



Resilience Of The Perang Obor Tradition In The Midst Of The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine what adaptations or adjustments were made to the implementation of the Perang Obor tradition in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response from the people of Tegalsambi Village. The method used in this research was a qualitative approach with interview and observation techniques. Interviews were conducted with the community and the village head of Tegalsambi. While the observations were carried out by seeing directly what the Perang Obor was like in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study found the fact that the existence of the Perang Obor tradition in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic was maintained but with some changes. The changes include the implementation of health protocols, the number of participants and limited time to avoid crowds that can become a medium for the spread of COVID-19. This study also found the fact that the policy of the village head continued to carry out the Perang Obor tradition in the midst of a pandemic because this tradition is related to meaningful cultural values and ideologies. Therefore, if it is abolished, it is feared that it will cause conflict for the people of Tegalsambi because the response from the people of Tegalsari has been very positive although they hope that the Perang Obor tradition can be carried out as vibrantly as when there was no COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19; Existence; Policy; Tradition; Perang Obor

A. Introduction

The Perang Obor is one of the traditional ceremonies held by the people of Tegalsambi Village, Tahunan District, Regency (Ratri, 2010). The Perang Obor tradition is actually an earth alms ceremony which is carried out annually on Monday Pahing night, Tuesday Pon (the name of the day in the Javanese calendar) after the harvest. The Perang Obor tradition is an expression of gratitude for the local community to God Almighty for abundant sustenance, health and safety. They believe that the universe is within them because humans are miniatures of the universe (Amaliyah, 2018).

The Perang Obor is a traditional ceremony that is still preserved today. The Perang Obor itself was first carried out in the 16th century AD in connection with the fight between Ki Babadan and Ki Gemblong (Aristanto, 2011). The people of Tegalsambi in their lives are still very colored by a variety of different traditions. They create a relationship between the community and God, the community with each other, as well as the community and the natural environment through the Perang Obor (Rosdiana & Saefudin, 2018).

This tradition is based on the legend of Ki Gemblong who trusted by Kyai Babadan to care for and shepherd her cattle. However, due to being complacent with fish and shrimp in the river, livestock are forgotten so that they get sick and some die. Kyai Babadan, who refused to accept Ki Gemblong's carelessness, then smacked Ki Gemblong with a torch made from a coconut midrib. As a result, he used a similar torch to defend himself. Unexpectedly, the clash of the two torches spread flames across haystack next to the barn. Cattle that were initially sick suddenly be healed. Belief in the fire of a torch that can bring health and rejecting reinforcements is what is used as the basis for implementing Perang Obor Tradition (Aristanto, 2011).

These days the implementation of the Perang Obor tradition is somewhat different from previous years. This is of course due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus pandemic in the country. The massive and uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 virus has worried several countries including Indonesia. The positive number of COVID-19 in Indonesia which is quite high has the potential to cause death. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only affecting the health sector but also the other sectors. However, other sectors such as the economy, social and culture and even the stability of a country are also threatened. In addition, the spread of COVID-19 has also penetrated to all corners of the countryside. Therefore, the village government through the authority of the central government makes regulations to deal with this national disaster to avoid the worst risks (Hidayati, 2020).

All activities that invite large gatherings of people are limited during the pandemic. One of them is the policy regarding the prohibition of socio-cultural activities in rural areas. Socio-cultural activities in the village were not a little changed. Traditions that invite large crowds must be abolished or their implementation postponed until an undetermined time limit due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Tegalsambi Village Government decided that the Perang Obor tradition would still be held but limited and adjusted to health protocols.

Looking at the existing problems, the researchers did have a chance to analyze the implementation of the Perang Obor tradition before the pandemic, how the adaptation or adjustment of the implementation of the Perang Obor tradition in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what the response from the people of Tegalsambi Village in performing the Perang Obor tradition in Indonesia was like in the middle of a pandemic.

B. Methodology

The method used in this research was a qualitative approach. According to Rukin (Rukin, 2019), qualitative research is descriptive research and tends to use an inductive approach to analysis. In this study, researchers were directly involved in the *Perang Obor* Tradition procession and observed the incident, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in Tegalsambi Village.

The research location in this study is in Tegalsambi Village, The Annual District of Jepara Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The reason for choosing this location is because Tegalsambi Village is a village that still maintains local wisdom. This can be seen from the many treasures of traditional and modern culture, such as "*terbang telon, orkes melayu, qasidah, band, and others.*" In addition, in the field of culture Tegalsambi village also has the potential that is no less interesting, namely the alms of the earth which is carried out once a year. In the tradition of alms of the earth there are cultural rituals that are still preserved today, namely *perang obor*.

The focus of research in this study is based more on the level of importance, urgency and phaseability of the problem to be solved, as well as the factors of limited effort, funds and time (Sugiyono, 2017). The focus of this research contains dimensional explanations and becomes an in-depth research center where it aims to make the right decisions about the data to be obtained. This study was focused on looking at the Resilience of the Tradition of Implementing *Perang Obor* in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The data was collected by means of field observations and interviews. The author made two observations to observe the *Perang Obor* Tradition procession and its series. Meanwhile, interviews were carried out in two ways, namely face-to-face interviews with resource persons and interviews via WhatsApp digital media for some informants who could not be found because the situation was not possible due to the pandemic. The author conducted direct interviews with several local residents. Indirect interviews or through Whatsapp digital media, the author conducted with several young people, local residents. The informants in this study were divided into the main informants and supporting informants. The main informants in this study are representatives of community leaders in Tegal Sambi Village and residents / general public in Tegalsambi Village. While supporting informants are culturalists outside of the residents of Tegalsambi Village. From the informant, then by the researcher conducted an interview. The author's live interview was conducted on several local residents, including Nor Widyaningtyas, and interviews indirectly or through whatsapp digital media the author conducted to several *kawula muda*, Sutiyo as a village device and local residents and Agus Santoso as the important tegalsambi village.

In addition to observations and interviews, the authors also seek data from literature studies and written sources. Literature studies through books, journals and articles related to the *Perang Obor* Tradition and written sources through documents and archives from the administrative data of Tegalsambi Village. The data that has been obtained is then analyzed by source triangulation and technique triangulation. In source triangulation, checks were made between statements submitted by one source to another. While in technical triangulation, checks were made between the data obtained by using one technique with another.

C. Discussion

1. The Image of *Perang Obor* Tradition in Tegalsambi Village Before the Covid-19 Pandemic

The *Perang Obor* Tradition is one of the traditional ceremonies held owned by the people of Tegalsambi Village, Tahunan District, Jepara Regency (Ratri, 2010). The *Perang Obor* tradition is actually an earth alms ceremony which is carried out annually on Monday *Pahing* night, and Tuesday *Pon* (the name of the day in the Javanese calendar) after the harvest. The *Perang Obor* tradition is an expression of form thank the local community to God Almighty for the abundant sustenance, health and safety. They believe that the universe is within them because humans are

miniatures of the universe (Amaliyah, 2018). This is in line with Nor Widyaningtyas' statement stating that "*Perang obor* is a local wisdom that is backgrounded by events in the past, which is very thick in the community. *Perang obor* Ritual is a form of attraction performed by the local community as a ritual that has been passed down for generations as an expression of gratitude to God Almighty".



Source: AnalisaDayli.com

Picture 1. The Implementation Of Perang Obor Before the Pandemic

Early pre-Islamic times, the people of Tegalsambi Jepara believed in the mystical nature of the *Perang Obor* tradition. They used to believe that all problems whose solutions were beyond their capabilities could only be solved through magical powers. This power is personified by the form of visible objects which are believed to have supernatural powers that reside in them such as statues, trees, large stones, and others. This symbolic belief is also manifested through behavior in the form of sacred dances and prayers. This is called *magic imitates*. Torch wars are considered to have *magic imitates* the form of a torch. The torch symbol is considered a weapon that can repel enemies, be it humans, animals, or evil spirits.

Perang obor tradition in Tegalsambi Village aims to show that jepara regency still has a diversity of traditions that are maintained until now. This shows that the people of Tegalsambi Village are still preserving (*nguri-uri* = Java) because one of the characteristics of Indonesian Islam is accommodation of local wisdom or local wisdom values from the community. Based on the story of the Tegalsari people (Rosdiana & Saefudin, 2018) Based on stories from the Tegalsari community, at first the torch was considered to be a repellent for diseases suffered by both pets and the people of Tegalsambi. Then after the arrival of Islam, this tradition continues to be wrapped in Islamic stories. This *Perang Obor* was then associated with Islamic figures who spread Islam in the Tegalsambi area. According to the Islamic version

(Rosdiana & Saefudin, 2018) The origin of the *Perang obor* was influenced by walisongo figures from the time of the kingdom of Demak. There used to be a wealthy hardworking farmer named Kiai Babadan who had many pets, namely cows and buffalo. One day he ordered Ki Gemblong to raise his cattle. Instead of paying attention to Kiai Babadan's livestock, Ki Gemblong was engrossed in catching abundant fish in the river. As a result, the livestock is thin unkempt. Knowing this then Kiai Babadan became furious and beat Ki Gemblong with a torch from a coconut frond. Ki Gemblong retaliated by taking a coconut frond and lighting it with fire. In the fight between Kiai Babadan and Ki Gemblong, the longer the fire gets bigger and spreads to the cattle pen. Surprisingly, farm animals that were initially sickly then healed by themselves (Amaliyah, 2018).

The story of the battle between Kiai Babadan and Ki Gemblong became an oral story (*folklore*) which was then spread to posterity in the village of Tegalsambi. From there, the *Perang Obor* tradition is believed to bring goodness to residents of the Tegalsambi village. This tradition is also equipped with a shadow puppet show. The procession of this Islamic story is also carried out by the procession of four heirlooms, namely two Gendir Easy swords from a statue, and a Dobil drum. These four heirlooms are believed to be the inheritance of Sunan Kalijaga to Kabayan Tegalsambi (Ratri, 2010).

The symbols of the two wooden swords are believed to be pieces of wood used to build the Demak mosque. Another story apart from the *Perang Obor* by other regions is also known as Torch which only exists in Tegalsambi village, Tahunan sub-district, Jepara Regency, Central Java province and is held on Monday night in the month of *Dzulhijjah* on the basis of the belief of the people of Tegalsambi village, Jepara. The community believes that this tradition brings blessings and contains the meaning to remember, respect and pray for the ancestors who had great service to the village. *Perang obor* activities are carried out by means of the movement of Bedug which is the legacy of Sunan Kalijaga and two wooden swords that are believed to be *soko guru* of the Demak mosque, so that in this procession has a great attraction by the community and invites various tourists to come and watch this event in person.

The changing times led to the renewal of the *Perang obor* tradition carried out by the community. Entering the pre-Islamic era to the Islamic age experienced quite significant changes. Initially the *Perang obor* tradition was carried out to expel evil spirits that are believed to have a bad impact on society. Then after converting to Islam, the tradition was replaced into a religious shi'ite event. *Perang obor*

procession is quite complicated because it is only carried out once so the preparation must have been done a few days or a few months before the celebration. The main thing that needs to be done so that a series of traditions run smoothly before *Perang obor* Ceremony is carried out is to perform a rescue or prayer together to the tombs of the ancestors several times in a certain time.

The procession of offerings brought by the community in shape and content varies indicating the existence of a certain structure in society. The more important it is, the more complete and numerous offerings, and vice versa. This offering contains many symbolic meanings, which is an expression of gratitude to the Almighty. Tegalsambi village mayarakat usually bring rice along with side dishes, market snacks, and bananas After that, the Village Chief and his deputy burned frankincense and then continued prayer together and tahlil prayer led by Mudin Village. After that, it was followed by eating together at the village chief's house. On Monday night Tuesday Pon, before *Perang obor* was carried out there were several things that were done: (a) The departure of *Perang obor* actors from the house of the local Mr. Lurah; (b) After all gathered the next event is the incense burning ceremony led by Mr. Modin; (c) Recitation of prayers by village elders.

Perang obor traditions can run lively when carried out at the peak of the harvest. *Perang obor* is carried out by the youth of Tegalsambi Village who have the guts and usually they will get wages from the village government. This is based on the opinion expressed by Nor Widyaningtyas who stated that "the players / perpetrators of this *Perang obor* come from youths or village communities appointed to carry out a series of actions and attractions of *Perang obor*".

The *Perang Obor* tradition is not only in the form of fighting using torch palm fronds as a weapon, but also a celebration ceremony carried out by the people of Tegalsambi village as a form of gratitude to God Almighty for the abundant harvest. The salvage ceremony was held in the evening with the highlight of the Torch War. Armed with the trust of village elders, all participants were given the safety of completing the Torch war. Thus, the *Perang Obor* tradition has become a ceremonial tradition in the context of the earth alms in Tegalsambi Village which aims to give thanks to God Almighty for an abundant harvest .

2. Adaptation of the *Perang Obor* Tradition Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Implementation of the *Perang Obor* in Tegalsambi Village underwent some adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This adjustment can be seen in the

adaptations made by the village community to continue to hold *Perang Obor* traditions and a Series of Events in the midst of the COVID 19 pandemic. The implementation of the *Perang Obor* tradition in Tegalsambi Village has changed compared to previous years. The Tegalsambi Village Government decided that the *Perang Obor* tradition would still be held but limited and also adjusted to health protocols. In commemoration of the *Perang Obor* tradition of the Tegalsambi Village community, they are required to make a number of adjustments related to the *Perang Obor* ritual during the pandemic.

According to the Head of Tegalsambi Village, Agus Santoso, "The *Perang Obor* tradition can't be eliminated until now, apart from being part of the earth alms tradition, it is believed that this tradition will cause problems if left behind or abolished. In addition, we will not abandon the tradition which is local wisdom. Due to the pandemic period, the *Perang Obor* is being held in other ways, such as alms to the earth, which is carried out in a minimalist, small but beautiful way." Another opinion was conveyed by Nor Widyaningtyas as a *kawula muda* who said that the community is very firm in the culture and traditions that have been carried out with full life. *Perang obor* tradition becomes an important culture and cannot be abandoned by the people of Tegalsambi village because it is preserved for generations and raises the perception in the community that if it is not done it causes a problem in the future, therefore the people of Tegalsambi Village are happy to carry out this *Perang obor* Tradition.

Preparations for the *Perang Obor* were well-prepared in advance. This matter because there are many things that need to be prepared, such as making a torch which is quite a lot with the main ingredients such as *blarak* (dried coconut leaves) and *klaras* (dried banana leaves), offerings for ancestors or village founders, religious propagator and other figures. The forms of offerings include male buffalo (slaughtered and processed), rice, diamonds, market snacks, porridge colorful, telon flower, *pitik dhekem*, dhekem crab and others (Aristanto, 2011). According to Sutiyo (village officials) there are 16 *petilasan* places must be visited in the tradition of the torch war.

Various efforts to limit and adjust were applied in carrying out the *Perang Obor* Tradition. Performers in this tradition are also asked to wear masks and comply with health protocols. Torch lighting is also carried out symbolically with a small number of torches. In addition, participants who attend are also limited and the duration of the activity is relatively shorter than the *Perang Obor* activities before the pandemic. From the village community, they strongly support the

implementation of the *Perang Obor* in order to maintain the existence and noble values contained in it, although it is carried out with various adjustments, it does not reduce the essence of the *Perang Obor* itself. This is because the community strongly believes that there is a close relationship with cultural values and ideologies that are meaningful for the residents of Tegalsambi village.



Source: *AnalisaDayli.com*

Picture 2. The Implementation of Perang Obor in the midst of a Pandemic

Based on the data that the authors collect, it can be seen that there are several adaptations in the implementation of the *Perang Obor* tradition in Tegalsambi Village:

a. Limiting the Number of Players and Spectators

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact in the implementation of the *Perang obor* Tradition, various adjustments are made in this tradition performance. During the pandemic, *Perang obor* was carried out symbolically and did not invite tens of thousands of spectators as usual so that it used to be very crowded by tourists from various regions now become quiet and there are only spectators from their own territory. The implementation of this tradition is carried out by maintaining a fairly strict health protocol from the community and its players. The event was held using players as many as four to six people. This is certainly very different from the implementation before the pandemic which usually has hundreds of torches. Meanwhile, at the time of this year's implementation, only 10 torches were made.

b. Ritual Adjustment

Religious ritual activities are carried out on a limited basis at midnight. This is aimed at preventing the occurrence of crowds of citizens to watch. Ritual events are carried out *alakadarnya* with offerings including male buffalo (slaughtered and processed), rice, ketupat, market snacks, colorful porridge, telon flowers, pitik

dhekem, crab dhekem and others. Offerings whose shape and content vary indicate the presence of a particular structure in society. The more important it is, the more complete and numerous offerings, and vice versa. This offering has many symbolic meanings, which is an expression of gratitude to the Almighty (Aristanto, 2011). According to Sutiyo Kamituo (Village device) there are 16 places that must be visited. However, to shorten the time and cost, it is enough to 7 petilasan only.

c. The tradition of torch wars is an obligation.

All Tegalsambi Village People think that *Perang obor* tradition is an obligation that must be carried out every year. They believed that if *Perang obor* was not implemented it would bring havoc. This reason was also revealed by the Head of Tegalsambi Village, Agus Santoso who said "The tradition of *Perang obor* until now cannot be eliminated, in addition to being part of the tradition of earth almsgiving, this tradition is believed to cause problems if left behind or eliminated". Another opinion was conveyed by Nor Widyaningtyas who stated that "This *Perang obor* is a local wisdom that is backgrounded by events in the past, which is very thick in the community, this *Perang obor* tradition becomes an important culture and cannot be abandoned by the people of Tegalsambi village because it is hereditary preserved and raises a perception in the community that if it is not done then it causes a problem in the future".

d. Implementation of Health Protocols

The next adaptation, namely the application of health protocols to every local citizen who is present in *Perang obor* tradition. Local residents who attend *Perang obor* ritual are required to wear masks, carry hand sanitizers, and keep their distance from each other. A small but tangible step, giving extraordinary meaning in maintaining the safety and health of the local community and the audience so that *Perang obor* tradition show can be held without causing cluster transmission and breaking the chain of spread of Covid-19.

3. Community Response to the Implementation of the *Perang Obor* Tradition in the Midst of a Pandemic

The development of COVID-19 is increasingly worrying. The government has issued various policies to address the spread of COVID-19 in the country. The central government synergizes with the village government to bring order to its citizens in an effort to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Seeing various appeals from the government to minimize the crowd, the community together with the Tegalsambi

Village devices decided to hold *Perang obor* Tradition but still carry out health protocols.

The community welcomes the decision, because considering *Perang obor* Tradition is a must that must be done, and if eliminated according to the beliefs of local villagers will cause a problem. This is as stated by Nor Widyaningtyas that the community is very firmly holding fast to the culture and traditions that have been carried out with full life. This *Perang obor* tradition becomes a culture that cannot be abandoned by the community because it has always been preserved for generations and raises the perception in the community that if it is not done it causes a problem in the future, therefore the people of Tegalsambi Village are happy to carry out this *Perang obor* Tradition.

The community hopes that the pandemic can end soon so that local wisdom traditions such as *Perang obor* can be carried out with great fanfare as before the Covid-19 pandemic. Because besides this is a cultural performance, *Perang obor* Tradition is also one of the means of increasing the existence of the area and as a means of improving the economy of the surrounding community because there are many tourists who come to witness firsthand *Perang obor* tradition procession is carried out so that this can trigger the economic growth of the community.

D. Conclusion

Perang obor is one of the traditional ceremonies owned by the people of Tegalsambi Village, Annual District, Jepara Regency. The tradition of *Perang obor* is actually an earth alms ceremony performed once every year on Monday Pahing night Tuesday Pon (the name of the day in the Javanese calendar) after the harvest. *Perang obor* tradition is a form of expression of gratitude of the local community to God Almighty for abundant sustenance, health and safety. However, the Covid-19 Pandemic greatly affected the implementation of *Perang obor* which resulted in a lot of adjustments made, both in customary processions and as late as even to the peak of *Perang obor* event. Although in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the village government through the Village Head and the local community continues to carry out *Perang obor* Tradition in the midst of the pandemic, because this tradition is believed to cause problems if left behind because it is related to cultural values and ideologies that mean.

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