(Research/Review) Article

Realising Social Harmony Through Religious Moderation in Indonesia's Multicultural Era

Yusep Arimatea[1], Timotius Sukarna [2]

[1] Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kadesi Bogor : yuseparimatea@gmail.com
[2] Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Kadesi Bogor : timotiussukarna@gmail.com
* Corresponding Author : yuseparimatea@gmail.com

Abstract: Indonesia is a unitary state with a lot of diversity, including various tribes, languages, religions, and cultures. Because it has so many differences, it is important for this nation to practice moderation in religion in order to prevent divisions that can damage the unity of the country. This research is educational and empirical. From the educational aspect, the focus is on the social aspect of religion in a multicultural society by emphasising the values of moderation. Meanwhile, from the empirical side, researchers will analyse the behaviour and actions of society in the practice of religious moderation. A country that is rich in diversity like Indonesia today often faces the issue of radicalism. Various groups that claim to represent certain interests are growing and openly spreading their ideologies. Therefore, religious moderation is an important element to encourage mutual understanding and respect for differences. It is hoped that this can be realised in harmony between religious communities in the midst of community life. The main objective of this study is to explore how to implement religious moderation as a strategic step to create a more inclusive and harmonious Indonesia in the future. The approach used in this study is a literature review, with a descriptive analysis style, namely examining documents and the implementation of religious moderation programmes in Indonesia. The results of the study show that the government faces various challenges in implementing religious moderation, such as rejection from conservative groups and lack of support from educational institutions. The conclusion of this study is that religious moderation is a key factor in building a harmonious and inclusive Indonesia. This can be achieved by increasing collaboration between the government, religious leaders, and the community in promoting the values of moderation. Thus, religious moderation can be a strong foundation for ensuring peace and social stability in Indonesia.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Harmony; Multicultural

1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a highly diverse population, encompassing various ethnicities, tribes, religions, languages, and cultures. This diversity has its own uniqueness and potential, as well as plurality, which makes it a multicultural society with a high level of social interaction. However, if this diversity is not managed properly, challenges and threats in the form of conflict, division, and strife can arise, which can disrupt social peace and security. Therefore, creating a peaceful and safe environment must begin with individual awareness of the fact that we are social beings who always need help from others. This can be achieved through a strategy of religious moderation.

For Indonesians, diversity is considered a gift from God. This variation has given rise to the motto Bhineka Tunggal Ika, which means 'unity in diversity.' Therefore, to maintain solidarity among diverse communities, it is important to promote moderation in religion to prevent actions that could divide the country. With its diversity, Indonesia often experiences social conflicts due to differences. Especially when it comes to religious issues, conflicts are often unavoidable. Recently, religious communities in Indonesia have often been pitted against each other, especially during election periods, where religious issues are often used as political tools to harm opponents. The issue of terrorism in the name of religion also continues to threaten national unity to this day. This is certainly very dangerous for the unity of the Indonesian nation. To reduce this problem, the government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, is actively campaigning for religious moderation.

The goal is simple: to prevent religious communities from being exposed to radical ideas. Radical ideas tend to view differences in a way that encourages violence. In religious moderation, it is important to understand the context, where understanding of religion needs to be moderated. Indonesia has many aspects of diversity that cannot be ignored. One such aspect is religious diversity, which must be accepted and cannot be eliminated. Religious moderation serves as a unifying force rather than an attempt to exploit differences. Every religion carries a mission of salvation and peace, and teaches balance in various aspects of life. Therefore, moderation in religion is a way to practise religion in a manner consistent with the essence of life that respects human dignity. As a multicultural country in terms of culture, ethnicity, and religion, Indonesia needs a strategy to create and maintain harmony among religious communities. This is very important so that the Indonesian people can live in peace, security, prosperity, and unity under the ideology of Pancasila. To achieve a good religious situation, the application of religious moderation is very necessary. Thus, there will be mutual respect and tolerance among people who are not involved in radicalism, extremism, and intolerance.

2. Literature Review

The diversity of the Indonesian people can be seen from data showing that there are 726 ethnic groups with 116 local languages and 6 religions (Oktavianus, 2019). No other country in the world shows such diversity as Indonesia. The motto Bhinneka Tunggal Ika has existed since the Majapahit era in the 13th century, indicating that Indonesia has been a diverse nation since ancient times. Diversity in ethnicity, religion, race, and culture among more than 280 million people is an asset that can have a positive impact on the welfare of society. However, this diversity can also lead to problems if there is inequality in development, injustice, social gaps, poverty, and political instability.

Currently, the Indonesian nation is facing serious challenges with the increasing social conflicts, both vertical and horizontal. These conflicts can arise from ideological differences or foreign interference that threatens sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security. When conflicts are driven by organised groups, they can pose a major threat to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. A clear example is the frequent conflicts between religious communities, both between different religions and within the same religion, such as violence, destruction of places of worship, and other acts of violence by the community.

Several events that reflect conflicts with religious elements include the burning of a mosque in Tolikara, Papua (Masykuri Abdillah 2016), which occurred when Muslims were celebrating Eid al-Fitr on 17 July 2015 and was allegedly carried out by a group of people from GIDI. The burning of the HKI Suka Makmur Church in Aceh Singkil in 2015 marked the beginning of what was referred to as the Aceh Singkil conflict (Raihan Nusyur, 2017). At that time, several churches were burned and demolished because they were deemed to lack proper permits. On Saturday, 20 July 2016, eleven Buddhist temples and two foundations were damaged by an angry mob in Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra. Several buildings adjacent to Buddhist places of worship were completely burned down.

These incidents do not reflect the true meaning of diversity in Indonesia, which should bring beauty, uniqueness, or other positive aspects. Diversity can also pose a threat, such as the emergence of divisions between groups and social jealousy. In reality, threats or conflicts in Indonesia do not stem from differences themselves, but from misunderstandings in communication. To prevent such misunderstandings, it is important to foster awareness of the importance of appreciating, respecting, and upholding the principle of equality. With this awareness, individuals and groups will be better able to get to know, understand, appreciate, and communicate with one another, thereby achieving the true meaning of multiculturalism.

For the Indonesian people, diversity is a destiny that is believed in. It is not something that is asked for, but a gift from God who created us; it is not to be bargained for, but accepted with sincerity. With diversity in Indonesian society, it is easy to imagine how varied the opinions, perspectives, beliefs, and interests of each citizen are, including in matters of religion. Fortunately, we have one unifying language, Indonesian, so that these differences in beliefs can still be communicated and citizens can understand one another. However, friction due to mistakes in managing diversity sometimes still occurs.

Indonesia, which is rich in religious and belief diversity (Jessica Salsabilla Cavalera Priatna, 2024), faces significant challenges in maintaining harmony and religious tolerance among its citizens in the future. Therefore, strengthening the concept of religious moderation emerges as a relevant and important solution to create an inclusive, tolerant, and peaceful society for Indonesia's future. The existence of religious moderation is not only the responsibility of individuals or civil society groups but must also serve as the foundation of government public policy, confirmed to support the fundamental essence of religious and belief diversity practices in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, within the current open democratic era, differing perspectives and interests among diverse citizens are regulated in such a way that all aspirations can be expressed

effectively. Similarly, in terms of religion, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion, emphasising the right to embrace and practise one's religion according to one's beliefs. Plurality, as a gift from God, gives significant meaning to every individual to respect the presence of others and participate in living on this earth in a peaceful manner to create common good. The practice of religion in communal life must be based on the motivation for tolerance, which is respecting the beliefs of others who may have different religions. Religious values and tolerance must grow in balance to create a harmonious, peaceful, and dynamic community (Fitri Alfariz, 2021).

It cannot be denied that the earth is home to all of humanity. However, it is a law of nature that its inhabitants consist of various ethnic groups, races, languages, professions, cultures, and religions. Therefore, diversity is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided. Diversity is present in various aspects of life, including religion. Pluralism is not only seen in large social groups such as the state community, but also in smaller circles such as households where family members may adhere to different religions. To manage the highly diverse religious situation in Indonesia, an approach that can create harmony and peace in religious practices is needed. This can be achieved by promoting religious moderation, respecting diversity, and avoiding extremism, intolerance, and violence. Therefore, to make religious moderation a solution, it is necessary to have a correct understanding of its true meaning.

Today, it is increasingly difficult to find a country where all citizens adhere to the same religion. In facing an increasingly diverse world, what is needed is not how to avoid plurality, but rather ways or mechanisms to respond to that diversity. In this regard, Islam teaches the importance of harmony and tolerance and rejects all forms of violence and discrimination.

Tolerance is a means of achieving peace and is considered an important element in creating peace (Joni Tapingku, 2021). Essentially, tolerance means having an attitude and nature of mutual respect. This attitude must be adopted by every individual to respect the diversity that exists in Indonesia. Although simple, tolerance has a significant positive impact on the integrity of the nation as a whole and on social harmony in particular. A lack of tolerance can lead to unwanted conflicts. The practice of tolerance must be accompanied by an open-minded attitude and the maintenance of one's principles without compromising them (Brigita Intan Prahesti Yaningtyas & Nikodemus Thomas Martoredjo, 2020). Tolerance arises from differences in principles, and respecting those differences without compromising one's own principles is its essence. In understanding tolerance, there are two interpretations of the concept. First, a negative interpretation states that tolerance is merely allowing and not harming other people or groups, whether they are different or the same. Second, a positive interpretation says that tolerance is not limited to allowing, but also includes support and assistance to other people or groups.

Religious moderation encourages a moderate attitude that respects differences, does not belittle others, and upholds universal values such as justice, truth, and compassion (Azis Tata Pangarsa, 2020). This contrasts with extremism, which triggers conflict, injustice, and insecurity. With the spirit, values, and principles of religious moderation, it is hoped that Indonesia will be able to overcome all forms of religious differences and achieve sustainable peace.

One important aspect of religious moderation is education. Inclusive and comprehensive education about different religious values and beliefs can shape a generation that is tolerant, respectful, and understanding. In addition, the mass media (mainstream and anti-mainstream) also have a major role in promoting religious moderation, far from hoaxes, while continuing to present accurate and balanced information and promoting the values of peace. Furthermore, the government also needs to play an active role in encouraging religious moderation through policies that support religious diversity and protect the rights of minorities. The establishment of interfaith dialogue and the involvement of civil society are also key to strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia.

The important meaning of adopting religious moderation as a guideline in the practice of state life is so that the Indonesian people can move towards a harmonious and inclusive future. Therefore, the necessary steps to realise this are to uphold the commitment to religious moderation as a consensus among all components of the nation in maintaining diversity as a valuable asset and making religious moderation an important foundation for building a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious future for the nation. Furthermore, this study will examine the application of religious moderation for a harmonious and inclusive future for Indonesia. This section outlines the relevant theories underlying the research topic and provides a review of several relevant previous studies that provide references and a basis for this research. If there are hypotheses, they can be stated implicitly and do not have to be in the form of questions.

3. Proposed Method

This research uses the literature review method. Literature review is a series of activities related to the method of collecting data and information by exploring knowledge or science

from available sources such as books, written works, and several other sources that are considered relevant to the research object. This type of research is descriptive with a literature review method to collect, identify, and interpret matters related to the application of religious moderation for a harmonious and inclusive future for Indonesia.

This research is more oriented towards finding the root causes that have the potential to nullify the spirit and meaning of religious moderation, as agreed by the Indonesian government in Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 concerning the Strengthening of Religious Moderation. In addition, this research also seeks to find concrete solutions to various social issues in Indonesia that lead to national disunity.

4. Results and Discussion

Pluralism is a fundamental characteristic that underpins the social culture of the Indonesian nation (Azmussya 'Ni, 2021). The diversity of Indonesian society, with all its unique details, is an asset and strength that enriches human creativity in utilising Indonesia's beautiful, fertile and prosperous natural resources to realise a great and dignified nation. However, pluralism also harbours the potential for conflict between citizens in various forms and for various reasons. Following the reform era, there emerged a growing awareness among citizens to celebrate democratic freedoms, yet this often escalated into physical conflicts. Diversity, as a cultural wealth of the nation, now faces the threat of disintegration due to a tendency to emphasise religious, ethnic, or other primordial sentiments. The Indonesian society, known for its friendliness, politeness, and religiosity, is now confronting the rising issue of violence committed in the name of religion.

In some groups, religious militancy has turned into violence and radicalism. Society has become highly sensitive and easily provoked to commit acts of violence in the name of defending their ethnic, racial, religious or group identity. Small personal problems can escalate into major issues involving a large number of citizens.

Conflict theory posits that social change does not occur through a process of value adjustment that brings about change, but rather through conflict that results in compromises that differ from the original conditions (M. Wahid Nur Tualeka, 2017). This theory is based on the ownership of the means of production as the primary factor separating classes in society. Conflict has a very broad spectrum, ranging from small conflicts between individuals, conflicts between families, to conflicts between villages and even mass conflicts involving several large groups, whether based on territory or primordial ties. Basically, conflict can be categorised into horizontal and vertical conflicts, both of which have a significant impact on efforts to maintain peace in this country.

Horizontal conflict is a conflict between social groups caused by various factors such as political ideology, economics, and primordial factors. Meanwhile, vertical conflicts are conflicts between the government or authorities and the people (Husnul Khotimah and Indhra Musthofa, 2023). Mass conflicts do not occur spontaneously, but are always preceded by underlying tensions within society, which can then escalate into physical conflict due to triggering factors.

Some real-life examples of serious conflicts, both vertical and horizontal, include: (1) separatist conflicts in Aceh, Maluku, and Papua; (2) ethnic conflicts in West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and Ambon; (3) ideological conflicts such as communism and radicalism; (4) political conflicts due to issues of election fraud, regional expansion leading to attacks and destruction; (5) economic conflicts such as plantation conflicts in Mesuji; (6) conflicts driven by spontaneous solidarity such as inter-regional riots or football fan violence; (7) conflicts related to religious or belief issues such as the SARA issue in Cikeusik Sub-district, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, and the issue of deviant religious groups; and (8) conflicts related to government policies such as elections, fuel prices, BOS, LPG, and others. From a sociological perspective, conflict is a 'social process' in which two individuals or groups attempt to eliminate the other party by destroying or weakening them. From an anthropological perspective, conflict arises due to competition between at least two parties; each party can be an individual, family, kinship group, community, social class with a particular ideology, political organisation, ethnic group, or religious group (Mulyadi, 2012).

According to Lewis A. Coser, conflict can be an instrumental process in the formation, unification, and maintenance of social structures. Conflict can establish and maintain boundaries between two or more groups (Tualeka, 2021). Conflict with other groups can reinforce group identity and protect it from being absorbed into the surrounding social world. All of these positive functions of conflict can be seen in the illustration of a group experiencing conflict with another group. For example, the approval of the separation of the traditional church (which maintains pre-Vatican II Catholic practices) and the Anglo-Catholic Church (which separated from the Episcopal Church over the issue of women's ordination). The years of war in the Middle East have strengthened the identities of the Arab and Israeli groups.

Coser adds that safety valves function as a way out that defuses hostility, without which relations between opposing parties would become increasingly tense. Safety valves are a special mechanism that can be used to protect groups from the possibility of social conflict. Safety valves are institutions for expressing dissatisfaction with a system or structure. Another opinion was expressed by Ralf Dahrendorf, who asserted that society has two faces: conflict and consensus. Therefore, sociological theory must be divided into two parts: conflict theory and consensus theory. Consensus theorists must examine the value of integration in society, while conflict theorists must examine conflicts of interest and the use of violence that binds society together in the face of such pressures. Dahrendorf acknowledges that the formation of a society cannot be separated from two elements, namely consensus and conflict, which are mutually dependent (Syamsul Hadi, 2020).

One of the challenges in social life in the state and society today and in the future is related to the practice of mutual respect and appreciation of religious and belief diversity. This attitude poses a challenge for the government, religious organisations, and other parties. In Indonesia, religious tolerance was introduced before Indonesia itself existed. This is evidenced by the motto of diversity since ancient times. Tolerance is not only a social reality but also an idea, a concept, and a way of thinking. The 1945 Constitution clearly states that 'the state guarantees freedom for every citizen to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religion and beliefs.' Because of this law, every citizen with various cultural identities, ethnicities, genders, religions, and others must be protected by the state. This also means that the state must not discriminate against its citizens for any reason. The government and all citizens have the obligation to uphold the constitution.

In the construction of places of worship, the Indonesian constitution has provided clear guidelines. From obtaining permission from the community to obtaining permission from the government. However, despite these regulations, there are still certain groups that attempt to establish places of worship illegally. This issue often triggers anarchic actions under the guise of religion. The disorder that leads to anarchy poses a unique challenge for the government. One of the steps that must be taken immediately is to design a strategy so that the existing laws and regulations can be understood and implemented by the community. Amidst the dynamics of Indonesian social life, the challenge of respecting religious and belief diversity has emerged as a test for religious harmony. Practices of discrimination, the spread of extremism, and a lack of understanding of differences often lead to injustice and conflict. Technological developments and the strengthening of identity politics have further complicated this diversity.

Of course, the above issues must be viewed as collective challenges for all citizens, not just the government, in order to preserve these differences as a divine gift that must be preserved, protected and used as a means of national integration for every element of the nation, as well as a tangible manifestation of the spirit of Indonesian unity, despite our differences, so that we remain steadfast in our diversity and sustainable in our pluralism. Religious and belief diversity in Indonesia has existed since the nation declared its independence and even long before the historic events

. Historically, this fact also served as the backdrop for important events in the long struggle of the Indonesian people towards independence. In any case, the role of interfaith leaders at that time was an important part of implementing the values of diversity to achieve unity in order to gain independence. Discourse related to religious moderation is certainly not something that can be resolved. It must continue to be pursued given the ongoing developments in society, technological advancements, evolving human interests, and other factors that will continue to shape the journey of humanity. Various conflicts of interest or clashes between religions and beliefs that emerge could potentially trigger national disintegration. Therefore, the key point is that religious moderation must continue to be practised with the widest possible public participation and implemented in ways that are not monotonous.

Moderation is an adjective derived from the root word 'moderation,' which means 'not excessive' or 'in the middle' (Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, 2019). In Indonesian, this word has been adapted to 'moderasi,' which is defined by the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) as an effort to reduce violence or avoid extremism. The KBBI also notes that moderation comes from the Latin word 'moderatio,' which means a state of being neither excessive nor deficient (Kemdikbud, 2021). When the word 'moderation' is combined with the term 'religious,' it becomes 'religious moderation,' which refers to efforts to reduce violence or avoid extremism in religious practices. Religious moderation explains the meaning of moderate attitudes and moderation in a religious context so that it can be clearly understood by all religious communities. An explanation of religious moderation is considered essential because it is at the core of religion, and its implementation is a necessity in a diverse and multicultural society like Indonesia to foster harmony both within and among religious communities.

The strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia has also been regulated in Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on the Strengthening of Religious Moderation. Religious moderation is an effort to foster a moderate character in religious practice.

This effort must continue because, in reality, conflicts with religious undertones that have the potential to disrupt national unity are still frequently encountered. This is especially important because Indonesia is a country with high levels of diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, language, and culture. Practices of religious moderation that respect and value diversity can be implemented, for example, through:

1. Multicultural education, which involves enhancing education that teaches tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and an understanding of the meaning of different religions and beliefs.

2. Interfaith dialogue, which involves fostering dialogue to build understanding of differences and find common solutions to problems faced.

3. Responsible use of the media to disseminate accurate, balanced information that supports unity, peace, and tolerance.

4. Formulating inclusive policies, namely encouraging the government to implement policies that respect religious and belief diversity and protect the rights of minorities.

5. Strengthening interfaith cooperation, namely establishing active cooperation between religions in various social, economic and cultural activities to strengthen harmony and brotherhood.

6. Collaboration among civil society in promoting religious moderation to preserve harmony among religious communities.

It is hoped that with the comprehensive implementation of these measures, Indonesia can achieve strong religious moderation and build an inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious society in the future. The important meaning of implementing religious moderation encompasses various aspects relevant to community life.

5. Conclusions

The practice of religious moderation in Indonesia must continue to be preserved and implemented more broadly and comprehensively. Several things that can be done to encourage and strengthen religious moderation in Indonesia include strong multicultural education, interfaith dialogue, strengthening interfaith cooperation, wise use of the mass media, inclusive policies/regulations, and collaboration with civil society. Indonesia has specific regulations governing religious moderation, namely Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation.

The overarching idea of preserving diversity must be a concern for all parties. As a diverse nation with various backgrounds and differences, the path of religious moderation must be a shared focus and spirit that must be preserved and strengthened. This effort can begin with mutual respect for differences among fellow citizens.

Through these various efforts to strengthen moderation, it is hoped that Indonesia's future will be brighter, especially regarding issues of tolerance in religious and belief diversity, fair distribution of justice for minority groups, and so on. May social and national life in Indonesia find a more harmonious future where every individual, regardless of religion or belief, is respected and given an equal place in a society that upholds the values of inclusivity.

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