

THE MEANING OF PONDOK - PESANTREN

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Pondok-pesantren, sometimes called **pondok** or **pesantren**, also **pa-santren**, literally means the residence of **santri**, the place where the pupil pursues the religious studies. The word **pondok** itself, means hut, a rude of small house, hovel, cabin, or dormitory. 1) The term **santri** refers to the pupil who studies in the **pondok-pesantren**.

In the **pondok-pesantren** the **santri** (pupil or disciple) stays and receives various Islamic teachings, i.e. intellectual, mental, spiritual as well as physical education. This institution is governed by one or more persons called **kyai** (the religious teacher and venerable man). The **kyai** is considered as a teacher, guardian, trainer, guide, and helper.

The term **pondok-pesantren** as used in the Archipelago, refers to the Islamic educational institution, or religious school, which in Madura is called **panyantren**, in Pasundan (West Java) **pondok**, in Aceh **ranggang meunasah** and in Minangkabau **surau**.

To give a general idea of the meaning of **pondok-pesantren**, it is necessary to refer to the points of view of both foreign and Indonesian scholars.

Pondok-pesantren, according to R.A. Kern is a seminary for students of theology (**santri**) on the islands of Java and Madura. He states that the **pondok-pesantren** is the institution for advanced theological training, and consists of several buildings. When it is not built in the countryside, it is at least in a separate quarter of the village. 2) He describes the **pondok-pesantren** as follows :

"The **pesantren** consists in the first place of the house of the teacher and his assistants, then of lecture-rooms, a chapel (sic), rarely a Friday mosque, the lodgings of the students (**pondok rice-barns**, all of which occupy a considerable space. The **pondok** alone possesses a peculiar form of architecture not found in other buildings. A **pondok** is a quadrangular building—built of the usual materials". 3)

Describing the interior of **pondok's** building R.A. Kern continues :

"The interior is divided by two walls into three long compartments of about equal breadth, the central of which forms a corridor running from an end of the building to the other. The two outer ones form the living rooms; each of them is divided into cells of equal size by partitions. The door of the **pondok** is in the centre of one of the shorter outer walls; it opens into the corridor. Only blank walls are seen on right and left as one enters; then it is noticed that very low little doors are let into these walls, made of the same material as they are; these admit to the cells. The little doors are at regular intervals in the two walls, two always being opposite one another". 4)

With regard to the **pondok-pesantren** in Aceh, C. Snouck Hurgronje states that the **rangkang** is built in the form of a dwelling-house, but with less care. Instead of three floors of different elevations it has only one floor on the same level throughout, and is divided on either side of the central passage into small chambers, each of which serves as a dwelling-place for one to three **murids** (pupils). 5)

Clifford Geertz states that the genetic name for the traditional Muslim school in Indonesia is **pesantren**, a residence for **santris** (religious students). A walled compound of student dormitories centers around a mosque, usually in a wooded glade at the edge of a village. The **pondok-pesantren** consists of a religious teacher (usually called a **kyai**) and a number of young, in most cases unmarried, male students; who chant the Qur'an, engage in mystical exercises, and seem generally to carry on the pre-existing Indic tradition with a slight, and not very accurate, Arabian accent. 6) C. Geertz describes the nature of the **pondok-pesantren** as follows :

"When a European first sees a traditional **pesantren**, it reminds him almost inevitably of a Catholic monastery. Usually located at the edge of a village, it is placed away from the road, concealed in a small grove of trees, around which a white-washed, chest-high stone wall runs. Within this grove, the most prominent building is the mosque, a white stone structure, totally bare inside and with a shining tile floor; in front of which hangs a wooden slit gong which is beaten five times a day to announce the obligatory prayers." 7)

C. Geertz describes the dormitories of **santris** as follows :

The dormitories of the students, or **santris**, are grouped in an irregular semi-circle around the mosque, and each consists of a series of small doorless, sparsely furnished cells, joined together by a continuous front porch open all along the outward side. Between the dormitories, the mosque, and the bathing enclosure next to the mosque there are raised stepping stones, so that the **santri** who has once bathed his feet may move in and out the mosque without each time re-washing them. The **kyai's** house is off to one side, its veranda commonly facing away from the main building cluster, and between it and the mosque there is a large open square, where various semi-secular activities - sports, holiday celebrations, and the like - take place." 8)

Clifford Geertz rejects the opinion that the **pondok-pesantren** is similar to a monastery, and he argues that a **pesantren** is only superficially like a monastery, for the **santris** are not monks, since they have not made vows. The **santris** come to the **pondok-pesantren** when they wish, and leave it when they wish. While there, they are expected to lead a reasonable facsimile of the holy life, but they are not expected to dedicate themselves to it permanently. They are not men of extraordinarily powerful religious needs who have decided to cut themselves off forever from secular existence and to devote themselves to the service and adoration of God. He concludes that they are, rather, ordinary young men who have come away from the ordinary village life to get a certain amount of elementary religious training experience, and when they have this they will return home. 9)

Many definitions of **pondok-pesantren** might be given. However, the definitions are not really definitive. Some definitions depend on impressions of some aspects which are found in the **pondok-pesantren**, such as the building or dormitory, others on the life of the **santri** or **kyai**; still others on the educational method.

According to the definition given by team surveys of The Improvement of Religious Examination Committee of the Department of Religious Affairs, the **pondok-pesantren** is, "The educational institution which has a complete compound where Islamic education and teaching is given at an advanced level and by individual instruction". 10) The Committee also categorized the **pondok-pesantren** into three types, 11) namely :

Type A : the **santris** study and live together with the **guru (kyai)**; the curriculum is dependent on the **kyai**; and the method of teaching is individual and without **madrassa** for study.

Type B : combined with **madrassa** for study; has a definite curriculum; the teaching of **kyai** is applicable to their life and the main teaching is in the **madrassa**; the **kyai** give a general lecture to the **santris** at certain times; the **santris** live in the **pondok-pesantren** and follow the teaching of the **kyai** besides studying the religious and non-religious subjects.

Type C : the **pondok-pesantren** is only a dormitory for the **santris**; the **santris** study in the **madrassa** or school outside the **pondok-pesantren**; the function of the **kyai** is as superintendent of spiritual instruction.

According to A. Mukti Ali, the present Minister of the Department of Religious Affairs, the **pondok-pesantren** is an Islamic educational institution which has a specific system of education and teaching called, as well, **pondok-pesantren**. Generally the **pondok-pesantrens** are located outside of a town or in the villages. Most of the **santris** come from farm families. He feels therefore, that the **pondok-pesantren** has a strategic position in the building of the Indonesian nation. 12)

Kyai Haji Imam Zarkasji infers that the **pondok-pesantren** is an Islamic educational institution with the **asrama** (boarding house) system. The real meaning of the **pondok-pesantren** is in the content of its teaching rather than in the building. The essence of the **pondok-pesantren** is education. Through several centuries the **pondok-pesantren** have given a spiritual education which was valuable to the **santri** who became Islamic propagandists and leaders of the **ummat Islam** (Islamic community). 13)

According to **KI Hajar Dewantara**, 14) an important figure in national education, the founder of **Taman Siswa**, 15) the **pondok-pesantren** is: "A form of residential religious school in which the pupils gather around a reputed master in religious instruction, supporting themselves by work in the community. 16) "Sistim pondok dan asrama itulah sistim nasional" which means "The **pondok** and **asrama**, boarding house, is the national system." 17)

The real meaning of the **pondok-pesantren** is lost to those who examine it from a materialistic point of view, i.e. with reference to the building as a dormitory, or the daily living habits of the **santris**. The essence of the **pondok-pesantren** lies in its impact on Indonesian culture. It was the original educational system and it has moulded the Indonesian nation through the impact of its education.

The **pondok-pesantren**, however, was not immune to the influences of either the indigenous Indonesian culture or Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam which reached the Archipelago and had an effect in the educational field.

Sugardo Purbakawaca observes that the **pondok-pesantren** is more like a Hindu educational institution than the Arab educational institution, even in Islamic characteristics. 18) The same conclusion is also reached by Sutejo Brajanegara who states that the system of the **pondok-pesantren** originally came not from Arab sources, but from Hindu. 19)

I.J. Brugmans 20) made an investigation regarding the origin of the **pondok-pesantren** and arrived at the conclusion that it was a Muslim-influenced form of a typical educational institution from India. He argued that the **pondok-pesantren** is older in origin than Islam, and that the phenomenon which points to the non-Islamic origin of the **pondok-pesantren** as an educational institution is that it does not exist in contemporary Muslim countries. While it is quite comparable to institutions which are still operating in Hinduistic India and in Buddhist Burma and Thailand. 21)

However, the establishment of the **pondok-pesantren** did indeed follow the spread of Islam in the Archipelago, and particularly in Java. From the early period of the Islamic era, the preachers stressed learning, with great emphasis on Islamic teaching as well as Qur'anic recitation. It is agreed that the first preachers were the **Sufis** or at least influenced by the **sufism**. Part of the method of preaching Islam was the establishment of the institutions for Islamic learning and practice. These institutions are recognized as **pondok-pesantren**. It is also believed, that the founders of the **pondok-pesantren** were the **walis**. 22) Historically, some of the **sufis** supported the Sultan, and the Sultan gave them the liberty of giving religious instruction. Some of the **walis** founded sultanates. For example **walis** founded the centre of Islamic learning in Gresik (East Java) in the early Islamic period, and the sultanates of Demak, Banten, and Cirebon. These sultanates had become centres of Islamic propagation as well as centres of learning. People were encouraged to study. In addition, they sent missions to the Muslim world and invited scholars from abroad to teach in their centres. 23)

In connection with this, Muslim holy men (**walis**) **ulama'**, **kyais** or whatever names are used, undoubtedly played an important role in the conversion of people to Islam, especially in the coastal cities. They gained considerable fame as miracle preachers. 24) In the early fifteenth century Mawlana Malik Ibrahim, 25) a **wali** began to propagate Islam in East Java, in the reign of Brawijaya V, 26) **Raden Rahmat** (known as Sunan Ngampel), 27) regular instruction in Islamic teaching 28) was permitted in Ampel, Surabaya (East Java). This institution was one of the earliest institutions founded by **walis** in Java.

In Islamic teaching and other activities of the **walis** or **kyais** are reminiscent of the **ulama'** in Mediaeval Islam. The Islamic institution or the Islamic learning in Indonesia (**mesjid**, **surau**, **pondok-pesantren**, **madrassa**) might be compared to Islamic institutions in Mediaeval Islam or to those found even earlier in Classical Ages. **Abbasid** caliphs, for example, opened **Dar al-Hadith** (House of Tradition) while al-Ma'mun (813-833) founded **Dar al-Ilm** (House of Knowledge), and the **Fatimids** in Egypt subsequently

established al-Azhar as a mosque and university as well. These were followed in Zaituna of Tunis and Qarawiyan of Fez in Maghrib. This institution was developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Nizam al-Mulk 29) modified the Islamic school of **madrassa**. Nur al-Din Zangi, Saladin, and others founded schools of **fiqh**, which were institutions for the study of Islamic religion. 30) There are similarities between these early Islamic institutions and the **pondok-pesantren**.

Basically, the **wali** or **kyai** are recognized as learned men of Islam. They exist in every Muslim country, no matter what they are called. However varied their culture, they have unity in their religion. The term **kyai** is similar to **ulama'** (learned men of Islam) in any Muslim country, whether in the Middle East, Northern Africa, Pakistan or anywhere. Thus, where there are Muslims the term **ulama'** is well known among all Muslims.

With reference to the **kyai** and his **pondok-pesantren** many scholars claim that the **pondok-pesantren** owes more to Buddhist and Hindu monastery-schools than to Islamic schools, i.e. **madrassa**. 31) Some scholars claim that **pondok-pesantren** is a continuation of the old Javanese Hindu-Javanese **mandala's** (converts), and neither the life of **santri** nor the social position of these theological schools have been considerably changed in Java by four centuries of Islam. 32)

We might arrive at the conclusion that **pondok-pesantren** was partly influenced by the Buddhist and Hindu monastery-schools, which were responsible for the social and religious circumstances of the Indonesian people in the early period of the Islamic era. In fact, however, the **pondok-pesantren** were more strongly influenced by the **kyais**, who were perhaps **Sufis**. The existence of the **pondok-pesantren** as an Islamic educational institution was established by the **kyai** with Islamic character and adapted to Indonesian culture.

The development of the **pondok-pesantren** can not be separated from the Muslim community. The growth of the **hajj**, (pilgrimage to Mecca) in the nineteenth century, gave a positive effect. According to H.A.R. Gibb, the pilgrimage to Mecca was the most effective of all the religious institution that nourished the community spirit of Islam. 33) The **kyai** came increasingly from among those people who returned from the **hajj** to Mecca. And the **pondok-pesantren** increased due to the **haji**, as well, although, not all **kyai** had been to Mecca, and most of the well known ones had. By far, not all **hajis** were **kyais**. The **haji** concluded an important period of Muslim life in which many **hajis** became more dedicated to religious life. 34)

With the support of the society, mosques and lodgings were often built with the funds of the **waqf**. Some people gave a **waqf** or built a dormitory. Therefore, there were buildings called regencies, which indicated the origin of the persons who gave the building and the students who lived there. Thus, until the present time there are "kombongan Brebes" for instance, where the students from the Brebes regency lived or "kombongan Cirebon, etc. In some places, **kombongan** is also called **bilik**, which means lodge or dormitory.

Pondok - pesantrens were also located in the **perdikan - desa** (free village). 35 This system of giving land for religious school existed in the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods. In the Islamic period, village units, singly or

In blocks, were assigned by the Sultan to the *kyai* for the purpose of establishing religious educational institution. Usually the *perdikan desas* were free from taxes or obligations and governmental control. All authority was in the hands of the *kyai*, many of whom were closely related to the sultan. An example is the *perdikan desa* of Pondok - Pesantren Tegalsari in Ponorogo (East Java). It was established in 1742 by the Sultan Paku Buwono II (Sunan Kumbul, 1725 - 45) to show his gratitude to the *kyai*, i.e. *Kyai Bashari* (or *Besari*).³⁶ Not only did the Sultan Paku Buwono II continue to support the *pondok-pesantren*, but he also built the dormitory and mosque.

The *pondok-pesantren* was, and is, a continuation of studies for any pupil who wants to pursue and penetrate deeper into Islamic subjects. Such institutions can be very large. The subjects they offer may include all branches of Islamic studies. Studies include elementary Qur'anic recitation, the Islamic subjects of Law, Theology, Sufism, Arabic grammar, the study of Hadith, the instruction of the Qur'an and its branches, *al-Tafsir*, *al-Tajwid*, *al-Qira'at*, including *Qira'at al-Saba* (seven ways of the Qur'anic recitation). Students may also learn the whole Qur'an by heart.

Several branches of religious subjects are also taught in the *pondok-pesantren*: *Ilm al-Fiqh*, including *Usul al-Fiqh* and *al-Faraid*, is perhaps the most selected subject among the students. Arabic, including *al-Nahw wa al-Sarf*, *al-Balagha*, are also taught. *Ilm al-Kalam* (Theology), *al-mantiq* (Logic), *al-Akhlaq* (Ethics), are sometimes taught, as well as *al-Tasawwuf* (Mystics) and *al-Falak* (Astronomy).

Some *pondok-pesantren* specialize in certain Islamic subjects, *Tariqa*, as well. However, the *pondok-pesantren's* character and method of teaching is most importantly influenced by the *kyais* themselves. Some of the *pondok-pesantren* well known in certain specialities. For instance, *pondok-pesantren* *Lirboyo* and *Ploso*, both in Kediri (East Java) are known in *al-Qawaid* and *al-Tasawwuf*. *Jampes*, Kediri is also known in *al-Tasawwuf*. *Tebuireng* (East Java) is well known in *al-Tafsir* and *al-Hadith*. *Purwosari*, Kediri and *Buntet*, Cirebon (West Java) are known for physical education. Also there are other *pondok-pesantren* which place more emphasis in the Qur'anic sciences. These include *Pondok-pesantren* *Lasem* and *Mangkuyudan*, Solo (both in Central Java) and most *pondok-pesantren* in *Banten*, *Serang* (West Java).

Pondok Modern *Gontor*, Ponorogo is well known for language teaching (Arabic and English). *Dar al-Ulum*, Paterongan, Jombang (East Java) is well known in *Tasawwuf*. *Pesantren Persatuan Islam*, Bangli, Surabaya (East Java) is well known in Islamic Law. *Dar al-Falah*, Bogor (West Java) is well known in *ketrampilan* (manual skill) particularly agriculture. These *pondok-pesantrens* are considered as modern *pondok-pesantren* because where the teaching has been adapted to modern methods.

However, there is no obligation to take all subjects and the student is free to choose his own subjects as well as follow any *kyai* in the *pondok-pesantren*. Therefore, some students study many subjects, while other do not take any. As a result, some of them successfully master their studies in a relatively short time. As a result of the educational system in the *pondok-pesantren*, some students may become learned scholars of Islamics, however, many of them may attempt for years without acquiring any knowledge what so-ever.

FOOTNOTES

1) For further details see R.A. Kern "Pasantren", *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, op. cit., pp. 460-62; see also H. Aboebakar, op. cit., pp. 43-52; see also Clifford Geertz, *The Religion . . .* op. cit., pp. 177-182.

2.) R.A. Kern, "Pasantren",, p. 460.

3) Ibid., p. 460.

4) Ibid., p. 460.

5) See C. Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, vol. 1, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1906, p. 29.

6) See C. Geertz, "Modernization in a Muslim Society: the Indonesian Case", in Robert N. Bella, ed., *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia*, New York, Free Press; London Collier-MacMillan, 1965, pp. 98-99.

7) Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: the changing role of a cultural broker", *Comparative Studies in society and history*, vol. II, no. 2, January, 1960, p. 234.

8) Ibid., p. 234.

9) Ibid., pp. 234-35.

10) Laporan Penelitian dan Seminar Pendidikan pada Perguruan Agama, Jakarta, Proyek Peningkatan Penelitian Keagamaan Departemen Agama, 1971, p. 5.

11) Ibid., p. 5.

12) Ibid., pp. 481-82; see also A. Mukti Ali, *Beberapa Masalah Pendidikan di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta, Nida, 1971, pp. 17-18.

13) See "Seminar Pondok-Pesantren seluruh Indonesia", *Al-Djamiah*, No. 5-6, Tahun IV (Sep. - Nop., 1965), p. 26.

14) Ki Hajar Dewantara was born Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat. Under colonial rule his aristocratic status enabled him to pursue his formal education in the Western stream of the Dutch system. He dropped out of medical school, and subsequently became a journalist. He first settled in Semarang (Central Java), but in 1921 he returned to Yogyakarta, and it was here he became a member of a cultural discussion group, the Sarasehan Siasa Kliwonan, which seems to have given the final impetus to his decision to found a National School System, which is known as Taman Siswa.

15. Taman Siswa literally means "Garden of Pupils." It was operated in Yogyakarta in 1922. Taman Siswa was not purely traditional, it was consciously progressive and open-minded. The central principle of Taman Siswa was known as the sistem among, which meant the construction of education around the child, making the maximum use of his own self-educational instincts.

16. David Radcliffe, *Ki Hadjar Dewantara and the Tamansiswa School Yogyakarta*, Majelis Luhur Persatuan Taman Siswa, 1971, pp. 11-12.

17. See Ki Hajar Dewantara, *Karja*, p. 370, reprinted Wasita, vol. 1, No. 2, November, 1928; see also David Radcliffe, op. cit., p. 11, n.16.

18. See Soegardo Poerbakawatja, *Pendidikan dalam alam Indonesia Merdeka*, Jakarta, Gunung Agung, 1970, pp. 17-18.

19. See Sutedjo Bradjanegara, *Sedjarah Pendidikan Indonesia*, Yogyakarta, 1956, p. 25.
20. I.J. Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van het Onderwijs in Nederlandsch Indie*, Groningen, J.B. Wolters, 1938.
21. See Selo Soemardjan, *Social Changes in Jogjakarta*, Ithaca N.Y. Cornell University Press, 1962, pp. 341-42.
22. See H. Aboebakar, *op. cit.*, p. 5; see also Mahmud Junus, *op. cit.*, p. 190. He states that Raden Fattah, one of the walis in Java was established pesantren in Glagah Arum or Bintara, in 1475. Now this place known as Jepara (Central Java).
23. For historical information, see John Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago*, Edinburgh, 1820; see also Robert van Niel, "The Course of Indonesian History", in Ruth T. McVey, ed., *Indonesia*, New Haven, Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1963; see also H.J. de Graaf, "South-east Asian Islam to the Eighteenth Century", *The Cambridge History of Islam* vol. II, Cambridge, The University Press, 1970, pp. 123-154; see also D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, London, Macmillan, New York, St Martin's Press, 1968.
24. See Robert van Niel, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-78.
25. Mawlana Malik Ibrahim, according to the Javanese chroniclers was one of the important walis in Java and the first preacher in Java. But modern scholarship prefers to regard him as wealthy merchant who probably made good money in the spice trade.
26. Brawijaya V was the last of the Majapahit ruler in East Java, who reigned from 1468 to 1478. It was generally accepted that Majapahit fell in 1478.
27. Raden Rahmat, in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, had been appointed Imam of the Muslim community by a Majapahit authority. His numerous pupils spread Islam further across Java.
28. The Institution of Raden Rahmat was in Ngampel-Denta, the foreign quarter of Surabaya (East Java).
29. Nizam al-Mulk was the minister of the Saljukid sultans Alp Arslan and Malikshah. He gained the powerful support of the ulama', especially those of the Shaff'i school, of which he was an ardent champion, by the institution of innumerable pious foundation, in particular of madrasa.
30. For further details on Muslim institution, see Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Muslim Institutions*, London George Allen & Unwin, 1950.
31. For a brief account of Islamic tradition, see Leonard Binder, "Islamic tradition and politics: the kijaji and the allm", a comment on Clifford Geertz's "The Javanese Kijaji . . .", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. II, no. 2, January, 1960, p. 250.
32. C.C. Berg, "Indonesia", *op. cit.*, p. 257.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
34. For further details on hajj see Jacob Vredenburg, "The Hadjdj," B.K.I. (Bydragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Koninklijk Instituut), Leiden, 1962.
35. For further information on Perdikan Desa, see W. Fruin-Mees, *Geschiedenis van Java*, 2 vol., Veltveden, 1922, p. 86; see also C. Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji . . ." *op. cit.*, pp. 231-32; see also Robert Jay, Santri and Abangan, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-61.
36. For more information on Pondok Tegalsari, see *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, vol. XXIV, 1877, pp. 318-336.