

The Important Role of Community Figures in Efforts to Maintain Religious Harmony in Ngampin Village, Ambarawa District, Semarang Regency

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Abstract : *This research examines the role of community leaders in maintaining religious harmony in Ngampin Village, Ambarawa District, which has the characteristics of a multicultural society. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with community leaders and field observations during the period 17 October to 30 November 2024, which explores the dynamics of tolerance between religious communities. Based on statistical data, Ngampin Subdistrict has a diverse religious composition, namely 4,673 Muslims, 586 Catholics, 450 Protestants, 13 Hindus, and 7 people of other faiths. Research reveals that religious harmony is built through a comprehensive strategy, through the formation of the Religious Harmony Association (PKUB), preserving local Nyadran and Merti Dusun traditions, as well as a dialogical approach between religious communities. The findings show that success in maintaining harmony requires a high awareness of tolerance, local wisdom, and the active role of community leaders in reducing potential conflict.*

Keywords: *Religious Harmony, Community Figures, Religious Moderation*

1. BACKGROUND

Indonesian society consists of a very diverse society. Indonesia, which consists of various tribes and religions, requires its people to have the ability to respect each other. Community life in an environment that has diversity is very prone to the emergence of conflict, including environments that have people who adhere to different religions. People who live in a heterogeneous environment are required to always implement an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect for each other.

It is unavoidable that Indonesia has a variety of social structures, which need to be preserved and cared for. Tolerance is one answer to overcoming this problem. A society that has good tolerance skills will create a social life that is conducive and avoids conflict. Religious harmony can be achieved in a society even though people practice different religions if everyone is able to tolerate one another (Almayana, 2021).

Tolerance can increase the awareness of each individual to respect each other. Tolerance requires someone to respect the opinions and activities of other people who are different (Nazmudin, 2017). Tolerance can be interpreted as an individual's open-hearted attitude to respect and respect followers of other religions to carry out their respective worship in accordance with the teachings and rules of their religion without interference or coercion. The increasingly advanced development of the times has led to the emergence

of conflict between religions, requiring a society to always uphold an attitude of tolerance (Wulandari, Yuliatin, Basariah, & Zubair, 2024).

Efforts to create an attitude of tolerance in social life are not easy. Especially realizing an attitude of tolerance among people who have different religions or beliefs. The role of community leaders is very much needed to help create a society that has a good attitude of tolerance. Public figures who are widely respected by society must be able to provide good role models in social life, including in dealing with people of other religions. Apart from that, community leaders must be able to prevent the community from inter-religious conflict. The challenges for community leaders who live in a diverse environment are more difficult in maintaining community harmony.

One of the Ambarawa District's subdistricts, Ngampin Village, is home to a community of people from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The fact that Ngampin Village residents can participate in community events together, irrespective of their religion or ethnicity, demonstrates how much they value one another. Therefore, this research aims to determine the role of community leaders in maintaining religious harmony in Ngampin Village.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The study was carried out by researchers who used a qualitative descriptive approach and field research. The use of qualitative methods was carried out by researchers with the aim of obtaining data in the form of words, both written and verbal. Data collection was carried out using interviews and direct observation methods carried out in Ngampin Village. The interview was conducted with one of the community figures in Ngampin Village, namely Mr. Kiai Wartoyo Nurdimulyo. Observations were carried out by researchers by observing community activities involving many religious figures and the general public. This research was carried out while the researchers were carrying out real work lectures in Ngampin Village from 17 October to 30 November 2024.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Community Figures in Maintaining Religious Harmony

Ngampin is one of the villages in Ambarawa District with a high level of community heterogeneity. One of the symbols of the pluralism of the Ngampin community is the diversity in religion and belief. Data from the Semarang Regency Central Statistics Agency for 2024 shows that there are 4673 people who adhere to the Islamic religion, 586 people who adhere to the Catholic religion, 450 people who adhere to the Protestant religion, 13 people who adhere to the Hindu religion, and 7 people who adhere to other religious beliefs.

Heterogeneous environments, like Ngampin Village, are more likely to cause division than homogeneous ones, so a high level of tolerance and a spirit of moderation are necessary. Teaching people to get used to and adapt to diverse social conditions is the right choice in preserving harmony and balance. This effort will run more optimally if religious leaders contribute to it (Prasitiya et al., 2024).

Religious harmony in Ngampin is said to have been well established and maintained. This has been proven from the results of interviews conducted with Mr. Wartoyo, a community leader and Islamic religious figure in the Lonjong Neighborhood, Ngampin Village. According to him, "There is good harmony between the religious communities in Ngampin because each neighborhood has administrators who actively participate and take good care of their residents." The real form of harmony can be seen in people's daily lives, starting from community service, cleaning the village, celebrating holidays, to helping when there is a death. Despite the fact that the individuals in question practice different religions, we will still do everything in our power to support one another." Mr. Wartoyo also added that in maintaining harmony between communities, the most important thing to pay attention to is the use of good speech and good manners in society.

How Community Figures Collaborate with Other Religious Figures in Maintaining Religious Harmony

Harmony between religious communities is a reality that cannot be avoided from ancient times, even more so in modern times. There is almost no society without plurality (Suryana, 2011). A community or area is typically made up of people from various religious backgrounds and beliefs, just like the residents of Ngampin Village. The way community leaders in Ngampin Subdistrict create harmony and peace between religious

communities is by respecting each other in the community, strengthening the awareness of others, establishing healthy interactions between religious communities, strengthening communication between people, and carrying out worship activities without disturbing other people. This is simple to understand because the Ngampin community essentially already possesses the necessary resources to establish religious moderation in multicultural circles, including democracy, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and local wisdom, which is a value that can foster peace and harmony (Darmalaksana, 2021).

In order to maintain religious harmony in Ngampin Village, community leaders work with other religious leaders by creating a forum for inter-religious harmony, according to the findings of an interview with Mr. Kiai Wartoyo Nurdimulyo. There is an interreligious group in the Ngampin subdistrict known as the Religious Harmony Association (Paguyuban Kerukunan Umat Beragama). This forum, which is led by Mr. Rohadi, was only established in 2024. Various religious leaders from Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism make up the Religious Harmony Association (PKUB). This forum was formed to maintain, develop, and empower inter-religious communities to create prosperity and harmony between religious communities.

Another way for community leaders to collaborate with religious figures in Ngampin Village is the existence of local wisdom traditions, which are still carried out today. The local wisdom of the Ngampin community aims to contribute to providing benefits to each other in the context of building social life. Ahmadi (2004) states that social interaction basically influences the reciprocal relationship of the parties' efforts in solving various social issues according to the expected goals. Social interactions built by Muslims with people of other religions and beliefs need to prioritize a humanitarian attitude in dealing with emerging socio-religious issues and contribute to resolving them fairly and wisely. A form of local community wisdom that can unite various religious communities in Ngampin sub-district is the existence of Merti Dusun and Nyadran cultural customs.

Nyadran culture is a form of local wisdom tradition of the people of Ngampin Village. Nyadran is a tradition of praying for deceased ancestors. Nyadran is usually done in the month of Ruwah or Sya'ban before the month of Ramadan. The Nyadran tradition in Ngampin Village is carried out by all levels of society to preserve the culture of mutual cooperation and maintain harmony in social life through group prayer and eating together. As part of the Nyadran tradition, people clean the graves of their ancestors, pray together, and then eat together. The socio-cultural values obtained in Nyadran activities are the

values of mutual cooperation, establishing relationships between religions and communities, and sharing between communities in an environment.

Apart from the Nyadran tradition, Merti Dusun is a tradition in Ngampin Village that is still preserved to this day. The Merti Dusun tradition is a series of activities that include traditional ceremonies, cultural carnivals, and local traditional arts performances. This tradition aims to express gratitude for the good fortune given to God Almighty, to strengthen ties of friendship between all levels of society, and as a means of unifying society because this event is attended by all people from various circles and various religions. By implementing the Merti Dusun tradition, it is hoped that the community can maintain the continuity of local traditions and culture left by their ancestors. This is very important to maintain local cultural identity and enrich Indonesia's cultural diversity.

These two traditions reflect the values of harmony and tolerance between religious communities in Ngampin Village. Communities help each other and respect each other's beliefs, creating a harmonious atmosphere that benefits all parties. These activities not only strengthen local cultural identity but also build strong social solidarity. In this way, Nyadran and Merti Dusun are not only traditions but also a means of maintaining harmony and unity amidst diversity.

The Difficult Challenge for Community Leaders in Maintaining Religious Harmony

Environmental conditions with diverse beliefs certainly pose a challenge in maintaining harmony between religious communities. Diversity itself is an important part of Indonesian people's daily lives. Stretching from Sabang to Merauke, this country has a variety of diversity, such as religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. In Ngampin Village, diversity is also a characteristic of this area, and with diversity, the challenges in maintaining integrity and harmony are also greater. The existence of differences of opinion and belief is certainly the biggest challenge in fostering harmony.

On the positive side that can be seen from diversity, this condition presents unlimited opportunities and potential resources without ignoring the other side, namely the inevitable issue of conflict (Alfikri et al., 2024). According to Octaviana et al. (2021), every individual has unique qualities that contribute to their character development. Humans essentially have the ability to think with the best way the brain works among other living creatures, so that with the ability to build their beliefs, every human being has the ability to build their character.

In practice, differences of opinion between communities in rural areas such as Ngampin Village will be very visible due to the conditions of the residents who are close to each other. This allows for division or disintegration if the community is unable to implement an attitude of tolerance toward diversity. This condition would not have been created without the community being able to implement a good attitude of tolerance and the presence of wise community figures conducive to society when conditions arise that threaten community harmony.

4. CONCLUSION

This research produces the fundamental discovery that interreligious harmony is the result of deliberate and sustainable social construction. The main strategies developed include institutional ones in the form of the formation of the Religious Harmony Association (PKUB) as a forum for inter-religious coordination, which includes figures from various religions; cultural ones in the form of preserving local traditions of Nyadran and Merti Dusun, which function to transcend primordial religious boundaries through the practice of mutual cooperation and friendship; and communicative ones in the form of developing dialogic communication patterns that prioritize speaking ethics, politeness, and mutual respect for differences in beliefs. The main challenge in maintaining harmony is the complexity of individual differences and the inherent potential for conflict in multicultural societies. However, social capital in the form of a spirit of tolerance, democracy, and local wisdom is able to reduce the potential for disintegration. Religious harmony requires critical awareness of shared commitment and transformative leadership from community leaders.

Suggestion

Research conducted by researchers is still very limited. There is a need to conduct ongoing research to document harmony practices and develop new models in maintaining social harmony in multicultural societies. Apart from that, it is hoped that further research can examine in more depth the role of community leaders in efforts to maintain religious harmony. So that later the research can be useful and can be an example for other places in efforts to maintain religious harmony as well.

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