Chapter III

Islam observed and Discussed
Theological Differences among Java Muslims

1. Introduction

Introducing the last chapter, we tried to clarify the notions of terminologies used in the study of religion, to briefly define the concept of orthodoxy in Islam, and to trace the general theological differences among Muslims in general, before drawing a general picture of theological difference among Muslims of Kerala. This chapter will look to the Java province of Indonesia with a similar focus. It will try to give a general idea about the Islam being observed and discussed in Java. The purpose of these two chapters is to make the understanding of the system of Islamic higher education easier, because one can see, in most of the Islamic history after the 10th century, the Islamic learning centers as serving the aims and objectives of groups with certain theological orientation in a big way.

It is amazing to see the abundant academic interest on Indonesia. Plenty of studies with emphasis on different aspects of religion, culture and politics, have been held on Indonesia. Home for the largest Muslim community in the world and located far away from the Islamic or Arab heartlands, Indonesia, with its unique culture, have been one of the most sought after place by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and scholars of religion. One can see a large number of studies undertaken in colonial period, especially by some eminent Dutch scholars like Snouk Hurgronje. However, it was the celebrated Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), who ignited a new academic interest in studying the religion and culture of Indonesia. His study is of great significance since it laid a framework for understanding Javanese Islam and shed light on the political problems of modern Indonesia in general.

In his highly-celebrated anthropological study on Indonesia, Geertz classifies Javanese Muslims into three. The first group Abangan observes a 'syncretized form of religion commonly consisted of a balanced integration of animistic, Hinduistic and Islamic
elements, a basic Javanese'. ‘It is made up primarily of the ritual feast called the slametan, of an extensive and intricate complex spirit beliefs, and of a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery, and magic’. The second group is Santri, who follow a more purist version of Islam. The Santri religious tradition consists not only of a careful and regular execution of the basic rituals of Islam – the prayers, the fast and the pilgrimage – but also of a whole complex of social, charitable and political Islamic organizations’. The third is the Prijaji, ‘referred to the hereditary aristocracy which the Dutch pried loose from the kings of the vanquished native states and turned into an appointive, salaries civil service’. They are white-collar elite who conserved and cultivated highly refined court etiquette, a very complex art of dance, drama, music, and poetry and Hindu-Buddhist mysticism’. ‘It was upon this bureaucratic group that the Dutch had their most direct acculturating influence, leading ultimately to the production of the highly secularized, westernized and commonly somewhat anti-traditional political elite of the Indonesian Republic’. So the three main sub-traditions Geertz describes about are Abangan, representing a stress on the animistic aspects of the overall Javanese syncretism and broadly related to the peasant element in the population; Santri, representing a stress on the Islamic aspects of the syncretism and generally related to the trading element (and to a certain elements in the peasantry as well); and Prijaji, stressing the Hinduist aspects and related to the bureaucratic element’ (Geertz, 1960)

After Geertz’s much cited work, which he wrote based on extensive fieldwork in a small Javanese town, a host of critical reviews and counterpoints followed, with some saying that Geertz failed in understanding the nature of the development of Islam in Java, while others said that this failure was due to his being too much influenced by modernist Muslim perspectives (Pranowo (1991), Woodward (1989), Hodgson (1974)). However, the terms he introduced to the outside world were widely accepted as the basic principles for studying the different categories of the Javanese socio-cultural system. Geertz did not actually invent them, but he is responsible for their earliest and most thorough

67 Geertz links this second group with the market including the whole network of domestic trade relationship on the island, because the purer form of Islam spread in Java, according to him, through the traders from Middle East.
development as explicit and interrelated concepts. All later studies on Islam in Java always refer to Geertz’s study. These later studies differ from Geertz’s approach in many respects, although they use his framework in a loose way.

In a critical study of Geertz’s classification, Abdul Rachman Patji, trying to draw on the historical evolution of these three widely used terms, opines that the terms, its usages, and the general attitude of Muslims in Java make one believe that only abangan and Santri can be identified as religious variants. The first represents a belief that is the product of the syncretism of native animism and Hinduism and/or Buddhism with an admixture of Islam. Santri refers to any person who follows Islamic principles seriously, whereas priyayi does not indicate religious tradition, but it is a social class. They are the traditional legitimate elite; it refers to those who are ascribed to belong to a different social-status that is different from the commoners. So this term refers to people of a particular social class rather than a religious tradition (Patji, 2002). Some scholars have even opposed the use of the word abangan saying it is too harsh a designation. ‘From the religious points of view, it might be better to consider them as those who know less about Islam, are not overly concerned with its precepts, and thus are not so strict in fulfilling their religious obligations. (Boland, 1982)

Despite criticism from many scholars, the Santri-abangan dichotomy is important for an understanding of the religious and political orientations of Muslims in Indonesia, who were first divided theoretically between nominal Muslims and the devout. The term Santri is used to refer to observant Muslims. Geertz and others further divided Santri into two groups, kolot (traditionalist) and moderen (modernist). The former, according to Geertz, accommodated local practices and rituals in their Islam, while the latter were determined to ‘purify Islamic teachings from local syncretic practices’. There are many attempts to study and classify according to the political orientations of Santri. Geertz said the traditionalists politically affiliated with Nahdlatul ‘Ulama(NU) when it was fully engaged in politics before totally withdrawing to social and religious issues relinquishing

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68 Abangan derives from Arabic word 'aba'a' meaning 'to ignore', used by Christian missionaries to distinguish between the avanese nominal Muslim and those who faithfully practice islamic teachings. Santri is used to both faithfully devout Muslims and also, for students of pondok pesanren
the politics, whilst the latter preferred to join Masyumi, an Islamist political platform. Allan A. Samson has also classified Santri on political lines, distinguishing traditionalist and modernist as politically accommodationist or reformist in nature, further adding a new Santri type. He named them ‘radical fundamentalist’ for their Darul Islam movement in the 1950s, rebelling against the new Indonesian state in favor of an Indonesia Islamic State. (Samson, 1972)

Still it is difficult to get a real picture of Santri with limited compartmentalization as we saw above. According to Endang Turmudi, an Australian educated academic and NU leader, the new Santri do not represent one single phenomenon, and compared to the first half of 20th century where a traditionalist-modernist dichotomy was easier, the new trends are totally different. He says, “The generation of Muslims of the 1970s tended to combine traditionalist and modernist features, while the subsequent generation of the 1980s and the 1990s took different directions. This generation expressed their disillusionment towards both traditionalist and modernist heritages and began to search for an alternative religious expression. They took their religious references, either from existing radical groups in Indonesia, such as the Darul Islam just mentioned, or from global movements, such as Ikhwanul Muslimin, Salafi and Hizbut Tahrir”. (Turmudi, 1996)

Originally Santri is a student or follower within an Islamic school called a Pesantren (literally, "place of the Santri") headed by a Kiai master69. "The word 'Santri' referred to persons who removed themselves from the secular world in order to concentrate on devotional activities and mystical matters, and Pesantren were the focus of such devotion. It was only later that the word Santri was used to describe that particular class within Javanese society that identified strongly with Islam, distinct from the more nominal Islam of the abangan. However, the Santri should not be considered as a

69 Kiai, santri, Pesantren: these three terms are very important as far as this comparative study is concerned. It is here we try to draw the parallel between Java and Kerala the most. Kiai is the Javanese term for religious scholar, Santri is the religious student and Pesantren is the religious education centre. All these terms are popularly used in the traditional circles, but in general term whole religious scholars, students and institutions, irrespective of its belonging to traditionalists or reformists, are denoted by these terms. In Kerala, we see the names Musliyar ('Aalim), Musliyarkutty (muta'allim) and PalliDarss (Mosque College) is used in almost the same notion. This study is basically a comparison between these two types of traditional education system.
homogenous group, as they are themselves polarized along traditionalist/modernist lines. It is usually difficult to immediately differentiate 'mystically inclined' traditionalist Santri from modernist 'orthodox' Santri. Both may strongly identify themselves as Muslim.  

One can differentiate the Javanese Santri from the rest of the population through their identity. Santri consciously identify themselves as Muslims, and attempt as far as possible to live in accordance to their own understanding of Islam, be it traditional or purist, or mixtures of both. They both adhere to the formal requirements of the religion, especially the five-time daily ritual compulsory prayer, which is the main thing that separates the Santri from the abangan more than anything else. There is apparent difference between the Santri and abangan in dressing as well, especially among women. The Santri women wear a jilbab (full headdress covering the head, ears, and neck, leaving only the face visible). Traditionally, the Javanese Santri male also wears certain types of clothing like the gamis, a type of loose-fitting, long-sleeved, round-collared shirt worn often for formal religious occasions or for Friday Prayers, sarung, chequered dhoti, and Kopaya or Peci.

Geertz’s further classification of Santri into kolot (traditionalist) and moderen (modernist) has been mentioned above. Nowadays, these two groups are widely known as the Kaum Muda, 'New Fraction' or 'Young Fraction', and Kaum Tua, or 'Old Fraction'. There are many organizations that represent both the fractions. However, two major organizations Nahdlatul 'Ulama and Muhammadiyya are generally considered as the synonyms for traditionalist and modernist platforms in Indonesia respectively. One can say that both of them are equally orthodox in their religious outlook, but represent different colors of orthodoxy in the Indonesian context as they ‘differ mainly in their emphasis on the concepts of being orthodox’. While Muhammadiyah tends to be more

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71 According to Koentzeningerat, in contrast to the daily prayer, many abangan also follow the compulsory fast during the month of Ramadan, though perhaps not as seriously as their santri counterparts. The reason for this is their identification of the fast with the indigenous idea of tirakat, of deliberately seeking out hardship and discomfort for religious reasons.
rigid and puritanical while coming to religiosity-enhancing rituals, NU is tolerant to the local culture and many piety-making rituals unless it is against the tenets of Islam.

Geertz made the Kolot-Moderen dichotomy visualizing the religious patterns followed by the two groups in terms of the content of the doctrines involved and their different way of interpretations. Smitten with the belief that the modernists represent the true Islam, Geertz saw the doctrinal differences in five ways. 1) while the Kolot group lived a 'fated life' depending on the blessings of the Almighty, the moderen tended to make a relationship with the God emphasizing on hard world and self-determination'. 2) The Kolot has a totalistic concept of the role of religion in life blurring the lines between the religious and secular, while the moderen has very narrowed notion of religious in which only certain well-defined aspects of life are sacralized and in which the boundary between the sacred and the secular tends to be fairly sharp. 3) while the modern group insists upon an Islam purified of any foreign religious matter, the kolot group tends to accommodate religiosity-enhancing rituals that can be justified with Islamic doctrines. Geertsz and others always called this syncretism. 4) the Kolot group emphasizes on religious experience, while the moderen group tends to emphasize the instrumental aspects of religion. 5) The kolot group tends to justify practice by custom and by detailed scholastic learning in traditional religious commentaries. The Modernen temporary group tends to justify it upon the basis of its pragmatic value in contemporary life and by general reference to the Quràn and the Hadith interpreted loosely. (Geertz, 1960)

It is not that belongingness to any of these two organizations is necessary to be a Muslim orthodox in Indonesia. There are also many other Muslim organizations that are active in Indonesia, and also many individual Muslims who keep themselves away from affiliation to any organizations, thanks to many Pesantrens having no affiliation to NU who had the sole monopoly of such learning centers, and to many governmental educational institutions that help Muslims gain a good understandings of religious doctrines, almost equivalent to what is being taught at Pesantrens.

The case of Ahangan is also changing. The overall development that is taking place in Indonesia, coupled with the compulsion of more rural people from Javanese villages to
the towns in search of job, is paving the way for increased inclination among the *abangan* group to be more devout, thus orthodox Muslims. Even at the centers of Javanese syncretic culture, like the traditional courts of kings, the Islamic orthodoxy grows brighter in place of the old Javanism. Saleh gives the example of Javanese court of Yogyakarta, which was a symbol of syncretism. The court has now replaced the old ritual food distribution of *slametan* during the birthday celebrations with a mass Qur’anic recitation, called *semakan.*

(Saleh, 2001, p100) 72

Shortly, if Islamic orthodoxy is considered in its universal manifestation – in belief (‘*aqidah*), ritual practices (‘*ibadah*), ethics (*akhlaq*) and law (*shari`ah*), the Muslims of Java are becoming more orthodox. However, a traditional Javanese signature will be manifest behind all this embrace of orthodoxy. Saleh takes this point home clearly.

“The Javanese symbolism remains present in their religious behavior. For instance, to pay respect to one’s parents (*birrr al-Walidayn*), which is a universal Islamic doctrine, a Javanese must use a higher, polite level of Javanese (karma inggil) in addressing them. The use of such a higher degree of Javanese is a symbol of respect manifested by the younger people to those older. There is also a *sungkeman* tradition held once a year when every member of the family gets together during the *Id al-fitr* celebration, to ask forgiveness from each other and to pray for the well-being of the family, as well as to strengthen the family ties. Asking forgiveness from one’s parents is a request for their favor and thus will bring further blessing. The value is Islamic but expressed in Javanese symbolism” (Saleh, 2001, p101) 73.

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72 *Semakan* is a religious gathering held to recite the Qur’ān thoroughly from the first to the end. Several *Huffaz* are assigned to recite the Qur’ān in turn from memory without looking the text. The other participants will listen carefully and check verse by verse. The *semakan* usually lasts up to 19 hours, beginning after dawn prayer with some short breaks for meals and prayers. Though a tradition started by traditionalists, even modernists like Muhammadiyah also now hold *semakan* at various places.

73 During my visit to Indonesia, I had spent my last three days with an elite family at their wi-fi home. Father Dr Supriyadi is the Advisor to Finance Minister and director of the national coal company, Mother just retired as editor of a leading English Magazine, two sons, one a Marine Ministry official and the second a diplomat with foreign ministry. The hospitality they showed upon a friend of a friend to the second son, Aditya Ihsan was awesome and overwhelming. Despite the family having no any apparent connection with any of the religious organizations, they were highly religious, but they never boast any religiosity through symbols and all. It was amazing to see that both the sons, high government officials already, would not go out without seeking permission from their parents and respectfully kissing their hands.
Federspiel has drawn a brighter picture about the different Muslim grouping in Indonesia in his painstaking study about a modernist Islamic group called *Persatuan Islam* (PERSIS). He first divided the entire Indonesian Muslims into three based on their response towards four major concerns faced by them in the last century; ‘seeking Islamic accommodation with national and local cultures, installing standard Islamic belief and practice as the *modus operandi* in the Indonesian region, devising appropriate political structures that both reflect Islamic values and promote Islamic life, and adapting modern thought and technology consistent with Indonesian-Muslim culture’. Responding to these issues, ‘one major group identified itself closely with traditional Middle Eastern Islamic beliefs, ritual and jurisprudence and attempted to make local culture, intellectual thought and political institutions conform to that religious system’. This group, called ‘purist Muslim’ by Federspiel, is what we identified as *Santri* earlier. Another group ‘remained tied to indigenous Southeast Asian customs and values, have sometimes reshaped Islamic beliefs and ritual to mesh with some of the important features of these indigenous values, and have accepted technology and favored political solutions that seem to fit with this value system’. This group is *abangan*, whom he called ‘nominal Muslim’. ‘A third group has responded to Western secular thinking about the nation-state, the importance of nationally-evolved civic values, and the uses of technology for the creation of an affluent national economy. This group is called nationalist by Federspiel, and Geertz’ naming of *Priyayi* comes close to this. Taking the purist Muslim group for further consideration, he says that this group is concerned with the application of Islamic values, standards and law and all have insisted that in the adoption of technological tools there must be an Islamic ethic governing their application, and that the state itself must be identified in some positive way with the sustenance, maintenance and further development of Islam in the nation’. However, ‘there was no consensus among the purists itself regarding just what constituted proper religious practices, the application of Islamic standards to local culture and the role of religions in the state’. The ‘traditionalists held that religious truth was contained in the writings of past Muslim scholars’, while the modernists ‘held that new investigation and interpretation of religious fundamentals were necessary rather than relying on the tradition of past interpreters’. The NU and *Muhammadiyah* respectively represented both the sub-groups. ‘The divide between these two factions was doctrinal
and ideological in the first instance, was apparent in approaches to society and social problems, and had its ramifications in political alliances as well’.

There is also a political aspect, similar to that we saw in the case of Kerala, in the revivalist and reformist movements of Indonesia. The early 20th century Java was witnessing a cessation of the armed struggle by Santri Muslims against the Dutch Colonial regime. The Padri War in West Sumatra (1821-1828), the Java war (1825-1830) and the Aceh War (1875-1903) were all armed Santri actions against Dutch imperialism which culminated in the loss of these territories to colonial control and the consolidation of the Dutch hegemony over the East Indies. The subsequent colonial measures resulted in harsh times to the people. They introduced the secular Dutch education to a number of indigenous students, but it was limited to the sons of priyayi. The Santris had to be satisfied with their traditional education in the Pesantrens. This dual system of education led, in turn, to a dualism in the leadership cadre of the indigenous elite, divided between the abangan and priyayi elite on the one hand, and the Santri elite on the other74. Later, the impoverishment, which was the result of successive colonial policies, induced the indigenous people to change their mode of struggle against the Dutch from military confrontation to peaceful organized resistance, by adopting measures to improve the economic status and founding educational and welfare programs. (Khuluq, 1960)

The revivalist and reformist movements, both traditional and modern, got their life blood and inspirations from Middle East and other contemporary Muslims communities that were witnessing a sea of change. Pilgrims and students returning from the Middle East could instill the enthusiasm for change among the indigenous community. In the late 19th century and early 20th century there were several Indonesian Muslim teachers resident in Makka who taught many of the Indonesian students studying there. ‘One of the most prominent Ulama’ to have a great influence upon Malay-Indonesian students was Shaykh Ahmad Khatib bin Abdul Latif al-Minangkabawi. He was one of the most important of the Minangkabau reformists and the first ‘alim of non-Arab origin to be

74 One can see a similar kind of situation occurred in Kerala where the British colonialists pushed many indigenous elite families to their system of education, thus creating a big divide among those and the others.
appointed and commissioned by the Sharif of Makka as one of the Grand Imams at Masjid al-Haram, representing the Shafi’ Madhhab in the country. His former students were scattered throughout the Malay world, and many of them were his staunch followers, even though some did not subscribe to his reformist ideas'. (Othman, 9:2, 1998)

‘There were apparently a host of viewpoints concerning Islam in the Middle East, including new jurisprudential thoughts, which favored fresh interpretation (ijtihad) of the texts, renewed interest in the Hadith of the Prophet, revived interest in a cross-national Islamic community, called in the west as Pan-Islamism, alongside continued attention to Sunni teaching on doctrine, legal studies and mysticism that had marked the general learning in Islam for several centuries’. (Federspiel, 2001) All these diverse influences were reflected in Indonesia through returning students and pilgrims. K.H. (Kiai) Hasyim Asy’ari (1871-1947), who later founded the traditionalist organizational platform of Nahdlatul ’Ulama , was one such student who spent years in Makkah, and who ‘regarded language reform as essential, whereby the meaning of Arabic was to be as important as learning its forms for reading and recitation. He saw no reason to change orientations toward long-held teachings of Ash’arite doctrine and Shafi’i jurisprudence. Haji Omar Said Cokroaminoto (1882 -1934), the great leader of Syarekat Islam (SI, Islamic Association), K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (1882-1923), the founder of Muhammadiyah, and Ahmad Hassan (1887 -1958), the leader of Persatuan Islam, represented the modernist platform in different colors.

Back from Makka after the Hajj and studies, the modernist scholars concentrated on the issue of ‘purifying religious rituals from outside influences’. They attacked some aspects of mysticism calling them excessive and non-Islamic, rebuked certain practices in ritual worship citing accretions to orthodox practice, and rejected the schools of jurisprudence as the final authority in Islamic matters. The traditional religious scholars, many of them educated in Makkah and some students of Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, vehemently opposed the modernist activities, charging them with ‘emasculating Islamic teachings by de-emphasizing the interpretations of classical and medieval theologians and jurists’. The struggle between the two groups continued as the modernist ideas started spreading into
more parts of Indonesia. The reform and revivalist movements utilized particular vehicles to spread like the renewed educational system, mass Muslim organizations, political activity and an expanding press. 'The dispute often took on nasty overtones, going so far as declaring followers of the opposing factions 'heretics' and refusing them burial in cemeteries'. (Federspiel, 2001)

Generally, the organizations did more positive functions. It 'became the backbone of the Muslim movement and served as important loci for Muslim activity throughout the 20th century. They offered institutions through which general problems facing the Muslim community could be considered and addressed. They offered a means of mobilization of large numbers of Muslims with similar outlooks and allowed them to formulate religious outlooks and methods of expressing themselves. They offered a safe haven for Muslims who wished to escape the political rigors of the times, and group solidarity in fashioning approaches that still allowed them to be active in non-political ways for the improvements of the community. And also these associations became training ground for leadership, since they were organized on serials of levels'. (Federspiel, 2001)

2. Sarekat Islam

*Sarekat Islam* (SI), founded by Hadji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto in 1911 in the company of Hadji Agus Salim and Tjokroaminoto, is the first organization established in Indonesia on an Islamic color. Starting in a non-political way in the name Sarekat Dagang Islam, or Islamic Trade Union, SI was originally a movement of batik entrepreneurs from East and Central Java, with the aim to protect their batik trade against Chinese interlopers. The Sarekat Islam soon developed into a more general political movement, supported by rural masses unhappy with the current situation, the purist *Santri*, and also by some *Abangan* and some *priyayi*.

The ideology of the organization was firmly based on the teachings of Islam in the Modernist tradition, but the leadership tried to combine Islamic traditionalism with European ideologies, such as liberalism, and later socialism. This stance caused a tug of war within the organization between the moderate, often traditional leadership, and the
militants from the Semarang branch, which had close connections with the Marxist-socialists in that city.

In the early 1920s, internal conflicts rattled the SI as it was accused of masterminding the many rebellions launched by Santri Muslims against the Dutch authority, resulting in the expulsion of the Socialists and Marxists from SI in 1921. Those ousted formed a new platform called Partai Kommunis Indonesia. Further rift resulted in the expulsion of Muhammadiyah members from SI in 1929 and the PERSIS members shortly afterwards, as they accused SI of drifting away from its Islamic base. Basically, the concept of "socialism on an Islamic basis" brought the Sarekat Islam in conflict with the Islamists, and this lead to the disintegration of Sarekat Islam.

3. Muhammadiyya

Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 by famous reformist scholar Ahmad Dahlan who spent years in Makkah for education. Dahlan was influenced by the reform movements held in Egypt, Makkah and India. He was heavily fascinated with the works of Muhammad Abduh, Ibn Taymiyah and Ibnu Abdul Wahab. He had met Rashid Rida and held profound discussions with him regarding his ideas of reform. Back home he was disturbed by religious perceptions of the traditionalists as well as with the advanced Christian missionary activities. ‘He formed Muhammadiyah and organized itself in a western pattern, selecting a president, a governing council and office staff, setting up branches all over Indonesia, holding national conferences, and publicizing activities through the media’. (Peacock, 1973) According to Abdul Mu'ti Ali, reformist leaders founded Muhammadiyah when they perceived impurity in the religious life of Indonesians, inefficiency of religious education systems, the damaging activities of Christian missionaries, and the indifferent attitudes of the intelligentsia. (Ali, 1957)

Initially, Muhammadiyah concentrated on education and social welfare activities in the central Java region before becoming more widespread in the 1920s and 1930s. Until Ahmed Dahlan’s death in 1923, Muhammadiyah spent most of its energies on social, economic and educational issues as it set up many schools and modern type of Pesantren.
Though represented the modernist Muslims, *Muhammadiyah* people had shared a common platform in the Syareket Islam, a movement of Muslim merchants. It was after the death of Dahlan, who was personally close to the traditional leaders, *Muhammadiyah* started openly questioning the ideological and religious practices of the traditionalists.

*Muhammadiyah* introduces itself as ‘an islamic movement that bases all its religious and social activism (’*amal wa-’*ibadah) and its worldview on the Book of God and the traditions of the Prophet as narrated in the sound *Hadith*. It also follows the struggle of the Prophet in propagating islam and promoting the common well-being of the community’. (Saleh, 2001) It is a fact that, in a bid to translate this ideal to reality, *Muhammadiyah* has continuously engaged in Da’wa activities, in founding religious schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, mosques and many other welfare and philanthropic activities. Though the NU sees *Muhammadiyah* less attached to the beliefs of Ahlu Sunna, it is, to a greater extent, deeply committed to Sunnism. According to its doctrinal belief, *Muhammadiyah* members are devout adherents of Ash’arism, a key characteristic of ASWAJA. In this case they haven’t taken a critical stance like the modernist thinkers such as Muhammad ‘Abduh, or even like some reformists like Ibn Taymiyah and Muhammad b Abdul Wahab. (Saleh, 2001)

For Muhammadiyya, non-binding to any particular school of law is convenient and beneficial as it allows modern Muslims to learn and adopt several current of thought at the same time, and take a pluralistic and broad stance on issues without being psychologically constrained by a fear of violating the doctrine of a particular *Madhhab*. (Saleh, 2001)

Muhammadiya has a departmental institution called *Tarjih* consisting of some scholars and experts, especially in Islamic jurisprudence, whose duty is to consider legal opinions on religious matters. They insist that in *Tarjih* mechanism, decisions should be based on the perceptions of the Ahl al-Haqq wal-Sunnah, a name they coined from *al ibanah ‘an Usul al-Diyانah*, by Al-Ashr’ari, and they used instead of ASWAJA pronounced by the traditionalists.
One can easily understand that in the present day Indonesia, the enmity between the traditionalists and modernists is a thing of the past, and the organizational forms of both the platforms try to come together for common causes, and in controversial issues they take a non-offensive and non-aggressive style of propagating concerned views in the public.

In the case of *Muhammadiyah*, it is nowadays more concerned with issues directly relating to the welfare of or social problems faced by Indonesian Muslims and less interested in debating minor differences of religious practice. Its new leaders think that to engage in formulating an effective strategy to improve the living conditions of Muslims is on the top of their priority list than to debate on the nature of God or attributes of Allah as the Ash'arites and Maturidites did or to argue on the creation of *Qurān* as the Mu'ātazil did or to deeply engage in ‘simple jurisprudential issues’ on which various scholarly opinions are already formed\(^{75}\).

A woman’s organisation was started in 1914. Named the Aisiyah (after the name of Prophet’s beloved wife) it has built women’s mosques, kindergartens, and women’s Islamic schools, encouraging women to be active agents of the spread of Islam among other women; and giving them a dynamic public role, while at the same time emphasising modesty - but not uniformity - of dress. A youth movement, Hisbul Wathan, has some similarities to the Boy Scouts, albeit with a more pronounced religious orientation.

James L Peacock, who conducted a research on *Muhammadiyah* in early 70’s, indicated that outside the Christian world, *Muhammadiyah*, with its 500 health institutions, 15,000 schools from kindergarten to high school, and nearly 200 higher education institutions and 350 orphanages, is undoubtedly the largest Muslim organization in the world engaged in humanitarian services for the poor and disadvantaged persons. ‘This largest faith-based organization has been able to move forward and expand its humanitarian services during the colonial era, better than any other organization established for similar mission during the colonial era’. (Peacock J. L., 1986)

\(^{75}\) Most of the new generation leaders of both Muhammadiyyah and Nahdlatul ‘Ulama I met during my fieldwork were of the opinion that they have less time to engage in debates on trivial legal and jurisprudential discourses, as they are more concerned with social issues faced by Muslims.
4. Nahdlatul ‘Ulama, NU

K.H. Hasyim Asy’ari⁷⁶ co-founded the Nahdlatul ‘Ulama (Emergence of ‘Ulama ) in 1926 together with K.H. Abdul Wahab Hasbullah (1888-1971), a former student of Asy’ari at his Pesantren Tebuireng. The first leader of NU, Asy’ari was later considered as its Great Leader (Raees Akbar), thanks to his charisma and leadership which contributed significantly to the development of the movement. Basically, Hasyim Asy’ari did not oppose the modernist movements like Muhammadiyah and Sarekat Islam first since they did not forbid traditional religious practices. He had even allowed his student and NU cofounder Abdul Wahab Hasbullah to actively participate in these organizations. Before setting up the NU, Hasbullah founded a discussion forum called Taswirul Afkar (Intellectual Exercise) with K.H. Mas Mansur, who later became one of the Muhammadiyah leaders. He also founded an Islamic school called Nahdlatul Watan (The revival of the motherland) in 1916. Hasbullah also involved in a forum for secular nationalist intellectuals. In the meantime, he advised and guided some younger Kiais to establish Shubbanul Watan (Youth Generation of the Nation), a youth movement with nationalist character.

As we mentioned earlier, the Muhammadiyah started openly attacking the traditionalist Muslims after the death of its founding leader Ahmad Dahlan in 1923. The 1920s also witnessed the emergence of PERSIS, another modernist organization which ‘stated its opposition to such traditional practices as slametan⁷⁷ and Talqin⁷⁸ among others, in radical terms, openly condemning such practices as polytheism (shirk) and sin.

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⁷⁶ Hasyim Asy’ari was born in a kiai ancestry in Jombang, East Java, and studied at various Pesantrens in Java before going to Hijaz for higher learning. After return from Hijaz he founded Pesantren Tebuireng in Jombang where he became famous for his knowledge of Hadith. According to Zamakhsyari Dhofier, Asy’ari was the ‘greatest and most well-known kiai throughout Indonesia during the first half of the 20th century. (Dhofier, The Pesantren Tradition, A study of the Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of the Traditional Ideology in Java, 1980)

⁷⁷ Slametan is the Javanese version of the religious ritual and communal feast, which symbolizes the mystical and social unity of those participating in it (Geertz, 1960).

⁷⁸ Talqin is the recitation of a prayer in which there are contained the answers to the angels’ questions concerning the pillars of faith and Islam posed to a recently deceased person in his grave. This recitation is usually made by a kiai just after the burial.
Involvement in the organizational platforms mentioned above, encouraged Hasbullah to establish a similar organization for traditionalist Muslims as a means of defending their faith, viewpoints, practices and interests from the critiques of modernist Muslims. He approached his teacher Asy’ari seeking approval of a new organization for the ‘Ulama, but, for a period of time, he seemed to doubt whether an independent organization for traditionalist Muslims was necessary in the midst of so many other Muslim groups. However he soon realized the need for traditionalist Muslims to have an organization of their own simply in order to reduce the tensions and conflicts between them and the modernists at the Sarekat Islam meetings. He led the new organization from the front.

While Sheikh Muhammad Khatib al-minangkabawi, Indonesian resident teacher at Makkah, became the intellectual powerhouse of Muhammadiyah in its formation period, it was the eminent scholar and prolific writer Sheikh Muhammad Nawawi al-Bantani that influenced the thoughts of traditionalists. Nawai and Sheikh Mahfuz Termas, both expert scholars of Fiqh and taswwuf, rejected the reformist views of Wahabism.

NU declares in its organizational constitution that it follows the doctrines of Ahl Sunna Wa al-Jama’a (ASWAJA) in their religious belief and practices, that it was established with the aim of upholding the teachings of the four Madhhabs, and that it is necessary to examine all books which would be used for religious education to assure that they were entirely in agreement with the teaching of ASWAJA. The doctrines of ASWAJA are at the centre of NU thought, and it claims to be the only one group that has an authentic attachment to it. Historically, they promote the tradition about Islam’s spread through Wali Songo (the seven Awliya of Allah), who applied different approaches to the propagation of Islam. According to Achmad Farichin Chumaidy, the establishment of NU should also be seen, in addition to the growth of the Wahhabi movement in the Hijaz, in the light of the lengthy conflicts and disputes between the traditionalist and reformist groups.79 Annoyed with the consolidation of reformist powers through different organizations, and by their damaging attacks against their theological views regarding a

host of issues, the traditionalists decided to establish an association ‘as a forum for discussing religious matters and a channel for spreading Madhhab teachings among Indonesian Muslims’. According to Sidney Jones, the NU was established as a medium for the traditionalist Javanese Muslims to oppose Abduh-influenced Muslim reformism. (Jones, October 1984)

The formation of NU was coincided or preceded with a Hijaz Committee formed in January 1926 consisting major traditionalist scholars, who was worried about the advancement of Wahhabi movement and their purification movements in Saudi Arabia under the Saud dynasty. The committee’s task was to demand the king’s guarantee of freedom to adopt a Madhhab and to practice religious rituals according to Madhhab doctrines. Dhofer puts the Islamic tradition of NU very straightforwardly when he speaks about NU’s peculiar way of interpreting ASWAJA, which means to hold unswervingly the principles laid down by the Madhhab leaders in jurisprudence, by Abu al-hasen Al-Ash’ari and Abu Mansur al-maturidi in theology, and by Abu Qasim al-Junydi al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in Tasawwuf. (Dhofer, 1999) The traditionalists insisted to follow any of Madhhab, because the religious principles formulated by the Madhhab leaders, according to them, are correctly based on the Quraan and the Sunna. They also maintained that certain religious practices like Tahlilan, tawassul, slametan or giving charity in the interests of the deceased are divinely vindicated. (Saleh, 2001)

The NU ‘Ulama have actively participated in the national politics earlier, and at certain point of the time, the NU itself acted as a political party. Its leaders took part in the formation of MIAI (High Council of Indonesian Islam) at the end of Dutch colonial rule in 1930s, and also in Masyumi (Majlis Sjuro Muslimin Indonesia) which was formed to replace the dying MIAI during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945). The Masyumi transformed a political party after the independence. Both Muhammadiyah and NU were

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80 Saed Aqeel Siroj, a leading contemporary scholar of NU, told me, during a detailed talk with him at his office in the majestic NU headquarters at Karamat Raya, Jakarta on 26th July, 2009, in detail about the formation of NU and the importance of Hijaz Committee. He said the Indonesian ‘Ulama representatives on behalf of world Muslims requested Saudi King two things to which he agreed; not to demolish the Sacred Mausoleum of the Prophet, and to allow the majority Muslims of the world to fulfill dream of visiting the Prophet’s grave whenever they wanted.
two of the biggest special members of the Msyumi then. NU withdrew from Masyumi in 1952 and made itself a political party and it continued so until 1973. An active participation in the national politics did not go well with the NU and its scholarly leaders. The Islamic politics was not easy during both Soekarno government and Suharto’s New Order government, in which Islam was marginalized. Four Islamic political parties, including NU, contested the 1971 election under the platform of United Development Party (PPP), but the PPP was pushed into a weak position. The dismal condition experienced in the New Order, raised the awareness among the new generation of NU, a generation of intellectuals grew up in 1970s. The only answer to revive NU was a call to return the traditionalist organization to its previous Khittah (mark of the struggle) when founded in 1926, namely the existence of NU as a Jam‘iyyah Diniyyah ijtima‘iyyah, a religious social organization. According to Robin Bush, ‘the NU, which claims to have an approximate membership of 50 million members, withdrew from formal politics in a move called kembali ke khittah 1926, or ‘Return to the Guidelines of 1926’. This gave NU room under the repressive Soeharto regime to develop a nascent civil society movement. In the twilight to the New Order period (1966-98) and during the early reformasi period, this movement became more critical of the state and at the same time gained momentum internally. One element of the discourse it produced was an opposition to islamist politics – a stance that was deeply embedded in the historical modernist-traditionalist conflict colouring intra-Islamic relations in Indonesia for the previous century’. (Bush, 2009)

The NU had since its formation tried for social-cultural transformation through economic movement. Firstly, it formed an economic organization, named nahdatul Tujjar, which paid attention to the economic condition of the country at that time. The NU statute has clearly promulgated the need to develop trading institutions. One of the biggest step NU took in this regard was the establishment of Cooperatie Kaoem Moeslimin (CKM) 1929 in Surabaya, and of Syirkah Tijariyyah (Cooperation of trading) selling daily necessities. In 1930, NU established Lajnah Waqafiyyah (the body of donation) in every branch of NU, aimed at managing donated lands. The economic activities of NU were in stagnation when NU became a political party. In 1973, NU revived its economic movement through
establishment of a specific body, lajnah waqafiyah which had been given an authority to purchase and manage donated lands based on Islamic principles. Later, NU formed Syrkah Mu’avanah (cooperation in every branch of NU). In 1988, the NU stepped into banking world, establishing BPR in various places.

The history of both NU and Muhammadiyah movements is the history of education throughout Indonesia. Both the organization has their own system of education through which they transmit, spread and reproduce their particular perspective of Islam. We will look into this in the next chapter.

4. Persatuan Islam

Persatuan Islam (Muslim Union, Persis) is one of the factions in the modernist genre that was founded in 1923, stressing on the importance of Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet as sources of religious values, belief and behavior. This 'ideological and highly controversial' group, though small and loosely knit' depended on intensive activities like publishing, public debates, political action and education to attain its goals. Its press and education activities were influential. It tried to define for Indonesians 'what it was that constituted Islam, what its basic principles were, and what the proper behavior of a Muslim really was'. Federspiel calls them a 'fundamentalist Muslim society', who 'rejected the secular concept of the nation-state and called for establishment of a state and society structured to implement its concept of Islamic values'. Its uncompromising political stance that called for an all-encompassing form of Islamic religious law 'attracted a significant number of followers and its message had an impact on the formulation of the Islamic political parties' in the first half of the last century.

The PERSIS was found in Bandung by a group of merchants, headed by Ahmed Hasan, a scholar and Islamic intellectual emerged from an Arab-Indian family that settled in Southeast Asia for trade. It was strict to some Muslim customs, which were considered as superstition in contradiction with the main Islamic teachings (aqidah, faith), although other Muslims accepted those customs as proper Islam. It strongly came against the nationalist circle in the country accusing them of playing to establish Hindu and animism
beliefs. The PERSIS were strong and rough in the methods of promoting their ideas. Its members often challenged and invited people to debate. Its idea had got popularity not only in Indonesia but also in Malaysia and Singapore. The writings and activities of Mohammad Natsir, a student of Ahmad Hasan, who was also the leader of Masyumi\textsuperscript{81} (Majlis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia, Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslim), played a big role in the spread of PERSIS’s ideas among Indonesian intellectuals.

In the present day, Persatuan Islam can be seen as a small educational and religious community with small numbers of followers through Indonesia and Malaysia, largely viewed as intense believers in Islamic piety and righteous behavior. It does not have the influence it wielded some 60 years ago when its members were involved in debates of the political and social issues of the day.

5. Arab Organizations

There was a sizeable Arabic community in Indonesia in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and a large number of them claimed direct descent from the Prophet. Most of the Arabs preferred traditionalism, and lived with high status for their higher Islamic observance and esteemed status. There arose a controversy regarding their higher status among the modernist Muslims, and even many from the Arab community itself came against the traditionalists. They formed a reformist organization called Al-Irsyad in 1915. Founded by Ahmad Surakati, Al-Irsyad was important until 1950s when its mission was made largely irrelevant by developments in the Arab community itself which began its integration into the larger Indonesian society. The Alawi group of Hadrami Arabs, who claimed descent from the Prophet, was the main representative of the conservative viewpoint among the Arabs. They formed organizations like Jam'iyyat Khairiya

\textsuperscript{81} Masyumi was a national Muslim organization established during the Japanese occupation. At a National Islamic Meeting (Muktamar Islam Indonesia) held on 7–8 November 1945 in Yogyakarta, this Organization changed itself into an Islamic party. Most of Islamic organizations were represented within this party, but in 1952 Nahdlatul ‘Ulama withdrew and became another Islamic party. In the 1955 election, Masyumi proved itself as the strongest party in the outer islands and in the West Java, while NU had the strongest support in East Java province.
(Benevolent Society) and the Masyarakat Thalibin (Education Society) in order to attack modernist Muslims and to defend traditionalism.

6. Jamaah Tarbiyah

Jemaah Tarbiyah and its political vehicle the Prosperous Justice Party, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) are new Islamic force in Indonesia, Jemaah Tarbiyah emerged in the mid 1980s, mainly on campuses, and in 1998, it transformed itself into political party known initially as the Justice Party, Partai Keadilan (PK), and as PKS since 2003. its emergence has arguably contributed to shaping a new variant of Santri outside the modernist and traditionalist classifications, and new forms of Islamisation in Indonesia, both in society and the state. ‘Jemaah Tarbiyah is categorized as a movement of a global Santri. In contrast to fundamentalist features of other Islamist forces in the Islamic world that have been influenced by the Muslim Brothers of Egypt, Jemaah Tarbiyah has shown an accommodative and flexible approach in responding to religious and political questions. It has been an agent of Islamisation that has followed a course between accommodationist and purificationist reformism’. It has showcased a non-violent approach in responding to the political repression of Soeharto’s New Order. It tried to avoid direct confrontation with the regime. ‘Since becoming a political party, the movement has had to adjust its Islamic aspirations to political realities. A pragmatic approach has become its choice in order to attract popular support. In fact, this too has been largely influenced by the ideas of Hasan al-Banna of the Muslim Brothers, who laid the foundations of reform within the system. The Jemaah Tarbiyah attracts activists both from a traditionalist background and modernist backgrounds. This organization has been trying to domesticate a trans-national movement into the Indonesian context, and it uses the campus Islam activists in promoting the ideas of al-Banna. It has not openly tried to implement Shari‘ah in Indonesia, but rather it has been attempting to revise its image by focusing on the issues of prosperity and justice. ‘An analysis of the experiences of Jemaah Tarbiyah and PKS in Indonesia is crucial to an understanding of how an Islamist group can influence the state within the democratic system’. (Machmudi, 2006)
Looking to the entire variants of Islam in Indonesia Lukens-Bull has tried to generalize in this way. "There are two major variants of Sunni Islam in Indonesia, which I will refer to here as Classicalist and Reformist, sometimes referred to as Traditionalist and Modernist. Classicalists are typified by their use of classical Islamic texts and their affiliation with Pesantren and the organization Nahdlatul 'Ulama. Reformists, who are affiliated with the organization Muhammadiyah, seek to reform Indonesian Islam so that it draws primarily on scriptural sources. Two smaller groups need to be briefly mentioned. There are some people who seek to bridge these two approaches and are referred to as Neo-Modernists or Neo-Traditionalists. Finally, in recent years, especially since the fall of the Suharto regime, Islamist groups have emerged in Indonesia. The Classicalist variant is centered around Pesantren and their headmasters (kyai), are hence the leaders of this religious community. The terms "Pesantren world" (dunia Pesantren) and "Pesantren people" (orang Pesantren) are preferred by most members than the term ‘traditionalist Santri’, a designation made popular by Clifford Geertz. (Luckens-Bull, 2005)

7. Differences between NU, Muhammadiyah

Both the reformists and modernists have different approaches in explaining the doctrine of Islam and its practices. While the former accuses the latter of deviation and shirk, the latter criticizes the reformists for being too rigidly text-oriented, and less inclined to accept local traditions and religious festivals that, according to them, are not against Islamic principles, but are divinely vindicated. Traditionalists support many popular religious rituals, seeing it as a channel for expressing religious emotions by means of which they can awaken religious consciousness in their followers. Celebration of Prophet’s birthday, ritual recitations of Prophetic panegyrics like Qasidat al-Budrdah, Maulid Barzanji and Maulid Daiba'i, and special adoration of days, like Lilatul Qadr, Isra Mi'raj (27th rajah), 15th Sha'aban, 9-10th Muharram, etc are some of the popular traditions observed by traditionalists, but opposed by the reformists. While the reformists

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82 The popularity of Barzanji Moulid among the majority traditionalists of Indonesia is almost similar to the popularity of Mangus Moulid among Muslims of Kerala. It is frequently recited during lifecycle events like birth and marriages, and it comes in full swing during the month of Rabit'ul Awwal. According to traditionalists, almost all Shafiite jurists have approved the celebration of Prophet’s birthday with panegyric recitations.
see these all as innovations that are not clearly sanctioned by Shari’a, the traditionalists justify each and everything, employing certain Qur’anic verses, Hadiths and interpretations of bygone scholars.

The theological approach regarding innovation is what differentiates between the two platforms. Disapproving an act, the modernists argue that it was not commended in the Qur’an, Hadith or in the customs of the Companions and thus it is a bid’ah, innovation. Endorsing the same, the traditionalists would argue that even though clear reference could not be found in basic sources, the act is beneficial and hence was meritorious addition (bid’ah Hasanah not a Bid’ah Sayyiah which is reprehensible). ‘The modernists held to the dictum that in worship everything is forbidden unless specifically stated in Qur’an and Hadith, while the traditionalists held that, even though change in worship was forbidden, some additions that promoted piety could be added without harm and, hence could be considered meritorious’. (Federspiel, 2001)

The rigid textual or literalist approach in understanding Islam has deprived the modernists, according to traditionalist critics, from developing the cultural as well as spiritual aspects of religious activity, like holding parades during Prophet’s birthday celebration, systematization of Dhikr and prayers after five-time Salat and reciting hymens while waiting for the congregational prayers.

Due to these different approaches, one can find that the progress of art and culture in Indonesian Islam is more evident in traditionalist circles than among the modernists.

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83 Sheikh Hamim Nuh Keller, an American convert to Islam who now serves in Syria as a great scholar of traditional Islam and a Sheikh of a Shaduli Sufi order with a large following in the Arab and outside world, often criticizes the close-minded and bad-tempered tendencies of the modernists or so-called Salafis. He says: “Something is the matter with them. They emphasize the body and rhetoric of faith but miss out on the ruh. It is a Salafi burnout.” (Ahmed, 2007)

84 In Java’s traditionalist mosques one can see people reciting various types of litanies in chorus, in Arabic or in Javanese, just after the Muaddin perform the call for prayer and before starting the prayer to fill the time while waiting more people to come for the jama’at. Saleh has quoted in his book one such famous litanies in Arabic, a poem ascribed to Abu Nuwas (756-810): Ilahi lastu lil-jirdousi Ahlan, wa-la aqwa ‘ala al-nar al-jahim/ Dhunubi mit hi a ‘dad al-rimal, wa-dhunubizaid kayfa ihtimali/ Ilahi ‘abduka al- ‘asi ataka, mu’dirran bil-dhunubi wa-qad da’aka/ Wa-in taghfir fa-anta li-dhaka ahlu, wa-in tatrud fa-man nrju siwaka.
Without having any ideological constraints, the traditionalists could expand their talents in art and culture in accordance with the tradition prevalent in the Sunni community, where the arts have developed to a considerable degree even in the Pesantren, home to such musical forms as orkes, gambus or qasidah. (Saleh, 2001) Dealing this issue, Geertz said the modernists were less interested in forms of art. (Geertz, 1960)

Sayyid Hussain Nasr has explained this aspect of traditional Islam. He says, ‘wherever Islam went, it did not destroy the local culture, but transformed it into an Islamic reality. What were rejected were elements of a clearly un-Islamic nature. As a result, Islamic civilization developed into several distinct cultural zones including the Arabic, Persian, Black African, Turkic, Indian, Malay, and Chinese’. ‘Islamic civilization produced a very rich tradition in the aural arts of poetry and music. There are very few civilizations of the past two millennia in which so much attention has been paid to poetry and in which poetry has occupied such an exalted position as in Islam’. About the development of Music among Muslims, he said, ‘Islamic civilization discouraged an exteriorizing music that would simply intensify the worldly passions within the soul. Rather, it drew music toward the inner dimension of human existence. In the hands of the Sufis, music became a steed with which the soul could journey from the outward rim of existence to the inner courtyard of the soul, where the Divine Presence resides’. Trying to read the cultural developments in Muslim societies under the label of traditional Islam, Nasr says that ‘there has always been an understanding of the intellectual aspects of Islam within the Islamic perspective and from the traditional point of view, from the perspective of the sacred and universal teachings of Islam as they were revealed and later transmitted over the ages. This point of view stands opposed to both modernism and its complement, so-called fundamentalism, and speaks from the view of those Muslims who have remained faithful to their sacred traditions despite the onslaught of the secularizing forces that have invaded the Islamic world during the past two centuries and reactions to those forces in the form of narrow “fundamentalism” or extremism of one kind or another’. Concluding his all-inclusive vision in this regard, he says that the ‘Islamic tradition cannot be confined solely to the message which was received in the form of the Holy Qur’an by the Blessed Prophet - upon whom be blessings and peace - fourteen centuries ago, although
of course this message has been and will always remain the heart of all that is Islamic. Islam includes, in addition to this heart, its unfolding in time and space and all that it absorbed according to its own genius and made its own through its power of transformation and synthesis. Thus not only are the Holy Qurān and Hadith Islamic, but also the sacred forms of Islamic art, schools of Islamic philosophy and the sciences, and Islamic social and political institutions are Islamic whatever may have been the historical origin of the ‘matter’ which the Islamic tradition absorbed and imbued with the form of Islam. The Holy Qurān and Hadith, as well as the oral instructions and the grace or barakah issuing from the revelation of the Holy Qurān and its recipient, the Blessed Prophet, are like the roots and the trunk of the tree of the Islamic tradition. The arts and sciences, social institutions and the like are the branches of the tree, some located closer to the trunk and others farther away but all a part of its organism and nourished ultimately by the roots. Some of the 'branches' like Islamic art reflect directly the inner aspects of the Islamic revelation and are indispensable to the tradition. Others like certain schools of thought reflect these principles less directly and are more incidental to the tradition. Yet they too have fulfilled and continue to fulfill a necessary function for certain types of mentalities'. (Nasr, 2002)

The modernists and traditionalists are similar in most of their fundamental beliefs and practices. They used to dispute each other in Furū‘iyat, supplementary aspects of doctrine. The NU members prefer to pray Tarawih during the Ramadan in twenty raka‘ats, whereas Muhammadiyah stands for eight raka‘ats. While the traditionalists usually perform their Eid prayers in mosques, the modernists insist to pray in the open, in grounds.

As the time of bitter disputes has gone, the new scholars tend to see the similarities than differences. As Fauzan Saleh puts it, ‘the fact that each party performs tarawih, Friday prayers, ‘Id al-fitr and ‘Id al-Adha prayers (and other religious obligations) persistently is more significant as a token of their similarity as upholders of orthodox beliefs and practices. (Saleh, Modern Trends In Islamic Theological Discourse In 20th Century Indonesia, 2001)
Ijtihad and Taqlid are among the most controversial issues in Islamic thought and it usually leads to heated debate between modernists and traditionalists. While the former insists that Muslims should abandon taqlid and exercise ijtihad, the latter says taqlid is permissible or even obligatory. The modernists rap traditionalists for their claim that the gate of Ijtihad is closed, saying that there are still many issues requiring that Muslims carry out ijtihad in order to arrive at appropriate solutions. This doesn’t mean that traditionalists are stagnant and never deal with newly emerging issues in an Islamic way. They approach each and every issue through the laws of jurisprudence laid by the Madhhab scholars, and in fact what traditionalists wanted by restricting Ijtihad is to check free and immature interpretations by lay scholars and also not to reinvestigate legal and other issues that have been already dealt with by the earlier scholars.

Translation of Quràn into the local language and delivering of the Friday sermon in vernacular languages were also debated between the traditionalists and reformists. The standard practice regarding Friday prayer had always been to read the khutuba (sermon.) The traditionalists say that it is part of the prayer and it should be in Arabic, and also Prophet did it in Arabic. The modernists say it should be in vernacular as the purpose of the sermon is to inform Muslims concerning proper religious and moral behaviors. There are a number of controversies regarding the rituals after death.

85 In a recent academic study about the Ijtihad-Taqlid controversy Mohammad Fadel said that the study of the relationship between ijtihad and taqlid has been dominated by an approach that privileges ijtihad over taqlid on the assumption that the former is an intellectually superior mode of legal reasoning. He concluded after analyzing the role of taqlid in regulating the actions of muftis and judges as discussed by post-6th/12th century jurists of the Maliki school, that taqlid resulted from the desire to have uniform rules rather than as a result of intellectual stagnation. While ijtihad was individualistic and solipsistic, taqlid was the result of group interpretation that provided an objective basis upon which legal decisions and legal rulings could be described as being either substantively correct or incorrect. Viewed in this light, taqlid was originally a desire to limit the discretionary power of legal officials, especially those at the bottom of the legal hierarchy. (Fadel, 1996)