

Questioning *Gapura*: How has Islamic Cosmopolitanism Worked?

D.I. Ansusa Putra^{1*}

¹ Aliansi Transintegrasi Lektur Agama dan Sains (ATLAS);
UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia

*Correspondence: ✉ ansusa@uinjambi.ac.id ; ansusa@atlas.or.id

ABSTRACT

This preface explores the historical, philosophical, and civilizational significance behind the naming of gapura. The term gapura, derived from the Sanskrit to the Arabic term ghafura, meaning divine forgiveness and mercy. This adaptation reflects the creative integration of pre-Islamic cultural forms into Islamic ethical and spiritual frameworks within Nusantara Muslim societies. This is show that the gapura represents a material and symbolic manifestation of Islamic cosmopolitanism in Southeast Asia, emerging through centuries of cultural exchange, trade, migration, scholarship, and maritime interaction connecting the Malay-Indonesian world with Arabia, Persia, India, China, and Africa. Rather than developing through cultural rupture, Islam in the archipelago evolved through negotiation, translation, adaptation, and synthesis. In the contemporary context of globalization, polarization, ecological crises, and identity-based exclusion, Islamic cosmopolitanism offers an ethical framework grounded in coexistence, justice, intercultural dialogue, and shared humanity. As a metaphorical gateway rather than a barrier, the gapura symbolizes the balance between rootedness and openness, locality and universality, tradition and transformation, while positioning the journal as an intellectual space for interdisciplinary and global engagement

ABSTRAK

Pengantar ini mengeksplorasi signifikansi historis, filosofis, dan peradaban di balik penamaan gapura. Istilah gapura, yang berasal dari kata Sanskerta gopura ke istilah Arab *ghafura*, yang berarti ampunan dan rahmat Ilahi. Adaptasi ini mencerminkan integrasi kreatif bentuk-bentuk budaya pra-Islam ke dalam kerangka etika dan spiritual Islam dalam masyarakat Muslim Nusantara. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa gapura merupakan manifestasi material dan simbolik dari kosmopolitanisme Islam di Asia Tenggara yang terbentuk melalui berabad-abad pertukaran budaya, perdagangan, migrasi, keilmuan, dan interaksi maritim yang menghubungkan dunia Melayu-Indonesia dengan Arab, Persia, India, Tiongkok, dan Afrika. Alih-alih berkembang melalui keterputusan budaya, Islam di Nusantara tumbuh melalui proses negosiasi, penerjemahan, adaptasi, dan sintesis. Dalam konteks kontemporer yang ditandai oleh globalisasi, polarisasi, krisis ekologis, dan eksklusif berbasis identitas, kosmopolitanisme Islam menawarkan kerangka etis yang berlandaskan koeksistensi, keadilan, dialog antarbudaya, dan kemanusiaan bersama. Sebagai gerbang metaforis, bukan tembok pemisah, gapura melambangkan keseimbangan antara keterikatan dan keterbukaan, lokalitas dan universalitas, tradisi dan transformasi, sekaligus menempatkan jurnal ini sebagai ruang intelektual bagi keterlibatan global dan interdisipliner.

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The word “gapura” carries a deep historical, philosophical, and civilizational resonance within the cultural landscape of the Indonesian archipelago. More than a physical structure, a gapura represents a symbolic threshold—a point of transition where identities, beliefs, cultures, and ethical values encounter one another. In this sense, the choice of the term *gapura* reflects the very spirit of Islamic cosmopolitanism: openness toward diversity while maintaining moral and spiritual rootedness.

Historically, the term “gapura” derives from the Sanskrit word *gopura*, meaning “gateway” or “grand entrance.” In the Hindu-Buddhist traditions of South and Southeast Asia, a *gopura* referred to the monumental gate that marked the entrance to sacred spaces, temples, royal compounds, or spiritual centers. Etymologically, the term combines *go* (cow or sacred being) and *pura* (city, fortress, or holy place). The gate thus functioned not merely as architectural ornamentation, but as a liminal structure mediating the transition from the profane world into a sacred moral order.¹ It symbolized passage, transformation, protection, and reverence. Within the kingdoms of the Nusantara world, including regions connected to maritime networks in Sumatra and Java, the gapura stood as a marker of civilization itself—a sign that the territory it guarded possessed ethical norms, spiritual meaning, and collective identity.²

However, the story of *gapura* did not end within the Hindu-Buddhist civilizational framework. As Islam spread across the archipelago through trade, scholarship, migration, and cultural interaction, the term underwent a process of reinterpretation and Islamization.³ In local Islamic cultural memory, *gapura* became associated with the Arabic word *ghafura* or *ghofuro*, meaning forgiveness or divine mercy. Although linguistically distinct, this phonetic and symbolic adaptation illustrates how Muslim societies in the Nusantara creatively integrated pre-existing cultural forms into Islamic ethical and spiritual horizons. Passing through a gapura toward a mosque, pesantren, or sacred communal space symbolized not only physical entry but also spiritual purification and moral readiness. The gate became a reminder that entering a sacred environment required humility, ethical consciousness, and openness to divine grace.⁴

This historical layering demonstrates that *gapura* is itself a product of cosmopolitan encounter. It is the material and symbolic outcome of interactions between Sanskritic civilization, Islamic spirituality, local traditions, and maritime cultural exchanges that shaped Southeast Asia over centuries. The existence of the

¹ Suwarna, ‘INJAUAN SELINTAS BERBAGAIJENIS GAPURA DI DAERAH ISTIMEWAYOGYAKARTA’, *Cakrawala Pendidikan*, VI.2 (1987), 63–83 <<https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/cp/article/view/7451>>.

² *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia*, ‘*Kepustakaan Candi*’, *Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia*, 2014.

³ Aufa Fasih Azzaki and others, ‘*Akulturasi Budaya Masjid Menara Kudus Ditinjau Dari Makna Dan Simbol*’, in *Simposium Nasional RAPI XX – 2021 FT UMS*, 2021.

⁴ Moh Hasyim, ‘*Makna Arsitektur Masjid Pakualaman Dalam Tinjauan Kosmologi Jawa*’, *Analisa*, 18.2 (2011) <<https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v18i2.134>>.

gapura in Indonesian society reveals that Islamic civilization in the archipelago did not emerge through cultural isolation or civilizational rupture, but through negotiation, adaptation, translation, and synthesis. In other words, the gapura stands as historical evidence of Islamic cosmopolitanism in practice. It embodies the ability of Muslim societies to absorb external influences while transforming them into locally meaningful ethical and spiritual expressions.

The cosmopolitan character of Islam in the Nusantara has long been sustained through networks that transcended geography and ethnicity. Muslim scholars, merchants, pilgrims, and Sufi teachers connected the Malay-Indonesian world with Arabia, Persia, India, China, and Africa through dynamic routes of trade and intellectual exchange. Mosques, ports, pesantren, manuscripts, and ritual traditions became cultural gateways that facilitated the circulation of ideas, values, and worldviews.⁵ In this historical process, Islam did not function as a closed ideological system but as an open civilizational horizon capable of engaging plural realities. The gapura thus symbolizes the encounter between local rootedness and global connectivity – a core principle of Islamic cosmopolitanism itself.

For this reason, the concept of Islamic cosmopolitanism remains profoundly relevant in the contemporary world. Today, humanity faces intensifying cultural fragmentation, geopolitical tensions, ecological crises, digital polarization, forced migration, and the ethical uncertainties produced by accelerating globalization.⁶ Public discourse increasingly reflects suspicion toward difference, while political structures in many societies amplify exclusionary identities and civilizational anxieties. In such circumstances, Islamic cosmopolitanism offers an alternative worldview that emphasizes coexistence, ethical responsibility, intercultural dialogue, and shared humanity. Rather than viewing diversity as a threat, Islamic cosmopolitanism understands plurality as a condition of human existence that must be managed through justice, compassion, and mutual recognition.⁷

The metaphor of the gapura becomes especially important in this context. A gate is not a wall. It does not exist to permanently separate one community from another, but to regulate encounter, movement, and communication. A gapura invites entry while simultaneously reminding individuals of ethical boundaries and collective values. Likewise, Islamic cosmopolitanism does not advocate rootless universalism detached from spiritual commitments. Instead, it proposes a morally grounded openness in which religious identity coexists with intellectual humility and global

⁵ Khairuddin AlJunied, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism Southeast Asian Islam in Comparative Perspective* (Edinburg University Press, UK, 2016) <<https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-muslim-cosmopolitanism.html>>.

⁶ Samsudin Samsudin and Siti Nurbaya, 'KONSEP PEMIKIRAN ABDURRAHMAN WAHID TENTANG ISLAM KOSMOPOLITAN', *FiTUA: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 3.1 (2022) <<https://doi.org/10.47625/fitua.v3i1.371>>.

⁷ M Siswanto and M Anas Fakhruddin, 'Islam Kosmopolitan Gus Dur Dalam Konteks Sosio-Keagamaan Di Indonesia', *JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY*, 01.01 (2022).



solidarity.⁸ The gapura therefore represents a philosophical balance between rootedness and openness, locality and universality, tradition and transformation.

This inaugural issue of *GAPURA: Journal of Islamic Cosmopolitanism* seeks to position Islamic cosmopolitanism not merely as an academic theme, but as a living worldview capable of addressing contemporary global realities. The journal aims to provide a scholarly space where interdisciplinary conversations on Islam, humanity, ethics, mobility, culture, and global interconnectedness can flourish. By drawing inspiration from the symbolic and historical meaning of the gapura, this journal aspires to become an intellectual gateway connecting diverse perspectives, regions, and traditions of knowledge.

Ultimately, the choice of the name *gapura* reflects a civilizational aspiration. It reminds us that the future of humanity cannot be built upon exclusion, isolation, or rigid cultural boundaries. Instead, it requires gateways of dialogue, ethical encounters, and mutual recognition across differences. In this spirit, Islamic cosmopolitanism emerges not simply as a historical phenomenon, but as an intellectual and moral framework for imagining a more humane, just, and interconnected world.

⁸ Usman, 'Islam Kosmopolitan, Nilai-Nilai Indonesia & Transformasi Kebudayaan', *Jurnal Masyarakat Dan Budaya*, 10.1 (2007).

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