

ORAL HISTORY VERSUS ORAL TRADITION : Local History of Jombang Pesantren Revisited

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1. Introduction

It is commonly accepted among Muslims of Jombang Regency especially or even in East Java that the existence of religious teacher or *kyai* in this region is only possible in the southern part of the area. Consequently, there will be no possibility to have any one to run *pesantren* or even assigned himself as *kyai* in the northern part of the area. (Jombang Regency is separated by Brantas River into two parts, namely southern part and northern part). Historically, the southern part is the basis of *kyais* belonged to the supporters of Nahdlatul Ulama. Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari, one among the founders of Nahdlatul Ulama also came from this area, so that the southern part was and is considered as the oldest and the centre of religious activities in the area. See among others Sarijo, et al., 1979:37; Dhofier, 1994). Other source (Deliar Noer (1982:249) mentioned that Hasyim, who was born on 14 February 1871 was also the bread of religious teachers. It was also stated that his grandfather was also from Demak. Hasyim father's name was Asy'ari, who was able to study with Kyai Usman of Nggedang, a village situated in the northern part of Jombang. He married to the daughter of Kyai Usman. The story of Kyai Asy'ari dan his son Hasyim seems to be the only tradition transmitted among the *santri* of southern part of Jombang. There is no other tradition, whatsoever, is possible to be transmitted among the *santri*, so that the tradition is strongly regarded as the only information on the matter in Jombang. So when in the 1974, a religious teacher tried to reopen a religious school in Kedung Turi Village, Plasa Sub-District which had been in operation in the northern area since the mid of the 19th century. Since there is no relation in many respects between the

newly emerged *kyai* in Kedung Turi and the relatively settled-down older *kyais* of southern part, namely in Tebuirang, Tambakberas, and the surrounding villages, they declared that the *kyai* of Kedung Turi is not a genuine *kyai*. In this paper, an attempt is made to discover why the Kedung Turi religious school is considered as not a genuine *pesantren* and the *kyai* is not a genuine *kyai* and how it developed within period of relatively in relatively short period of time has been attracting so many followers.

2. Oral Tradition Versus Oral History

In a community where the written tradition has not yet been part of culture, oral tradition would be the only mean of transmitting values, norms, and laws from one generation to the others. In studying such community, historian is challenged by situation in which he has to be alert with the availability of historical sources. He has not only to collect information from oral, written, and archaeological sources as much as possible but also to treat it further by implementing check and recheck method. In treating oral tradition, historian has to be alert, as Vansina puts it (In Gilbert and Graubart, 1971; Kuntowijoyo, 1995) that once the meaning of traditions is understood, one must determine why they have to be transmitted. What is their functions and purposes? The fact that between the southern part of Jombang Regency is dominated by religious teachers belonged to traditional Islam (Geertz, 1963) while the northern part of the area is belonged to the sufism or tarekat. This basic difference motivated strongly not only the NU *kyais* of East Java but also *kyais* from other areas in Indonesia to react negatively toward the Losari group (See Muchammad Muchtar Mu'thi, 1994). Consequently, a myth was transmitted among *kyais* and *santris* the

southern part of Jombang Regency is the only area suit to have *kyais* while the northern part is not. This tradition was widely accepted among the community members. In regard to traditional or tarekat orientation, there is no animosity among the two because Kyai Khalil of Bangkalan who was wellknown as an expert on Arabic, *fiqh*, and *tasawuf* or *tarekat* teacher, although he was not a leader of a specific *tarekat*, was a teacher of many prestigious *kyais* in Java who belonged to either traditional or tarekat *kyais*, namely Hadratus Syekh Hasyim Asy'ari, Jombang, Kyai Manaf Abdul Karim, Lirboyo, Kediri, Kyai Munawir, Krapyak, Yogyakarta, Kyai Muhammad Siddiq, Jember, Kyai Maksun, Lasem, Rembang, Kyai Abdullah Mubarak, Suralaya, Tasikmalaya, and Kyai Wahab Hasbullah, Jombang (Dhofier, *Ibid.*). Moreover, the marriage relationship among *kyais* families is also commonly practiced.

In responding to the situation, the *Kyai* of Kedung Turi made close relationship with government officials and agencies at local as well as at regional level. In this respect, there had been a cleavage in Jombang Regency in the sense that the *kyais* of southern part of Jombang Regency belonged to NU or PPP block which in many cases played a role more as opposant to the government while *kyai* of Kedung Turi strongly recommend his followers to be the supporter of government or Golongan Karya in their political activities. It seems that due to various reasons, the religious orientation had shifted its function to political one.

The purpose of the oral tradition transmitted is to build an image among muslims or the followers of the *kyais* that the only genuin *kyai* is the one belonged to the traditional *kyai*.

Consequently, those are not in accordance with this line are not regarded as *kyais* and branded as *sempalan* or out-grouped. Again, the point laid at the bottom of this is that the established group, namely the Tebuireng group, is trying to claim its domination and it is expected that the Kedung Turi will be neglected by its followers. But what hap-

pened is that Kedung Turi, which is latter called Losari, is able to expand its' branches in 42 regencies in Java and Sumatra.

One of the crucial matter in using oral tradition as source of history is something related to methodological aspect. If, the reconstruction local history of *pesantren* of Tebuireng group is mainly based on oral tradition is very risky. On the contrary, the historian in his attempt to reconstruct history of *Pesantren* Kedung Turi has a wider opportunity in finding sources required. In this case, the historical sources available not only oral tradition, oral sources but also archaeological one.

When the tradition or oral history is known before the archaeological was found, the researcher should evaluate other material they collected, among others to determine the reliability of the tradition by applying the cannons of the historical method, presuppose a thorough knowledge of the languages involved and a great intimacy with the society and culture in which the tradition flourish. The role of Diponegoro followers in the process of Islamisation in East Java is very important (See *Sejarah Perjuangan Rakyat Sidoarjo*, 1989). In the mid-19th century, one of the Diponegoro supporters came from Demak named Mbah Suhadak, arrived at Plasa Village. He started a living by growing food crops. At the same periode, other Diponegoro followers came to Jombang area and settled down there. Diponegoro is known as a religious leader so it was also understandable if his followers were also moslems. The Diponegoro followers thought Islam to the people living in his neighbourhood. One of the specific identity of Diponegoro follower residence is that there is a *sawo* tree in his yard. There are several houses which used to belong to Diponegoro followers could be found in Plasa Sub-District. According to Deliar Noer (*loc.cit.*), the father of Hasyim, Asy'ari like Mbah Syuhada' and his relatives was also came from Demak. It was also possible that Asy'ari was also one of the Diponegoro followers who moved from Demak to East Java.

In regard to the role of Hasyim in starting *pondok* in Jombang, Deliar Noer (Ibid.) said further that after his marriage with the daughter of Kyai Ya'kub of Sialan Panji Sidoarjo, he went to Mecca to study with Syech Achmad Khatib for seven years. In 1899, Hasyim backed to Indonesia and opened a *pondok* in Tebuireng. He started with seven student and gradually the number of his *santri* was increasing. By Deliar Hasyim was considered as a kharismatic religious teacher because on 1933 his former religious teacher came to Tebuireng to listen to his preaching.

The oral sources of Kedung Turi history is the *kyai* himself who used to be the one received oral history from his mother about his grandfather who opened a *pesantren* in Kedung Turi. The story is transmitted to his followers and some of it already codified as main information about Kedung Turi. Although, a critical process should be taken in the historical method the role of the tradition as well as oral information available is very important. Moreover the archaeological sources namely the tomb of Mbah Suhadak, the grandfather of Kyai Kedung Turi, who died at the end of the 19th century, is very important. It is believed that the oldest *pesantren* in Jombang is Tebuireng which was established in 1907. In respect to the existence of the tomb and the existence of religious school run by Diponegoro followers in northern part of Jombang long before 1899 is it possible that northern part Jombang Regency was the area to have older religious school?

There is an oral tradition accepted by the people of northern part of Jombang Regency that long before the emergence of Kedung Turi settlement the four Diponegoro followers had been working as religious preachers in this area. After Diponegoro War was ended in 1830, many Diponegoro followers outmigrated from Mataram to Central Jawa such as Demak and Pemalang. Achmad Syuhada' and his relatives moved to Demak. After short period of time, they moved eastward to East Java. The informants of Losari interviewed believed that not long before Java War was ended Mbah

Syuhada' and his relatives had actively preached in the area they settled down temporarily until Mbah Syuhada' arrived at Kedung Turi to start a settlement and open a *pesantren*. On the other hand, the formal status from the Dutch government obtained by *Pondok* Tebuireng was dated in 1907. So that, the statement that the oldest *pondok* in Jombang is Tebuireng is strongly opposed by Kedung Turi group. But the question is that is the evidences of Kedung Turi group sufficient and strong enough to support their argument. In the following paragraphs we will discuss about it.

3. Archaeological Sources and Oral History

As suggested by Vansina (loc.cit.) that the historian should made uses best of tradition by implementing a comparative method of the sources available in the study. He strongly recommended that other data such as written documents, archaeological artifacts, cultural material, and linguistic information could be used in checking or rechecking the data obtained from tradition.

In the case of Kedung Turi, there is a archaeological artifact, namely the tomb of Kyai Achmad Syuhada', the grandfather of Kyai Muhammad Muchtar Mu'thi, the present *kyai* of *Pesantren* Losari or the formerly *Pesantren* Kedung Turi. It is believed that Kyai Syuhada' died in 1323 Hijriah or in 1905 AD. Syuhada' was the pioneer in opening Losarirowo land, which was originally swampy land. The present village or *kampung* Losarirowo which approximately 1000 or 2000 hectares in size was turned into arable land from swampy land by the huge efforts carried out by Syuhada'. It is also transmitted among the followers of Kedung Turi that Syuhada' was able to carry out that huge task with the assistance of *jins*. Perhaps, this kind of information has symbolic meaning, namely to put Syuhada' as an extraordinary figure so that his followers will have a sort of pride upon him. Or, perhaps, it will also has a function as legitimacy for him as a religious leader.

But, above all, if the time of the dead of Kyai Syuhada' is true, it is probable that two or three decades before that time he had been actively working as a preacher in Kedung Turi. As other Diponegoro followers working in the villages in Plasa Sub-District, Kyai Syuhada' also planted sawo tree in his front yard. This tree is commonly planted by ordinary people of Yogyakarta Region. But in Losariowo, it became a symbol of courage in struggling against injustice namely the domination of Dutch government over the Javanese Moslem communities under the leadership of Prince Diponegoro (See Muchamad Munif, 1983:10).

According to the tradition, Syuhada' is belonged to royal family member of Sultanate Yogyakarta. After the Java War, some of the Diponegoro followers moved from Yogyakarta city to other areas in Central Java. Syuhada' and his relatives and friend moved to Demak. From this area, namely Kadilangu Demak, Syuhada' and his some other friends moved further to East Java. His little brother, Hasan Rozzak or Kasanrejo moved to Mejoyo Village, Gudo Sub-district, Jombang Regency. Syuhada' and his other little brother moved to Trosobo, Jombang Regency; while Mujarat and Amudah his brothers moved to Ngepoh, Rangagung Jedong Village, Sidoarjo Sub-district, in Sidoarjo Regency. Due to various reasons, Syuhada' moved to Losari Village. Syuhada' and his relatives were actively participated not only in opening new settlement as new settlers but also in religious activities as preachers.

It is also transmitted that the role played by Diponegoro followers not only preaching about Islam but also settling down a peace and order in East Java area like Surabaya. Before Syuhada' and friends arrived at Jombang they were able to defeat a group a notorious criminal operating in Surabaya. But there was also reported that Diponegoro follower was able to retain his animosity against the Dutch government by organizing a riot in Sidoarjo Regency in 1905 under the leadership of Kyai Hasan Mukmin of Sumanoro Village, Sukodono Subdistrict. Hasan Mukmin was also known as

Diponegoro follower (Sejarah Kabupaten Sidoarjo, 1969:20). Considering these information, it is possible to argue that the activities of Diponegoro followers in East Java, either in socio-economic activities such as opening a settlement or in religious matter as a preacher, had been in existence long before the end of the 19th century. Mbah Syuhada' came first to Trosobo and than moved to Losari. In the new place, he started to do a huge task namely to dry the swampy land. After several years, Mbah Syuhada' opened a religious school

I named *Pesantren* Kedung Turi, because he was able to dry-up the swampy land or *kedung* and planted *turi* trees on it while at the same time he also succeeded to open a *pesantren*. Two or three generations later, when Tebuireng group belonged to the PPP block the grandchildren of Mbah Syuhada' declare himself and his followers as the supporter of government political orientation namely Golkar or whatsoever.

4. Conclusion

Based on what had been explained above some conclusions could be mentioned as the following:

- a. Oral tradition in developing countries, such as in Asia and Africa, had played a role as a mean in retaining a charismatic status, among others in socio and religious matters, among groups. In order to attain such objective, the tradition is sometimes necessarily to be codified and utilized as basis to obtain loyalty among the followers.
- b. The conflicting argument between *santiris* of southern part and northern part of Jombang Regency is basically lack of communication between them. The Tebuireng group insisted that the only founder of *pondon* in Jombang is the most prominent Kyai Hasyim Asy'ari, so that the only tradition possible to be transmitted among them is about him and his relatives. On the other hand, the Kedung Turi group believed that Kyai Syuhada' is, apart from the founder of the older *pondok* also is believed

- as the hero of the people of East Java at the grass root level, especially in Surabaya, Mojokerto, and the area surrounding it.
- c. The religious orientation between northern and southern Brantas river group had been a symbolic socio-religious orientation which, latter, had been widely expanded to socio-political linkages.
- d. If the socio-religious activities of Diponegoro followers during their wandering period in East Java (1860-1880) until they settled down could also be considered as preliminary form of *Pesantren* Kedung Turi. On the other hand, there is no such evidence could be found in Tebuireng group.
- e. The myth that Tebuireng is the oldest pesantren in Jombang is questionable due to the fact that available new additional evidences to be considered as a sources in reconstructing a local socio-religious history of Jombang Regency. Consequently, Kedung Turi could be regarded not only as the older *pesantren* than Tebuireng but also rather more nationalistic one, due to the fact the spirit of Diponegoro War was still in flame in time and space far away from the origin of the war (Masur Suryanegara, 1995).
- f. The founding fathers of both Tebuireng and Kedung Turi groups are belonged to the Diponegoro follower and probably they belonged to and uprooted from royal family orientation and moved downward to ordinary people and religious way of life (Taufik Abdullah, 1987).
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List of Informants:

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2. Muchammad Munif, a senior preacher of Kedung Turi
3. Mustakim, senior religious student, of Kedung Turi
4. Muh. Ihwan, senior preacher of Kedung Turi
5. Sunyoto, head of Pesantren Kedung Turi
6. Fauzi, the father of junior student religious school Tebuireng
7. Mashur Ridlo, former student of Tebuireng
8. Muchibuddin, a senior religious student Tebuirang
9. Eva Yunarso, senior religious student Kedung Turi

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