kyai in Banyuwangi who were more capable of leading the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat ritual than those from Kediri. Moreover, they argued that because the ritual took place in Banyuwangi, it was more appropriate for this group to be run by involving kyai or leaders of pesantren who lived in Banyuwangi.

In dealing with these points, Kyai Hisham, the coordinator of the group, argued that he could not prevent Gus Abdul Latif, the author of Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat prayer, from attending the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat ritual in Banyuwangi because he was the person who had given the ijāza (authorization, license) for the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat prayers. It was a courtesy that, as the recipient of the ijāza, Kyai Hisham should include Gus Abdul Latif in the Istighāṭhat Iḥsāniyyat.
Because Kyai Hisham regarded himself as a student of Gus Abdul Latif, even though both were colleagues, Kyai Hisham would not dare to destroy this teacher-student relationship. According to pesantren tradition, this relationship endures even after the teacher has passed away. If a student cuts this relationship, he will never obtain the sanctity of God through his teacher. It is for this reason that Kyai Hisham did not ask Gus Abdul Latif to stop attending the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat ritual in Banyuwangi, despite objections from many local kyai.

When consulted by Kyai Hisham about these objections, Gus Abdul Latif insisted that he and Kyai Hisham could not be separated in running the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat in Banyuwangi, and if others asked him to leave the group, he would withdraw the ijaʿa and dissolve the group. In the pesantren tradition the giver of ijaʿa (authorization) has the authority to withdraw ijaʿa from the recipient or to ask the recipient not to transmit the ijaʿa to others. For example, when the initiator of ijaʿa asks the recipient not to give it to others, the recipient should obey. If he or she ignores this rule, the ijaʿa will be no longer valid.

Kyai Hisham and Gus Abdul Latif needed to cooperate in order to obtain their objectives. On the one hand, Gus Abdul Latif needed Kyai Hisham as a liaison to spread the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat in Banyuwangi. His job as a religious books distributor allowed Kyai Hisham to make close contact with many leaders of pesantren. By approaching these pesantren leaders, Kyai Hisham succeeded in attracting a number local people to join with the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat ritual. It is for this reason that Gus Abdul Latif preferred him to be a coordinator of the group in Banyuwangi. Because Gus Abdul Latif solely determined the appointment of the coordinator, none of the members of the group could succeed Kyai Hisham. Therefore, Kyai Hisham needed Gus Abdul Latif to pave his way to control the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat group in Banyuwangi.

Another objection from the Banyuwangi kyai toward the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat group had to do with the involvement of this group in local politics. According to these kyai, some officials of the group used it for political and worldly interests by putting The Chief of Executive of the district’s name (I., bupati) on the advisory board. Those kyai worried that the bupati would use the group to increase his popularity. This anxiety was reasonable because the popularity of the bupati had decreased following strong criticism of his moral behavior. As a result, those kyai strongly rejected an invitation from bupati to hold the Istighâhat Iḥṣâniyyat ritual in his office. Kyai Hisham took the view that those who lived in Banyuwangi should obey the leader of regency, so they should accept the invitation despite various objections. Without consent from those kyai, Kyai Hisham and Gus Abdul Latif held istighâhat ritual in the bupati’s
office (I., Pendopo Kabupaten). This, of course, added to the kyai objections to Kyai Hisham and Gus Abdul Latif since the two ignored the opinion of the kyai in Banyuwangi.

As a result, some kyai who had previously supported the group established a new istiğhāth satellite group which did not include any kyai except those from Banyuwangi. In order to enhance its local nature, this new group was called Dhikr al-Shafā’at, a name which appeared to have been taken from the name of a local charismatic kyai in Banyuwangi, Kyai Muhammad Shafā’at. He was the founder of Pesantren Blok Agung, which is the oldest pesantren in Banyuwangi. Perhaps, the name of Shafā’at was used in the attempt to match the popularity of Iḥsāniyyat. This group might have deliberately used the name of Kyai Shafā’at in order to attract local people to join this new group. But according to Kyai Fahrur Rozi, a secretary of the group, this name was originally taken from the Arabic word shafā’at which means blessing and healing (kesembuan). Those who recited Dhikr al-Shafā’at prayers were expected to be able to obtain kesembuan (healing) and shafā’at from the Prophet. In order to attract followers, this group offered rituals and prayers which are very similar to those of Istiğhāthat Iḥsāniyyat. It also included some individuals who had become officials members of the Istiğhāthat Iḥsāniyyat. One of the members of the Istiğhāthat Iḥsāniyyat group claimed that this was done to lessen the popularity of Istiğhāthat Iḥsāniyyat. In response to the new group, Kyai Hisham let his followers freely choose to join any group they wanted to. He argued that if the content of the prayers were good, he would let them join the Dhikr al-Shafā’at group.

The Istiğhāthat Iḥsāniyyat group also faced another challenge from some kyai involved with the local branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Banyuwangi. These kyai argued that since the activity of the group was closely related to istiğhāthat and most supporters of this group came from NU pesantren, this group should be integrated and reviewed regularly by NU. However, Kyai Hisham opposed that suggestion arguing that this group was not part of any organization, including NU, and did not use the symbol of NU, though it followed the spirit of Ahlussumnah wa al-jama’ah upon which NU was established. Thus, this group was not opposed to either NU or its teachings. He further stated that if this group were integrated under NU, this would reduce its popularity among people from other social and political backgrounds. Furthermore, according to Kyai Hisham it would also affect the development of the group since each official member of NU had their own opinion about how to administer the group. In

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13 Interview with Kyai Fahrur Rozi, Banyuwangi, April, 2005.
this sense, Kyai Hisham was fully aware that if he allowed other local kyai or NU officials to review the Ihsânîyyat group, he would gradually lose his role to control the group. Therefore, he was strongly opposed to that plan.

In its hometown, the Istighâthat Ihsânîyyat had another competitor not from outside, but from one of the relatives of the leader of the Istighâthat Ihsânîyyat group himself. Gus Abdul Latif lived within Pesantren Jampes, which many other descendants of the founder of the pesantren also occupied. These descendants were not only entitled to live in the pesantren but also to use the legacy of the pesantren founder, including the founder’s name, for their own religious purposes. One of these descendants established another istighâthat group called Yamisda al-Ihsan. Yamisda stood for Shaikh Yahûda, Shaikh Mesir, Shaikh Isti‘ānat, and Shaikh Dahlan, all of which are names of ancestral kyai of Pesantren Jampes and are regarded as saints (I., wali). The leader of this group claimed the names of wali would lead to obtaining blessing (I., barakah). It is for this reason that the group was called by the names of these wali. In addition, the name Yamisda also gave the impression to the public that this group had much greater legitimacy than Ihsânîyyat since it had many transmitters, including Kyai Ihsan, and his father and grandfather.

Like Ihsânîyyat, the Yamisda group also had istighâthat prayers as the core of its ritual. However, unlike Ihsânîyyat, this group used alumnae of the pesantren network to spread the istighâthat. This was possible because Kyai Malik, the oldest kyai in the pesantren, recommended that his students and Pesantren Jampes alumnae recite the istighâthat and develop it when they returned to their hometowns. As a result, this group developed branches in many regions in which these alumnae of the pesantren lived.

By contrast, Ihsânîyyat does not have a formal network which can be used to spread the istighâthat. Students are not normally allowed to go out of the pesantren at night, so they rarely participate in the ritual of Ihsânîyyat, which is mostly held on Thursday nights at the pesantren family’s cemetery, situated outside the pesantren. Students are, however, allowed by the leader of Pesantren Jampes to take part in the ritual of Yamisda, held on Saturday nights at the cemetery or at the pesantren. Without doubt, Yamisda has benefited from this policy. Although it was not intended to prevent the progress of Ihsânîyyat, it did limit the spread of the Istighâthat Ihsânîyyat only to those who are categorized as lay people, while those who are categorized santri have not been involved. Although in fact there has been latent competition between the two groups, a student of the pesantren denied the competition and did not see the emergence of Yamisda as a competitor of Ihsânîyyat or vice versa. The student argued as follows:
Perhaps, outsiders see the emergence of two istighâthah groups within one pesantren as a rivalry between them. But, in fact there is a hikma or a blessing with the emergence of the two groups. The emergence of Yamisda will serve not only as a means for Kyai Malik to be active outside pesantren but also as a venue for alumnae to gather. Furthermore, the emergence of both groups has helped both to reach a wide area of preaching (dakwah). If there was only one group in the pesantren, it would be difficult to cope with the wide area of dakwah.\(^{14}\)

This response, put forward by a student on the emergence of the two groups in his pesantren, is a typical view of the santri. This view is based on positive thinking (husn al-zann) rather than negative thinking (sûu al-zann) toward teachers. This view is also part of the courtesy (adab) of students toward their teachers, which is a quality strongly stressed in the relationship between students and teachers in pesantren.

The rivalry among istighâthat groups occurred when each attempted to promote their group based on the genealogy of their leaders and founders. Had the leaders of these groups been integrated in one group, this group might have had greater potential for spreading istighâthat prayer among people.

### 5.3. The Ritual of Iḥsāniyyat

The central ritual of this group is the recitation of istighâthat. One of the leaders of this group stated that this ritual includes pronouncing the name of the shaikh or teacher as mediator in the ritual (A., tawassul), remembrance (A., dhikr), the recitation of Šalawât, prayer(A.,du‘ā’), and a request for forgiveness (A., istighfâr). All of these features are endorsed by Islam and regarded as ibâdat (Muttahid 2004). Ibâdat is understood by this group to refer to additional activities such as reciting the Qur’an, tahfîl, tahmîdand visiting tombs in addition to the five actions linked to the five pillars of Islam: the witness of faith (A., shahâda), prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage (Muhaimin 1995). In other words, ibâdat in this sense is understood in its broader sense, which includes doing things that can be used as a means to seek God’s pleasure and to attain closeness to Him.

According to Gus Abdul Latif, all of these activities have a strong basis either in the Qur’an or the hadith. Dhikr, for instance, is a practice drawn from many references in the Qur’an explaining the excellence of the remembrance of God.

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\(^{14}\) Interview with a student of Pesantren Jampes, Kediri, November, 2004.
In addition, the Prophet not only encouraged Muslims to practice dhikr but also explained that a reward could be earned by those who practice dhikr. For example, the Prophet said that when any group of people remembers God, angels surround them and mercy covers them, tranquility descends upon them, and God mentions them to those who are with Him (narrated by Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Bayhaqi).

Another component of istighatha is tawassul. This practice is understood by the group as pronouncing the names of ‘ulamā’ or Sufi masters as mediators in supplicating God, irrespective of whether they are alive or dead. This practice is not intended to ask something from those people but merely to identify them as righteous persons in the view of God. Gus Abdul Latif has argued that, since these people are believed to be the most beloved of God, pronouncing their names in prayer, will increase the likelihood that God will grant the prayer. He made the analogy to a person who wished to meet a manager. If they are accompanied by a person who is closely known to the manager, the person is much more likely to attract the manager’s attention than if the person comes to the manager’s office alone. This analogy is widely used among kyai in Java. Other kyai object to this since in this situation people recognize the authority of the intermediary as much as that of the manager. In contrast, other kyai compare the tawassul to people who use spectacles to read the Qur’an. In this way, people can be said to view only the Qur’an, not the glass in their spectacles (Dhofier 1999).

The recitation of Ṣalawāt (invoking the blessing on the Prophet) is also part of the istighatha ritual and it is sanctioned by God. Gus Abdul Latif argued that since every Muslim receives guidance from God by virtue of the Prophet, they should invoke blessing on him. Furthermore, quoting the verse of Qur’an, Gus Abdul Latif mentioned that indeed, as God and His Angels invoke blessing on the Prophet, so should people. In addition, the Prophet is the right person to whom blessing is given because he was believed to be able to provide his intercession (shafaat) both in this world and in the hereafter.

Another important element of the istighatha is istighfār. Gus Abdul Latif mentioned that the istighfār was included as a formula to invoke God’s forgiveness. The importance of istighfār is well supported both by the Qur’an and the hadith because it is closely related to the concept of repentance (A., taubah). According to Sufi tradition, repentance (A., taubat), which is considered to be the first station (maqām) in Sufi practice, is required of all Muslims, since no Muslim is able to perform God’s order perfectly. Moreover, no one can be free from the intrigues of the devil nor from the lower soul’s (nafs) desire, which contributes to disobedience (Muhaya 1993:43).
To perform taubat, it is not enough just say istighfār, without following three requirements. Qushairī notes three essential conditions in order for repentance to be acceptable. The first is contrition for acts of disobedience. The second is the immediate abandonment of sin through fulfilling the obligation to refrain from disobedience. The third is the determination not to sin again (al-Qushayri 2002:111). This is similar to Gus Abdul Latif’s view that no son or daughter of Adam is immune from committing sins, and the best of those who have committed sin are those who repent from it. Moreover, it is believed that performing istighfār is able to purify hearts and get rid of sins.

The last component of this istighāthat is the prayer of supplication (A., du‘ā’). This ritual is normally placed at the end of the istighāthat. It is at this time that people are urged to pray to God with the guidance of their leader, asking not only for their happiness in the hereafter but also for happiness in this life. As in other Sufi orders, du‘ā’ is stressed in this group because it is considered to be the most important practice of the istighāthat.

The ritual of istighāthat is normally led by the leader of the group or his representatives at the tombs of holy people or other places such as in mosques, a village public hall (I., balai desa) and member’s houses. This ritual usually begins with a session called arwahan. As implied by this term, which is derived from the word meaning the soul of deceased person (I., arwah), this ritual involves the leader sending prayers or the al-Fātihat chapter15 to deceased persons at the request of the participants. However, in this session many people request the leader to recite al-Fātihat not for deceased persons, but for their own worldly purposes. For example, during this session participants have asked for success in the local regency elections, Indonesian football competition, earning money, the military tests, selling houses, or for the recovery from a chronic disease. Normally, these requests are written on a piece of paper and given to the coordinator a few minutes before the session begins. Asking for a share in the blessing (I., barakah) and intercession from the personage in the tombs, the leader reads the request and makes a prayer. In return, those who make these requests should give some money voluntarily to the coordinator. The amount of money is not determined. In the great ritual of istighāhat, the arwahan session can take a long time since many people make requests.

When the arwahan has been concluded, the next session will be a religious lecture (A., mau’izat al-hasanat) followed by interactive dialogue involving the participants and the leader. The topic of the lecture is not determined beforehand.

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15 This first chapter of the Qur’an is considered by Muslim scholars as the core of the rest of the Qur’an in term of the content of its message. Therefore, it is believed that reciting this chapter is like reciting all the chapters of the Qur’an.
and is usually based on the preference of the leader. On some occasions, the lecture is given and developed from questions asked by the participants. Therefore, the lecture could include various topics on Islamic subjects and individual consultations. Usually during a major ceremony or ritual held by Sufi orders, this kind of lecture does not allow the audience time to ask questions.

Plate 5.2: People using trucks to get to the Istighāthat Iḥṣāniyyat ritual Banyuwangi

Plate 5.3: Female participants at a Istighāthat Iḥṣāniyyat group ritual in Kediri.
After the religious lecture, the main ritual of *istighāthah*, that is *tawassulan*, occurs. This consists in reciting the *al-Fātiḥah* chapter conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad, and from him in succession to his families, his companions, the generations after companions (A., *tābiʿīn*), the generations after the *tābiʿīn* (A., *tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn*), the saints (A., *auliyāʿ*), Muslim scholars (I., *ulama*), and all virtuous Muslims (A., *sāliḥin*). Other prophets such as Adam and Eve, Khīḍr, Elias, Christ, are also specifically mentioned. Other names recited can include ‘ʿAlī ibnAbīṬālib, the only one of the Prophet’s companions specifically mentioned in the list; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī; ‘Αbd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī, the founder of Qadiriyah orders; ‘Αbd al-Salām Ibn Mashīḥ (d.1228), the teacher of the founder of Shadhiliyyah orders; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Αbd Allah Ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbaʿr al-Shadhīlī (d.1258), the founder of Shadhiliyyah orders; Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad bin ‘Alī al-Būnī (d.1225), the author of *Shams al-Maʿārif* (The Illumination of Knowledge) which is the most widely read medieval Islamic treatise on talismans, and the magical square (A., *wifq*) in pesantren; ‘Αbd al-Wahhaʿb al-Shaʿrānī (d.1565), the founder of Shaʿrānīyyat orders, and Abū Madyān al-Maghraʿbī (d.1197), the teacher of Ibn Mashīḥ.

It is clear that some of the names cited during *tawassulan* are renowned names, which have important positions in the chain of transmission in various famous Sufi orders. Pronouncing these names during the *tawassulan* session does not mean that these names are considered as transmitters (A., *isnād* or I., *silsilah*) of the *Iḥsāniyyat* group. These names are cited to help to obtain blessing from those who are considered to be ‘the axis of saints’ (A., *Qutb al-Aqtaʿab*). It is believed that these saints, despite their death, ‘reside simultaneously in their tombs and in heaven’ (Woodward 1989). Moreover, they are also believed to be capable of becoming involved in the lives of those who pray (Ewing 1997:117).

Other names cited during the *tawassulan* session are the leader’s family ancestors including *Shaikh Yahūda, Shaikh Mesir, Shaikh Ujang Śāliḥ, Nyai Istiʿanah, Sheikh Dāḥlān, Shaikh Iḥsān, Shaikh Muḥammad,* and Nyai Ḥasanah. Apart from the last two, these names are also cited during the *tawassulan* session held by the *Yamisda* group. The last two names are not mentioned by *Yamisda* because they are not regarded as family ancestors of the leader. Sheikh Muhammad was the elder brother and and Nyai Hasanah the sister-in-law of Yamisda’s leader, *Kyai Malik*, so their status in the group is considered less significant.

Among those family ancestor names, *Shaikh Iḥsan* is cited twice during the *tawassulan* session after reciting *al-Fātiḥah* for all deceased teachers of Pesantren Jampes, all deceased Muslim fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, and all dead or live Muslims. For the *Iḥsāniyyat* leader, this name needs to be
emphasized in the ritual and should be given special attention because he is regarded as a transmitter (A., sanad) of this group (Muttahid 2004). According to the rule of hadith (A., ‘ulûm al-ḥadîth), a sanad is understood to be the person who narrated the text of a hadith. The succession of these sanad starts with the last narrator and ends with the Prophet who spoke the hadith. It is not clear in this group whether or not Shaikh Ihsan is regarded as a sanad in the strict sense of this term. If he is, he should receive the Istighâthat formula through a chain of narrators which leads back to the Prophet. However, there seems to be no evidence that he has received this formula from the Prophet through a chain of transmitters.

After reciting al-Fatîhat for Shaikh Ihsan, by asking for a share in his sacredness (A., karâmat, I., karamah16), blessing and secrets (A., asrâr), the tawassul session is closed with a prayer. Unlike rituals held by others Sufi groups, this prayer is recited in both Arabic and Javanese. It can also be recited in other vernaculars depending on the language of the majority of supplicants. The reason for using the Javanese language is to steady the supplicants’ hearts because all of them are Javanese and few of them understand Arabic. It is widely held in Sufi teachings that to invoke God, people should understand the meaning of the invocation because it will guarantee the success of the prayer. As al-Ghazâlî said, praying without understanding the meaning is like a parrot that can say anything but understand nothing. Even, in the five times prayers, understanding the meaning will contribute to improve the focus (A., khusû’) of prayer. This prayer is as follows:

O! Allah I ask of your taufiq and guidance, your mercy and blessing, as well as your contentment and forgiveness for me and for my family. And Oh! Allah I ask you to ease all of my problems, to meet all my needs, to make all business successful for my family and myself. And I ask you to make me and my family happy both in this world and the world to come, to increase my livelihood and wealth which are blessed and useful, and I ask you to save me and my family from trials, misfortune, dangers and from all unpleasant things. And I ask you to answer all of my requests by virtue of the blessing, the miracle and the secrets of al-Fatîhat chapter 17(Muhammad n.d.:7).

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16 The term karâmat(plural karâmâ) is an Arabic word meaning the wonders wrought by Muslim saints for the good of the people as well as in proof of their own saintship. In Javanese the term karâmat changes to keramât which refers to sacred place such as a holy grave or the shrine of a holy person.
17 ‘Ya Allah kulo nyuwun , kulo sekeluargo mugio panjenengan paringi Taufiq lan Hidayah panjenengan, Rahmat lan Nikmat Panjenengan , Soho ridha lan pengampunan panjenengan , lan kulu nyuwn Ya Allah kulo sekeluarga mugio panjenengan gampilaken sedoyo urusanipun, hasil sedoyo hajatipun, sukses sedoyo usahaniipun, lan kulu nyuwn Ya Allah kulo sekeluargo mugio panjenengan dadosaken tiang ingkang bahagia donyo lan akhiratipun, kathah rizkipun,kathah bondonipun ingkang barakah lan manfaati, lan kulu nyuwun Ya Allah kulo sekeluarga mugio panjenengan selametaken saking fitnah, bala’ afat lan sedoyo perkawis ingkang mboten ngeremenaken. Lan kulu nyuwun Ya Allah mugio sedoyo panyuwun kulo kolowau panjenengan ijabahi sedoyo lantaran barakah, karomah, soho asroripun Surat a-Fatihah.’
This prayer is not the end of the ritual. Rather, this prayer is the beginning of the dhikr session that consists of the reciting of the first chapter of the Qur’an (al-Fātiha) forty times; the reciting of al-Ikhlāṣ chapter eleven times; the reciting of istighfār phrase, استغفر الله المعظيم سبحان الله وحده, (I beseech Allah’s forgiveness, the Magnificent, glory be to Allah and praise be to him); the reciting of the salāwa phrase a hundred times, إبَّا النَّبِيِّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبِرَكَاتِهِ (May the peace, the Mercy and the Blessing of Allah be upon you, O! Prophet); the reciting of Kalimat al-Ṭayyibat a hundred times, المبين نِعَمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ (There is none worthy of worship except Allah, the sovereign Lord, the Truth, the Clear evident), the reciting of some of God’s names a hundred times, يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ بِنَاسِكَتْ بَيِّنَى يُبَشَّرُونَ بِيَوْمِ يَوْمِ يُقَدِّرُونَ (In the name of Allah, O! the Opener, the Provider, the Most Sufficient, the Rich) and the reciting of hauqalā' phrase a hundred times, بَنَاتِي الْعَنيِّ العَظِيمِ بِنَاسِكَتْ (In the names of Allah the All Merciful and the All Compassionate, there is no change and power except through Allah). All of these formulae are recited vocally either by the leader or the participants. Eventually, the ritual is closed by a long prayer led by the leader.

It is important to note that the dominant feature of the dhikr ritual performed by this group is the recitation of God’s names taken from the best names of God (A., asmā‘ūl ʾḥusnā). Although Muslim scholars have different opinions on the number of these names, it is widely held that there are ninety nine names. In addition to the use of His names focusing on his transcendence and power, this group also employs His names or attributes which imply His response to requests. For example, if one says Ya Fattāḥ (the Opener), Ya Razzāq (the Provider), it would mean ‘be opening and be providing’. In other words, it is expected that by reciting these God’s names, divine aid in opening and providing a livelihood for humans is sought. This practice is sanctioned by God in the Qur’an, which asks people to invoke God using His names (al-ʾAʿrāf : 180; al-Isrā‘ : 110). It is expected that mentioning God’s attributes and his names in praying will cause the prayer to be granted by God, as well as creating optimism in the heart of supplicants (Shihab 1998:xxxvii). However, particular Sufi orders such as the Hamidiyyah Shadhiliyyah order, recite God’s names but not in connection with questions and requests. According to Hamidiyyah Shadhiliyyah group, the proper purpose of dhikr is to focus on the Absoluteness of God, on His transcendent, Eternal Being, with no thought of material purposes (Gilsenan 1973:167-68). In contrast, In the Ḥṣāniyyat group, the participants are allowed to invoke God with respect to their own intentions.

The ritual of istighatha is conducted in a group (berjamaah) on a weekly and five-week (J., selapanan) basis. It may also be practised daily by individuals at any time. The weekly ritual is usually held in places such as the tombs of holy
men or in some villages located in Kediri. These rituals are usually attended by a small number of people. On the other hand, the selapanan ritual is generally held outside Kediri and can be attended by a great number of people. In addition, the ritual is also specifically held in connection with the birthday of this group and the anniversary of the death of Muslim saints in the vicinity of Kediri such as Shaikh Ihsan Dahlan, Shaikh Muhammad and Nyai Hasanah, Shaikh Murshad, Shaikh Ali Lalayan (Pangeran Demang), and Shaikh Ageng Karanglo. Like the selapanan rituals, these rituals are held on the anniversary of the saints’ deaths and involve many members of the group from different regions.

Only the selapanan ritual of istighāthāt is followed by other cultural performances such as hobby-horse dances (J., jaranan), the tiger-masked dances (I., Reog Ponorogo), a Chinese traditional dances (I., barongsai), and dangdutan. On these occasions, a meal and special water are provided for the participants in the ritual. When the ritual has concluded, the committee that organized the ritual usually serves a meal from a general kitchen (I., dapur umum) set up in the location. The special meal provided during this ritual is rice served with eggplant vegetable curry. For the leader of this group this menu has a particular significance. According to him, the soft texture of eggplant symbolizes the softness of the heart after performing the istighāthāt ritual. Therefore, it is expected that reciting istighāthāt, can make the hearts of the participants soft and ready to receive guidance (I., hidayah) from God.

In addition to the meal, special water called blessed water (I., air karamah) is provided for the ritual participants at every entrance. To obtain this water people should voluntarily give a small amount of money. Before being offered to people, this water is specially prayed over by a group of selected kyai in turn so that this water is believed to have particular power (I., karamah) that can be used for many purposes. Gus Abdul Latif believes that this water can be used to heal or for other purposes because it has absorbed spiritually the sound waves of recited dhikr. In order to enhance the power of this water, a special prayer can be directed to it. Gus Abdul Latif argued that this practice was well supported by the fact that the Prophet himself carried out the same practice. It was said in a hadith that when one of the Prophet’s companions was sick, the Prophet gave him water while reciting a prayer. It is for this reason that in order to obtain blessing (barakah) during a manāqiban ritual (reciting a particular Sufi saint’s biography) or during a istighāthāt recitation held by some Sufi orders in Java, many participants bring a bottle of water from home, and place it in front of the ritual gathering with its lid open.
5.4. The Structure of the Group

Gilsenan, in his classical study on Saints and Sufi in Modern Egypt, used the terms, ‘organization’ and ‘association’ to describe the structure of Sufi orders. An organization emphasizes ‘a high degree of stratification on the basis of differential expertise and/or efficiency’. An organization is also characterized by ‘greater structural recognition of functional inequality’ and formal control based on ‘a hierarchy of authority statuses’. Another mark of organizations is that their holders are full time and fully paid. In contrast, an association is characterized by ‘looseness of structure with minimal development of a status hierarchy.’ Individual commitment in an association is also voluntary and egalitarian. Moreover, the appointment of officials is based on administrative convenience. He concluded that the majority of Sufi orders in Egypt could be placed on a continuum between association and organization (Gilsenan 1973:65-66). Sufi orders in Indonesia can also be shown to follow this typology.

However, Gilsenan’s typology cannot be easily applied to the structure of Majlis Dhikr groups like Istighāthat Iḥsaniyyat. Unlike many Sufi orders in Indonesia which have hierarchical positions such as master (murshid), vice-master (khalifah), and disciple (murid), in the Iḥsaniyyat group these positions are not recognized. Instead, Iḥsaniyyat only recognizes a single position of leader who is regarded as a central figure (I., tokoh sentral) in this group. Although there are chairpersons (I., ketua) in some branches, they function only as coordinators for major istighāhat rituals (rutinan selapanan) and other rituals held in these branches. If the tokoh sentral cannot come to the ritual, these chairpersons will substitute for him to lead the major istighāhat (rutinan selapanan) ritual. These branch representative chairpersons are appointed directly by the central leader without any further qualification and without any limit on the time. As a result, they are immediately responsible to him. In this sense, the position of these representatives is not like the khalifat or naib in other Sufi orders who can function as intermediaries linking murid with murshid but also supervising the initiation of new murid on behalf of their murshid.

Because there is no intermediary person to link the members with the tokoh sentral, people find it easy to meet with him either privately or on public occasions. For example, prior to the weekly istighāhat ritual and at the end of the ritual, people can freely meet Gus Abdul Latif, in the relaxed context, sitting together and chatting (I., jagongan) with him. It is on this occasion that people can ask, consult, and discuss everything with their leader. Moreover, such occasions are sometimes used by the leader to give religious messages to his members informally. It is also evident on such occasions how the tokoh sentral
Figure 5.1 Organizational Structure of Iḥsāniyyat Group.

Source: Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, November 2004.

demonstrates his sympathy and care toward his members by staying until midnight, if called upon to do so. In addition, if people want to consult privately, they can meet him directly in his house at any time or they can make a call through his assistants (J., khadam) to check on his availability.

As happens in many other Sufi groups, the exact number of members and their social background are unknown because the Iḥsāniyyat group keeps no official records, and the recruitment of new followers is not officially registered. The majority of its members come from the lower classes of society. Most of them come from rural areas rather than urban areas. The members of this group comprise not only elderly men and women but also younger people.

To become a member of Iḥsāniyyat, people do not need to take an oath or initiation (A., bay’at, I., baiat) to the leader or his representative or pass a test. In other words, the mode of entry is voluntary, so people can recite and practice the ḍhikr (dhikr formula) without asking direct permission from the tokoh sentral. Moreover, the Iḥsāniyyat group does not demand an exclusive commitment on the part of its members. Therefore, people can voluntarily join this group while also being members of other dhikr groups. They are also able to practise the ritual of istighāthāt intermittently without any sanction, even though the leader of this group recommends the members (jamaah) practise the istighāthāt ritual continuously. In contrast, other Sufi orders require their members to take a vow of allegiance (bay’at) to their shaikh or murshid, before they can recite a special ḍhikr and more aḥzāb (Trimingham 1971:186). Even Sufi groups such as Hamidiyah Shadiliyah (Gilsenan 1973:94), and Tijaniyah
demanded an exclusive commitment and allegiance from their members. For example, on joining the Tijaniyah order, people are expected to abandon their commitment to other orders. They will not suffer any harm if they abandon those orders. However, if they abandon their allegiance to the Tijaniyyah, they will experience harm and death (Sirriyeh 1999:17-18).

The relationship between the tokoh sentral and his members is not like the strong master-pupil (murshid-murid) relationship in many Sufi orders. The relationship is based on a general normative comportment (I., adab) as commonly practised in teacher-student relations in the Islamic learning tradition, while the relationship between murshid and murid in Sufi orders is strongly based on a complex set of adab as well as sanctions. Kyai Usman Ishaqi, a murshid of Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyyah order from Surabaya, mentioned in his book, al-Khulāṣat al-Wafiyyat fi al-Adāb wa Kaifiyyat al-Dhikr ‘Inda al-Sāda al-Qādiriyyat wa al-Naqshabandiyyat, the adab by which the murid should completely respect their murshid. He put it this way:

You should respect your shaikh and believe outwardly (dhahir) and inwardly (batin) that without the help of the shaikh, your objective will never be obtained. You should not complain about what the shaikh has done, even though the shaikh may have done something which is unlawful in appearance. Instead, avoiding negative prejudice against the shaikh, people should be convinced that what the shaikh has done is clearly based on God’s orders. If you still do not understand this, you should think that this is because of your lack of knowledge in understanding the essence of matters. Sometimes what the shaikh has done seems to be blameworthy (madhmūmat) in appearance; however in its essence what he has done is praiseworthy. You should surrender yourselves to him because challenging him is like a disease, which is difficult to cure… the murid who ask their shaikh about his behaviour will never prosper. In all your life matters either in their totality or in their details, in devotional aspects or cultural aspects, you should abandon your own choice because your shaikh has chosen for you. In short, you should surrender yourself to him. The annihilation in master (A., fānā’ fī al-shaikh) is an introduction to the annihilation in God (A., fānā’ fī Allah)... You should not talk in front of your shaikh. When he asks you, instead of answering too long, you should answer the question precisely. This is partly because speaking too much in front of the shaikh will eliminate his veneration. Therefore, the excellent adab of a murid toward his shaikh is that he should be silent, quiet and pay attention to what the shaikh says and do that which contributes to welfare (al-Ishaqi n.d.:5-6).

This adab is relevant to the famous expression in the Sufi tradition, ‘Be with your shaikh like the corpse in the hands of the washer; he turns it over as he wishes and it is obedient’ (Trimingham 1971:187). This long practical adab instruction
in a Sufi order is always stressed, either by the murshid or his khāfīfat, especially on the occasion of initiation (A., bay’at) and some other occasions. In contrast, although the members of Iḥsāniyyat do not engage in such adab, they still pay respect to their tokoh sentral as a teacher. For example, it is very common for Iḥsāniyyat members to chat with their tokoh sentral after an istighāthāt ritual session until midnight. Sometimes they laugh if the tokoh sentral makes a joke about one of his members. According to the adab prescribed in the Sufi orders, none of these practices is allowed.

Since the highest authority in the Iḥsāniyyat is in the hands of the tokoh sentral as founder as well as guider of the group, every decision related to the group is determined only with his approval. For example, every activity is conducted by establishing a temporary committee, the members of which are recruited from capable group members on his approval. When those activities have been completed, the committee is responsible for reporting about these activities to the tokoh sentral. When tokoh sentral has approved and accepted the report, he officially dismisses the committee. If he cannot attend and lead the weekly ritual, he delegates his representative to lead the ritual. Without a mandate from him, no one dares to lead the ritual.

In order to support and run the activities of Iḥsāniyyat, this group does not have particular ways to gain financial funding. For example, it has never asked its members to give money regularly to the leader of the group. The only financial funding that can be obtained by this group comes from events such as ruwatan (a special ritual to cleanse people’s misfortune) and the regular istighāthāt ritual (I., rutinan istighathat selapanan). In an event like ruwatan, for instance, the event committee usually asks those who participate to give some money. Moreover, at another event such as a major istighāthāt ritual, this group can collect funds from the arwahan session, donation boxes, and air karamah provided to the participants. In order to be included in the arwahan session, people should give some money voluntarily to the coordinator of the session. Likewise, if they want to receive air karomah, they should give some money in return.

To encourage members of Iḥsāniyyat to give more alms, Kyai Hisham argued that prayers would be more easily granted by God if they are followed by alms and charity (I., sadaqah). The more people give the greater the chance their prayer will be granted by God. He described this notion to the members of Iḥsāniyyat by pointing out that ‘if someone wants to catch a big fish, they should have big fish bait.’ However, it is not clear what percentage of the money collected should be allocated to the group or given to the leader. It is therefore difficult to trace the stream of funding in this group because all financial matters
are discussed internally among a few individuals. As a result, the members and public have no idea how much money has been collected by this organization so far.

It is interesting to note that although this group has not included pesantren in its structure, pesantren have still played an important role in the spreading of this local group. In the case of Ḳḥṣāniyyat, the network of alumnae who graduated from Pesantren Jampes has played an important role in disseminating knowledge of this group. The position of Gus Abdul Latif as the leader of Ḳḥṣāniyyat, as a son of a kyai of the pesantren, and as an Islamic preacher (I., muballigh) has attracted many alumnae to invite him to give religious lectures in their home towns. On such occasions Gus Abdul Latif often introduces Ḳḥṣāniyyat to the participants. On many occasions, this group is deliberately introduced to the public as a group from Pesantren Jampes rather than from Kediri. In this way, Pesantren Jampes has become a part of the group’s structure. Pesantren Jampes has contributed to popularizing this group.

5.5. From Tombs to Mosques: Implementing Sufi Dakwah and Religious Tolerance

Dakwah is a Qur’anic concept that has been widely used and practised by Muslims. However, since this term has different connotations and understandings, Muslims in diverse parts of the world conceive the practice of dakwah in various ways. Even in Indonesian Islam, dakwah is applied and interpreted in different ways. Some people use the concept in ‘its restricted form (to apply only within Islam), while others use dakwah in its open form (for all of humanity).’ As Gade has explained, dakwah basically means ‘call to deepen one’s own or encourage others’ Islamic piety’ (Gade 2004:16).

For the leader of Ḳḥṣāniyat, dakwah is understood not only as encouraging others’ Islamic piety but also seeking the guidance of God (I., hidayah), which is necessary for the success of dakwah. It is in line with this definition that the ritual of Istighāthat Ḳḥṣāniyyat is combined with a religious lecture (A., mauzūt al-ḥasanat). The first aim is to ask God’s guidance and then to deepen and encourage others’ Islamic piety. Gus Abdul Latif believes that without God guidance (I., hidayah), the objective of dakwah will not be perfectly achieved. Likewise, istighāthat without mauzūt al-ḥasanat is like ibāda without knowledge (I., ilmu), which is considered worthless. To achieve hidayah entails the purification of one’s heart from negative worldly desire. This purification can be done through istighāthat which contains continuous worship and repentance.
When *hidayah* has been achieved, people can deepen their understanding of Islamic knowledge from any source. This form of *dakwah* has been practised by the group since *Gus* Abdul Latif realized that the *dakwah* of Islamic preachers in Indonesia has not contributed to the improvement of Muslims’ religious attitudes. This is partly because the practice of *dakwah* has placed too much stress on public lectures (I., *ceramah*), while ignoring the obtainment of *hidayah*. *Gus* Abdul Latif explained the importance of *istighāthah* in the *dakwah* project as follows:

Human beings consist of two aspects: a physical aspect (I., *jasmani*) and a spiritual aspect (I., *rohani*). Both of them constitute life in unity which needs different food supplement. The former will become healthy and functional if it is supplied with enough nutrition and vitamins. Likewise, the latter will be healthy and functional if it is supplied with enough nutrition and vitamins. This nutrition and vitamins can be gained from sincere worship and religious activities which can bring one nearer to God through *istighāthah*. However, most people have forgotten this spiritual need. In fact, if this spiritual need can be fulfilled, all social problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, as well as social crimes can be resolved.  

Since its inception, this group has catered for those who are categorized as difficult people (I., *orang ruwet*) and marginalised people (I., *orang pinggiran*) though it is also open to other groups of people. *Ihšāniyyat* even attracted those who were previously addicted to narcotics (I., *narkoba*), alcohol, ecstasy tablets, and opium (*sabu-sabu*). According to *Gus* Abdul Latif, the reason for recruiting those people into the *Ihšāniyyat* group was that they had been ignored by other religious leaders in their *dakwah* projects. Instead of ignoring them, he stressed that these people should become the main target of Islamic *dakwah*. These people in his view were similar to government officials (I., *pejabat*), nobles (I., *orang pangkat*), and Muslims scholars (I., *ulama*) and these people should be treated patiently without labeling them as *orang nakal* or *orang ruwet*. However, some of *Gus* Abdul Latif’s colleagues have objected to such *dakwah*. They feared that if such people were involved, they could ruin their status as *Gus* or kyai. In response to this objection, he argued as follows:

The status of someone’s *kyaiship* will not disappear because of associating with bad people, thieves, and drug addicts. The status of a person’s *kyaiship* will be sustained so long as they maintain their consistency to conduct and hold their belief [religious belief]. Even if they associate with pious people but do not maintain their consistency, their status as kyai will decline.

18 Interview with *Gus* Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.
Gus Abdul Latif further argued that the recruitment of orang ruwet in the dakwah project was based on the fact that the Prophet himself was very concerned about these people. The Prophet give his advocacy (A., shafā’at) for those who committed capital offences (I., dosa besar). Gus Abdul Latif insisted that if ‘ulama’ are considered the Prophet’s inheritors, they have to emulate him by welcoming, and embracing such people, and strengthening their Islamic piety rather than ignoring them. Therefore, in the context of dakwah he maintained that ‘people should guide those who cannot walk rather than guiding those who are capable of walking.’

Involving those people in the dakwah project can also mean that they should be regarded as respected people (I., orang terhormat) rather than as the dregs of society (I., sampah masyarakat). For Gus Abdul Latif, respecting them and involving them in the dakwah project will enhance their confidence, which ultimately contributes to their consciousness to return to the right path. One of his ways to increase their confidence is by asking them not to be upset by their past deeds. He maintained that if those people are willing to repent seriously, God will forgive all their past sins; God only loves those sinners who are willing to repent. Furthermore, he motivates them by saying that the repentance of those sinners could be likened to fertilizer made from animal feces, which is useful for plantations. Without this fertilizer, plants will not grow perfectly. Thus, he believes that because of those people, the status of other people before God can improve. Therefore, instead of condemning them, people should thank them. According to Gus Abdul Latif, this notion is based on the hadith which he described as follows:

‘Later, the flame of fire licks many Muslims on the Day of Judgment; no one including Muslim scholars (ulama) can prevent the fire. Suddenly, the Angel of Gabriel comes and brings water to extinguish the fire and it is out. The Prophet says to the Angel, ‘What sort of water did you bring to extinguish the fire?’ Gabriel answers, ‘I collected this water from the tears of those who regret their sins.’

Furthermore, to those who have committed sins and would like to repent, Gus Abdul Latif says, ‘Your rank (derajat) before God is higher than mine, because God loves much those who want to repent from their sins and only those who have sinned are able to repent.’

Here, Gus Abdul Latif’s positive opinion toward those who have committed sins relies heavily on the teaching of Sufism (I., tasawuf). Based on this teaching, people’s fate at the end of their lives is difficult to know: whether they will have a good death (A., ḥusn al-khātimat) or a bad death (A., sū’ al-khātimat).
In this respect, some people may do good deeds during their life, but commit sins at the end of their life without having a chance to repent, so these people obviously die with sû’ al-khātimat. Furthermore, he argued that people should not underestimate those who have committed sins during their life, because they might have the chance to repent at the end of their life so that they may die with husn al-khātimat. Therefore, since people do not know their own fate, they should not underestimate others who are still sinning. In this sense, Gus Abdul Latif’s opinion is similar to Ibn Aṭā’illah who pointed out that, ‘Bad deeds (I., maksiat) which bring someone to obedience to Allah (A., tā’at) are much better than good deeds (A., tā’at) which are coupled with, and lead, to pride (A., takabbur) (Pranowo 1991:50).’

Another approach taken by Gus Abdul Latif to attract those orang ruwet into his group is based on the teachings of the Qur’an. For example, when approaching drunken people who ultimately succeed in stopping drinking, he never overtly prohibits them from drinking. He believes that if they have not received hidayah, they will not stop drinking. Therefore, since quitting drinking is a matter of hidayah, he allows them to drink but at the same time, he asks them to keep in their mind that God prohibits drinking alcohol. This strategy was inspired by the way the Qur’an gradually prohibited drinking khamr. As described in the Qur’an, the prohibition took place four steps: the first step is that the Qur’an just informed people that:

And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink (sakar) and (also) good nourishment. Lo! therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense [An-Nahl 16:67].

At the second step, when one of the Prophet’s companions reported that khamr can lead people to unconsciousness and bankruptcy, the Qur’an responded that:

They will ask thee about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: ‘In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit which they bring.’ And they will ask thee as to what they should spend [in God’s cause]. Say: ‘Whatever you can spare’. In this way God makes clear unto you His messages, so that you might reflect [al-Baqarah 2:219]

In this verse, instead of explicitly prohibiting people from drinking strong liquor (A., khamr), the Qur’an only noted that the sin, which resulted from drinking khamr, was greater than its usefulness. At the third step, the Qur’an only prohibits people from drinking khamr while they are about to pray. The Qur’an explained that:
O! ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, until ye know that which ye utter [al-Nisa’ 4:43].

At the fourth step, the Qur’an explicitly forbade people from drinking khamr because it is part of Satan’s handiwork. The Qur’an said that:

O! ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan’s handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed. [al-Maidah 5:90]

All of these verses suggest that in order to prohibit khamr, God prescribed a gradual method rather than a direct method, and this method can be applied in dakwah projects. The application of this method is also stressed by the Prophetic tradition which encourages Muslims to behave according to God’s ethics (A., akhlāq Allāh).

In line with this method, Gus Abdul Latif allowed Javanese popular arts such as the hobby-horse dance (I., jaranan), tiger-masked dance (I., reog), dangdutan, Chinese dragon dance (leang-leong), and ruwatan to be performed on the annual anniversary of Iḥsāniyyat. Such Javanese popular arts within the framework of pesantren and Sufi group are unusual. These popular arts are closely associated with the abangan group (nominal Muslims), a group that is seen by some scholars as being always contrary to the santri group (devout Muslims). However, Gus Abdul Latif believes that these performances can be used as a means to propagate Islam among those nominal Muslims. He put it this way:

Holding jaranan on the anniversary day of Iḥsāniyyat could be seen as part of lisān al-ḥāfin the dakwah project. In other words, although without saying anything, I have shown to them that I can accept and accommodate those performances…As a result, we can bring the jaranan society or abangan group back to the Islamic path by respecting and appreciating them. If we have been accepted [by them], we can remove slowly the content of the performance arts that is prohibited by Islamic Law. If this succeeds, they can propagate Islam through the performance arts.19

In response to this statement, the leader of the Lukojoyo Jaranan Group commented as follows:

As an ‘ulāma, Gus Abdul Latif was willing to watch our performance, without denouncing it. He, even, suggested we improve the quality of jaranan performance, whereas other ‘ulāma’ have regarded us as people who are outside of social norms (I., di luar norma sosial) (Hisbi:2004).

19 Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, January, 2005.
This response makes clear that these people felt happy to be embraced by Gus Abdul Latif in his *dakwah*. Gus Abdul Latif often involved this group in organizing *istighāthat* rituals in their own area. As a result, they were not reluctant to join other rituals held in other places.

According to Gus Abdul Latif, there were objections among other ‘ulama’ towards those Javanese performance arts. Some ‘ulama’ objected to those performances, saying that those arts were un-Islamic. However, Gus Abdul Latif criticized those who regarded Javanese arts such as *reog* and *jaranan* or *jatilan* as sinful arts (*kesenian yang berdosa*), while others such as *qasidah* and *gambus* were considered to be Islamic arts (*kesenian Islami*). He questioned: ‘What makes those Javanese arts un-Islamic, whereas the latter are considered Islamic arts (I., Islami)?’ He argued that it is not fair to say that *jaranan* is an un-Islamic art, while *qasidah modern* is Islamic because it has an Arabic flavor. He argued that *qasidah*, in fact, must be considered as less Islamic than *jaranan*, since *qasidah* or *gambus*, even though they contain Arabic songs, always involve women who dance and sing. According to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), watching dancing women and hearing women singers can lead to immoral acts (I., *maksiat*) rather than spiritual benefits (*manfaat*).20

In fact, Gus Abdul Latif’s predecessor also allowed various Javanese popular arts performances. My informant mentioned that Shaikh Ihsan Dahlan, Abdul Gus Latif’s grandfather, included various popular Javanese arts when he conducted graduation (I., *khataman*) celebrations after he had finished reciting the whole chapters of *Ihya Ulumuddin* and his works, *Sira‘ al-Talibin* in his pesantren21. At that time, Kyai Hasyim Ash’ari, the founder of the Nahdlatul Ulama organization, asked Kyai Ihsan about the involvement of these Javanese popular arts in the *khataman* celebration. Instead of answering, Kyai Ihsan Dahlan just opened his mouth. According to my informant, Kyai Hashim looked inside and saw the blue water of an ocean in Kyai Ihsan’s mouth. My informant argued that this blue water of the deep ocean remains pure and clean even though dirty streams of water from rivers flow into it. This blue water of the deep ocean thus also symbolized the depth of Kyai Ihsan’s Sufi practice that could purify all vices brought about by those Javanese popular arts. Gus Abdul Latif’s acceptance of Javanese popular arts showed that santri culture is not always opposed to Javanese indigenous culture. Furthermore, Gus Abdul Latif’s acceptance of Javanese popular arts reflects the nature of Sufi teachings which emphasizes continuity rather than change in local tradition and practices.

20 Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, October, 2004.
21 Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, October, 2004.
The involvement of Javanese performances in the Ihsāniyyat group’s dakwah reminds us of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the nine saints (I., Wali Sanga) of Java, who introduced Javanese gamelan of sekaten (I., gamelan sekaten) in his dakwah in commemoration of Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (I., maulid nabi). The word sekaten is a Javanese word which is adapted from the Arabic shahādatain (the two sentences of the declaration of faith), the first pillar of the five pillars of Islam. Sunan Kalijaga used the story and actors in shadow puppet (I., wayang kulit) performances and creatively modified them to propagate Islam (Saksono 1995:91). In fact, as van Dijk (1998:225) has described, most Wali Sanga propagated Islam in Java with ‘tact and moderation and accepted existing culture wherever possible.’ They never touched, criticized or banned any sensitive issues and local customs in the society by rigidly imposing religious teachings, even though they lived in an abangan-santri society.

In addition to his tolerance toward Javanese culture and arts, Gus Abdul Latif also demonstrated his tolerance toward other religious followers. For example, he allowed a Christian to join regularly in the istighāhat ritual held by the Ihsāniyyat group in Kediri without asking him to convert to Islam. Gus Abdul Latif further demonstrated his tolerance toward followers of other religious by praying sincerely for a Christian, at his request, for success in finding a new house. The reason for accepting this person as a member of the group is related to his dakwah strategy to show the tolerance and inclusiveness of Islam toward other religious believers. Gus Latif stressed that Islam and other religions have many more similarities than differences.22

Another reason to accept followers of other religions as Ihsāniyyat members is to provide a bridge for interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding, which is essential in building religious life in Indonesia. The significance of this religious relationship can be concluded, for example, from a dialogue between a Christian and Gus Abdul Latif concerning a comment put forward by Abu Bakar Ba’asyir that, ‘We have to destroy America, and enemies of Islam in Indonesia’. The Christian felt threatened by Ba’asyir’s comment. In response, to this concern, Gus Abdul Latif said that every Muslim knows who Abu Bakar Ba’asyir is, and so one should not be worried by his threats. If this problem is not communicated in the frame of religious friendship, Gus Abdul Latif believed, followers of religions other than Islam will think that the majority of Muslims are like Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. Therefore, interfaith friendship and dialogue are important to reduce potential conflicts between religious beliefs because of misunderstandings. This mission is relevant to the motto of this group, that is, as a builder of a conscious and adhesive ummat (I., pembina mental dan perekat umat).

22 Interview with Gus Abdul Latif, Kediri, October 2004.
When asked about why he, as a Christian, was able to join with Gus Abdul Latif and become a member of the Ihsāniyyat group, the Christian replied that he joined because he saw wisdom in the figure of Gus Abdul Latif. He said: ‘As a Christian, I need wisdom as well as happiness in this life, and I can find these from everyone, regardless of their religion.’ When he first joined the istighāthat group and actively listened to religious lectures given by Gus Abdul Latif, his parents worried that he would convert to Islam because of his closeness to the leader of Ihsāniyyat. To convince his parents, he answered, ‘If I was born a Christian, I will die a Christian.’ In other words, he felt secure as a Christian because what he heard from Gus Abdul Latif’s lecture (I., pengajian) and advice was relevant to the universal ethic, which is also prevalent in other religious teachings. He described Gus Abdul Latif as follows:

As a drug addict, I want to quit my addiction. However, no one including my close friends could help me to quit. Instead of helping me, they all left me alone with my problem. Actually, I need those who can hear and help me to ease my problem. Finally, I found a person who could help and listen my problem. The person is Gus Latif. He is a wise man. I have spent many nights chatting with him until morning. He patiently heard my problem and gave advice to me. While he advised me, he never alluded to theological matters regarding Christianity’.23

Although Gus Abdul Latif pointed out that the recruitment of members was not the main objective of his group, nevertheless, as a Majlis Dhikr group which is missionary in nature, Ihsāniyyat inevitably needs to recruit as many members as possible and to spread its influence to others. The need to recruit new members was evident when I attended a major istighāthat held in Banyuwangi, and Gus Abdul Latif proudly said to me that although this group was only established a few years ago, it had successfully attracted a large number of participants.24 Moreover in every istighāthat ritual, he specifically invokes God’s help so that Ihsāniyyat can develop everywhere. Given the fact that various groups already exist in the region which offer programs such as dhikr, reciting the Qur’an and Salawāt, the Ihsāniyyat group needs to look for a distinct way to recruit members and spread its practice.

The first method used by the group to promote Ihsāniyyat was to broadcast its events and programs on the radio. This method is not new among religious preachers. In fact, this method has been widely used by other Indonesian Islamic preachers and several dhikr groups in Indonesia. Following the boom in establishing new TV stations in Indonesia in the 1990’s, famous national

23 Interview with Andik, Kediri, October, 2004.
preachers such as Kyai Abdullah Gymnastiar (usually called ‘Aa Gym), Kyai Ilham Arifin, Jeffri and Ustadz Haryono have all become widely known by Indonesian viewers through dakwah programs on particular TV stations. However, in the local context of Kediri, the use of radio stations by the Ihsaniyyat group to teach and spread Islamic teachings and local tarekat is quite new.

Initially, one of the biggest radio stations in Kediri, Wijangsongko FM radio, which is well-known for its programs of Javanese music and songs and keroncong music, invited Gus Abdul Latif to host a weekly interactive program called Sajadah (Sajian Amal dan Ibadah). This program was intended to provide listeners with a discussion of Islamic subjects ranging from Islamic jurisprudence and theology to Muslim daily life based on questions from listeners. This radio program could be heard by those who lived in Kediri but also by those who lived in other cities such as Tulungagung, Nganjuk, and Jombang. Unlike other radio and television programs on Islamic subjects, this program was presented in Indonesian and Javanese so that it could be easily followed by its listeners. Gus Abdul Latif realized that this program could be used as a means to introduce Ihsaniyyat and to announce its programs as well as to strengthen the unity of Ihsaniyyat members. For example, at the beginning or at the end of the program, he always addresses his listeners and followers as well as invoking the help of God so that He will help to promote Ihsaniyyat mission. In this way, as a leader of the group, he can communicate easily with his followers. For his followers who cannot visit him regularly, this program helps them to keep in touch with their leader.

A second avenue for making dakwah acceptable, especially to those categorized as orang ruwet, marginalized people (I., orang pinggiran) and nominal Muslims was through a dakwah project called ‘from tombs to mosques’ (I., dari makam ke masjid). This method involved conducting istighâhat rituals at several tombs of Muslim saints. Among ‘modernist’ Indonesian Muslims, this practice is regarded not only as an improper addition to religious ritual but also as a serious violation to the Islamic teachings verging on polytheism (shirk) because people may wrongly ask something directly from the deceased persons. The istighâhat in the Muslims tombs is usually held by this group at night. Fox maintains that Javanese people visit tombs at the appropriate times for various reasons, including ‘to nyekar, offer flowers (and incense), to pray, to make a request or to fulfill a vow after having made request (nyadran) and, in the process, to gain a share in the blessing (berkah), possibly even the potency (kesakten) of the sleeping one (Fox 1991:20)’. However, Gus Abdul Latif explained that the aim of visiting the tombs of Muslim saints is by no means to ask for something from
those buried within. By holding *istighāhat* rituals in those tombs, *Gus* Abdul Latif perhaps wanted to illustrate how to perform visits the tombs (I., *ziarah*) in a correct way so that people are not led to polytheism.

However, the main objective of holding *istighāhat* rituals in the tombs of Muslim saints rather than in mosques was to attract as many *orang ruwet* and nominal Muslims as possible to attend the ritual so that they could enhance their religious knowledge and practice. Since the tradition of visiting tombs is a well-established practice among Javanese, *Gus* Abdul Latif considered it easier to ask people to come to the tombs than directly to come to a mosque. When people understood the practices of Islamic teachings, they would be expected to come voluntarily to mosques.

As explained by Kyai Misbah, *Gus* Abdul Latif’s brother, another reason why the *Iḥṣāniyya* group held its *istighāhat* ritual at tombs rather than in mosques was because this procedure is actually justified by Islam. It is sanctioned by the Prophetic tradition because it can encourage Muslims to remember death (A., *dhikr al-maut*). According to the Sufi tradition, *dhikr al-maut* is one way which can lead to an increase in asceticism (A., *zuhd*) from the world as well as the purification of heart. In regards to *dhikr al-maut*, the Prophet Muhammad in his hadith asked Muslims to remember death abundantly and regarded those who frequently remember death as people of genius. As noted by al-Ghazâli in his *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, the reason for the excellence of remembering death is because it can increase one’s preparation to face the world-to-come (al-Ghazâli 1973:434).

Furthermore, Kyai Misbah has argued that some ‘*ulamā*’ consider the tombs of Muslim saints to be among the particular places in which people’s prayers to God must be granted (A., *maqām mustajābat*). In other words, the tombs of saints are considered efficacious places from which to offer prayer (I., *doa*). This notion, he asserted, in fact was relevant to several hadith, which state that the tombs of Muslims are part of the gardens of paradise (A., *rauḍ min riyāḍ al-jannat*), whereas the tombs of unbelievers and hypocrites are part of the hollow of hell (*ḥufratun min ḥufr al-nīrān*). Based on this hadith, the ritual practice of *istighāhat* at the tombs of Muslim saints is both lawful and strongly recommended as a means to remember death.

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25 These *hadith* are as follows: *ṣanātta* bāna rádah dhī’awr rishdā](narrated Tirmidhi), ‘Increase your remembrance to something which destroys the pleasant.’

26 Actually the original text of hadith he cited does not mention the tombs of Muslims and the tombs of unbelievers. The text of hadith, instead, states that the tombs [can become] paradise gardens or hell’s abysses. So, this hadith can be interpreted as tombs becoming gardens of paradise if people follow properly the teachings of religion during their life in the world, or the tombs can become the abyss of hell if people transgress the teachings of religion.
Another reason for holding the *istighāthat* ritual at the tombs of venerated Muslim saints is to ask for the intercession and blessing of these deceased pious saints. According to *Gus* Abdul Latif, since it is difficult to guarantee that people’s good deeds will be granted by God, these pious saints can be used as intercessors for the living so that God may grant people’s prayer because of these pious people. Therefore, for *Gus* Abdul Latif, it is necessary to venerate and love those saints who are beloved of God so that God will give His love to the people.

There are several Muslim tombs where this group holds its rituals. Most of these tombs are located in Kediri but some are in Bali while other include several tombs of the Nine Saints (*Wali Sanga*) in Java. In Kediri, for example, the *Iḥsāniyyat* group has held its ritual at the tomb of Shaikh Ihsan Dahlan, the *Iḥsāniyyat* leader’s ancestor, but also at the tombs of Raden Demang, *Shaikh* Mursyad, *Shaikh* Ali Lalean (Pangeran Demang), *Shaikh* Ageng Karanglo. These shrines are located in several regions of Kediri, enabling this group to attract people who live in the vicinity of these shrines. Interestingly, several tombs of Muslim saints in Kediri were also used by other local *tarekat* groups as ritual objects without raising any conflict and tension. When I attended a ritual in *Shaikh* Mursyad’s tomb, I met some one who had actively participated in one ritual held there by another group. He attended the *istighāthat* ritual held by *Iḥsāniyyat* and had become a member of *Iḥsāniyyat* while also being a member of another group.²⁷

Other shrines which have been subject to visitation and ritual, are located in Bali. Muslim tombs in Bali that have been said by local people and by this group to be Muslim saints’ tombs are the tombs of Ḥabīb ‘Alī Bafaqih in Negara, Pangeran Mas Sepuh (*Keramat Pantai Seseh*), Sayyidah Khadijat (Denpasar), *Shaikh* Abū Bakr al-Ḥamīd (*Keramat Kusumba*) in Klungkung, Ḥabīb ‘Alī Zainal Idrus (*Keramat Kembar*) in Amlapura, *Shaikh* ‘Abd al- Jāfīl (*Keramat Saren Jawa*) in Bangli, *Shaikh* Ḥabīb ‘Umar Yusūf (*Keramat Bedugul*) in Bedugul, and *Shaikh* ‘Abd al-Qādir (*Keramat Temukus*) in Buleleng. During my visiting with *Iḥsāniyyat* pilgrims to these tombs, I found that one of these tombs, Pangeran Mas Sepuh’s tombs (*Keramat Pantai Seseh*), was not like Muslim tomb. The ornamentation of the tomb was like most Hindu tombs. Situated near to the beach, the tomb was also venerated by Hindus. Visits to these tombs and the tombs of *Wali Sanga* (The Nine Javanese Saints) are usually made on an annual basis including the tombs of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Gresik, Sunan Giri in Gresik (East Java), Sunan Drajat in Drajat, Lamongan (East Java), Sunan Bonang in Tuban (East Java), Sunan Kudus in Kudus, Sunan Muria in Muria (Central Java), Sunan Kalijaga in Central Java, and Sunan Gunung Jati, in Cirebon.

²⁷ Interview with Pak x, Kediri, August 2004.
Plate 5.4: Gus Abdul Latif (wearing a white hat) and the researcher (left) after conducting istighāthat ritual at the shrine of a Muslim saint.

Plate 5.5: The Yamisda group holding istighāthat at Kyai Ihsan Dahlan's tomb.
Yet another method to attract people to join the Ḥasanīyyat is through publishing a small book consisting of dhikr formulae written by Gus Abdul Latif, along with the general and particular purpose (khasiat) of these istighāthah formulae. As stated in this book, the general purposes of this istighāthah are as follows:

(1) To reach closeness with God 
(2) for salvation of life in this world and life in the hereafter 
(3) for happiness and welfare in life in this world 
(4)
for removing sins (5) to obtain shafa’at from the Prophet Muhammad (6) as safeguard from jinn and satan (7) as safeguard from witchcraft (A., sihr) and sorcery (santet) (8) to facilitate all business (9) to facilitate all needs (10) to make successful all businesses (agriculture, commerce, farming, animal husbandry, and industry) (11) to facilitate the means of living (A., rizq) (12) to build a peaceful and harmonious family (I., keluarga sakinah) (Muhammad n.d.:17).

It is clear that the purpose of the istighāthah is not only for spiritual matters but also for ‘worldly’ matters. Explaining this cannot but help to attract people to join the group. This strategy is, in part, taken by Gus Abdul Latif to avoid attracting people to the dakwah project by emphasizing too much the karamah of the leader. In other words, every member of Ihsāniyyat can practise and recite the formulae so that they can draw benefits for their life without depending on their leader. In this way, members of the group do not need to regard Gus Abdul Latif as a wali or Ghauth, constantly seeking blessings and karamah through physical contact. In fact, Gus Abdul Latif strongly criticizes the strategy of dakwah which stresses the karamah of the leader since it can undermine other preachers who do not possess the same qualities of karamah.

This book also notes that each formula has a particular and specific purpose if it is recited a specified number of times and in specific ways. For example, reciting the al-Fātihat chapter will help those who wish to succeed in their school exams as well as help them to strengthen their memory. This verse, according to this book, can also be used to help people who want to collect a debt so that they can get their money back. To do this, they should recite the chapter to the creditor 313 times. This practice should be performed for seven days consecutively at midnight or 10 pm. Another example is the specific purpose of al-Iḥlās chapter in the Istighāthah Ihsāniyyat formulae. If this al-Iḥlās chapter is recited a hundred times for seven days at midnight and is followed by a particular prayer each time, this chapter increase a person’s charisma so that his or her boss or colleagues can respect and love them (Muhammad n.d.:17-30). To conclude, every single one of the istighāthah formulae has a purpose which is related to health, career, protection from evil spirit, husband and wife relationships, or seeking a soul mate (I., jodoh). In other words, the formulae of the istighāthah answer most people’s needs.

The tradition of using the collection of dhikr formulae for specific purposes in the Ihsāniyyat group might be strongly influenced by the spread of books about ‘Islamic magic’ as well as works on medicine (A., tibb) and occult sciences (A., hikmat) which are widely used in Javanese pesantren. As observed by Bruinesssen, the book on hikmat usually contains symbols which are derived from pre-Islamic tradition, whereas the book on tibb usually uses symbols taken from
Qur’anic texts as amulets. Among the books used by santri are al-Ghazālī’s al-Awфq, Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Būnī’s Shams al-Ma’ārif al-Kubrā, Manbā’ usūl al-Hikma and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jauzī’s Al-Ṭib al-Nabawīy (Bruinessen 1990:261-262). In fact, during my research, the two works of al-Būnī were taught by Gus Abdul Latif in Pesantren Jampes. When I asked about the particular meaning of the amulet, he explained by referring to al-Ghazālī’s Al-Awфq.28

Plate 5.7: The Book of Istighāthat Iḥsāniyyat.

28 In addition to classical works on Islamic magic, medicine, and occult sciences, other works on similar subjects compiled and written by famous local tabīb are also used by some students in Javanese pesantren. Usually, in order to obtain access to these books, a student should individually seek ijāza for the book from its author. Local tabīb have compiled materials for their books on the basis of ijāza obtained from other tabīb or from their teachers. Some tabīb ask that individual students to stay for some days to be taught the content of the books, while other tabīb just give these books with their ijāza. These santri reciprocate with money to cover printing costs.