

The Emergence of the Residents' Belief in the Existence of Gembel Children in Dieng Plateau Area

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Abstract

This study aims at analysing the emergence of Javanese's belief and attitudes in the existence of gembel children among the residence of Dieng Plateau Area. This study focuses on two villages to be observed, Dieng Village (Eastern Dieng) that belongs to Wonosobo Regency and Dieng Kulon Village that belongs to Banjarnegara Regency. The researcher conducts in-depth interview, observation and also documentation toward the stake holders (residents, traditional leader, gembel children). The result is that the existence of them (gembel children) are very important to the residents, they also have the great attitudes toward them (gembel children). Some believes also emerge among the residents of these two villages as a result of their existence (gembel children).

Keywords: *Javanese's believe, attitude, gembel children*

Introduction

The location of Dieng which is mountainous and far from the city. Dieng Plateau (116 km northwest of Yogyakarta) is one of the tourist' destinations in Indonesia. It is 116 km northwest of Yogyakarta and it can be reached by public transportation. There are several villages in Dieng Plateau Area, the two of them are Dieng (Eastern Dieng) and Dieng Kulon (Western Dieng). Dieng with the area of 2.82 km² belongs to Wonosobo Regency and Dieng Kulon belongs to Banjarnegara Regency with the area of 3.38 Km². Most of people are very familiar to these villages compare to others villages in this Plateau. It is because the two villages become the tourist destination (Department of Culture and Tourism of Banjarnegara Regency 2015).

Dieng Plateau area has a beautiful scenery. The residents of Dieng Plateau mostly support their life by farming potatoes, cabbage and also other vegetables. As their main job as a farmer, the residents of Dieng Plateau area ignores the

formal education. The important thing that they should be owned are having a good harvest to life together with their family.

Dieng Plateau area has cultural heritage. There are many Hindu Temples which stands since hundreds years ago. It is why although the residents of Dieng Plateau area are moslem (only some of the residents who are not moslem), but they are still influenced by the Hindhu culture.

The situation, condition and also educational background of the residence influence their mind, cultural practice and believe. As the indigenous people (Javanese), *kejawen* can not be separated from their life, It is still exist in Dieng Plateau area (Damayanti 2011). The myths are still believed by almost all indigenous people of Dieng; “*anak gembel*” (children with dreadlocks). Although they are originally born in normal such as most children then they experience a sudden high fever and the dreads started to grow from their heads (Damayanti 2011). Most people believe that dreadlocks children are the offspring of the ancestral founder of Dieng. He is Ki Ageng Kolodete. Various-studies have not found any scientific reasons of the growth of dreadlocks.

According to the interview that was done in 2015 with Mr. Yoyo, *gembel* children are not treated differently compared to their friends. It is just that they tend to be more active, strong and somehow mischievous. When dreadlocks children are playing together, they tend to fight each other. Dieng residents believe they are descended from the ancestral founder of Dieng and there is a supernatural being that “inhabit” and “maintain” these dreads. Dreadlocks are not passed on genetically. In other words, no one knows when and who will receive this gift. It is said that the ancestral founder of Dieng, Ki Ageng Kolodite left the message to people to keep and take care of children with dreads.

According to the interview that was done in 2015 with Mr. Yoyo, the traditional leader of Dieng Kulon Village, *Ruwatan* is a ritual in Java that aims to eliminate *sukerta*. *Sukerta* is any detrimental effect on humans. It is believed that there are certain people who bring *sukerta* experienced since birth. The tradition of people living in Dieng requires the dreadlocks kids to do the *ruwatan*. The ceremony of *ruwatan* done by the people at Dieng Plateau in Central Java has

been passed around for generations; thus, it has embedded in the Javanese culture in Dieng plateau.

The uniqueness and phenomena which is in Dieng Plateau Area especially in Dieng village and Dieng Kulon village makes the researcher wants to explore deeply about the importance of *gembel* children among the residents and the kinds of believe that emerge among the residents toward the existence of *gembel* children.

Literary Review

Family Relation

In Javanese tradition, woman has the role only for keeping the house and children, they have to obey all the instruction of the husband. In Javanese, woman has a less potent compare to a man. It is why in the household, the husband has a greater power than a wife. Man has big responsibility to take care and fund the family. As a result of these situation, woman can not behave as a person who become the resistance of husband's anger outburst, between them sometimes are not able to live in harmony (Keeler 1987).

Mystical knowledge has been familiar since their ancestor there. *Ngelmu* is the particular term for the Javanese people who know and possess the mystical knowledge. *Ngelmu* consists of *aji-aji* and *rapal* (magical formulas), mystical practice and various knowledge which have relationship to them. When we are talking about *ngelmu*, we should avoid the science. Because *ngelmu* is not logical to the understanding of science. Between them are very contrasted. *Ngelmu* usually is owned by the older people. But sometimes there are also some people who is still young possess/ maintain *ngelmu*. Either the older people or younger people who possess *ngelmu*, they will be called as older people/*sesepuh*. *Ngelmu* can be thrown away (*ngguwak*) to avoid the pain or suffer in the process of dying (Keeler, 1987). In the process of throwing *ngelmu*, they can go to a river banks at the middle of night while giving the offering to the spirit then pronouncing the *aji-aji/rapal* (magical formula), "I am throwing this formula" (Keeler 1987:82). When they have finished ritual of throwing *ngelmu* (*ngguwak*), they are not able to use that magical power (its *ngelmu*) anymore although they are still remember the words of *aji-aji*/formula.

Javanese's Belief

a. Potency, Possession and speech

Most of people in Java know what it is called as *dhanyang*, territorial spirits that settle and maintain the area. There are many areas in Java which is believed by many people that the areas settled by *dhanyang*, for example in the certain place of every hamlets (Keeler 1987). *Dhanyang* sometimes can live together with the human in the same area although the human can not see them. There's also *dhanyang* who live/settle by themselves in the certain area (not together with the humans). They maintain the area and stay there, don't want to be disturbed by the humans. *Dhanyang* have a magical power but they don't want to disturb the humans since there's no human who begin to disturb them.

Not all the people can see *dhanyang*, it's only the people who have much potency. Javanese mention the people who are good at potency as *wong tua* (respected elders) and *dhukun* (magic specialists) to assist in a matter of *kebatinan* (Keeler 1987). *Wong tua* (respected elders) is not only for old people but also for younger people who have the substantial of *kakuatan batin*. he is regarded as a highly respected person who has great potency.

When we have discussion about *dhanyang* who settle in the certain area, it can not be separated from the discussion of spirit. In Java, Javanese also believes that there are certain people who are maintained and inhabited by certain spirit. The spirit who is inside the body, it can be a good spirit (maintaining) but it can also be the spirit that wants to control the owner of the body, so that the human (the body inhabited by spirit) will be under the control of the spirit. To avoid the unexpected problem which caused by the spirit, the spirit must be evicted from the body with ritual procession. The ritual procession usually done by the Javanese is called *ruwatan*. In Dieng Plateau Area, there is a *ruwatan* for the *gembel* (dreadlocks) children. They belong to the *sukerta* type which must take the *ruwatan* ritual procession.

b. Myth and *Kejawen*

As the explanation of Raglan (1955) that sometimes we can not fully believe in myth because it is like as the history that can not be proven, it is not the past of historical incident. The people who receive a myth in their mind and then realize

that in to the ritual practices, the ritual practices mostly develop gradually from generation to generation. Actually the relationship between them (myth and rite) is still problematic (Hefner 1985). Then when we are talking about the term *kejawen* (Javanism), it is little bit complicated. Because *kejawen* itself raises up from the custom and tradition of Java. Woodward (1988) said that people who follow the believe of *kejawen* do not behave the action under the *Syariah* (Moslem Religious Law). Here in Dieng Plateau Area, the residents are moslem, they follow the duty of Islam, but still following *kejawen* practice, so that there is a new term in this case, “Islam *Kejawen*”.

Ruwatan

In an interview with Yoyo in March 3, 2015, he stated that “Ruwatan is a ritual in Java that aims to eliminate sukerta or any detrimental effect on humans, because it is believed there are certain people who bring sukerta experienced since birth.” There are three kinds of *ruwatan*; *ruwatan sukerta*, *ruwatan sengkala* and *ruwatan lembaga*. *Ruwatan sukerta* is a *ruwatan* for children who are born as children who belonged *sukerta*. Basically, this is a *ruwatan* that requests for that the child’s salvation and happiness in the future. Then *ruwatan sengkala* is a *ruwatan* for the people who get bad at luck. While *ruwatan lembaga* is a *ruwatan* to get a better for an organization or institution. *Gembel* (dreadlocks) children in Dieng Plateau Area belong to *sukerta*. They have to do the ritual procession of *ruwatan sukerta*.

Attitude

According to Oxford Dictionary which is released in 2003, the word “attitude” means way of thinking or behaving. Attitude can not be separated to perception. The perception comes before the attitude. By having the perception individuals are required to provide an assessment of an object, then the perception of an object will form an attitude. We should know that in the perception it can be either positive assessment or negative, depends on the way of themselves thinking, subjective or objective (Demuth 2012). It is why there will be different attitude for each residents on this research.

Research Methodology

There are some ways of collecting data in this research; observation is conducted in two villages, Dieng village which belongs to Wonosobo Regency and Dieng Kulon village which belongs to Banjarnegara Regency. Both of the villages are located in the peak of Dieng Plateau Area. Below are the location of Dieng Plateau Area;

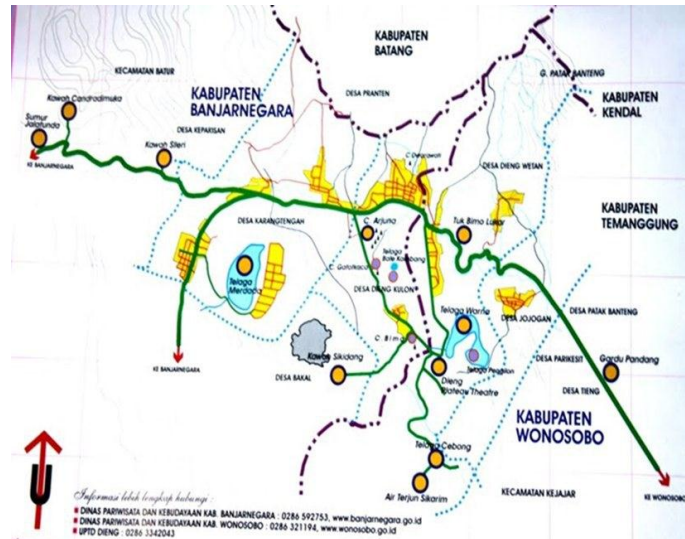


Figure 1.1 Map of Dieng Plateau Area

Source: <https://www.google.co.jp/search?q=peta+dieng&ie=utf>

The researcher goes to the area for three months and meet some stake holders there. In-depth-interview is done to the residents of Dieng and Dieng Kulon vilalage, The parents of *gembel* children and also *Sesepuh* (traditional leader/ a person that is believed by the residents to guide the *ruwatan* ritual procession) in both village). The researcher also met some male and femel *gembel* children. *Gembel* are dreadlocks owned by the children of Dieng Plateau Area. Through the permission from the informants, the researcher also takes the documentation to acquire the authentic evidence. IC recorder is used to record the interview from the informants the camera is for taking the photos and videos.

Findings and Discussion

The Importance of Gembel Children among the Residents and the Attitudes Toward Them

Gembel children are very familiar among the residents in Dieng Plateau Area even the people the outside of the city know who are they. They are unique children, not all the indigenous people and Dieng Plateau can have them. They can not be asked or rejected. Having the *gembel* children are a gift. Because they are the offspring of the ancestral founder in Dieng Plateau Area. He is Ki Ageng Kolodete. He is the founder of Dieng at the first time. Ki Ageng Kolodete left a message to the residents of Dieng that they have to keep and care to *gembel* children who live in Dieng. By giving a good attention to them. He also said that *gembel* (dreadlocked) which is owned in children maintained by him (Kolodete). When the residents of Dieng care to dreadlocked children, Dieng will get the prosperity. But if the *gembel* children is ignored, the calamity will come because the anger of spirit (Kolodete) that possess and inhabit in their body (*gembel* children). The researcher interviewed the residents of Dieng village and Dieng Kulon village.

Mrs. Ani (Dieng Kulon), based on the interview in March 3, 2015.

Mrs. Ani is indigenous people in Dieng, she was born in 1977. Since he was child, they knew that *gembel* children had been special in residents' heart. The residents of Dieng Plateau respect to them and don't want to make pain their heart.

Mr. Suhardi (Dieng), based on interview in March 15, 2015.

Mr. Suhardi married to the indigenous people of Dieng. At the first time living in Dieng he saw that the residents who met the *gembel* children then they asked something to them (residents), the residents gave it to *gembel* children without any doubtness. He also said that the residents must keep and care their heart (*gembel* children). They do not want to make their heart pain.

Mrs. Lastri (Dieng Kulon), based on the interview in March 17, 2015.

"If it can be asked, I want to have daughter who owns the *gembel*" (Lastri, March 17, 2015). She dreams to have *gembel* daughter, but there is no one of her children who own *gembel*.

Mr. Haryono (Dieng), based on the interview in March 20, 2015.

“The existence of them (*gembel* children), will bring Dieng to the prosperity” (Haryono, March 20, 2015). He also tells that the growth of economic in Dieng influenced by the *gembel* children. There is *ruwatan* ritual procession of hair cutting toward the *gembel* children and many tourist come to Dieng and in this procession all they want will be granted.

Almost all the residents that interviewed give the statement that *gembel* children is very important among them. They really believe that the existence of them bring the prosperity toward the residents of Dieng Plateau Area, since they take care of *gembel* children. It can be seen that now most of tourist come to Dieng not only because of the beauty of Dieng but also for the witness of *ruwatan* ritual procession of *gembel* hair cutting. This condition makes the development of economy in Dieng grow faster.

The Kind of Belief that Emerge among the residents toward the existence of Gembel Children

The existence of *gembel* children in Dieng Plateau Area brings to the emergence of residents' belief;

- The belief in *Kejawen*

The residents of Dieng Plateau Area mostly are Islam. But still they are influenced by traditional and custom as they are Javanese. Animism is still widespread in that area. As Woodward (1988) explained that there is relationship among the *Kejawen* (Javanism) and animistic. Animistic practices is under the believe of *Kejawen* (Javanism). The people conduct the practices/action not under the *syariah* (Muslim Religious Law) (Woodward 1988).

The different cases happen in Dieng Plateau Area. The residents still obey to the practices of Islam but their mindset is still stick on the Javanese tradition and custom. It is why the residents said that mostly the believe of them is Islam *Kejawen*. The evidence of this believe is that;

- a. They still regard that in the certain place; cave, big tree or stone, in the corner of rice field are in possession or inhabitation of spirit.

Mr. Ono, “I go to the corner of my own garden and provide *sesajen* before planting the potatoes (March 21, 2015). Mr. Ono is a farmer. He plants the potatoes in his garden. Before planting he provides the *sesajen* and make a wish toward the spirit who settles in that area, hopefully that he will success on his harvest.

- b. In the certain month and day (Javanese Calender), they go to the sacred place and provide the *sesajen* (flowers and many kinds of favorite food’s spirit). Then they make a prayer to the spirit or make a wish.

Mr. Manto, “ In the night of 1 *Sura* (Javanese Calender), I provide the *sesajen* in Semar Cave” (March 23, 2015). Semar cave is often visited by the residents of Dieng and also the people from the outside of the city. They go there to meditation. Every visitor has their own wish.

- c. In ritual procession of *ruwatan gembel* children, there are always sequences of animism practices also.

- The believe in myth

The existence of *gembel* children in Dieng Plateau Area is not only make the emergence of Islam *Kejawen* believe but also mystical believe. The residents of Dieng Plateau Area are really believe the myth of Kolodete as the existence of *gembel* children in Dieng. The residents obey all the messages from Kolodete.

One of the residents’ believe toward the myth of Kolodete is the emergence of *ruwatan* toward *gembel* children in Dieng Plateau Area and there are two kinds of *ruwatan* :

1. Public *ruwatan*: is a ritual procession of *ruwatan* which is followed by more than one *gembel* children. This *ruwatan* is organized well. This event usually hold in every year. The public *ruwatan* also utilized as tourists attraction.
2. Private *ruwatan*: is a ritual procession of *ruwatan* which is held by the parents of *gembel* children. It is funded by themselves (parents). Private *ruwatan* will be there depends on *gembel* children. When they ask the *gembel* to be cut off, the parents must fulfil their want. believe in myth of Koledete

Conclusion

From the discussion above we can see that how important the gembel children among the residents of Dieng Plateau Area especially Dieng Village and Dieng Kulon Village. The gembel children really accept in the heart of residents. No one has a brave to insult what they are. The residents regard that what are there on gembel children is the uniqueness. Although gembel children are mostly different to other children (children without gembel), for examples; they are more naughty, fussy, more active and all they want must be granted but the residents always patient to see this situation. Even having gembel children is like a gift from the God, it can not be asked or rejected. Then the existence of gembel children among the residents of Dieng Plateau Area make the emergence of residents' believe. Myth, kejawen (Javanism), Islam kejawen and animism are widespread among them.

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