

Khairul Umam

THE ORIGIN OF LOMBANG VILLAGE



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LONTAR MADURA

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Around 16th century, presumably during the reign of Pangeran Lor II, there lived a kiai named Mahfud, also widely known as Gurang Garing. He was a religious and authoritative figure. Kiai Mahfud was the fifth generation of Sunan Kudus's descendants or the third generation of Sayyid Baidhawi Katandur's. He lived in a remote place in the northeast part of Sumenep, about 12 km away from the regency's center.

The place was so beautiful. Coconut trees grew tall with their leaves slowly waving; banana trees made a line; and, other kinds of plants joined to decorate the scenery and amplify the harmonious atmosphere which would attract people to return to this place. The air was so fresh in the morning. Various kinds of birds flew around and sometimes alighted on the branches to sing. There were left undisturbed by any human being. It did not mean that there were no bird hunters who were always ready with their catapults in hands and highly experienced in hunting down their targets. It was Kiai Mahfud's authoritative figure that made them able to control their hunting desire.

The birds sang even louder. They did not only stay in the tree, but some flew down to the wet land full of caterpillars that fell down along with the dry leaves. The birds found their food by flipping the fallen leaves. Every so often, they scratched the still wet land. Satisfied, the birds would fly again and play in the tree. They occasionally sang.

From the porch of *musala* (a small area in or next to a house), sitting with legs crossed and a book on his lap, Kiai Mahfud watched those phenomena in astonishment while keeping extolling God for his might in creating the world and all things there in such perfection. God's creations needed and completed each other. After watching those amazing phenomenon that made him continuously praise God, he turned his focus back to the lesson and his students who had been sitting and reading their books in full concentration, waiting to for explanations from their teacher.

"In this life, we need to give each other. We are not perfect, so we need to complete each other," Kiai Mahfud delivered his first wordings that had been memorized by all of his students when studying in the morning.

"So, harmony is the key. Harmony does not apply to us human beings only. God's creations are too many to be limited to human beings only. There are animals and there are various kinds of them. There are plants with many types. And then there are inanimate objects such as dirt, rocks, water, air, and so on." Kiai Mahfud then stopped his explanation. He took a deep breath and fixed his sitting position that was getting uncomfortable.

"Thus, every creature must live in harmony. Because, we, human beings, are the only one who were granted intelligence by God, we are supposed to take greater role in keeping that harmony. That is why God has destined every human being to be a leader. So we can take control. We may not destroy it instead."

The getting-old Kiai every so often glanced at his students who were concentrating to read every line in the book that would be studied soon. Although Kiai Mahfud's explanation were more than the texts they read, his students did not dare to look up. They preferred listening to him and pretending to look at the book on his lap. Kiai Mahfud actually was hoping his students would ask questions or ask him to repeat his explanations in

case they had missed something. However, those students sitting before him did not show any sign of getting ready to ask questions.

“Harmony among human beings means that we must respect each other. We may not denounce each other, let alone hurt each other. We must also respect the existing tradition because it has been long applied. If there is any tradition that seems conflicting with our religious lessons, we may not destroy it. We can change it gradually by making adjustments. That is a way suggested by Wali Songo (the nine saints who spread Islam in Java). That is why Islam has grown rapidly.”

“Harmony among all God’s creations including plants, animals, and earth is the outcome of human effort not to greedily and cruelly overexploit them. We may slaughter some animals for their meat as long as we do it properly and do not torture them. The most important thing is that we must care for their continuous existence so that they will not go extinct. To reach the harmony in this world, we may not exploit them beyond their limit. Trees may be cut down, but not too many and we must replace the cut-down trees. If we can live that way, if God wishes, we will have a peaceful life.” Kiai Mahfud stopped his lecture again and observed his students who were still reading the widely-opened book.

“There is no key of harmony but being thankful,” Kiai Mahfud spoke again.

After delivering a long explanation about the importance of harmony, the charismatic Kiai with his humble appearance continued to study a book. He usually chose book of fiqh (Islamic law) to study in the morning and later the book of tasawwuf (the inward dimension of Islam) and tajwid (correct pronunciation). New students always got lessons of salat (Moslem prayers) first. Those new students were usually closely supervised by Kiai Mahfud until they had a sufficient knowledge and were able to study

individually. Salat or prayer was the top priority. Prayers were the pillars of religion. A good life would start from good prayers.

The remote place, where Kiai Mahfud lived, later was named Lambi Cabbi village. He lived the way his students lived. He devoted his days to study Islam. More students came each day, and more students graduated from his *pondok* (also *pondok pesantren*; Islamic boarding school in Indonesia). Those graduated students went back to their own villages. In their villages, they would apply the religious lessons they had learnt during their study in Kiai Mahfud's school. However, not every news was good news. Kiai Mahfud also got bad news.

In the north coast, 12 km away from Kiai Mahfud's place, there was a big harbour where merchants from all over the country and other continents came and carried out businesses. Everyday, the harbour was very busy. It grew and followed the rhythm of merchants who kept coming from various places, near or far.

Many of the travellers decided to stay permanently and got married to local people. They later on built permanent houses and created a village behind the waves that seemed to summon fortune every day.

In the coast that had become the economic centre for the local people and merchants coming from other places, they lived prosperously. Dry land and the spreading sands that seldom grew plantation were not destructive nor a bad omen. The people managed to fulfil their needs of food, clothing, to housing. The financial circulation ran fast and evenly. There was a happy life there.

Nevertheless, the happiness and the abundant prosperity had led them to ignorance. They forgot to thank God. And the disaster began from then on. At first, they only wanted to get together at nights and had some gossiping about various issues, from trivial ones to the business matters.

They gathered in local *warung* (a small restaurant or café in Indonesia) serving coffee and snacks.

Nights became their favourite time to hang around since it was the only time most of them had no economic activity. For them, hours of darkness were the perfect times to rest from all weariness resulted from their activities all day long. Gathering around was the best way for mutual sharing after dispersing to work the whole day, perhaps some quarrels might occur between them to gain respect from the buyers.

No one knew who brought the bad habit into this coastal village. Out of nowhere, gambling had been around in the village. Those who were gathering in a *warung* were very likely found gossiping and gambling. Their chosen time to get together had completely changed. They did not only spend a couple of hours at night, but they would rather stay awake instead to win the gambling game. Those who were winning needed to keep their success until everyone gave up could not continue playing.

From that time on, those *warungs* kept opened until the nights ended. The hectic nightlife had given a different tone to the village. During the daytime, they worked hard to put food on the table and chased wealth and at nights the gambles to earn more money. They believed that the end justifies the means. For them, fortune was the ultimate goal. Although gambling often gave them losses, but the illusion of winning big was more fascinating to those groups of males.

To stay awake all night and to still be able to work hard the next morning, they got used to drink alcohol that began to be available in some *warungs*. The *warungs* that did not serve any liquor usually would not attract many customers and eventually would lose them. Those *warungs* were forced to adjust their businesses that alcoholic drink could be found in all *warungs* across the village.

Firstly, some Kiai Mahfud's students who lived there tried to stick to their religious principles and dare to refuse joining the bad habit. They chose to stay at home during the nighttime and only carry out their activities in daylight. They still frequently read holy books they had studied in Kiai Mahfud's school. They also keep doing their midnight prayers and praying to God despite all the bullies they got.

"Don't act like you're a saint!"

"You kid are just born yesterday. Don't be such a smartass!"

"Quit keeping up with the joneses! Come and join us! We won't mind. In fact, we would be very happy, the more the merrier!" Those men ended their words with laughter.

Slowly, the frequent bullies and enticement from all over the place had weakened the moral of some Kiai Gurang Garing's former students. They started to feel awkward if they were seen or found praying or reading holy books. They could not do much for being outnumbered. Therefore, they decided to secretly pray and study holy books, but when the night came, they preferred joining the local people doing their bad habit all night long.

In the beginning, they intended to reduce their neighbors' prejudices. However, when they began joining the circle and hanging around with their neighbors, worse thing happened; they got carried away. They began drinking liqueur a bit and gambled sometimes. The habit regularly nurtured and also supported by the environment eventually made them forget their religious education. And later on those students became an inseparable part of their unwilling-to-change community.

The life became more and more uncontrolled. The coming merchants intending to sell spices, textiles, and everyday things began to take the risk

of bringing hostesses, prostitutes to keep the gamblers accompanied all night long.

Those hostesses put heavy makeup on their faces. They applied lipstick on their lips in such a way and used strong-smelling perfumes. With their seductive voice, they flirted every drunk man to make the night livelier and the gambler bet more money all over the place in the village. The most extreme was that those hostesses also served as prostitutes. Since, those *warungs* had turned to places serving prostitution as well.

The life of the coastal village drastically changed. Men found staying home boring. In the daylight, they were too lazy to work. Businesses were run by foreigners who intentionally took advantage from the situation. The night *warungs* with their liquor businesses were booming while the wives were getting concerned about themselves being abandoned by their husbands.

Shortly after, the wives also changed. They seldom did their duties and works. Instead, they were busy putting up makeup and prettifying their appearances so that their husbands would not choose those prostitutes over their own wives. They began to seduce any man they saw. They did not care whether the man was married or wifeless. For those wives, they would win if they could seduce and bring that man to her bed. Only that way, they could give their husbands some kind punishment and, in addition to that, they could earn more money.

From day to day, that coastal village's life had worsened. Their debts were accumulating from their gambling losses. Foreigners started to control businesses and economic life. On the one hand, they needed to fulfill their everyday needs. On the other hand, they could not stop from gambling. Also, they could not reject the temptation to have fun with those expensive beautiful women. Their lives were getting ruined.

Eventually, those bad habits lead to crimes. Robbery happened and sometimes it could lead to death. Some hostesses were found dead with bloods on the lips and the back of their heads in the rooms specially provided to serve their customers. Underage girls also became victims of rape. Quarrels often took place between foreign businessmen and local people when they collected debts.

The village turned to an unsafe place. People were suspicious to each other. Merchants coming from other places took precautions. They hired bodyguards who were willing to die to protect them. Nevertheless, hanging around at nights and gambling had become an inevitable routine although, every night, arguments and deadly fight might happen. Moral and ethical lessons that were previously their guidance had been ignored.

Finally, the news was heard by Kiai Mahfud. A student had just visited and informed the immoral habit. He remained silent for a while and looked up at the weaving leaves. He occasionally nodded and shook his head slowly.

After contemplating and considering many things, Kiai Mahfud decided to move the coastal village. In his mind, it was necessary for him to see the situation by himself and try to guide people back to God's path.

After entrusting his school to his children and saying farewell to his students, Kiai Mahud left home with the hope of saving the village's people and some of his former students. Every move and breath of him was accompanied by a prayer. He added salutation upon the prophet Mohammad to each of his observation. He did all that until getting to his destination.

In the dry and hot land, he soon found a different atmosphere. The hot temperature came from the sun light and the strong wind blowing something new. He took deep breathes many times and asked for God's

forgiveness thousand times, while watching people busy doing their businesses and ignoring the praying call.

In one day only, he had learnt many weird things. At nights, he walked around the village, disguising as a traveler who was seeking a place to stay. No one cared about his presence. The men were too busy with their gambling games all over the place, found drunk with hostesses on their laps or stroking those women's backs. Some of them were seen walking into small rooms and disappeared behind those seemingly fragile doors.

After staying for a couple of days, studying the terrible situation, Kiai Mahfud decided to do his mission, teaching again religious lessons and asking people to return to God's path. He visited those people one by one, starting from his former student. Next, accompanied by the student whose house became his place to stay in the village, he walked to other houses, one after another. Occasionally, he held a big event to get all the people in the village together.

However, such a big effort of his that spent much energy did not bring the expected result. In his prayers, he contemplated. He asked himself whether he had done something wrong that no one listened, even his own students. The door of forgiveness seemed to be tightly closed. He suddenly cried. In the silence of the night, he prayed to God for patience and His guidance.

"They are still God's creations who got lost in the darkness. I hope someday they will realize their wrongdoings and return to God's path." He spoke in his heart in the cold wind blow in the middle of wet midnight.

After a long failure, Kiai Mahfud still maintained his patience and persistently adjusted himself to the people's habit. He also tried to bring children to study religious lessons with the hope of breaking the chain of immoral behavior that had widely infested their lives. Only few allowed

their children to study with him. Most people would bring their children to work, wait at home, or accompany them gambling.

Kiai Mahfud took a deeper contemplation while praying harder. His cry broke again, made his cheeks and turban wet. He carefully made a decision. He considered and reconsidered the decision he was going to make. He did it repeatedly and took another deep breath.

In this confusing and dilemmatic situation, his lips pronounced a prayer that trembled the village. With a heavy heart, he had to take a hurtful decision that would harm many people, but he had no other choice. In his mind, at least he would wipe out one generation that had already been severely damaged. Kiai Mahfud asked for a plague, a deadly disease that could not be cured and would killed its victim in short time. He asked for the disease *ta'un*. He wholeheartedly prayed in full concentration. The prayer was immediately granted.

Dozens of people in the coastal village suffered from severe stomachache that could not be cured because it was impossible to find a shaman or healer. The disease attacked anyone, at anytime. It would attack people when they were resting, working, spending time with their family, or even gambling and committing adultery. Soon, the

number of dead people were increasing out of control. Before one dead body was buried, there came another dead person. Every day, the village was busy taking care of dead bodies that kept coming and accumulating.

When the people were so busy and confused taking care of the dead bodies, there occurred an inspiration to dig a big *lobang* 'hole' for the corpses so that they could save their energy because there certainly would be way more other dead bodies to take care of.

Kiai Mahfud himself who was still staying in the village could not escape from the plague. He suffered from the same disease and died. He was buried in the village. People then had in inspiration from the big hole to name the coastal village. However, in the end, the descendants of the village people called the place *Lombang*.



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