

Sarekat Islam Organizations

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Abstract

This study examines the historical background of the establishment of Sarekat Islam and the role of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto in the development of the organization during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative historical method using library research techniques. Data were collected from books, scientific journals, historical documents, and relevant academic publications published within the last ten years. The study reveals that Sarekat Islam initially emerged as a response to economic inequality experienced by indigenous Muslim traders, particularly in facing the dominance of Chinese merchants and the discriminatory policies of the colonial government. Over time, the organization transformed from an economic association into a broader socio-political movement representing the aspirations of Indonesian Muslims. The leadership of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto played a crucial role in strengthening Sarekat Islam through political education, Islamic nationalism, and the promotion of social justice. Under his leadership, Sarekat Islam became one of the most influential organizations in the Indonesian nationalist movement and contributed significantly to the development of political awareness among indigenous communities. Despite internal conflicts and ideological divisions, Sarekat Islam remained an important foundation for the emergence of modern nationalist movements in Indonesia.

Keywords: Sarekat Islam, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, Islamic Nationalism, Colonialism, Indonesian National Movement.

INTRODUCTION

Sarekat Islam became one of the most influential political organizations in Indonesia during the early twentieth century. The organization originated from Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI), which was established in Surakarta on November 11, 1911, by Haji Samanhudi, a prominent Muslim batik merchant from Central Java. At its inception, SDI focused on protecting indigenous Muslim traders from the growing dominance of Chinese merchants in the commercial sector. The movement also reflected dissatisfaction with Dutch colonial policies that provided greater economic privileges and protection to Chinese entrepreneurs (Hilalludin 2026a). As the organization developed, its orientation expanded from economic interests into a broader socio-political movement. In 1912, SDI officially transformed into Sarekat Islam under the leadership of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, who played a crucial role in strengthening the organization's political influence and national consciousness (Mustakif, Muhammad Kaffin 1912).

The change from Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI) to Sarekat Islam (SI) reflected broader political and strategic ambitions within the organization. Initially focused on economic activities, the movement gradually expanded its role into the political sphere in response to the growing needs of Muslim society under Dutch colonial rule. At that time, many indigenous Muslims expected the emergence of an Islamic-based organization that could represent their interests and communicate their aspirations to the colonial government. Consequently, the organization required a strong and influential figure capable of leading the movement and articulating its political goals. H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto was considered the most suitable leader because of his charismatic personality, political courage, and reputation as a prominent radical nationalist figure (Setiawan 2025).

Sarekat Islam developed partly as a response to the economic inequality experienced by indigenous Indonesians in the colonial trading

system. During the Dutch colonial period, Chinese merchants often occupied stronger positions in commerce and trade, creating social and economic tensions with the indigenous population. This situation reflected a broader colonial structure that distinguished between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, where economic opportunities were frequently concentrated among non-indigenous groups. As a result, many indigenous traders felt marginalized within the economic system established under colonial rule (Mustakif, Muhammad Kaffin 1912).

The establishment of Sarekat Islam was influenced by several important factors. One of the main causes was the growing economic rivalry in the batik industry between indigenous Muslim traders and Chinese merchants, whose economic influence continued to expand during the colonial era. The rise of Chinese nationalism after the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 also contributed to increasing social tensions, as many indigenous Indonesians perceived a stronger sense of exclusivity and superiority among sections of the Chinese community. In addition, local aristocratic elites in Surakarta often exercised social and economic pressure on ordinary Indonesians. Under these conditions, Sarekat Dagang Islam was formed as a protective organization aimed at defending the interests of indigenous batik traders in Solo against both foreign economic domination and feudal oppression (Yeti Setiawati 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method using a historical approach. The research focuses on examining the social, economic, and political background behind the establishment of Sarekat Islam during the Dutch colonial period, as well as analyzing the role of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto in the development and transformation of Sarekat Islam as an Islamic political movement organization (Hilalludin et al. 2025). The type of research used in this study is library research, in which data are collected from various written

sources such as books, scientific journals, historical documents, articles, and previous research relevant to the topic. The sources utilized mainly consist of academic journals published within the last ten years and historical references discussing Sarekat Islam, Islamic movements, and Indonesian nationalism (Sugari et al. 2025).

The data collection technique was conducted through documentation and literature review by identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant references related to the research problems. Furthermore, the data were analyzed descriptively and critically in order to explain the historical development of Sarekat Islam and the contribution of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto to the Indonesian nationalist movement (Hilalludin 2026b). To ensure the validity of the data, the study applies source criticism, including external criticism to verify the authenticity of sources and internal criticism to evaluate the credibility and relevance of the information obtained. Through this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the emergence and development of Sarekat Islam within the context of Indonesian history under Dutch colonialism (Rohmah and Hilalludin 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Background of the Establishment of Sarekat Islam

The emergence of Sarekat Islam cannot be separated from the socio-economic and political conditions experienced by indigenous Indonesians during the Dutch colonial period. At the beginning of the twentieth century, indigenous Muslim traders, especially batik merchants in Surakarta, faced increasingly intense competition from Chinese merchants who dominated trade and distribution networks (Hilalludin and Abdurrozak 2026). The colonial government indirectly strengthened the economic position of the Chinese community through discriminatory policies that granted them broader access to commerce and business opportunities. This condition

created social inequality and economic tension between indigenous and non-indigenous groups (Saputra 2025).

Initially, Sarekat Dagang Islam was founded by Haji Samanhudi in Surakarta in 1911 as an organization intended to protect indigenous Muslim traders from unfair economic competition. The organization mainly accommodated batik traders who sought solidarity and collective protection in facing the dominance of Chinese merchants and the pressure of colonial economic structures. However, over time, the organization developed beyond economic interests and transformed into a broader socio-political movement (Mustakif, Muhammad Kaffin 1912).

The transformation of Sarekat Dagang Islam into Sarekat Islam in 1912 marked an important phase in the history of the Indonesian national movement. This transformation reflected the growing political awareness among indigenous Muslims who desired an organization capable of representing their aspirations against colonial injustice (Fitria and Hilalludin 2025). Sarekat Islam gradually became one of the largest mass organizations in Indonesia because it was able to unite various social groups under the spirit of Islamic solidarity and nationalism. The organization not only discussed economic matters but also addressed issues of education, politics, social justice, and resistance to colonialism (Setiawan 2025).

Another important factor behind the establishment of Sarekat Islam was the dissatisfaction of indigenous people toward the feudal aristocracy in Java. The local aristocratic elites often collaborated with the colonial government and contributed to social inequality within society. Consequently, Sarekat Islam became a medium through which ordinary Indonesians could express their demands for justice and equality (Hilalludin and Sugari 2026). The organization succeeded in fostering political consciousness among

indigenous communities and strengthening the spirit of nationalism among Muslims in the Dutch East Indies (Soraya Rasyid dan Annisa Tamara 2020).

The Role of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto in the Development of Sarekat Islam

H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto played a significant role in transforming Sarekat Islam into a modern political movement. Under his leadership, Sarekat Islam developed rapidly and attracted millions of members from various regions in Indonesia (Abdurrozak et al. 2025). Tjokroaminoto was widely recognized as a charismatic and intellectual leader who combined Islamic values with the spirit of nationalism and social justice. Through his speeches and political activities, he encouraged indigenous Indonesians to resist colonial oppression and strive for equality and independence (Setiawan 2025).

One of Tjokroaminoto's major contributions was his idea of Islamic socialism, which emphasized social justice, equality, and solidarity based on Islamic teachings. According to him, Islam was not merely a religion concerned with spiritual matters but also a social and political force capable of liberating oppressed people from colonial exploitation. His political thought significantly influenced the direction of Sarekat Islam and inspired many Indonesian nationalist figures, including Sukarno (Manan 2016).

In addition, Tjokroaminoto emphasized political education and organizational consolidation within Sarekat Islam. He believed that education was an important instrument for raising national consciousness among indigenous people. Through Sarekat Islam congresses, publications, and public speeches, he succeeded in spreading nationalist ideas and mobilizing the masses against colonial domination. Under his leadership, Sarekat Islam became one of the most influential organizations in the Indonesian nationalist movement during the early twentieth century (Setiawan 2025).

Despite its rapid growth, Sarekat Islam later experienced internal divisions due to ideological differences between Islamic nationalist groups and socialist-communist factions. Nevertheless, the contribution of H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto and Sarekat Islam remained highly important in shaping political awareness and the development of Indonesian nationalism. The organization laid the foundation for future nationalist movements and became one of the pioneers of Indonesia's struggle for independence (Soraya Rasyid dan Annisa Tamara 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Sarekat Islam emerged as a response to the social, economic, and political inequalities experienced by indigenous Indonesians during the Dutch colonial era. Initially established as Sarekat Dagang Islam to protect Muslim traders from economic domination, the organization gradually transformed into a broader political movement representing the aspirations of Indonesian Muslims. The existence of colonial discrimination, the dominance of foreign merchants, and the pressure of the aristocratic class became important factors behind the establishment and development of Sarekat Islam.

Furthermore, H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto played a significant role in shaping Sarekat Islam into a modern nationalist organization. Through his leadership, political ideas, and Islamic values, he successfully encouraged the growth of political consciousness and national solidarity among indigenous people. Sarekat Islam not only functioned as an economic organization but also became an important instrument in the struggle against colonialism and in the development of Indonesian nationalism. Therefore, the contribution of Sarekat Islam and H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto remains highly significant in the history of Indonesia's national movement.

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